



# *The Standard Bearer*

***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

## **In This Issue:**

Meditation — <i>Rev. Cornelius Hanko</i> <b>Mary the Mother of Our Savior</b> .....	122
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> <b>The Birth of Jesus: Particular Grace</b> .....	124
Bring the Books — <i>John Calvin</i> <b>The Nativity of Jesus Christ</b> .....	126
Go Ye Into All the World — <i>Mrs. Jeanette Kortering</i> <b>Our Work in Myanmar (3)</b> .....	129
All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren</i> .....	133
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i> <b>Spikenard Saturday, Palm Sunday</b> .....	136
Contending for the Faith — <i>Rev. Bernard Woudenberg</i> <b>"Extra-Scriptural Binding" (?)</b> .....	138
Church and State — <i>Mr. James Lanting</i> <b>Supreme Court Upholds Ban on Physician-Assisted Suicide—No Constitutional "Right to Die"</b> .....	141
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....	143

**Vol. 74, No. 6  
December 15, 1997**

# Mary the Mother of Our Savior

*And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.*

Luke 1:30, 31

Hail, Mary!

Gabriel, who stands in the very presence of God, was sent to a lowly virgin in the city of despised Nazareth. In what form he appeared to her we do not know, but she knew at once that he was a heavenly messenger and, as may well be expected, she was filled with awesome fear.

To her amazement he knows and addresses her by her name. Why should she receive a visit from a holy angel? What was the purpose of his coming?

But she was even more amazed at his message. He calms her fears by telling her that she is highly favored by God. She, highly favored? She deserves no such recognition. He adds that Jehovah is with her. She knows that though

her sins are as scarlet she is righteous in the promised Savior, whose coming she awaits. Surely in that sense God is with her, but does this word of the angel imply more than that?

Still more astounding are his words of praise, "Blessed art thou among women!" She, the lowly, unknown virgin? She bows her head in bewilderment.

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

"Blessed art thou among women."

The fall in paradise had been through the woman. Even so salvation was promised through the woman. She would be blessed in bearing children. That would be her unique privilege, since through child-bearing the Christ would be born and the church come into existence.

The promise had come to Eve by God's curse upon Satan, "I will put enmity between thee and the

woman, and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

When Eve's first child was born she must have marveled at the wonder she beheld. Never could she have imagined anything like it. Here was flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Here was a child that looked like his parents, yet with his own individuality, his own character, personality, and life. Far more, here was the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise of the Seed that would crush all the powers of Satan and give eternal salvation and victory to God's people.

Did Eve for the moment imagine or hope that this very child might be the promised Seed? We can only surmise.

All the saints throughout the old dispensation looked for the Savior. There were always godly women who rejoiced in the fact that

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

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

#### REPRINT POLICY

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

#### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

#### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma  
4949 Ivanrest  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: dje@iserv.net)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Don Doezeema  
P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI  
49468-0603  
PH: (616) 531-1490  
(616) 538-1778  
FAX: (616) 531-3033

#### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426

#### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
c/o B. VanHerik  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

#### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Jonathan McAuley  
164 Church Rd., Glenwherry  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT42 3EL Northern Ireland

#### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

#### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

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

they were instrumental in a small way in bringing forth the promised Seed. We know such women as Sarah, Hannah, Ruth the Moabitess, and Elisabeth.

Abraham longed to see His day. Jacob declared in humble worship, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." The promised Christ made His appearance as the Angel of Jehovah to Abraham, to Moses, to Gideon, and to others. The inspired poets sang of Christ's coming, while the prophets spoke of it. Particularly Isaiah, standing on the mountaintop of prophecy, declared, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel." And again, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6).

The night of waiting had been long and wearisome. David had occupied the throne in Israel as a type of the coming Conqueror, and his son Solomon prefigured the glorious King in His kingdom even in building the house of the Lord. Kings had come and gone. Israel had been in captivity for seventy years and had returned to restore the house of God. But the time was not yet.

A great darkness fell upon the nation of Israel. They bowed under a foreign yoke and were about to be made a part of the great Roman empire. Wicked Herod sat on the throne in Jerusalem. But, even worse, the cold formalism of the Pharisees, and the wicked unbelief of the Sadducees controlled the Sanhedrin.

Yet there was always the light of the promise shining through the darkest night. And there was always the remnant according to the election of grace. By the grace of God there were those like Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon and Anna, and the shepherds. And there was the humble Mary in

Nazareth, a lone survivor of the royal line of David. In these dark days they prayed more earnestly than ever for the coming of the promised Savior, the King who would sit on David's throne, even forever.

Still today the woman is not inferior to the man, simply because the covenant mother has the blessed privilege, which belongs only to the woman, of bringing forth and rearing in tender love the covenant seed of the church. What a blessed calling and privilege to have a part in the gathering of God's church and the coming of His kingdom!

Of all covenant mothers, however, Mary stands out as the most blessed among women, for she was the mother of our Savior. All covenant mothers count her blessed because of her son.

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Blessed virgin.

The angel continues his message: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God." In sovereign good pleasure God eternally determined that she should be the virgin to bring forth the Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Gabriel assures her, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS."

Were more significant words ever spoken? God performs the humanly impossible. A virgin will conceive. A son will be born to her. And God Himself gives this child His name, which is above all names: Jesus, Jehovah saves.

The hope and longing of all the saints throughout the ages is being realized in this young woman. The repeatedly promised, the long awaited Savior would now come into the world. A Babe, born of a woman, even as God had promised. He would be the Shepherd-King to occupy David's throne forever.

No wonder that Mary asked in astonishment, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" She

shows no sign whatever of unbelief, as did Zacharias when he was informed of the birth of a son in his old age. Her faith embraces the word of the angel. But she wonders, for she is a virgin. True, she is engaged to be married to Joseph, but why would the angel come to her if Joseph were involved? It is all so marvelous, yet so strange, so incomprehensible. She can but wonder how this will come about.

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Blessed conception.

The answer of Gabriel expresses one of the greatest wonders, if not the greatest wonder, of all history. It is so simple, yet so profound, so far beyond all human comprehension. Surely nothing is impossible with God. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

We believe in our hearts and we confess with our lips that "Jesus Christ (was) conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary." The Holy Spirit laid the sperm of life in Mary, the beginning of a new life, yet the life of the person of the Son of God. The triune God in His Son joined Himself with us by implanting the seed of life in the virgin. By the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit this seed developed into an embryo and a fetus and into a fully developed child. The Son of God, who is completely divine, took on a complete human nature, as flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, like unto us in all respects except one, He was sinless. He was without our guilt since He had no human father. He was without our pollution and depravity because He was preserved as the holy Child Jesus in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit.

Great is the mystery of godliness!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Mary's response?

To all this Mary responds, "Be-

hold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

By God's abounding grace Mary surrenders herself in humble trust unto the will of the Lord. It is so grand, yet so terrifying.

In the back of her mind lingers the thought, how shall I ever explain this to my fiancé, Joseph? What will the people say when they see me as an unmarried, pregnant woman? Mercifully the angel suggests to her a temporary respite by going to her cousin Elisabeth. There she will also be assured of God's abundant mercies and blessings.

Her soul already rejoices in God her Savior!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Amazing sign!

"The Lord himself shall give

you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14).

We see that whatever is impossible with man is possible with God. Because of our transgressions and guilt, God's justice had to be satisfied. We cannot do that. No animal or angel can suffice for us. But God has eternally prepared for us the way of salvation.

We behold amazing grace, for the Most High God whom we have so sorely offended with our sins is the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

We shall never cease to marvel at the fact that God condescended to become like unto us, in order to make us like unto Himself in His glory. A very similar wonder takes place in us. We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of in-

corruptible by the Word that lives and abides forever. We are restored in the image of Christ, like unto the Father. It is all too marvelous to comprehend.

The apostle John writes, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.... Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:1, 2).

We are made partakers of the divine nature. We shall dwell in God's house. We shall behold Him and reflect His glory unto the praise of His matchless name forever and ever!

Blessed be our God! Praise His holy name! □

## Editorial

# The Birth of Jesus: Particular Grace

**W**e celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as the gracious act and gift of God. God acted in the birth of Jesus. The Holy Ghost worked conception in the womb of the virgin. The Word became flesh. The Father sent His Son into the world. In the birth of Jesus, the triune God performed the wonderful work of the incarnation of God the Son. This was the central act of God in history.

God gave in the birth of Jesus. He gave liberally. He gave His all, holding nothing back. He gave His only begotten Son. In Him, therefore, God gave Himself. In the birth of Jesus, God gave the unspeakable gift.

The act and gift were gracious. The purpose was the redemption

of guilty, depraved people from sin, death, and everlasting hell unto righteousness and eternal life. The motivation was the favor of God toward these wretched sinners. He loved them and desired to bless them. The objects were—and are—undeserving of the act and gift.

How undeserving we are for whom God acted and to whom He gave in the birth of Jesus is shown by the act and gift. Nothing would do for our deliverance save the incarnation of God. How damnable, how vile, how otherwise hopelessly lost must we be whose rescue requires that God Himself empty and impoverish Himself by becoming a man.

All talk of men's worth and works, all preaching of merits and

conditions, and all boasting of fallen man's goodness apart from Jesus Christ by "common grace" are exposed by the birth of Jesus as idle, empty, profane, and blasphemous chatter.

It is also the grace of the birth of Jesus that God acted and gave, although no one wanted the act and gift. Christ came unto His own, and His own received Him not. There was no room for Him in the inn. The hostility toward God's wonderful act and unspeakable gift on the part of the nations was evident in Herod's attempt on Jesus' life before the baby was two years old.

Jesus Christ was not born because man desired Him. Still less is the explanation of His birth

man's effort to produce Him, perhaps in cooperation with God. Man was excluded in the conception and birth of Jesus. That baby had no human father. The Power of the Highest alone worked conception in Mary, and He did so only because God had graciously willed it and graciously promised it.

That there were some, in fact, who did desire the birth of Jesus—a Zacharias and Elisabeth, a Mary, a Simeon, an Anna, the wise men—was the effect, not the cause, of the birth of Jesus. The grace of God that acted and gave in Jesus' birth acted and gave in such a marvelous way that it created men and women who desired and received the act and gift. The act and gift caused their own reception. So also they do still today in all those who embrace Jesus Christ with believing hearts.

The Word of God in the birth of Jesus Christ is: "Grace!" "Grace alone!" "Grace to the exclusion of all human worth, works, and will!" "Grace that so humbles fallen human nature as to leave it nothing but exposure to the wrath of God and slavery to sin!"

As the Word of grace, the birth of Jesus glorifies God. "Glory to God in the highest" is the celebration of Jesus' birth by the true church and by the believer, as it was the celebration by the angels.

Because it is the Word of grace, the birth of Jesus is gospel. It is good news to everyone who knows himself a guilty, shameful sinner before the face of the righteous God and who turns to Jesus Christ for salvation.

What a gospel! He who is rich with the riches of the Godhead became poor with the poverty of death, the grave, and hell for our sakes, that we through His poverty might be rich with the riches of the life and glory of God in the risen Jesus Christ.

What a gospel! The Son of God became poor in the birth of Jesus, not because we desired or deserved

it but because He Himself was gracious.

What a gospel! Now and to endless ages, our enjoyment of the riches given by His poverty is not conditioned by our worthiness or will, but is dependent solely on His grace.

The birth of Jesus was grace, but it was not grace for all humans in general. The birth of the Son of God was particular grace. The act and gift of God in the birth of the Savior were for some, definite members of the human race, and for them alone. The birth of Jesus was particular grace in the result: only some benefit from it. The birth of Jesus was particular grace in the purpose of the triune God: God willed, wished, and desired that the birth benefit only some, not all.

This is how God Himself described His act and gift in the birth of His Son. Filled with the Holy Ghost, Zacharias proclaimed Jesus' birth as God's visiting and redeeming His people (Luke 1:68). In explanation of the baby's name, Jesus, the angel declared, "for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Reflecting on the incarnation, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews taught that the Son of God "took part" of flesh and blood for the children whom God gave Him (Heb. 2:14).

Who they are for whom Jesus Christ was born is determined by the God who acted and gave in that birth. He determined them by the eternal, gracious decree of election. Jesus Himself said that He came down from heaven to save "all which He (the Father) hath given me" (John 6:39). If men and women themselves distinguish themselves from others as those for whom Jesus was born, the grace of the birth of Jesus is denied.

Exactly this is the offense of the birth of Jesus Christ to many. Many stumble at this, that the birth of Jesus was particular grace.

This is at the bottom of theological liberalism's rejection of the

incarnation and virgin birth. If it is indeed true, as the Bible teaches, that in the birth of Jesus God was manifest in the flesh through a virgin conception and birth, there is salvation only in this Jesus. Such a Jesus is the one and only Savior from sin and death. Only those who know and trust in Him by faith are, and can be, saved. All who live and die apart from Him are lost and damned. This is intolerable to the universalistic, natural mind of man. The issue is particular grace.

Resentment of particular grace explains why evangelical and Reformed theologians are now proposing that pagans can be saved in their heathen religions, if not *by* their heathen religions. These theologians are offended at the truth that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father. Particular grace is the stone of stumbling and rock of offense.

No different, essentially, is the universalism of much of "evangelical Christianity" today. In Christ, God is gracious to all men without exception. Christ was born for all; Christ died for all; the risen Christ now offers Himself to all. The reason is that God loves and has chosen all. "Evangelical Christianity" hates particular grace as much as do Rome and the liberals.

The very same opposition to particular grace appears in supposedly conservative Calvinistic churches in the teaching and practice of the "well-meant offer of the gospel." God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel of Christ to all who hear without exception. He loves all, sincerely desires the salvation of all, and offers Christ to all with the wish that all will accept Him. The grace of God in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is for all without exception. The ministers and churches who teach and practice this stumble over the doctrine of particular grace. They stumble over the particular Jesus, just as do the liberals and the open "free

willists."

How many Reformed preachers, this season, will boldly proclaim the grace of God in the birth of Jesus as grace intended for and made available to all without exception?

How many Reformed preachers, after having paid lip service (and very quickly) to election, will go on, in the application, to offer the child of Bethlehem as a Savior who graciously desires to save all in the audience, if not in the world, if only people will accept Him?

How many Reformed preachers will teach the act and gift of

God in the birth of Jesus without saying one word about that act and gift as *particular* grace?

A pity!

For to deny the birth of Jesus as *particular* grace is to deny the *grace* of it. If the birth of Christ is grace for all without exception, the reason why some are benefited by that birth, whereas others are not, is something in them themselves: works! will! worth! Or, we are to suppose that all without exception will eventually benefit from the birth of Jesus, even though many never believe, never love God,

never walk in God's holy ways. In either case, grace is no more (biblical) grace.

And if the birth of Jesus is not grace, it is not the wonderful act and unspeakable gift of God in the incarnation of the eternal Son on behalf of needy, miserable sinners. In this case, I have no further interest in the birth of Jesus.

Particular grace!

The only reason for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Particular grace!

The only confession that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. □

—DJE

## Bring the Books

John Calvin

# The Nativity of Jesus Christ\*

**W**e know that it is our good, our joy and rest to be united with the Son of God. As He is our Head, we are His body, so also from Him we hold our life and our salvation

and all good. In fact, we see how miserable our condition would be unless we had our refuge in Him, to be maintained under His keeping. However, we could not reach so high (seeing that scarcely can we crawl upon the earth), unless from His side He approached us, and already He had approached in His birth, when He clothed Himself in our flesh and He made Himself our brother. We could not now have our refuge in our Lord Jesus Christ's being seated at the right hand of God His Father in heavenly glory, unless He were abased as far as being made mortal man and having a condition common with us. That is also why, when He is called "Mediator between God and men," this title "man" is especially attributed to Him. As also for the same reason He is called "Emmanuel," that is, "God with us."

Yet when we seek our Lord Jesus Christ to find in Him allevia-

tion of all our miseries and a sure and infallible protection we must begin at His birth. Not only is it recited to us that He was made man like us, but that He so emptied Himself that scarcely was He reputed to be of the rank of men. He was, as it were, banished from every house and fellowship. There was nothing except a stable and a manger to receive Him.

Since it is so, then, we know here how God displayed the infinite treasures of His goodness when He willed that His Son might be thus humbled for our sakes. Let us recognize also how our Lord Jesus Christ from His birth so suffered for us that when we seek Him we need not make long circuits to find Him nor to be truly united to Him. For this cause He willed to be subject to every shame, in such a way that He was, as it were, rejected by the rest of men. But let us also learn to be little to be received by Him. For it is reason-

\* An excerpt from a sermon by John Calvin on Luke 2:1-14. This, no doubt, is the sermon that, according to the translator, Calvin preached on Christmas Day. The complete sermon is found in the recent publication, *Sermons on the Deity of Christ* (by John Calvin). The book consists of 20 sermons by John Calvin on the birth, passion, resurrection (one of which was preached by Calvin on Easter Sunday), ascension, and final advent of Jesus Christ, and on Pentecost. The book is published by Old Paths Publication, 223 Princetown Road, Audubon, NJ 08106. It sells for \$25.00. The excerpt is printed here with permission. —Ed.

able at least that there be conformity between the Head and the members. Men need not empty themselves to be of no value. For by nature already they will find such poverty in themselves that they will have good reason to be thoroughly dejected. But let us know of what sort we are, that we may offer ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ in true humility and that He may recognize us and acknowledge us as His own.

However, we also have to note that, in the history which St. Luke here recites, on the one hand we learn how the Son of God emptied Himself of everything for our salvation, nevertheless, on the other hand He did not fail to leave certain and infallible testimony that He was the Redeemer of the world promised from all time. Even though He took our condition, He was able to maintain His heavenly majesty. Both sides are here shown to us. For our Lord Jesus Christ is here in a manger and He is, as it were, rejected by the world. He is in extreme poverty without any honor, without any reputation, as it were, subject to servitude. Yet He is magnified by Angels from Paradise, who do Him homage.

In the first place, an angel bears the message of His birth. Then the same one is accompanied by a great multitude, even by an army, who are all present and appear as witnesses sent by God to show that our Lord Jesus Christ, being thus abased for the salvation of men, never ceases to be King of all the world and to have everything under His dominion.

Then the place, Bethlehem, gives proof that it was He who had been promised from all time. For the prophet Micah had spoken thus: "And thou Bethlehem, though thou be in great contempt, as a village which is not much to look at, and which is not densely populated, yet from thee shall come forth to Me He Who is to govern My people, and His goings forth will be from all eternity." We

see, then, here on the one hand how our Lord Jesus Christ did not spare Himself, so that we might have easy access to Him and that we might not doubt that we are received even as His body, since He willed to be not only a mortal man clothed in our nature, but, as it were, a poor earth-worm stripped of all good. May we never doubt, then, however miserable we may be, that he will keep us as His members.

On the other hand, we see Him here marked, as it were, by the hand of God, so that He may be received without any difficulty, as Him from Whom we must expect salvation, and by Whom we are received into the Kingdom of God, from which we were previously banished. For we see that He has in Himself a Divine majesty, since the Angels recognize Him as their superior and their sovereign King. We ought not to doubt, when we shall be under His keeping, that He has all that is needed to maintain us. Let us know, however much He was abased, it in no wise takes away from His Divine power nor hinders us from being securely under His guidance.

Now we see the summary of this history. That is, in the first place, we know that the Son of God, even our Mediator, has united Himself to us in such a way that we must never doubt that we are sharers both of His life and of all His riches. Let us know also that He brought with Himself to us everything that was required for our salvation. For (as I have already said) He was not thus emptied without always retaining His Divine majesty. Although before men He was made of no reputation, yet He always remained not only heir of this world (since He is the Head of the Church), but also always true God.

Besides, let us learn from those who are here ordained as teachers and leaders how we must come to our Lord Jesus Christ. To be sure, the wise men of this world are so

inflated with pride and presumption that scarcely will they condescend to be scholars of unlearned men and poor shepherds from the fields. But it is all our wisdom, nevertheless, that we learn from these shepherds (of whom it is here spoken) to come to our Lord Jesus Christ. For although we may have all the sciences of the world stuffed into our heads, of what use will it be when life fails us? How will it help us to know "Him in whom the treasures of all wisdom are hidden," as St. Paul says? Now we see where we must begin. It does us no harm to follow those who have shown us the way to come to our Lord Jesus Christ.

God gave this honor neither to the great ones of this world, nor to the wise, nor to the rich, nor to the nobles, but He chose shepherds. Since it is so, let us follow that order. It is true that Wise Men came from the East to pay homage to our Lord Jesus Christ. But the shepherds had to come first, in order that all presumption might be abolished, and that he who would be reputed Christian must be as a fool in this world. So, let us not bring a foolish presumption to judge by our imaginations the admirable secrets of God, but let us adore them in all simplicity.

Further, let us look at the faith which was in these shepherds. Then it will no longer be difficult to follow them. They come to adore the Redeemer of the world. And in what condition do they find Him? There He is laid in a manger and wrapped in a few little cloths, and it is the sign which had been given to them by the Angel. Now it surely seemed that this was to astonish them and even to make them turn their backs in such a manner that they might no longer recognize Jesus Christ as their Savior.

For the Scribes and Teachers of the Jews surely thought that the Redeemer who had been promised must come in great pomp, and that He must subject all the world, in

such a way that He would have only prosperity, that they would get wealth in abundance to glut themselves, and they would amass all the riches of the world. Here, then, was a scandal which could make these poor people lose courage, so that they would never have come to our Lord Jesus Christ, but rather that they would have been entirely alienated from Him, when it is said to them that they will find Him in a stable and wrapped with rags. The sign given to them of the Redeemer is that He will be laid in a manger as if He were cut off from the rank of men. Yet even that does not turn them away. They come, then, to know Him as Lord, confessing how God has had pity on them and that finally He willed to fulfill His promise which He had given from all time, and they are assured by such a spectacle.

Since, then, the faith of these shepherds was so great that it fought against everything that could turn them from coming to our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be doubly guilty and stripped of every excuse, unless we learn in their school, and unless the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ (although He appeared without dignity or pomp or nobility of this world) be not a scandal to hinder us, or to make us turn away from the good way, and unless we come to yield to Him as to our sovereign King, and to Him to Whom all dominion is given both in heaven and on earth. In fact, we need such an admonition. For, as I have already mentioned, the doctrine of the Gospel brings only scandal to those who are preoccupied with pride and folly and who repute themselves wise men.

We see also how many fanatics reject everything which is contrary to their brains. There are, on the other hand, many mockers who have never been touched by any feeling of their sins. Because they are profane people who think they will never be brought to an ac-

counting and they do not know whether there is a better life than the one they see here below, they reckon that it is only foolishness so to follow the Son of God and to acquaint oneself with Him. Let us see, then, how much more ought we to be strengthened by this admonition: namely, that the Son of God loses nothing of His majesty and of His glory, and that it is not decreased in His humiliation for our salvation; but rather we ought to be enraptured by it, knowing His inestimable goodness and the love He has borne toward us.

This, then, is how we must practice this doctrine, that we do not fail to come to our Lord Jesus Christ, although at first sight we do not find in Him what our flesh, that is, our natural senses, desire. But although He was wrapped in rags at His birth, and although He had been laid there in the manger, may we know and be resolved that He did not, however, cease to be Mediator to draw us to God His Father, to give us an entrance into the Kingdom of heaven from which we were entirely shut out. Still more today, although He does not rule in pomp, and although His Church is despised, and although there is a simplicity in His Word which the great men of this world reject, as for us, may we never cease on that account to cling to Him and to subject ourselves to His dominion in a true obedience of faith. For example, when one preaches, according to our custom it is not anything to draw us much. We hear a man speaking. And who is he? He is not of great dignity and reputation. Then, in summary, there is only the word. On the other hand, in what is preached by the Gospel there are many things which seem to us to be against all reason, when we wish to judge them according to our taste. So let us know we cannot draw near to what God shows and declares to us, unless we have first bowed down.

As a confirmation which He

adds for our sakes to His Word we have the Sacraments. And would a drop of water suffice to assure us of the remission of our sin, and that God adopted us as His children, and, though we are feeble and frail, yet we shall be clothed with His heavenly glory which will never fail us? Could we find a guarantee and assurance of things so great and so excellent in a little water? In the Holy Supper would a piece of bread and a drop of wine suffice to assure us that God accepts us as His children, that we live in Jesus Christ, and that He has shared everything with us? For it seems that such ceremonies which have no great pomp can have no value. So then, we see still better how what is here mentioned about the Shepherds pertains to us and how we should profit by it today. That is, let us not cease to draw near to our Lord Jesus Christ and to be assured that it is He in Whom we shall find all good, all rejoicing, and all glory, although it seems that He is still, as it were, in the stable and in the manger, wrapped with swaddling clothes. That is to say, there might be many things which could debauch us and dazzle the eyes of a few that they might not perceive the heavenly glory which was given to Him by God His Father, I say, even in the human nature He took from us. For since He is God, He has everything from Himself (as it is said in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John), but with respect to His humanity He received as a free gift everything that He brought to us, that we might draw from His fullness, and that we might find in Him everything that is desirable, and that we might have all our rest and contentment in Him alone.

Besides, let us note well that the Holy Spirit also wished to assure us that in following the shepherds who are here ordained as teachers and guides, we should have no fear of making a mistake. For if the shepherds had had no other sign than the stable and the

manger, we could say, "Look at the poor idiots who make themselves believe foolishly and without reason that He was the Redeemer of the world." That would be altogether too easy for us. We could, then, be in doubt. But the Shepherds were confirmed by other means to be certain that He was the Son of God, He Who was thus laid in the manger. That is, when the Angel appeared to them, then they heard this song which St. Luke adds, where all the Kingdom of heaven renders testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He has all power over creatures, in heaven as well as on earth.

Let us learn, then, to receive (to be assured in the faith of Jesus Christ) everything here proposed to us. For it is certain that God willed to convict of ingratitude all those who today do not condescend to do homage to His Only Son, when He sent such a multitude of Angels to declare that He was the Redeemer Who had been promised. It is vain, then, for us to be satisfied in our unbelief, as we see many stupid people who do not take account of everything that is contained in the Gospel. There are even mockers of God, who are so careless that it makes no difference what is preached to them.

They pay no more attention than they would to fables.

There is also something to convict of an obstinate and devilish rebellion all those who do not subject themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ to do Him homage. For since there are unbelievers, they will have an infinite multitude of Angels from Paradise who will testify against them. For these are the ministers of the truth of God. So then, though all the wicked and all those who are steeped in their vices and corruptions, take pleasure in it and are hardened as much as they wish in their unbelief, they have more-than-sufficient witnesses to testify their condemnation. For the Angels of Paradise appeared so that there might no longer be any excuse for us not to receive Jesus Christ as our sovereign King, humbly bowing ourselves before His majesty.

However, let us note on the other hand that God procured our salvation when He sent such a multitude of Angels, so that we might be able to come to our Lord Jesus Christ with a ready courage and that we might no longer be held back by dispute or scruple, but that we might be fully resolved that we shall find in Him all that is lacking in us and that He will have some-

thing to supply all our wants and miseries. Briefly, it is He by Whom God willed to communicate Himself to us. Do we wish to seek our life except in God?

There is all fullness of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. When, then, we have such a testimony, it is just as if God extended His two arms to make us feel His inestimable goodness: and to show that only when we have faith in Jesus Christ (I say a faith without hypocrisy) leaning only upon Him, knowing that it is from Him that we must receive everything, then we shall be sharers of all the benefits which are lacking in us and for which we starve. Besides, although today we do not see the Angels who appeared only for an instant, yet this testimony is registered so as to be authentic. For the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of St. Luke. Let us be satisfied, then, to have such a witness from God, Who declares to us that the Angels rendered testimony of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that, knowing how He was made man, that is, that He emptied Himself for our sakes, we may be so delighted as to aspire to the Kingdom of heaven, so as to adhere to Him in true union of faith. □

**Go Ye Into All the World**

**Mrs. Jeanette Kortering**

## Our Work in Myanmar (3)

**Monday, January 15.**

**D**ad's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and how special it was to spend it in Myanmar! We had an outing that day with about 30 people. We visited the Zoo. Dad and I felt as if we probably would have fit in better had we been in a cage along with the animals, judging

from the way people were looking at us. We were told that many people in Myanmar have never seen a Westerner before. We saw the Shwedagon Pagoda, which is the largest in the world and has been covered many times with gold. Enshrined in the pagoda are eight hairs of Buddha. (What a lot

*Mrs. Kortering is the wife of Rev. Jason Kortering, a minister-on-loan from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America to Singapore.*

of idolatry! It makes one sick to see all these people bowing down and praying to their gods.) We then went to the seaport and rode around Yangon, through the downtown. Our guides pointed out various buildings, like the American Embassy, etc.

After all that activity, we went back to Grace Church for a birthday party. Moses' son also had a birthday that day, his 17<sup>th</sup>, so it was a double birthday party. Moses said a few words in Burmese, and then they asked Dad to make some remarks. He shared some parting thoughts, testimony, and words of appreciation, and he assured them of our prayers. We sang Happy Birthday and had birthday cake. Then there was one request: "Can Pastor and Mrs. Kortering sing a song for us? We hear Mrs. Kortering singing alto and it sounds so nice." So we sang "How Great Thou Art," and Paul, son of Moses, accompanied us on the guitar. While singing the chorus after the last verse, we had our first electrical blackout. All the lights went out, but we continued on, "How great thou art, How great thou art."

Then it was time to say goodbye to all those who were at the conference. By that time a real bond of friendship had been established, so the hugs and handshakes were quite meaningful. This was done by candlelight, and by the time we were getting in the car to go back, the lights came on again. We reached the hotel around eight. We hadn't eaten a thing since breakfast, but we really didn't feel all that hungry either. So, some more fried rice. The people there are used to two meals a day, so they didn't plan to take anything. And we have to be careful not to give them the impression of buying all the time. They were very happy, though, to share in the bag of candy I brought along.

#### **Tuesday, January 16.**

Our first quiet day at the hotel. We stayed there all day. The

hotel has a nice green area complete with tables with sun umbrellas and chairs, so it was very pleasant sitting outdoors. We both did a lot of writing that day, which is helping me greatly in writing this account of our stay there. Dad made notes for his report. Tracy called on the phone and asked if she, Hla Hla, and Moses could come to the hotel to visit us for just a little while. Much to our surprise, Tracy gave me a shawl which was handmade by her mother. Up in the Chin state, they have special shawls which are made for certain occasions. This was one of those. The background is black with a very colorful design woven on it. By the way, Tracy was calling me "Mother" soon after we got there. She feels as if she has gained five sisters. She wanted to know about all of you, so I told her I would tell you that they have a new sister by the name of Tracy from Myanmar who is 26 years old, in addition to their Singapore sister, AiChoo. Hla Hla gave me a little package also and wanted me to open it (usual custom is like Singapore — don't open gifts till later). In the package were jade stones laid out in size for a necklace, bracelet, and earrings. Her son-in-law, who lives in Kale Province, is a stone cutter, and these were cut by him. It all looks very pretty, but I suppose it could be quite costly to have them made up because it would require a setting for each stone. We'll have to take them to a jeweller and have them evaluated first before deciding what to do with them.

Grace Church wishes to do an outreach by providing a home for elderly people, and Hla Hla will be the one to manage it. Arrangements are already in place for a house which will be provided by a widow lady who will be one of the residents. They have to do a little renovating on it. They like to have some non-Christians so they can witness to them. She says, "It may be that the Lord will save them, so they do not have to fear when they

die." This home will accommodate ten people.

#### **Wednesday, January 17.**

Dad had agreed to speak for the chapel services at the Far Eastern Fundamental Bible College. We had to be there at 8:30 and we arrived just on time. He had a speech on demons, that he had made in Singapore. He thought he could use it nicely here, and it went very well. All the classes at Far Eastern are taught in English. They do this because they want all their students to learn English, as there are more books available in English for their Bible study. Remember my talking about Rev. Titus, who is studying in Singapore in order to be a professor in this school? He is so Reformed and gets all excited about learning from Dad. Just can't get it fast enough. It's his uncle that is at the head of FEFBC. Titus attends Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore and is basically repeating all the instruction he has had before in order to get his degree. He is grateful to have learned Hebrew and Greek. We also met Titus' wife (no English) and little daughter and her mother. While Titus is in Singapore, his wife is staying at the hostel at FEFBC. He has a year and a half here yet. When he went back to Myanmar over Christmas, he talked with the professors about covenant theology. He said they were quite open to listen, which was encouraging to him.

After that we went to the Kindergarten at Galilee. The Kindergarten is an outreach of the church for the children in the neighborhood. It is run by two women of the church. All these children are from homes within walking distance of the church. Forty-eight of them! There was one who was 2<sup>+</sup>, and the rest are between 3 and 5. If anything melts your heart, it's that!!

The charge for Kindergarten is one kyat per day. That's one US cent. They told us that some of

the parents cannot afford it, and then they let them come free. While Fung Dun was in Singapore, he got some discontinued school uniforms from a Kindergarten, so most of the children wore identical little green outfits. The Kindergarten is held in the same building as the Galilee Church which I described at the beginning. We cross a little board-bridge from the road to the steps. The building is small, made of bare wood, with a bare wooden floor. Because it's built on stilts, you can see light come up between the floor boards.

We got there just at lunch time. The room is so small that the children in it seemed like a human carpet. The kids take their own lunch — rice and perhaps something with it. They share the water, using only a few cups for all of them. Some of the kids ate using their fingers, and others had spoons. Teachers had to go around helping them a little. After lunch they could go outside for just a few minutes. During that time, one of the teachers swept the rice from the floor, pushed it to an opening, and down it went to the ground.

We asked them if the children could sing a couple of songs for us when they came in. They sang two choruses in English. I caught some the words — one must have been about the Trinity because I heard "three in one, three in one," and the other was "Jesus Loves You and Me." Then it was nap time. One of the teachers opened a wooden box in the corner and started handing out pillows, and all the kids lay down on the floor. They were all so sweet and precious. What really struck me was that they were all so well-behaved and orderly.

Absolutely nothing in there — no chairs, no tables. I don't know if they ever get to write and color. On the chalkboard they had the ABC's and numbers, so I guess they are trying to teach them that, but neither of the teachers really speaks English either. We commu-

nicated with them through Fung Dun.

We went outside with the teachers to take a picture, and other neighbor children started gathering around. They probably recognized me as the lady with the candy, but by that time I didn't have another piece left. I felt bad about that. I gave the teachers what I had left of Granola Bars, etc., to share with the school children.

The Kindergarten is an outreach of the church. The teachers get to speak with the parents of the children and can share the gospel with them. Several of the children are members of the church but the majority are not. One Buddhist family (father, mother, and children) have been converted and have joined the church.

Steven was driving us around that day, and Fung Dun and Moses were with us. After that, Steven took us to the university which he attends and introduced these Western people to his teachers. He was skipping school that day to show us around, but when a friend told him they would be having an English test at 3 P.M., he promptly drove us back to the hotel so he could take the test.

#### **Thursday, January 18.**

Our last day. We took it slow in the morning and left the hotel around 11 a.m. to do a little souvenir shopping and looking around. We bought some tangerines for our lunch. (One has to learn how to find decent restaurants in Yangon. We saw plenty we didn't care to go into.) We went back to the hotel and packed things up. Had roasted chicken for dinner—definitely not our best meal.

#### **Friday, January 19.**

The send-off group was Moses, Fung Dun, Moses' neighbor, Rev. Bawi (pronounced Boy), Rev. James, Tracy, and the driver, Lian Te. Saying good-bye was not easy. They hope and pray we will be able to come again sometime, and so do

we. We really came to love them as dear saints in the Lord. Flight home was good, and Pastor Lau was at Changi Airport to pick us up and take us home.

Now just a few more interesting tidbits.

We found the people to be very warm-hearted and friendly. Even though the people we met are so very poor, they do not complain. They are genuinely happy people, which shows that happiness does not come in material possessions. They express a real joy in the Lord. They're very eager to learn and understand. They sing so enthusiastically. And they show such love and concern for each other! It was just a real joy to be with them for those couple of weeks. One of the ladies told me through an interpreter that she felt so bad that she could not speak English. Believe me, I felt bad that I could not speak Burmese or Chin. Right now a person could not enter Myanmar as a missionary, but we realize how important it would be, if a person were to work there, to know the language. These people are content to have their very basic needs supplied. They don't ask for money to improve their living conditions. Right now the Singapore churches are going to have to work through this and decide how much we can help. The cost of the conference was paid by the ERCS — travel for the delegates, food, and Dad's travel. We paid for my trip. And the others who went from Singapore paid their own too.

The money each church needs is just enough for their pastor to live, and the rest is for outreach. Many of their families are large—one pastor has 11 children, others have 4, 6, 7. There is an Indian family in Grace Church. The mother gave birth on Saturday night to their 10<sup>th</sup> child. Many Indian children are pretty, and those little kids were quite lovable. The father was in church with the family on Sunday morning, and they

sang a song together, with the father playing the guitar. We observed that the church people have plenty of time (some are unemployed—someone told us unemployment is 150%) so they do a lot of thinking and planning for outreach, but they don't have the money to carry it out. In Singapore the people have plenty of money, but they are so busy working that they don't have time. Up in the northern part (Kale and Falam) there are some farmers, so things are a bit easier up there and there is more possibility of their being self-supporting in a few years' time.

Yangon is a large city, bigger than Singapore, with a population of around three million. The city itself is quite nice, although it would be quite a culture shock for one coming from the US. We were surprised to see digital countdowns beneath their traffic lights. We had never seen that before, so here in this undeveloped country it seemed like something quite modern. When the light changes green or red, the digital timer counts down from 30 seconds, so it's possible to tell just how long before the light changes again. People in Myanmar drive on the same side of the road as we do in the US, but the funny thing is that they get a lot of their used vehicles from countries which drive on the other side, so the steering wheels are on the right side of the car. If they are going to pass on the left, they have to pull out so far before they can see if another vehicle is coming.

Main roads are paved and quite wide. There might be a center dividing line but no lane marks. Lines wouldn't mean anything anyway. People pass on the right and on the left, and simply blow their horns all the time to signal they are passing. In the villages, the people walk down the roads, so drivers also blow their horns to get them to move over.

There are some modern build-

ings in the city. Shops are set up on the sidewalks. In town we saw suit jackets folded and set in piles right on the sidewalk, and lots of fabric was just lying in heaps. There are many little coffee shops. Stools are tiny (about 8 to 10 inches high) and the tables a little higher. It looks like toy furniture.

A very familiar sight in Myanmar is all the Buddhist monks walking around. They have shaved heads and they wear saffron-colored ... I can't really call them robes—I think they are just long pieces of fabric wrapped a certain way around their bodies, with one shoulder exposed. Most Buddhist boys will spend one or two of their school years in a monastery, so you see young children dressed this way too, with their heads shaved. Some may decide to stay on after that, but otherwise they return back to their homes. Aside from that, one doesn't see a lot of Buddhist religious activity, as there is in Singapore with the burning of joss sticks and hell money, etc.

Weather was absolutely beautiful—like the best of California. No rain, sunny, clear blue sky. Cool at night, and even though it was hot during the day it wasn't humid like Singapore. Wow! did we ever notice the humidity when we came back home! People in Myanmar wear jackets, sweaters, and scarves in the morning when it is a bit cooler, but to us it was very refreshing and we didn't put our sweaters on once. Mosquitoes are abundant in the evening—another reason why it was good we could get back to our hotel early. One time Kip Vel gave me a mint-green crocheted shawl when she returned from Myanmar. With Singapore heat, I knew I would never wear it here, so I had it on the coffee table for awhile. Now I know what I am supposed to do with it. The women fold up these pretty shawls and set them on top of their heads, or wind them around their heads with some of the fringes hanging down, to keep

the sun from their heads.

We met the friend of Fung Dun who so generously loaned us the truck all week. In visiting with him (English-speaking, by the way), we learned that he earns 1,250 kyats per month. He has a family of four children and, because they have quite a few guests in their house, they need two large bags of rice per month. One bag (probably 50-75 pounds) costs 1,250 kyats. There is no way that people can survive there without making deals or working the black market. He told us that the prime minister has a salary of 3,000 kyats per month. It's only the government officials and their families that are rich because of all the kickbacks. Officially you can buy only two gallons of petrol per week, reasonably priced, so you are forced to buy what you need on the black market at a higher price—190 kyats per gallon. You have to know how to look for these places. You park along the road, and they bring the petrol to the car in a large metal pitcher and pour it in using a funnel. If an official would catch you doing this, he would fine you, but then you just pay him a bribe and you're on your way. There are "under the table" deals all the time.

The young people are trying to arrange for a youth conference in April of '97 up in Kale Province. From all the churches, they hope to have about 100 in attendance. They would very much welcome visitors at their conference from the Singapore churches or the PRC.

For clothing, men and women wear longyis (pronounce lon/gie). This is made from two yards of fabric sewn together with one seam to make a circle. Women's longyis may have several darts sewn in back to lie smooth, and a band sewn on top, especially if made from a silky fabric. Women step inside, pull the extra fabric to the left, hold it tight against their body, and then pull the extra fabric to the right and tuck it in. Men stand in the center of theirs and pull the

extra fabric from both sides to the center, forming a pleat, and they have some special way of flipping it over and making a knot. You see people all over, anywhere and everywhere, adjusting their longyis. They pull them apart and re-do them. Some fabrics are a bit dressier than others and they are worn with shirts, blouses, T-shirts, and sweaters. Everyone looks very decently dressed. I saw shorts only one time. Children are seen with dresses and different kinds of clothing. The churches in Singapore have already had a clothing drive for Myanmar. We saw men occasionally with trousers, and the women might have other clothing, but it's more rare. For bathing, the women just wear their longyi higher up underneath their arms. Bathing is a very familiar sight in the villages.

Much work is done manually in Myanmar—construction, road work, unloading ships, etc. The government can require a person to work for a month without pay on a road project or whatever. We saw streams of people carrying baskets of cement to a construction sight, and we saw the same thing at the seaport with loading and unloading. I forgot to tell you earlier, but one time while Dad was lecturing, he paused for Fung Dun to interpret and, when nothing was said, Dad looked over at him. Fung Dun had a frustrated, worried look on his face, and he motioned for

his brother Moses to go outside. The front door was open and there was a government truck outside with some officials looking in the direction of the church. For a moment he was scared, but he felt everything would be all right because, prior to the conference, they had gotten the OK from the local councilmen. On Tuesday noon we had had a picture-taking session out in the middle of the road, and it could possibly be that someone reported something going on. Everything turned out all right. Moses explained, and the government officials were satisfied, I guess, because they drove off and we didn't hear a thing from them.

That Tuesday noon there were many group pictures taken, and then everyone had to have his picture taken with Dad on one side and me on the other — their little keepsake. Some of them showed us their pictures. I don't know what our smiles looked like toward the end. I'm sure there were over 50 pictures taken.

Tracy, the niece of Moses, and living with their family at present, works full-time for the church, doing some translating and secretarial work. She receives a little pocket money for it. When she was 10 years old her aunt and uncle took her along to the US and promised her mother that they would return her to Myanmar at age 18. (Her father died when she was three years old.) She lived in Atlanta,

Georgia, where her uncle was a Baptist minister. Now the aunt and uncle are living in Guam. By the time Tracy came back, she had completed school through grade 10. She was in Myanmar for a year and then went to India for six years and taught English. Now she has been back in Myanmar for a year, but she desires to go for more training to a Bible school or Christian college in Singapore or the US, to acquire a degree so she would be able to teach in a Bible school in Myanmar, work in translations, teach other women, and witness in the villages. Her heart is really set on helping people in her own country. It's hard to slow such enthusiastic people down a bit and tell them they must be patient and wait for the Lord's leading in all of this. She's a very nice girl.

I guess this brings me to the end of my story. It was a wonderful experience for us, and we're glad we were able to share it together. I took notes during all the lectures because that kept me busy during the translating parts. Dad did very well and he enjoyed it immensely. This was real mission work! We did so much talking about everything while we were there, and there's so much to discuss now as to method, money, etc., etc. It's all very interesting and a real blessing to be involved in this work.

Much love to all,  
Dad and Mom

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ Different Paths to Salvation??

**W**e have heard the cry for unity—first it was a “unity” of all “Christian” churches, but increasingly it is a cry for a certain

“unity” of all world religions. With that, there is the expressed thought that those of other than Christian religions can be saved—and that, apart from the cross of Christ. It was the Rev. Richard Rhem of the Christ Community Church in Muskegon, MI who was condemned by Classis Muskegon of the Reformed Church for his teachings concerning this.

But the idea of salvation through other religions, and apart from Christ, is becoming a dominant cry heard in many churches and from many of the clergy of many denominations.

I was given two articles which appeared in the Religion section of the *Edmonton Journal*. The first is dated October 11, 1997. In its headline it reports: “Anglican bishop

*Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.*

condemns some Christians' narrow view of the divine plan." The article states in part:

It's time for Christians to drop the idea that Christ is the one sure way to salvation, says Vancouver Anglican Bishop Michael Ingham.

In a controversial new book, *Mansions of the Spirit*, (Anglican Book Centre, \$18.95) Ingham says he doubts what has been a central tenet of the Christian faith for most of the last 2,000 years: that God can be known only through Christ.

That conviction is increasingly untenable in a world where we now regularly encounter members of other faiths "whose depth of intimacy with God is evident and radiant," he says.

The fundamentalist belief that billions of non-Christians will be consigned to an "eternity of everlasting fire defies all moral sense and contradicts everything we know about God," he writes.

...Fundamentalism is on the rise around the world, he said, not only among Christians, but also among other faiths.

"It's a great threat to peace and security, and is based on a misreading of Scripture."

This Christian exclusivism has also turned many people off religion, because they see religion as creating violence instead of peace, he said.

"What I'm advocating is a pluralist theology that accepts God's grace in the great religions of the world, and calls us to see people of other faiths and traditions as brothers and sisters...."

In the November 1, 1997 issue of the same paper, there is a report on the moderator of the United Church of Canada. It states, "Rev. Bill Phipps wants to 'mend a broken world' by exhorting his flock to focus on social issues, not religious doctrine." The article continues:

...During a recent interview with the editorial board of the *Ottawa Citizen*, Phipps challenged some long-held Christian beliefs.

"Is heaven a place? I have no idea. I believe that there is a continuity of the spirit in some way, but I would be a fool to say what that is."

...Phipps, 55, told the *Citizen* that he doesn't accept the Bible as a valid historical record and questioned the idea of Jesus as the son of God.

"I don't believe Jesus is the only way to God," he said. "I don't believe he rose from the dead as a scientific fact. I don't know whether those things happened. It's an irrelevant question."

Statements like that have set the Christian world on its ear, and prompted a mini-revolt inside his own church. Last Sunday, Rev. Allen Churchill told his Ottawa congregation that Phipps' views were a "serious embarrassment" to the church.

Then there is the transcript of an interview by Dr. Robert Schuller (of the Crystal Cathedral and minister in the Reformed Church in America) of Dr. Billy Graham on the *Hour of Power* television broadcast of May 31, 1997. I quote from the *Christian News* of October 20, 1997:

SCHULLER: Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?

GRAHAM: Well, Christianity and being a true believer—you know, I think there's the Body of Christ. This comes from all the Christian groups around the world, outside the Christian groups. I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the Body of Christ. And I don't think that we're going to see a great sweeping revival, that will turn the whole world to Christ at anytime. I think James answered that, the Apostle James in the first council in Jerusalem, when he said that God's purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that's what God is doing today, He's calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Chris-

tian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven.

SCHULLER: What, what I hear you saying is that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?

GRAHAM: Yes, it is, because I believe that. I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that they have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, and never heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.

SCHULLER: ...I'm so thrilled to hear you say this. There's a wideness in God's mercy.

GRAHAM: There is. There definitely is.

According to the report in the *Christian News*, "Billy Graham's first great city-wide evangelistic campaign was held in Los Angeles in 1949. At that time he made a public promise that he would never have any theological modernists (theological liberals) on his platform." But now he declares that he will be in heaven with those of many other religions who attain salvation apart from faith in Christ. Schuller, minister in good standing in the Reformed Church in America, agrees. Scripture states, "How is their gold become dim!" (Lam. 4:1).

Leaders in the church world openly deny what Christ Himself taught, "This is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). And: "Nei-

ther is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

How openly and rapidly the churches and their leaders are changing! Surely the time of Christ's return must be at hand when the prophecy that he "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (II Thess. 2:4) is being fulfilled.

### ■ Promise Keepers (Again)

We continue to read of the "Promise Keepers." Now that several years have passed since their inception, it becomes ever clearer what these really are.

*World Magazine*, October 18, 1997, has a feature article about Promise Keepers and their huge rally in Washington, D.C. The article points out the widespread approval given this group. But it also points out growing opposition to the Promise Keepers and their program.

Other pastors are leery about elements of Promise Keepers—a parachurch usurping of church authority, the charismatic orientation of some leaders, and the putting aside of doctrinal distinctions....

The opposition also comes from some strange sources:

Elizabeth Toledo of the National Organization for Women (NOW) was starkly honest in explaining to ABC's *This Week* audience the opposition of NOW to Promise Keepers. She decried the emphasis on male headship within the family (Scripture "is no excuse for putting men in charge"), attacked an "agenda that is not tolerant to lesbians and gays," and complained that the large PK crowds "could affect our efforts to achieve equality for women."

Wow!! NOW is against Promise Keepers! One would almost be inclined to say, "If they are against it, then I am for it!" Sadly, the elements which they oppose are exactly those which would appeal to the godly man and woman. Those things which ought to be emphasized and taught in the church itself, this para-church organization has taken over. These are the very truths which we would also teach.

But there is the "dark" side of Promise Keepers. They have widely proclaimed, "Break Down the Walls!" It was their rallying cry a few summers ago. Those "walls" which must be broken down, are walls which divide race, but also denominations. Doctrinal distinctives are not important. The story is told that at one of the rallies (perhaps, then, at all of them!) the large audience was asked to shout loudly the name of the church or denomination to which they belonged. Of course, there was cacophony! Then the audience was to shout the name "Jesus." Now the single word stood out clearly and could be distinguished by all! The lesson was clear. Differing denominations only create confusion. We must all be united on the main thing: Jesus.

*World Magazine* points out further attempts to "break down the walls." It reports:

Last October, article 5 of PK's statement of faith read, in part, "man...because of sin, was alienated from God. That alienation can be removed only by accepting through *faith alone* God's gift of salvation which was made possible by Christ's death" (emphasis added).

Today, the statement reads, "Only through faith, trusting in Christ alone for salvation which was made possible by his death and resurrection, can that alienation be removed."

What's missing? Faith alone, *sola fide*, the core doctrine of the gospel. As of at least last October, PK stood with the Reformation, itself a movement that re-

claimed, among other truths, the clear Bible teaching that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Only through trusting in God's mercy in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf can man be saved.

Now, according to PK, it is not faith alone in Christ that saves; it is faith in Christ alone that saves. The latter is the classic teaching of the Roman Catholic church, that faith is a necessary but insufficient condition of salvation; trust in Christ's death merely begins the process of salvation, which is "completed" as Christ enables us by grace to participate in works of righteousness.

...Even if the distinction is no big deal to evangelicals—though it should be—it is a big deal to Catholics, according to the Catholic weekly *Our Sunday Visitor*. Its July 20 edition reported that PK changed its statement of faith to accommodate Catholics who wanted to join but couldn't, because to embrace "faith alone" would "force them to reject their Catholic faith."

*World* reporters sought out PK's side of the story. Staffers in the public-relations office issued a statement that claims the change "has not altered the meaning of this key principle in any way. Our objective was only to bring more clarity to this important fundamental truth of Christianity." Moreover, PK maintains, the revised statement of faith "expresses Ephesians 2:8-9 more accurately than the old statement, thus we felt we were being truer to Scripture. Promise Keepers believes that salvation is a free gift from God and cannot be earned by any human effort."

So the walls are being further "broken down." The article quoted above concludes correctly, "Fundamentally, there is only one (question): Is *sola fide* the official theological position of Promise Keepers, or is it not?" □

# Spikenard Saturday, Palm Sunday

(John 12: 1-19)

As Jesus' public ministry came to a close it became very clear: He was the kind of person you either loved or you hated. His ministry compelled one to take a stand either for or against Him. One could not halt between two opinions. His person, His visage, His words, His deeds worked faith and love for Himself, or, exposing sin and unrepentance in reprobate men, they hardened sinners. Light has this way about it: it brings out the children of the light who welcome the light with joy, and causes the rats to scurry into their holes.

John 12, being a record of the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, reveals just this point: Jesus is the One you either love or hate. We see this at a certain supper to which Jesus and others were invited on a Saturday night before the passover: people honoring Jesus, others hating Him and all He stood for. We see this when, the next day, Jesus rides into Jerusalem for the last time in His earthly ministry: the King coming, sitting on the colt of an ass.

Do you love Him? Or do you hate Him?

Let us search the Scriptures: with love! Love! For the Lord's anointed! For the humble and yet triumphant King of our salvation!

Celebrate Jesus with love and honor! Spikenard Saturday! Palm Sunday! Every day!

*Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.*

## For Meditation & Discussion

### 1. Setting: John 12:1.

It was six days before the Jews' passover. This is the third passover mentioned by John as having occurred during Jesus' public ministry (the other two are mentioned in John 2:13ff. and 6:4). Unless the unnamed feast of John 5:1 is another passover, the fact that Jesus' ministry spanned three passovers establishes the length of His earthly ministry at a little over two years. So much done in such little time! Should He not be given more, much more time to accomplish much more? Will it not be a tragedy when the Lord Jesus must die not many days hence?

There are parallel passages: Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9. Luke 7:36-38 is similar, but seems to be an altogether separate incident. Make a list of the differences in each report (Matthew, Mark, and John) of the incident recorded in John 12. How are these differences to be harmonized?

### 2. Love and Hate at Messiah's Table

Comment on how the following show either love or hate at this supper with Jesus (you will want to compare the parallel passages):

\*Martha: v. 2

\*Lazarus: v. 2,10-12

\*Mary: vv. 3-8

\*Judas Iscariot: v. 4-6

\*The disciples: Matthew 26:8, 9

\*Much people of the Jews: v. 9

\*The chief priests: vv. 10, 11

### 3. Mary, the Spikenard, and the Savior: vv. 3-8.

At this supper with Jesus, Mary took a pound of spikenard and anointed the feet of Jesus with it. Matthew 26:7 and Mark 14:3 record that she also poured it on Jesus' head.

This anointing was the event of the supper. It highlighted the importance of Jesus. It brought out who were for Him, who were confused about Him, and who were against Him.

Spikenard was a fragrant oil extracted from a plant native to northern India. It is still used today as a perfume for hair. It was, in Jesus' day, very expensive. It would be imported in sealed alabaster boxes which would be opened, and the spikenard used, only on very special occasions (according to the *New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, Ed.).

Mary thinks it is a special occasion. She takes a pound of the oil, which according to the reckoning of the day was worth some 300 pence, or denarii (v. 5). That is, the oil Mary poured on Jesus' head and feet was worth about a year's wages (figuring the daily wage at

1 pence or denarius: Matthew 20:2). Imagine that! Imagine Mary doing that today: taking something worth \$30-40,000 (average yearly salary today), and pouring it on Jesus! What would your reaction have been?

Judas and others (including the other disciples, Matthew 26:8,9) protest! Their argument: it would have been better to sell this precious ointment and give the money to the poor! What was revealed at this time about the nature and establishment of Jesus' kingdom which caused such indignation at the woman's deed? What was the difference between the indignation of most of the disciples, and that of Judas (cf. John 12:4-6, Matt. 26:14-16, and Mark 14:10, 11)?

Regarding the reaction of some to Mary's anointing of Jesus, D.A. Carson, in his commentary on John, writes: "If self-righteous piety sometimes snuffs out genuine compassion, it must also be admitted, with shame, that social activism, even that which meets real needs, sometimes masks a spirit that knows nothing of worship and adoration" (p. 429). Is there evidence today in Christendom of either "self-righteous piety" that snuffs out genuine compassion or of social activism which masks "a spirit that knows nothing of worship and adoration"? How do we guard against either extreme?

Jesus says that Mary, in anointing Him at this time, "wrought a good work" on Him (Mark 14:6), and that against (or "for") the day of His burying she did this (John 12:7; cf. Matt. 26:12; Mark 14:8). He honors Mary further when He says: "whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13; Mark 14: 9).

What is the significance of this anointing? Is there evidence to suggest that Mary *understood*, or did not understand, the necessity and significance of Jesus' death and burial?

#### 4. **Triumphal entry and lavish praise: vv. 12-19.**

This passage records Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19 complement the inspired John's record.

From John and the other gospel accounts we learn that from Bethany, where Jesus had His supper with Lazarus and others, Jesus had sent two of His disciples to acquire a donkey for Him to ride upon. From there He would ride the two miles or so to Jerusalem. As He did, a procession of people gathered around Him and rendered great praise.

Lavish praise indeed! The disciples had saddled the coat with their own garments, to comfort their King. A great many gathered and spread their coats on the way in the path of the donkey so that the donkey could walk on them. Others cut off branches of palm trees and waved them and laid them in His path in honor. All the while words of praise were rendered about Jesus and to Jesus. And by a great many people! The Pharisees even cry: "Behold, the world is gone after him" (John 12:19)!

It seems that there were two groups. Some came from Bethany to travel with Jesus to Jerusalem. Another group came from Jerusalem, especially, according to John 12, to see and praise this Jesus who had recently raised Lazarus from the dead. These groups, the one from Bethany, and the other from Jerusalem, apparently met at the top of the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem. There is the climax of praise! There the whole multitude rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen (Luke 19:37).

So lavish the praise given to Jesus, so fervent and frenzied the crowd surrounding Him as Jesus rides into the city, that it is no wonder that the whole city of Jerusalem was moved (Matt. 21:10). It was a movement of seismic propor-

tions! At the entry of the great King, who was riding on a donkey, Jerusalem was shaken in its very soul!

#### 5. **Blessed the King of Israel! (v. 13).**

How is Jesus the King? List several mighty works which Jesus did to show He is King of Israel, King of the universe!

The words of praise offered at this royal entry into Jerusalem were many. The words recorded in the gospel narratives are:

Matthew 21:9: "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

Mark 11:9,10: "Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."

Luke 19:38: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."

John 12: 13: "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."

What Scriptures are quoted in these words of praise? Discuss the significance of these words.

#### 6. **Necessary praise (cf. Luke 19:39, 40).**

Some of the Pharisees, true to form, urge the Master to rebuke His disciples for all the praise they are giving to Jesus (Luke 19:39). Jesus answers them: "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

There will be praise of Jesus!

Among the Pharisees there is the intense desire that Jesus be not praised, but put away. Why did they, and why do unbelievers today, seek to squelch the praise of Jesus? What evidence is seen today of the history-long anti-Jesus campaign? How is this seen today in Christian celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, when there

is supposed to be all praise given to Messiah?

Praise of Jesus there will, however, be. There will be praise of Jesus when He is exalted. God has ordained Him to have all the pre-eminence (Col. 1:15ff.). God will give Him a name which is above every name (Phil. 2:9). And at the very name of Jesus every knee, every disciple's knee, every Pharisee's knee, every rock knee shall bow!

But also now, that is, when Jesus is entering into His passion week and into the depth of His humiliation as the suffering Savior. There must be praise now!

Discuss these three reasons why there must be praise of Jesus at the royal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem for the last time on earth:

\* The reason why praise of Jesus is so necessary is that His kingship and glory are so obvious and great that even if people will not acknowledge it, lifeless objects, such as stones, will!

\* Praise at this time is necessary in order that prophecy might be fulfilled (cf. John 12: 14-16! What prophecy?).

\* Jesus' entry into Jerusalem now, though in humiliation, is a foreshadowing of His return in

glory as King to judge the wicked and gather His church.

### 7. Praise for the King riding on a donkey.

Jesus had need of a donkey (Luke 19:30,34). He may enter into Jerusalem no other way. Strange way to come and to establish a kingdom! Did not kings usually come in state, in pomp, on a fine horse, or in a chariot drawn by ten horses?!

Jesus rides the colt of an ass. This is because He establishes His kingdom in the way of humiliation. He is the sin-bearer. He comes to take sin away by suffering for it in His people's place. He comes to conquer not the Romans, but sin and death. His weapon will be a cross and not a sword.

How does the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-11, fulfilled here, point out the significance of Jesus' riding on a donkey?

He had come unto His own, already, in the form of a babe, born in a lowly cattle stall. He had willingly hid His full glory in the form and weakness of human flesh. Now He joins with the donkey, lowliest of animals, burden-bearer is all, now simply, terribly, to be crushed....

Despite all the lavish praise ...

is there evidence in Scripture that most of the people missed the significance of Jesus' riding in on a donkey, and, also, that if they had understood it, their praises would have turned to mocking and cursing?

For what kind of king and kingdom were the people hoping?

How do we show we understand and are willingly involved in the praise of the King of the cross?

### 8. Perspective, John 20:31

List the several ways Jesus is revealed in the events described above to be the Christ, the Son of God.

From the examples both of faith and unbelief in response to Jesus' anointing by Mary and His royal entry into Jerusalem, discuss the several characteristics of pure faith in the suffering Messiah.

Compare several things that money can buy with the blessings Jesus has purchased for us through His suffering and death. Do they compare?

O Israel, Praise! Thy King cometh! Praise!

With oil! With praise! With palm!

In Spirit! By word! In deed!

Thy King cometh unto thee! □

Contending for the Faith

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

## “Extra-Scriptural Binding” (?)

*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,*

*Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

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

Philippians 2:1-3

**E**xtra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger is the title of a recently published translation of Dr. Klaas Schilder's answer to our *Brief Declaration of Principles*, as a series of articles in *The Reformation*, a magazine of which he had long been the editor. The title speaks for itself. Schilder maintained not only that the content of the *Declaration* was outside the bond of Scripture, but that its "binding" nature was unusual and constituted a serious new danger.

This is surprising, inasmuch as few could be expected to be more conscious of Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordrecht than the churches to which he belonged, their official name being, *Reformed Churches (according to Article 31)*; and it is this article which stipulates that "whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote (of a broader ecclesiastical body—BW) shall be considered settled and binding unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order." In other words, the binding nature of the *Declaration* was not unusual at all, for all decisions of the broader assembly in Reformed churches are just that, without any suggestion that this might be dangerous. Still, it is well that we should understand what the implications of this article are.

-----

To begin with, there is no suggestion here that ecclesiastical assemblies have some kind of an unction from God granting them a special authority over the people of God. This, after all, is not even so of those offices which are instituted in Scripture, as was evident already with Peter, who at one moment was declared by Jesus to be the recipient of infallibly inspired truth with an apostolic position in the foundation of the church (Matt. 16:17), and yet immediately thereafter, when he thought to rely on his own discernment, was rebuked for serving Satan (Matt. 16:23). No one, not even an apostle, can claim

authority such as that, and much less those who follow him in lesser positions. And, if so, certainly neither can our ecclesiastical assemblies, which have no distinct institution in Scripture. There are those, of course, who claim they do, insisting that the counsel or convent in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 was actually a first synod; but this is hardly valid, as Herman Hoeksema explained at the first synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches:

This gathering, which was held about the year AD 50, has sometimes been called the first synod. But this is hardly correct. For, first of all, we may remark that there can hardly have been room for a synodical gathering as long as the apostles still lived. They were directly guided by the Spirit. They had authority over all the churches. And the apostolic authority was final. As long as the apostles lived, therefore, there was neither need of, nor occasion for, a synod. Nor was the constituency of this gathering such that it could be called a synod. The latter is always a representative gathering. Its members are delegated by and receive their commission from the churches that delegate them. But the meeting at Jerusalem was constituted of the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem, together with Paul and Barnabas, who had been sent by the church of Antioch and who represented more particularly the churches among the Gentiles. Hence, we may more properly characterize this gathering as a convent under the direct guidance of the apostles.

In the early church there was no need for, nor is there any record of, the kind of broader assemblies which we now hold. These were the creation of a later age; and although we may certainly believe they came to be through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and out of a perfectly sound biblical principle, they certainly have no special innate authority in themselves. In

the end, God has left us with one authoritative standard of truth, the divinely inspired Scriptures; and conformity to it provides the only final authority as to what is to be believed and done. And yet our church order does stipulate that decisions of our assemblies are to "be considered settled and binding." On what is that based?

Within the historical record of the New Testament, we are told of the institution of the Christian church with its instituted offices (pastors, elders, and deacons), men ordained of God for the guidance and rule of His church; but their authority is not within themselves, or in the rights of the offices they bear. It is only in their knowledge and application of the teachings of Scripture that they can claim the right to be heard; and it is to that which they must be committed. But the fulfillment of this is not easy. We are all weak and sinful, and prone to misuse God's Word. So it is that Paul often instructed those who work within the church not to work alone, but in unity with each other, as in Ephesians 4:1-3: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And again in Philippians 2:1, 2: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." While behind this was always that foundational prayer of Jesus, John 17:21: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." It is within the communion of the saints that the Holy Spirit works and grants to the church to rise above the weak-

nesses of one or a very few. It is on and within the unity of the church that we must live.

Ideally, of course, such unity would include the whole body of Christianity in a united institution; but God has not seen well to provide the degree of sanctification which this needs. Rather, as time has passed, the institute of the church has become increasingly fragmented on every side. Still, the need for unity is there, if not with all, at least among those by whom a common conviction is shared. Nowhere was the sense of this more evident than in the great Reformation. Repeatedly the Reformers searched the Scriptures in an effort to demonstrate to those who rejected them that their positions were of God and should be accepted by all. And then, when it became evident that this was not to be, they took these formulations and used them as common confessions through which they might be joined together in the Word, guided in their quest for an ever deeper understanding of what God has made known, and protected from falling back into those ancient errors which have always tended to reappear. So denominations were formed.

Basically, therefore, a denomination is a group of congregations united under a common faith into a single administrative unit. In its own way it is a kind of natural spiritual response to a common belief. When believers hold the same faith, there is a natural affinity which draws them together for fellowship, worship, and mutual assistance in the needs of life. Because of weaknesses and frailties, Christians often struggle with problems bigger than they; and the churches need advice and assistance from those who believe as do they, particularly when it comes to matters of correction and discipline of those members in a congregation with whom they are too personally involved to make objective judgment on their own. And be-

sides that, there are also matters which are too great for individual congregations to care for by themselves, matters regarding such things as missions and the preparation of young men for the ministry. For all of these, denominational union is needed.

For such a union to work, however, there must necessarily be a moral commitment to respect and honor those decisions which are mutually made; and it is for this that the Church Order of Dordt was devised, with its heart in Articles 30 and 31. In this church order it is agreed that all the congregations which are so joined together, as represented by their ordained consistorial officebearers, will be divided into various geographical groupings, classes, (particular synods, when warranted), and general synods, all of which are temporary gatherings which exist only while they are in session, and by which only ecclesiastical matters are to be considered in the ecclesiastical way stipulated by the church order. These matters are of two kinds. First, there are those which arise out of the local congregations after it has become apparent that the local consistory is unable to handle them by itself. In such instances they are to be brought to the classis to which that congregation belongs for consideration and advice, and, if they cannot be settled there, passed on to the next meeting of synod for final advice. And, secondly, there are matters which concern the churches as a whole, matters of missions, training for the ministry, and mutual assistance of those churches where special need is found. It is simply a matter of all things being "done decently and in order" (1Cor. 14:40).

In all of this, however, most crucial of all is the good faith of all participants which alone can establish trust. There must be a common commitment by those who participate, individually or through their representatives, to respect

that which is done by the whole. In fact, the heart of the Reformed church relationship is that they "bind" themselves to such a mutual commitment in Article 31. It is not a matter of special ability or right on the part of those who gather and take part in these assemblies, but a common pledge which these believers make to each other when they join themselves in this denominational relationship. They commit themselves, first of all, to the three forms of unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of the Synod of Dordt) under which they as churches of the Reformation worship; and then, in the second place, to the church order, which binds them together in functioning as the body of Christ. In good faith to each other, they promise never to militate against this union either in its creeds or in its common functions, and to accept the decisions which are made. It is not a matter of binding the conscience. Even regarding the creeds it is recognized that there may be things which an individual does not see to be in harmony with Scripture as he understands it; and in such a case it is to the Scriptures that he must submit his faith. But at the same time he is also free to show to the churches where his problem is, and to seek to prove it is so. But when this is done, and if he has failed to prove his point, he must accept the decision given as that which will be maintained in the church, or leave for one more in agreement with what he believes.

-----

And so it was with the *Declaration of Principles*.

One must understand that at its beginning the Protestant Reformed Churches were founded on the conviction that the theory of common grace, adopted and forced upon the churches by the Christian Reformed synod and classis in 1924, was contrary to the Word of God as set forth in the Reformed confessions. If it were not so, it would

have been unethical for them to refuse to submit to what was decided, even if they disagreed. But, by the same measure, this also meant that the rejection of this common grace became a commonplace of the Protestant Reformed Churches, an agreed starting point about which they were formed. For anyone then to join these churches while refusing to accept this as that which would be taught among them would have been highly unethical and contrary to the principle of Article 31. It was a matter "settled and binding" from the start.

With the Liberated Churches in 1944, however, it was different. Within the Reformed Churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) in the Netherlands it had been decided from their beginning, and confirmed by synodical decision in 1905, that two different views of the covenant were to be acceptable among them, including the conditional view held by Schilder and his followers with its implicit element of common grace. Thus when the synod of 1944 simply threw them out because of their covenant view, with-

out reconsidering and rescinding its 1905 decision, it was in direct violation of its own church order. Among our people this aroused a great deal of sympathy for Schilder and his followers, even while we realized that doctrinally their views were quite different from ours, particularly regarding their view of the covenant. From the beginning Rev. Hoeksema pointed this out, and sought to discuss it, but with little response. And then suddenly it was learned that Dr. Schilder had spoken out in repudiation of common grace to the confusion of everyone. The result was that Rev. Hoeksema invited Dr. Schilder to come here so that they could discuss the matter together and see if common ground might be found doctrinally as well.

As it turned out, however, although Schilder came, this discussion did not take place—primarily due to the fact that Rev. Hoeksema had fallen ill. And, after touring all our churches, Schilder announced that essentially he agreed with our covenant view as well; and he was convinced that we could and should work toward a

sister-church relationship, so that when their members would immigrate to this country they could become members of our churches. For us there continued to be a problem because of our doctrinal differences, however; and when these people began to arrive, we warned them that there would be no common grace, directly or implied in our doctrine of the covenant, taught in our churches. And then it was learned that Schilder's men were instructing these same people privately to spread propaganda concerning their view of the covenant, with its implicit common grace, in our churches, a clear violation of Article 31.

That was why our *Brief Declaration of Principles* was set forth, a reminder of what had been settled and binding since our origin as churches. And the greatest disappointment was that, after all those years, Dr. Schilder had failed to recognize this fact, and instead gave forth with the indignant cry found in this book. At the same time, it brings out how essentially different we were—as we hope to see. □

## Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

# Supreme Court Upholds Ban on Physician-assisted Suicide—No Constitutional "Right to Die"

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

We disagree with the claim that the distinction between refusing lifesaving medical treatment and assisted suicide is "arbitrary" and "irrational." Granted, in some cases, the line between the two may not be clear, but certainty is not required, even if it were possible. By permitting everyone to refuse unwanted medical treatment while prohibiting anyone from assisting a suicide, New York law follows a long-standing and rational distinction.

*Vacco v. Quill*, U.S. Supreme Court (June, 1997).

In the last decade or so, the U.S., Canada, Britain, and other countries have been embroiled in an intense debate over the morality and legality of physician-assisted suicide. The "Death with Dignity Act" adopted in 1994 by a voter referendum in Oregon, Dr. Kevorkian's continued antics in Michigan, and cases filed in Canada have heightened the controversy.

Forty-four states in the U.S. have statutes making it a crime to aid another person to attempt suicide. Although many proposals to legalize assisted suicide have been introduced in state legislatures across the nation, none have been enacted, notwithstanding intense lobby efforts by "right-to-die" proponents.

But then in 1996, federal appellate courts in New York and Washington declared the laws criminalizing physician-assisted suicide in those states to be unconstitutional (see *Standard Bearer*, vol. 73, p. 162). Both of these cases were appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. This summer the Court unanimously overruled the lower courts, holding that state laws criminalizing physician-assisted suicide are not constitutionally defective.

### The Washington Case

In 1994, four physicians and Compassion in Dying, a nonprofit organization that counsels people considering suicide, sued the state of Washington seeking a declaration that Washington's law penalizing physician-assisted suicide was violative of patients' constitutional rights. In a decision that shocked the nation, the federal court of appeals struck down the Washington law banning assisted suicide, holding that the law violated a newly discovered constitutional right of a terminally ill patient to "determine the time and manner of one's death" or the "right to choose a humane, dignified death."

Although there was absolutely no legal precedent for this novel decision, the appellate court nonetheless fearlessly forged this innovative "right to die," relying almost exclusively on the abortion decisions. The appellate court, finding the abortion decisions "highly instructive" and "almost prescriptive" ruled:

Like the decision of whether or not to have an abortion, the decision how and when to die is one of "the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, a choice central to personal dignity and autonomy." ... the Constitution encompasses a due process liberty interest in controlling the time and manner of one's death—that there is, in short, a constitutionally recognized "right to die."

### Supreme Court Rejects a Right to Die

The Supreme Court found the appellate court's argument unpersuasive. The Court noted that for over 700 years the Anglo-American common-law tradition has always punished or otherwise disapproved of both suicide and assisting suicide. The Court also reviewed recent unsuccessful attempts to revoke assisted suicide bans in numerous states, and noted that an "overwhelming majority" of state legislatures continue explicitly to prohibit assisted suicide. The Court also attempted to distinguish the abortion decisions, arguing that those decisions (generating the controversial "right to choose an abortion") do not "warrant the sweeping conclusion that any and all important, intimate, and personal decisions are so protected."

The Court also declared that the state ban on assisted suicide is related to legitimate government interests: preserving human life; protecting the integrity and ethics of the medical profession; the protection of vulnerable groups (the

poor, elderly, disabled) from abuse, neglect, and mistakes; and finally, avoiding the path that leads to voluntary and involuntary euthanasia. In this regard, the Court noted the alarming reports from the Netherlands, where assisted suicide has been legalized, including a 1990 Dutch government study which discovered some 6,000 death cases where physicians administered lethal drugs *without* the patient's explicit request or consent.

### The New York Case Also Overruled

Another federal appellate court on the east coast struck down New York's ban on physician-assisted suicide, but for different reasons than the Washington court. This court held that the challenged law violated the terminally ill patients' equal protection rights because New York penalizes terminally ill persons who wish to hasten their deaths by self-administering prescribed drugs, but allows others to do so by removing life-support systems. In the appellate court's view "the ending of life by withdrawal of life-support systems is *nothing more or less than assisted suicide*." Consequently, it is unconstitutional, the court held, for New York to *permit* withdrawal of life-support systems for the terminally ill, but *criminalize* administration of lethal drugs, when both result in hastening death.

But the Supreme Court likewise overruled the New York case, rejecting the notion that the assisted suicide ban violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution by treating similar cases differently. The Court ruled that neither the assisted suicide ban nor the law permitting patients to refuse medication treatment treats anyone differently from anyone else or draws any distinction between persons. This is because *everyone* has the right to refuse unwanted medical treatment; *no one* is permitted to assist a suicide.

Most importantly, the Court vehemently rejected the lower court's contention that refusing lifesaving medical treatment "is nothing more or less than assisted suicide":

Unlike the Court of Appeals, we think the distinction between assisting suicide and withdrawing life-sustaining treatment, a distinction widely recognized and endorsed in the medical profession and in our legal tradition, is both important and logical. When a patient refuses life-sustaining medical treatment, he dies from an underlying fatal disease or pathology; but if a patient ingests lethal medication prescribed by a physician, he is killed by that medication.

The Court then entered into a somewhat philosophical discussion attempting to distinguish acts that may have the same consequence, but are done with widely different intents (e.g., when a physician administers a palliative drug to lessen pain, that drug may in fact hasten death, but because the physician does not intend to kill the patient, such procedures are moral and legal).

The Court concluded that New York's laws *permitting everyone* to refuse unwanted medical treatment while *prohibiting anyone* from assisting a suicide are in accordance with "long-standing and rational dis-

tinctions," and are, therefore, constitutionally valid.

### Comment

Reformed Christians, Right-to-Life proponents, and others breathed a sigh of relief this past June when the Supreme Court overruled these two federal appellate decisions which would have struck down all state laws criminalizing physician-assisted suicide. But the battle is hardly over. Right-to-die advocates, bitterly disappointed by the Supreme Court decision which would have repealed the assisted suicide laws in some forty states, have announced that they will re-double their efforts to sponsor voter referenda to repeal these laws on a state-by-state basis. They can do this because, although the Supreme Court held that the Constitution does not give Americans a right to physician-assisted suicide, the Court nonetheless invited states to resolve the controversial issue through the political process.

Oregon has accepted the invitation. On November 4, 1997, Oregon voters, by a resounding 20% margin, approved the state's 1994 controversial groundbreaking law legalizing physician-assisted suicide. Consequently, Oregon is now the first state in the U.S. to allow physicians to assist the "terminally ill" end their lives by ingesting lethal drugs. This unprecedented law has generated widespread con-

cern that the U.S. has now embarked on a course many fear will lead to euthanasia—"compassionate death" for the elderly, incompetent, and infirm. Physicians for Compassionate Care, a group of doctors opposing assisted suicide, declared the new Oregon law to be a "monumental paradigm shift" in the history of law and medicine.

Press releases in the past few weeks reported that right-to-die advocates have now launched a ballot initiative in Michigan, hoping that Michigan will be the next state to bypass the state legislature and legalize assisted suicide by voter referendum. Experts are divided on whether Michigan and other states will follow the Oregon experience, but recent surveys show that the voter initiatives may have quick success. Polls show that an ever increasing percentage of voters approve of suicide for "terminally ill patients." A 1996 survey published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that 56% of responding doctors in Michigan preferred legalizing assisted suicide. Another survey disclosed that 60% of the responding doctors in Oregon supported legalizing assisted suicide. As right-to-die propaganda continues to influence doctors and the general population, it is sadly predictable other states may soon follow Oregon's example and repeal laws criminalizing assisted suicide. □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Congregational Activities

If you read this magazine on a regular basis, then you probably have discovered by now that there was something missing between pages 95 and 96 of the November 15<sup>th</sup> issue. The missing words were

---

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

these: "...spoke on the subject of Christian Education. The congregation of the Edgerton, MN PRC met recently and approved putting permanent...." Our apologies to the readers of the "News" and to both Rev. Haak and our congregation in Edgerton. At least now we know what subject Rev. Haak spoke on, and who is sitting on newly padded pews.

Once again the deacons and the Helping Hands Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC sponsored a food drive for members of their congregation. Hudsonville's members were encouraged to use this as an expression of thankfulness for what they have been given, both spiritually and materially by their Lord and Savior.

Women from our Georgetown

PRC in Hudsonville, MI have met this fall for a weekly Bible Study at the Beaverdam Christian Reformed Church in Beaverdam, MI. As an expression of thanks to Beaverdam for the use of their church, Georgetown brought donations for the Zeeland Food Pantry, a project supported by Beaverdam.

Mr. Angus Stewart and Mr. Philip Rainey, the two men from the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland who are attending our seminary, have settled into their home near the seminary and have been attending our Hudsonville, MI PRC. In an effort to get to know them better, Hudsonville's congregation has been taking turns every Sunday having them over for dinner. Besides getting better acquainted, it also provides the men with a home-cooked meal and perhaps even a few leftovers for the week.

The Monday evening catechism classes of our First PRC in Holland, MI, along with other interested young adults, made a trip to the Scriptorium in Grand Haven, MI on November 20. The purpose was to acquaint the young people with the various forms in which the Bible has been written and preserved throughout its history.

#### **Mission Activities**

**R**ev. C. Terpstra and Mr. Gary Kaptein traveled to Spokane, WA on November 7 on behalf of our Domestic Mission Committee to visit with the leaders and members of the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church. This small, currently independent Reformed congregation is seeking to affiliate in some way with us and requested the visit.

Rev. W. Bruinsma and Mr. Gary Kaptein visited the San Luis Valley, CO mission in mid-November, also on behalf of our Domestic Mission Committee.

#### **Young Adults' Activities**

**T**he Young Adults' Fellowship of our Hope PRC in Redlands, CA invited their whole church to an ice skating party on November 22.

Young adults around west Michigan were invited to a "Retreat" at the Benton Harbor, MI Quality Inn on October 31. Rev. C. Terpstra led the discussion centered on the theme "Submitting to God's Will."

#### **Evangelism Activities**

**I**n a continuation from our December 1<sup>st</sup> "News," we mention some more lectures sponsored by various of our churches in celebration of the Reformation.

The Reformed Witness Committee of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI sponsored a lecture on November 7 at their church. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on "A Restored Treasure of the Reformation: Sovereign Free Double Predestination."

The same night Prof. D. Engelsma spoke at our Randolph, WI PRC on the theme, "The Reformation's Influence Upon the Family: Blessing and Bane."

The Evangelism Committee of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada sponsored a Reformation Day lecture. Their pastor, Rev. R. Miersma, spoke on the "Necessary Reformation of the Church."

Rev. R. Moore was the featured speaker at a lecture sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of the

First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada. He spoke on "Reformation for the Church Today."

A public lecture was sponsored by the Lynden, WA PRC on October 31. Rev. G. VanBaren, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, spoke on the topic, "Satan—And the Mother of All Battles."

#### *Food for Thought*

"Calvinism is that sight of the majesty of God that pervades all of life and all of experience."

—B.B. Warfield □

### *ANNOUNCEMENTS*

#### **NOTICE!!**

Please note this change in your 1997 Yearbook:

Bulletin clerk  
for First PRC (Grand Rapids):  
Melissa Looyenga  
4568 Blackfoot Dr.  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(616) 530-2933

And please note also that Grace Protestant Reformed Church began holding its first service at 11 A.M., instead of 1 P.M., November 30, 1997.

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The council and congregation of the First PRC of Holland express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Henry VanderKolk and to Mr. and Mrs. Greg (Pam) Bos in the death of their wife and grandmother,

#### **MRS. LORRAINE VANDERKOLK.**

It is our prayer that they may be comforted with the Word of God as found in Revelation 21:4: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Rev. Charles Terpstra, Pres.  
Glenn Kotman, Clerk