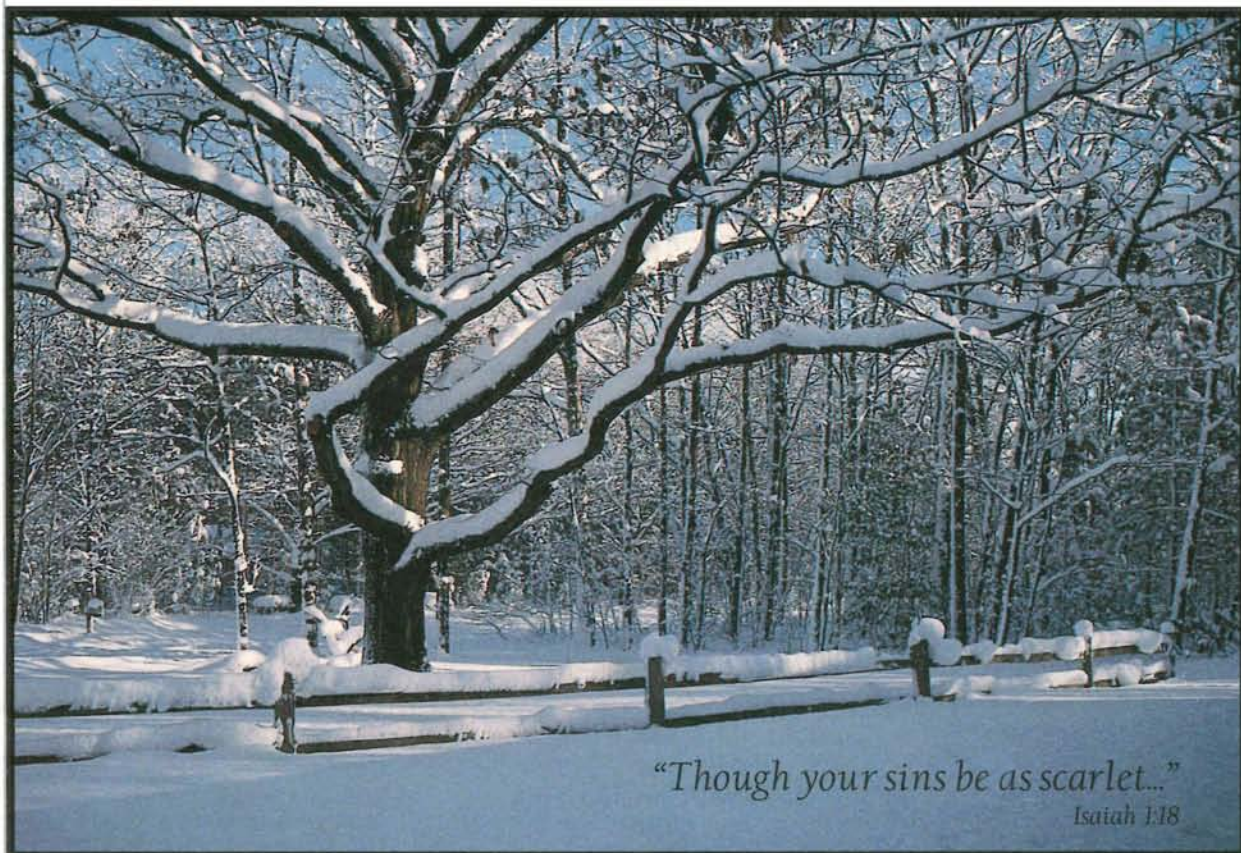


THE *December 15, 2000*  
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*Christmas Issue 2000*



*"Though your sins be as scarlet..."*

*Isaiah 1:18*

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Cover Photo by Marilyn Wassink

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## Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

# Mary's Ponderings

*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*

Luke 2:19

**T**here are a handful of people we meet at Jesus' birth: Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, the wise men. Many of these received revelations from God concerning the birth of the Christ child. Being saints of God they responded in faith.

This was certainly true of Mary. The angel Gabriel had appeared to her personally with the

message that she would be favored by God to mother the Christ child. Mary was aware also of revelations that God had given to others about her child. She reacted by keeping all these things and pondering them in her heart. This is the response of faith.

This must also be our response to the marvelous news of Christ's birth.

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What Mary kept and pondered in her heart was, first, what the shepherds had told her and Joseph when they came to see the babe on

the very night of His birth. What amazing things they had to tell. They told of an angel who suddenly appeared to them that very night, breaking the darkness of night with the glory light of heaven. They told of their great fear. But above all they told of the angel's wonderful message. He had glad tidings of great joy, not just for them but for all people. Born this very night in the city of David is a Savior, Christ the Lord. And there was a sign for them. They would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. But there was

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more. Suddenly the heavens were filled with a host of angels saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.

These glad tidings of the shepherds were nothing new to Mary. They only brought to mind what she already knew. For, some nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel had appeared to her in Nazareth with the good news that she would mother the Christ child. He had informed her that she had found favor with God. In God's wonderful favor she would bring forth a son, whose name must be Jesus. He would be great and would be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God would give to Him the throne of His father David. On that throne He would reign over the house of David forever; and of His kingdom there would be no end. What an amazing thing! And most amazing was the fact that this child would not be naturally conceived, but conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit, so that he would be called the Son of God. There could be no doubt about it: This child would be the Messiah promised long ago.

This message of the angel Gabriel had been confirmed to her by the revelation given to Joseph, her espoused husband. Yes, the word of the angel Gabriel had come to pass. Mary conceived as a virgin and was found with child. Because Joseph could only conclude adultery on Mary's part, he was determined to put her away. However, the angel came to Joseph in a dream to inform him that Mary's babe had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph must take Mary to be his wife and must name the baby Jesus.

And now, on the very night that her baby was born, the shepherds came. They spoke of the appearance of the angels announcing the birth of her son, the birth of the great Savior. Mary's mind must have been flooded with all that had transpired and all that had been revealed.

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All these things Mary kept and pondered in her heart.

This was not the case with the citizens of Bethlehem. The citizens of Bethlehem had essentially the same information as Mary. For after their visit to the manger the shepherds made known abroad the sayings that were told them about the child (v. 17). All in the vicinity of Bethlehem were told of the angels and their message.

Nor was this the first news around Bethlehem of this nature. About a year before this the aged Zacharias had strangely exited the temple in Jerusalem deaf and dumb. The people had concluded that he had seen a vision. Later, Elisabeth his wife miraculously gave birth to a child in her old age. When the babe was circumcised on the eighth day, Zacharias' tongue was loosed. What wonderful things he had to tell. He spoke of an angel that appeared to him in the temple. According to the word of this heavenly messenger, the little baby John was sent to prepare the way for the great Messiah.

In light of these irrefutable facts, the story of the shepherds could hardly be dismissed.

And all they that heard it wondered at these things which were told them by the shepherds. This means that they marveled. They were amazed, awestruck.

But for all that, they did not come to see the baby Jesus. We would expect people crowding the stable to see the baby of whom the shepherds spoke. But there is no mention of such in the Scriptures. Evidently, for all their amazement, the people did not come to the manger scene as the shepherds had.

What explains this?

This is the response of unbelief.

The people of Israel at this time looked for a savior. But in unbelief they looked not for the Savior promised by God in the Old Testament Scriptures. This Savior was one who would come to save the people of God from their sins. He

would be a heavenly, spiritual Savior. The people in their unbelief had long ago lost sight of such a Savior. Their heart was set on an earthly savior that would restore the people of Israel to the glory days of David and Solomon. From the report of the shepherds it was obvious that this babe in Bethlehem was not the savior they sought. The shepherds spoke of a baby born in abject poverty. This lowly birth was a sign of a deeper humiliation which awaited this babe. He must humble Himself to the death of the cross for the payment of sin. And although the people did not fully understand this sign as yet, they sensed that this child was not the savior they had envisioned. And so they wondered. They could not help but wonder. But this wonder was the awe and amazement of fear. It was the wonder one has at a catastrophe. And as soon as the shock of this amazement wore off, they promptly dismissed these things from their minds, as the wicked are so apt to do.

But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

She did not dismiss them but kept them in mind. She remembered them. And over the course of weeks and months she pondered them. Her mind went over and over the wonderful events that had transpired. She reflected on them daily. They were a source of great joy to her.

Mary pondered all these things not simply because they concerned her child. She pondered these things in faith. By faith she sought the Savior of God, not the earthly savior that had captured the heart of others, but the Savior whom God would send to save her from her sins. She saw in her baby this Savior. She did not fully understand the sign of her baby's lowly birth. But she certainly saw in this poverty a deeper poverty, a poverty that would be her son's in order to take away her sins. By faith she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.



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Very few ponder the birth of Jesus, as did Mary.

The world makes a big deal over the birth of the Christ child. Sadly, its attention is not on the Savior, the Immanuel, who has come to save His people from their sins. Its attention is rather on a human babe, on earthly peace, on gifts and partying. In its own way the world has done the same with Jesus' birth as Israel did long ago. They wonder at the babe of Bethlehem. But quickly they dismiss Him from their minds. For unbelief will not and really cannot keep all these things to ponder

them. The wonder of Christ's birth and the work He has come to do mean nothing to unbelief. They are in fact a terror to unbelief. And so the world in unbelief simply dismisses the real wonder of Christ's birth.

By faith we must do as Mary did. In this Christmas season we must focus our attention on the birth of our Savior, the Immanuel, who has come to save His people from their sins. And we must go beyond that, pondering all the works of salvation implied in and made possible by Jesus' birth. Mary, in her ponderings, could not clearly see all these things. In the light of fuller revelation, we can.

We can see the trail begun in the stable lead to the humility of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. We can see in Bethlehem's poverty the riches and glory that Christ now enjoys at God's right hand. From Bethlehem we can see even to the end of the world, when Bethlehem's babe will come on the clouds of glory to judge the living and the dead.

And in all these works, which have their beginnings in Bethlehem, we can see our salvation. On these things we must ponder, not just for the season of Christmas, but beyond to every season of our lives. 

## Editorial

# Celebrating the Birth of Christ: Emptying Self

**T**here is profit in our celebration of Christ's birth—great spiritual profit. Reading, hearing, and taking to heart the gospel of the birth of Jesus Christ are of benefit to the church.

This is why Holy Scripture proclaims the birth. And it does. The Old Testament rejoiced in the birth of the coming Messiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son ... " (Is. 7:14); "... unto us a child is born ... " (Is. 9:6).

So also does the New Testament make something of Jesus' birth. The modernists, bent on calling into question the account of the virgin birth in Matthew and Luke and the confession of the incarnation in the gospel according to John, are mistaken when they allege that the apostles show no further interest in the miraculous birth of Jesus. Galatians 4:4 declares that

in the fullness of the time, God sent forth his Son, "made of a woman"—the birth of Jesus. II Corinthians 8:9 reminds us that our Lord Jesus Christ, though rich, became poor for our sakes—the birth of Jesus. Philippians 2:7 teaches that Christ Jesus, who is in the form of God, "made himself of no reputation"—the birth of Jesus.

Each of these references to Jesus' birth (and there are others) announces the benefit of His birth for the church. Jesus was made of a woman, to redeem us (Gal. 4:5). He became poor, to enrich us (II Cor. 8:9). He made Himself of no reputation, in order to die the death of the cross in our place and thus privilege us to share in the honor of His glorious name through His resurrection (Phil. 2:9).

The proclamation of Jesus' birth in the epistles invariably has an intensely practical purpose in

the life of the child of God. The profound truth of the incarnation and virgin birth of the eternal and natural Son of God is applied to the behavior of the adopted children. Indeed, the Holy Spirit raises the truth of the birth of Jesus, not so much that we will wonder at it as that we will practice it. (But, of course, if we do not wonder at it, neither will we practice it.) Galatians 4:4 wants us, once and for all, to reject the false gospel of righteousness by our own works and unconditionally to embrace the one, true gospel of righteousness and salvation by grace alone. II Corinthians 8:9 has one, very practical purpose in view: that the Corinthians will dig deeply into their pockets and bank accounts when the collection plate comes around for the poor in Jerusalem.

In His incarnation and birth, Philippians 2:5-7 sees the mind of

Christ. From the incarnation and birth, the passage draws the lesson of a selfless life on the part of the members of the church. "Made himself of no reputation," as is the translation of the King James Version, was the act of the Son of God in the womb of Mary uniting the human nature of the baby Jesus to Himself. That act makes known the mind of Christ as a mind that does not consider His own advantage, but also the advantage of others. His is a mind that looks on the things of others, even though to His own great disadvantage. And this mind is exhorted upon the members of the church, so that we will live with each other selflessly.

The message of Christmas is the truth of *self-emptying*.

The call that goes out to the saints from the gospel of the birth of Jesus is that of living a life of *self-emptying*.

The mind displayed by the one who was born in Bethlehem takes form in every one for whom He was born. Still today, it reveals itself in a life of *self-emptying*.

Self-emptying is the lesson, the call, and the life of Christmas by virtue of the fact that in Philippians 2:7 the Holy Spirit inspired the word "emptied" to describe the birth of Jesus. "Made ... of no reputation" is in the original Greek the one word "emptied." In the womb of the virgin and in the stable, Christ Jesus *emptied Himself*. The exhortation drawn from this birth is that we be of a mind to *empty ourselves*.

What a strange message and exhortation in our society! Not *self-emptying* for the sake of others, but *self-fulfillment* at the expense of others is the reigning philosophy.

How necessary for us is this Christmas-lesson with its imperious call! We retain a nature that is aggressively self-seeking, a nature to which seeking self is as natural as burning is to fire.

Is not the call from Mary's womb and Bethlehem's cattle shed to a life of self-emptying an urgent one at this hour? Is it not an ur-

gent call to Reformed churches, including the Protestant Reformed Churches? Husbands and wives seek personal fulfillment by divorcing each other. The divorcing parents seek their own pleasure at the expense of the misery of the children. Women fulfill themselves by pursuing careers outside the home, to the neglect of the family. Married couples in the covenant refuse to have children because children are expensive and exhausting. Ministers scorn a sacrificial life of service to the congregation (and denomination), busying themselves with work and play that interfere with, spoil, or, at least, crimp the labor of the ministry. Able men refuse nomination to the offices in the church because caring for Christ's blood-bought flock is too demanding of their time and energies. Young people leave a true church to make their own life richer with a husband or a wife, an education, or a job, regardless of the grief of their parents and the blow to the church. And just as in the days of the apostle some members of the church do things through strife and vainglory, esteeming themselves better than others, so that the congregation is embroiled in schism.

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus at His birth!

He emptied Himself.

His birth was loss—loss of riches; loss of bliss; loss of power; loss of honor ("made himself of no reputation"); loss of life.

It was total loss. He emptied Himself completely, emptied Himself so that when He reached the end of His birth—the cross—there was nothing left of riches, bliss, power, honor, or life. There was only poverty, wretchedness, weakness, shame, and death—the death of damning wrath.

This was His own thoughtful act. As the one who is in the form of God, He brought about His own birth. Behind the act was His mind, the "mind of Christ." That mind concerned itself with the wel-

fare of others. If His beloved, but guilty church is to be filled with the riches, bliss, power, honor, and life of salvation — with Himself in the Spirit — He must empty Himself.

His self-emptying had a reason in the welfare of others. It was not a senseless act, as though Jesus took pleasure in the misery of emptiness for its own sake, or as though the life of lack is inherently virtuous.

For Christ Jesus, the emptying was not His loss of His Godhead, or His voluntary surrender of His divine perfections, or His voluntary surrender of some of His divine perfections, or His voluntary surrender of some of His divine perfections for a time.

How can God cease being God? How can God give up even one of the perfections that constitute Him God? How could God the Son in our flesh save us by His self-emptying, if He does not in His emptiness remain the fullness of Godhead?

But He took to Himself a human nature that was object of the curse and wrath of God from the moment of Jesus' birth. In His human nature, Jesus hid His divine riches, bliss, power, honor, and life. "The abasement of the flesh," writes Calvin on the emptying of Philippians 2:7, "was like a veil by which his divine majesty was concealed."

That was a real and emptying hiding!

He hid His divine fullness from the human race, with the result that they mocked, rejected, and killed Him.

He hid His glorious fullness from the Devil and his demons, with the result that the hordes of hell tempted Him and bruised His heel.

He hid His almighty fullness from His heavenly Father, with the purpose that the Father would make Him a curse, smite Him, and forsake Him.

He hid His blessed fullness from Himself, so that in His human nature He might truly know and fully experience the poverty,



wretchedness, weakness, shame, and death of sin in the judgment of the holy God.

This was the birth of Christ Jesus: self-emptying for us.

This, therefore, is the true celebration of Christmas, now and all the days of our life: self-emptying for the benefit of the other members of the church.

Let this self-emptying mind of the baby of Bethlehem be in us!

It is no easy thing to celebrate Christmas.

Let the husband deny himself, to please His wife. Let the wife lose herself in the help of her husband. Let the husband or wife whose marriage is unfulfilling, indeed positively burdensome, choose the way of personal, lifelong loss, for the good of mate and children.

Let husbands and wives whose

marriages are so troubled that they teeter on the brink of divorcing deny themselves, painfully resigning themselves (as they fear) to a life of unhappiness, for the sake of the happiness and salvation of their children and grandchildren.

There is in you the mind of Christ, is there not?

In a just-published bombshell of a book on the devastating consequences of divorce on the children, the purely secular author demonstrates that a bad marriage is far preferable to divorce as regards the children. She pleads in her own (hopeless) secular way, that parents who are unhappy in their marriage maintain the marriage for the sake of the children (Judith S. Wallerstein, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, Hyperion, 2000).

Let mothers especially sacrifice their very lives in the bearing and

rearing of children.

Let ministers (surely, with special zeal, ministers of this Christ) offer themselves on behalf of the congregation and its members, not for pay and prestige—"filthy lucre"—but with the mind of Christ.

And let the members, every one, deliberately take into consideration the other members of the church. Where it is possible, and when it is necessary, let every one deny his own will and give up his own advantage for the good (not merely the carnal pleasing) of the other and the peace of the church.

"And so it was ... she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

Let us celebrate. 

— DJE

## Letters

### Reserve regarding Treatment of the Regulative Principle

I have read with a great measure of reserve your assessment of the Psalm-hymn issue and the regulative principle in our churches ("Shall We Please God or [Certain Kinds of] People? or, the Regulative Principle of Worship," *Standard Bearer*, Nov. 1, 2000). Your presentation, I'm afraid, raises more questions than answers and as I read through your article I keep seeing the title above your editorial "Shall we please God or certain kinds of people." This should be foremost in our minds when we assess this issue. In reading your assessment, I find three basic considerations that are lacking which I consider vital in assessing this issue.

1. In treating the regulative principle in the Psalm-hymn issue should we not be dealing with it in its simple form as in our Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 35: "Worship

God in any other way than He has commanded in His word"? Our church founders were well acquainted with this simple form. However, there is no evidence that they were acquainted with the Presbyterian-coined phrase, "regulative principle of worship," nor were they acquainted with the negative aspect of it, that whatever is not commanded is forbidden.

2. In dealing with this Psalm-hymn issue as you did in this article, we are dealing with worshiping God in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. Is not what Scripture instructs in this regard of vital importance? Yet, I found it missing in your article. Our church founders and the ministers and the office of all believers in the first half of our church history fought the battle of the Psalm-hymn issue valiantly with a very, very strong handicap. They believed along with Rev. Hoeksema that Scripture instructed us to sing Psalms and good hymns and good

spiritual songs. I quote from Rev. Hoeksema, *SB* article of 1928, "Admonition to the CRC." Rev. Hoeksema states: "Why would not the church be allowed to sing other songs besides the Psalms? There is not a single proof to be found in God's word for the thesis that hymns and spiritual songs would not be allowed in the worship service. Rather Scripture encourages the singing of such hymns. How beautifully does the apostle admonish the church of Ephesus — "But be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18, 19).

During the synod of 1960 it was discovered that Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 were not admonishment to sing hymns and spiritual songs but rather meant just the opposite: it was an admonition to sing Psalms. This fact brings up a very interesting question. Halfway through our church history, when

we found texts in Scripture to mean exactly the opposite from what we formerly believed, would it not be incumbent for every one of our ministers to expound the true meaning of those texts to the people periodically? I have never heard one sermon ever on either of those texts.

3. The third issue that is troubling to me is your evaluation "in homes, choral societies, and programs and also our schools, yes also in our schools we must not expect a blanket rejection of hymns." You certainly take the opposite view than Rev. Ophoff held.

In 1928 there were four revealing essays in the *Standard Bearer* by four young men from the newly organized First Church. One young man had been a teacher in the Christian schools for eight years. He made it plain that all the Christian schools of that day were predominately using the *Service Hymnal*, all of those eight years. This was at a time when even the CRC was still a Psalm-singing church. It became apparent to Rev. Ophoff that it was in the homes and schools that the love of hymns was originating. It is in response to this that Rev. Ophoff, in seeing the fundamental connection between the church, the school, and the home said, "A better and safer way would be to cultivate such a love and esteem for the Psalms that the need for hymns can no longer be felt."

In response to finding out the Christian schools' use of the *Service Hymnal*, Rev. Ophoff sounds the warning that is just as appropriate now as it was 70 years ago. He states it this way: "I say again, the aforesaid condition only strengthens me in my conviction that our schools should eject all hymns and return to the Psalms, or versified scripture, and that our churches should permanently keep its doors closed to the hymns." Now, should we have a blanket rejection of hymns? Would it be wrong to sing good hymns in our

homes and schools? To answer the question the way you did, I believe was a wrong approach to the Psalm-hymn question. The proper approach it seems to me is to evaluate what Scripture instructs on Psalm-singing along with the example of the early apostolic church, also evaluating 2000 years of history in which we see the blessing of God upon Psalm-singing churches.

We now know, since the synod of 1960, that Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 were the Holy Spirit's injunction to sing Psalms. The primitive New Testament church recognized this. They did not have for everyone a Psalm scroll in the pew of the church. They had to learn the Psalms by heart through responsive chanting in the church. The word of Christ (the Psalms) dwelt in them richly and by them they taught and admonished.

God put His stamp of approval on 2000 years of history by showing that:

1. Psalm-singing and pure preaching were so intimately connected that one did not last long without the other.

2. When the love of the Psalms was taught it was the testimony of the early church fathers that the Psalms were the center of their lives. The following are quotes from *Modern History of Psalmody*.

"In the 'Apostolic Constitutions' we learn what was the method and practice of those days. We learn that 'the women, the children, and the humblest mechanics, could repeat all the Psalms of David; they chanted them at home and abroad; they made them exercises of their piety and the refreshment of their minds. Thus they had answers ready to oppose temptation, and were always prepared to pray to God and to praise him, in any circumstance, in a form of his own inditing.'"

"The testimony of Chrysostom is fully in point. 'All Christians

employ themselves in David's Psalms more frequently than in any other part of the Old or New Testament. The grace of the Holy Ghost hath so ordered it that they should be recited and sung night and day. In the morning David's Psalms are sought for, and David is the first the midst and the last. At funeral solemnities the first the midst and the last is David. Many who know not a letter can say David's Psalms by heart. In private houses where the virgins spin — in the monasteries — in the deserts, where men converse with God, the first, the midst, and the last is David. In the night, when men are asleep, he wakes them up to sing, and collecting the servants of God into angelic troops, turns earth into heaven and of men makes angels, chanting David's Psalms.' And on Psalm 145, the illustrious father remarks: 'This psalm deserves special attention, for it contains the words which are always sung by those admitted to communion, saying "All eyes wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due time; for he who has been made a child, and partaker of the spiritual table, with propriety praises the Father.'" And by Cyril we are told that at the communion solemnity they sung together, in Psalm 34, 'Come, taste, and see that the Lord is good.'"

"In the middle ages, the ages too of moral gloom and terrible superstition, the purest of the church of God was found in the valleys of Piedmont. Among the Waldenses were found the simplicity of the apostolic order, and the purity of evangelical worship. They sung, 'mid Alpine cliffs' the Psalms of Scripture. And long before the Reformation dawned on Europe, they sung them in metre. 'The Albigenses, in 1210, were metre psalm-singers.' The morning-star of the Reformation used them. Wickliff is blamed by some for singing metre psalms. John Huss, in the fifteenth, as Wickliff had done in the fourteenth century,



sung the psalms in verse. These were not friends, either to Papal domination, or to Arian heresy."

If we now take seriously the admonitions of Scripture and the lessons of history, it would seem to me our foremost duty is to learn by heart the Psalms and teach them to our children (in school?). If this was accomplished, there would be room for some good hymns; however, I believe if that was accomplished you would find no need for hymns. The Word of Christ (the Psalms) is sufficient for the refreshment of your mind, you will have a ready answer to oppose temptation, and you will always be prepared to pray to God and to praise

Him in any circumstance, in a form of His own inditing.

—John VanBaren  
Grandville, Michigan


#### RESPONSE:

Evidently, the above writer has no disagreement with the editorial he refers to, as first I thought he did.

The editorial demonstrated that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), like the Dutch Reformed tradition generally since Dordt, are committed to the singing of Psalms at worship, virtually exclusively. The reason, however, is not that the regulative principle requires exclusive Psalmody. The writer does not

take issue with this.

The editorial denied that the position of the PRC regarding the singing of the Psalms at worship implies the exclusion of sound hymns from the rest of the life of the members of the churches, particularly the Christian schools. In this connection, I affirmed that the Psalms should have pride of place. The writer quotes Prof. G.M. Ophoff, who explicitly approved of singing "versified Scripture" (hymns) in the schools, as well as the Psalms. And the writer himself, in the end, finds "room for some good hymns" in the schools, although questioning the need.

— Ed. 

## Guest Article

Gerrit Vos

# The Purpose of Christ's Coming

*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

Matthew 10:34

*... and on earth peace....*

Luke 2:14b

*... The Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6b

**H**igher criticism delights to find contradictions in the Bible.

Well, the above texts seem to teach such.

On the one hand we have heard the song of the nightingale in the Old Testament: Isaiah. He sang beautifully of the coming of

Jesus. And he told us even of the various names which He would bear. In Isaiah 9:6 we read, "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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Later, much later, we heard the song of the heavenly host at the birth of this Prince of Peace, and here are the words of that glorious song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

So both Isaiah and Luke agree: Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He shall, as such, bring peace upon the earth.

However, when Jesus began to teach He seems to tell us the very opposite. Especially Luke's version

is emphatic: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division."

So, again, higher criticism once more has a hellish delight in pointing to another supposed contradiction in Scripture.

Indeed, there are more texts that seem to stand in opposition to Matthew 10:34 and Luke 12:51-53. Read, e.g., Ephesians 2:14, 15: "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

And Zacharias the priest sang of Him: "To guide our feet into the way of peace!"

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*The late Gerrit Vos was a pastor in the PRC and for many years a writer for the SB. We reprint here an article of his which appeared in the December 1 issue in 1958.*



Is it not startling that Jesus seems to contradict the Holy Spirit in Isaiah, Zacharias, and the angels in the fields of Ephratha?

We have heard from our youth, yes, even from our earliest infancy, that the Bible is true; that the real Writer of the Bible is God, from Genesis to Revelation; that God cannot contradict Himself.

If there is one thing which is cemented in the hearts of the little ones when they come to their first catechism class it is this: The Bible is true! God is true! Jesus is true!

Does it then not shock us when we hear Jesus say: Think ye not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword!



It is my habit to say to persons, to the devil, and to myself when confronted with so-called contradiction in the Bible: God is true!

I cannot believe that there are contradictions in the Bible. The very thought is monstrous.

I readily admit that there are difficult texts in the Bible, and that it is difficult to harmonize one text with another. I will also admit that the branch of study called Textual Criticism is warranted, although I hasten to add that we should be very careful with that branch of study.

But even after we have studied a seeming contradiction in the Bible and have not come upon a satisfying solution, I am ready to confess: O Lord! I cannot understand this or these texts, but I confess that it is because of my stupidity. Thy name is *truth*! Amen.



However, in the case of the above texts there is only a *seeming* contradiction.

Let me show you first that the expression of Jesus in Matthew 10:34 is according to divine planning.

The plan of the Almighty for all of history is exactly as Jesus ex-

pressed Himself: He came not to bring peace on earth but the sword — or, according to Luke: division!

The plan of God is war, division, strife, rebellion, blood, and tears. The first revelation of that plan is uttered in Paradise: "And I will put enmity between thee (the devil) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

This was spoken by God to the devil who stood before Him in the guise of a serpent.

And this statement by our God is confirmed soon after in the slaughter of innocent Abel, and the subsequent struggle between the two seeds. On the one hand we see in all history the seed of the devil, and on the other hand we see the seed of the woman, that is, the church.

That struggle started at once; it continued every moment of time since; it is with us right here and now; it shall continue unabated until the last moment of history.

Listen to Enoch, the seventh from Adam: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Enoch is only the seventh from Adam, and note the intensity of the warfare which God brought upon the earth, by putting enmity between the devil and the church.

Next note the appellation which the Holy Ghost gave to Noah: the preacher of righteousness! Noah was not the preacher of the gospel of God, but of righteousness.

God did not decree any positive fruit either: the ark had no room for many thousands, while there must have been millions of men upon the earth.

The theme of Noah's preaching must have been: The flood is

coming. The flood is coming! And all because of you! In one hundred and twenty years Noah had not one convert.

But what a battle!

It was not any different in the days of Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord.

In his days the tower of Babel was an attempt of wicked men to maintain themselves against the Lord and His people.

But the time would fail me to tell you of the unrest, the strife, and the conflict between God and His anointed on the one hand, and the devil and his seed on the other hand. I would have to tell you of Nineveh, Syria, the Chaldeans; also of men like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, and more of their godless ilk.

But in all the ages we see nought but the holy war of God on the earth. Wherever God manifests Himself among men, you find the godless reaction of the devil and his followers. Wherever Jehovah reveals Himself, there you always find war, bloodshed, division, and unrest.

A great weariness comes over you when you follow God's footsteps in the Old Testament: the patriarchs, the judges, the kings, the priests, and the prophets. There are the foes without the camps of the seed of the women, but also the foes within the gates of Zion. At one time David wends his way in sweet company to the house of God, and later this same sweet (?) company will strangle him. Christ complains in David that they gave Him hatred for His love.



But it is not any different in the New Testament.

Wherever the Son of God appears there is strife, hatred, war, unrest.

During His three and one-half years of preaching, He is ever surrounded by a brood of devils. They watched His every word and move.

The hatred found its bathos in the crucifixion.

But even then the devil was not satisfied.

After the Ascension and Pentecost the hatred of the seed of the devil broke out anew. The devil knew that his time was short.

Wherever Paul appeared with Jesus in his heart and mouth, there you found strife, unrest, bloodshed.

Only one of the twelve died in his bed.

Read your gospels and the epistles of the witnesses of Jesus. Even in the organized churches of Jesus there is no rest. You read of divisions, hatred, jealousy, and envy. James complains: "From whence come wars and fightings among you?"

Will you please read the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor?

And will you continue to read what Jesus prophesies relative to the church of Christ and its reception in the world?

Was it any different after John closes Holy Writ?

Whenever you see Jesus appear on the scene you also find war and unrest, blood and suffering.

Indeed, God's plan for the Seed of the woman is not to bring peace on the earth, but a sword.



But what about Isaiah, the angels at the birth of Jesus, and Paul?

They all herald the coming of Jesus as the Prince of peace!

And the angels literally say: on earth peace!

Here is the solution, beloved: Christ did not come to send peace *for the wicked on the earth*. Christ came to do the exact opposite with respect to them: He came to destroy them!

He came to destroy and to bruise the *head* of the devil. The *head*, that is, the intellect, the thought, the counsel, the conception of the wicked. His own name of *truth*, and with the word of His mouth, that is, His truth, He destroys the lie and the makers of the lie, and at the same time, and

through the same truth, He sets you free!

So Jesus did indeed come to bring peace on the earth. Both Isaiah and the angels, as well as Paul, are right: His name is Prince of Peace. He did come to bring Peace upon the earth. A correct reading of the song of the angels would read: Peace on earth toward the men of good will, that is, to God's elect church.

And how?

Paul told us in the above quoted text of Ephesians 2:14, 15.

Christ brought peace on the earth by shedding His precious blood for you and me. So making peace.

Christ took our hatred against God on His neck, and paid the price of eternal death.

So making peace for us.

Peace now: a little bit of heavenly peace in our heart; a peace that passeth understanding.

And presently? In the sweet by-and-by? A kingdom of heavenly peace!

*When Thou Sittest In Thine House*

*Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers*

## Christmas: Enmity in Eden

*And I will put enmity....*

Genesis 3:15

**B**ethlehem lies sleeping. The Judean hillside rises gently in the pre-dawn stillness. Sheep graze drowsily on their frosty slopes. A handful of

bearded shepherds wrap their coarse outer garments ever more tightly around their shoulders to ward off the penetrating chill. Stars twinkle brilliantly.

Inside a small but pristine shed another scene is played out. Mary and Joseph gaze adoringly at their newborn son. Is that a faint first glimpse of a smile playing about Baby Jesus' mouth? The baby is bedded upon hay — nice clean hay with no trace of animal refuse on

it. Sanitized animals — donkeys, sheep, and cows — contentedly munch and ruminate nearby.

This is the Hallmark® version of the first Christmas. Every department store window in America displays some imaginative rendition of this idyllically peaceful first Christmas nearly 2000 years ago.

The birth of Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem was truly remarkable. It holds every man, woman, and child in thrall in the twenty-

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first century even as it has for God's people in every age before us. We stand as little children before the great mystery of Bethlehem. All the elements of simplicity and divine irony come together in Bethlehem's manger. A king lies on a bed of straw. Courtiers of donkey, sheep, and cow attend Him. Christ's High Priestly robes have been relinquished for swaddling clothes. He who spoke the Word (and was Himself that spoken Word) that framed the heavens and suspended the stars in their courses cannot so much as raise His own fist. Yes, even today Bethlehem baffles us. It humbles us. God's ways are shown once again not to be our ways.

It is easy to slip into Christmas card mentality on the subject of the first Christmas unless one remembers first, and most importantly, that the stable was not a peaceful place that night, even though we sing of it in lullabies so sweet. Rather, on the night of Jesus' birth, the manger was a battleground. It was the site of all-out, declared warfare. Secondly, Bethlehem's stable was not a peaceful place because of a Christmas celebration centuries earlier in the Garden of Eden. That first celebration was not one of peace and unity, but of enmity and division.

We go back to the Garden of Eden to recall this event. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God and eaten of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They had willingly listened to the lies of Satan, who had assured them that in so doing they would become as God, knowing good and evil. Now, as the painful reality and truth of their disobedient act is revealed, they stand naked and afraid, as God searches them out in the Garden.

After God metes out His just judgments for Adam, for Eve, and for the serpent, Scripture recounts the first Christmas commemoration. It comes in the form of a promise, and God Himself establishes it. Out of His eternal love

for His people, He lays down the non-negotiable terms forever in history. It is not a friendly promise with the hope that someday the two sides will get together in some spirit of détente or ecumenicity. But rather, it is a Christmas promise decreeing that there will be hatred, war, struggle, and division forever between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. God has said so. There is no bargaining table in Eden. The line of demarcation between the two warring factions is clear and unmovable, nor does it become more blurred as the ages come and go. Adam doesn't have a word to contribute to the matter. Eve keeps her mouth shut this time, hanging her head in shame. The serpent slithers away to rally his troops for the long, drawn-out battle ahead. He begins immediately to prepare for Bethlehem and Calvary, although there will be a myriad lesser skirmishes along the way. Every skirmish is part of a larger battle plan: the extermination of the Seed promised in Genesis 3:15. Satan never once loses his focus, and some of his skirmishes are very nearly successful. We think of wicked Queen Athaliah destroying the seed royal (II Chron. 22:10). We remember with horror King Herod killing all the male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Initially, the promise of Genesis 3:15 does not seem to embrace the elements of Christmas, but rather it seems to defy everything that the nations and our society work to overcome. Recrimination, rancor, and division stand in sharp relief against love, harmony, and unity. It is important to remember that God spoke in the Garden of Eden, and He spoke a most profound Christmas message. In addition, no mortal ever could or

would set the two sides at such variance. Nor was this hatred between the two seeds arbitrarily realized over centuries of ups and downs until one year, after trying to get along and work out a peace accord, the two sides were forced to conclude that they were sworn enemies. God established the enmity and He maintains the enmity. No serious student of the depravity of mankind can ever accuse man of pursuing this enmity. In this regard, we are like the schoolboy Edmund in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Always, and in ever more devious and deliberate ways, we try to break rank, sneak off, and join the forces of the enemy. And like Edmund, we are not satisfied to engage in treachery for ourselves alone, but try to take our brothers and sisters down that spiraling path with us.

We pattern ourselves after Eve in Paradise. We consciously work to make our peace with Satan and our enmity with God. It takes the Babe of Bethlehem to reconcile us to God. He alone restores our peace with God and seals our enmity with Satan and all his evil minions.

And so, it is not a pleasant scene at the manger of Bethlehem, no matter how fetchingly the artist paints the picture, or how happily we dress the windows. Satan is waiting at this manger. He has waited a long, long time to be here. And he is in full battle mode. The forces of hell are poised to strike the infant Christ. The sovereignly declared war at Eden has escalated. The dragon of Revelation 12 is prepared to devour the Seed of the woman: "... and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne."

It will take the Savior's work at Calvary to crush the head of His

opponent and finalize the great struggle of history forever. It is at the Cross that the promise of enmity between the two seeds established in Genesis 3:15 will be elevated to a fight to the finish. "It is finished," will be Christ's triumphant cry even as He suffers a bruise to the heel. By His meritorious death, he cements our enmity with Satan and strengthens our peace with God. Christ alone assures that the spiritual children of


Adam and Eve will never join forces with the spawn of Satan, although we foolishly and repeatedly try to do just that.

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Satan, having been foiled at both Bethlehem and Calvary, con-

tinues to seek his revenge on the seed of the woman until Christ's return. The Book of Revelation makes this clear. But his doom is sealed. It was settled unequivocally in Eden at the very dawn of history.

Our hatred of Satan and this world's hatred of us are two priceless Christmas gifts. They were the first ever given.

Christmas, through enmity, in Eden. 

## Special Article

Mr. Don Doezema

# The Christmas Story — for Children

*"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."*

Luke 2:7

**F**or many hundreds of years the children of Abraham, the Jews, were looking for the Christ to come out of the line of David. David had been a great and powerful and famous king. The Jews expected a Christ to be born who would be even greater and more powerful and more famous than David. The glory of Israel would then, they thought, shine brighter than it had ever shone before. What an exciting time that would be!

Were the Jews excited when

they learned that the forerunner of that great King was born? Was there a celebration in the city of Jerusalem? Did the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and Scribes, begin to prepare for the coming of the great King who would sit on David's throne?

The answer to all of that is, No. There was something about the story of the birth of John, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth, that just didn't seem *right*. No *important person* had seen an angel. Just a poor priest in the hill country of Judea. Could something so great have so lowly a beginning? The leaders of the Jews said, No! And most of the people agreed with them. So the story of an angel appearing to Zacharias in the temple was soon forgotten. Old Zacharias must have been just imagining things.

Several months later, however, the same angel, Gabriel, appeared again. And again it was not to anyone who was great or powerful or rich or famous. It was not even to one who lived in Jerusalem, the

capital city, where the throne of David and of Solomon had once stood. It came instead to a poor young woman who lived in a little town in Galilee. Nazareth, it was — a town hardly important enough to be on a map of the land of the Jews. And Mary was a nobody. None of the important people in Jerusalem even knew that she existed. Who could believe such a story as this?

"Hail, thou that art highly favored," the angel said to Mary, "the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Highly favored! And blessed! In all the history of Israel no greater honor could there have been for any woman than this honor, to be the mother of the Messiah. This honor would be *Mary's*. "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David," said the angel. Mary believed that. "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever." Mary believed that. Her son would be the long-awaited Messiah.

*Mr. Doezema is editor of the Sunday School paper used in the PRC. We include one of the Bible stories here, so that a part of this Christmas issue of the SB can be used with or by children.*



One thing, however, puzzled her. "How shall this be," she asked "seeing I know not a man?" Mary had already given her solemn promise to marry Joseph — but they were not yet *married*. And the angel was already talking about Mary having a *baby*. Does the angel mean that, after they marry, then Joseph and Mary will together have a son?

The answer to Mary's question was the most astounding, the most amazing part of the message of the angel. Joseph would not be the father of Mary's child Jesus. In fact, *no* man would be the father of this child. Never before had anything like that ever happened. And never has it happened since that time. Every other baby who has ever been born into this world has had a human father and mother. This child, the angel said, would be born of a *virgin*. He would have a human *mother* ... but not a human *father*. Few people at that time believed it. Few people believe it today. Mary believed it.

But Mary had to believe something even greater than that. The virgin birth, the angel explained to her, did not mean that her child would be fatherless. Jesus would have a Father. But His Father would be none other than *God Himself*. "That holy thing which shall be born of thee," said the angel Gabriel to Mary, "shall be called the *Son of God*." Think about that! The Creator God, in human flesh, soon to be lying in a manger in Bethlehem. Could Mary understand that? No. Can *we* understand that? No. But Mary believed. That is, God gave her faith to believe. And He gives us faith to believe. Though we cannot fully understand it, and though the world may mock us for having such faith, we can say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God."

Such good news! But to whom could Mary tell it? Who would believe her? "Thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age," the angel told Mary.

Ah, thought Mary, I can go to Elisabeth. *She* will understand. So away Mary went to the hill country where Zacharias and Elisabeth lived. And to Mary's surprise, she did not even have to tell Elisabeth what the angel had told her. "Whence is this to me," asked Elisabeth, "that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Yes, "my Lord." Elisabeth knew what Mary knew, and she too believed.

One who did not yet know anything about all this was Joseph. Finally one day he learned, too, that Mary was pregnant, that she was going to have a baby. Joseph thought at first that Mary must have gone to live with another man. But then the angel appeared also to Joseph, to tell him that he could still take Mary to be his wife because, the angel said, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Then Joseph, too, believed. And he took Mary to be his wife.



### The Savior Is Born

Many years before Jesus was born, God told His people, through the prophet Micah, that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Jesus was now very soon to be born. And where were Joseph and Mary? They were not in Bethlehem. They lived many miles away, in the village of Nazareth in Galilee. And they were not thinking at all about traveling anywhere. Was Micah, maybe, wrong?

But then there came a decree of Caesar Augustus, the decree that every family in his empire should be taxed. Joseph and Mary, because they were in the family of David, had to go to Bethlehem to register (that is, to give their names) for that taxation. A hundred miles it was, from Nazareth to Bethlehem! A long and difficult journey for Mary ... who would

soon give birth to a baby. The decree, they must have thought, could hardly have come at a worse time. But it was *God's* time. Just in time for the birth of Jesus. And it was in God's way. Not, this time, by an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream ... but by the decree of mighty Caesar, the ruler of the great Roman Empire. Why in *that* way? So that we might know that our God controls *everything*. Caesar Augustus was the most powerful man in the world at that time. His word was law. No man could overrule him. But our God simply used him as He pleased — to fulfill His promise to His church. What a great, good God is ours!

But can this really be the *right* time? For when Joseph and Mary finally reach Bethlehem, they find that the inn is already *full*. Too many people in Bethlehem at that time because of the taxation. No room left for two poor travelers from Nazareth. So a barn, a stable — that's the only shelter left for Joseph and Mary in the town of Bethlehem. Can it really be that this is *God's time* and *God's way*? Did not Joseph and Mary arrive too *late*?

Think about that. The promised Messiah. The King who would sit on David's throne. Wrapped in rags (swaddling clothes) and put in a manger for His bed. Can you believe that? No sign of the greatness and power of David. No sign of the riches of Solomon. Just poverty. Dirt poor. Who would believe that this was the *Messiah*?


Can it really be that God *planned* it that way? Yes, it can. He did. Why? Two reasons. Try to understand this, children. The first is to show that earthly riches and earthly power have *nothing* to do with the kind of King that Jesus is. That's why most of the Jews did not want Him. They looked for, and wanted, an *earthly* king, one who would give them freedom from the Romans and bread for their tables. It was clear already in His birth that this King would

never give them that. He took on Himself our *poverty*, our *spiritual poverty*, to give us freedom from *sin*, and to feed us with the bread of *life*. The manger bed and the swaddling clothes were therefore not *wrong*, but exactly *right*. They fit with the *kind of King Jesus is*.

The second reason why Jesus was born in a stable was to show *what kind of people we are*. No room in the inn. When Jesus came into this world, there was *no room for Him*. That's the way it was. That's the way it always is. No one wants the kind of Savior Jesus is. No one invites Jesus into his heart. No one,

by himself, *comes* to Jesus. The Father in heaven *brings* him.

Whom does the Father bring? "Not many mighty, not many noble," the Bible tells us. "But God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." We see that already in His choice of Zacharias and Elisabeth and in His choice of Mary and Joseph. And we see it again in the announcement of Jesus' birth. That announcement was more glorious by far than that which any earthly king had ever before been given. For the herald was none other than an angel from

heaven, the night was bright by the glory of the Lord, and a multitude of the heavenly host sang glory to God in the highest. But to whom was that announcement made? Not to the rich and the famous and the powerful and the wise in this world. But to poor shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. In them God had kept alive a hope for the Savior ... from sin. They hurried to Bethlehem and found it even as the angel had said: swaddling clothes, a manger, Christ the Lord. And they believed. May God give us that same faith! 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

# Abelard and the Doctrine of the Atonement (1)

## Introduction

**I**t is a bit difficult to make choices concerning the individual about whom to write when many others taught the same heresy as we wish to describe in this article. The heresy has to do with our Lord's atoning work on the cross. The choice of the story of Abelard is, therefore, somewhat arbitrary.

Yet, there are certain reasons why I have chosen to write about Abelard and not others who held to the same heresy concerning the atonement as this man. The first reason, probably the most important, is that Abelard himself was a contemporary of Anselm, and, in fact, studied briefly under him.

That may not immediately

strike one as being a good reason to choose him. But I ask the reader to consider the fact that Anselm was not only the sole defender of a sound and biblical doctrine of the atonement in the entire Middle Ages, but he was also a man whom God used to make an important and significant development of the doctrine. In fact, one really looks in vain for any significant development of the truth in the entire period from Augustine to the Reformation — a period of over 1000 years. Anselm is the exception. He did what no other medieval church man did. And he developed the truth in a crucially important area.

I have written on Anselm earlier. One can find the material in *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, pp. 73-78. If one would read that chapter, this present article would have more meaning.

The second reason for choosing Abelard as the representative of heretical views on the atonement

is that Abelard represented an extreme position. If I may make that a bit clearer, the question that was at issue was really the *necessity* of the atonement. That is, was Christ's atoning sacrifice necessary for salvation? or could God have saved without Christ's suffering and death on the cross?

Anselm insisted on the absolute necessity of the atonement for salvation. Many others, in fact almost all medieval theologians, denied this necessity of the atonement. Some said that the atonement was partially necessary, but not completely so; others said that it was not necessary at all, but served a different purpose. The latter view is the extreme view. It was the view of Abelard.

Perhaps another reason for writing on Abelard can be mentioned. His life was an extremely interesting one. It throws a lot of light on what life in the church during the Middle Ages was like. It

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gives us insight into the activities of a genuine scholar, though heretic. It even has the spice of romance about it. It makes for fascinating reading.

That brings up another point that needs mentioning. Abelard was not heretical only in his views of the atonement; he was heretical in many other views. He had a wrong doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, of the Trinity, and of faith and knowledge. For these views he was condemned by his own church. Yet, for his views on the atonement he was never condemned. That says a lot about the state of Roman Catholicism in the time in which Abelard lived.

I am not going to write very much about Abelard's heretical views on inspiration and the Trinity; my concern in this article is the doctrine of the atonement. To a discussion of Abelard and that doctrine we turn.

### **Abelard's Rise to Fame**

Though Abelard went through life with the name Peter, he was given at birth the French version, Pierre. To designate the place of his birth, he was called Pierre de Palais, for he was born in the village of Palais, a small village in Brittany. The year was 1079.

He was born of nobility, and his father, Berengar, was lord of the village and a knight. Abelard gave up his prerogatives among the nobility in favor of a life of study and teaching. He was, from an intellectual point of view, qualified for this kind of a career, for he was a brilliant student, a gifted teacher, and an original thinker — somewhat too original for his own good.

His first teacher was a man by the name of Roscelin, a gifted teacher in his own right. It must be remembered that in those days a gifted teacher would simply begin teaching somewhere. He would usually draw students to him who would then pay him to be instructed by him. Sometimes he was connected to a school (usu-

ally a cathedral school), but not always. The more gifted he was, the more students he attracted, the greater grew his fame, and the fuller were his pockets.

After a brief stay with Roscelin, Abelard wandered about for a time engaging in some teaching here and there. He eventually moved to Paris and studied under William of Champeaux, himself a man with a reputation that extended to the far reaches of Europe.

It was during these years of study under William that one of Abelard's chief personality traits appeared. Abelard was plagued all his life by a towering pride. Perhaps this was bred into him by his birth among the nobility, but it was fed by his intellectual acumen and success in studies. Pride is common to all men who have fallen in Adam, but intellectual pride is a curse on those who are responsible for studying and teaching, and it is almost as great a barrier to salvation as riches are to a wealthy man. Abelard had plenty of intellectual pride.

Abelard set himself up as a rival to William and began to teach views differing from William in an obvious attempt to steal William's students. He was remarkably successful. He drew students by the hundreds, from all parts of Europe. He claims in his autobiography, though probably with a bit of exaggeration, that he took all of William's students from him.

But intellectual pride was not limited to Abelard; William also had his share of it. Because of his position and "seniority" in academic circles in Paris, William was able to force Abelard out of the city. This was in 1113, while Abelard was still relatively young.

It was at this point that Abelard went to Anselm, who, although he later went to England to become archbishop of Canterbury, was at this time still in France.

Schaff has an interesting comparison of the two men.

[Abelard's] fame was derived from the brilliance of his intellect. He differed widely from Anselm. The latter was a constructive theologian; Abelard, a critic. Anselm was deliberate; Abelard, impulsive and rash. Anselm preferred seclusion; Abelard sought publicity. Among teachers exercising the spell of magnetism over their hearers, Abelard stands in the front rank and probably has not been excelled in France. In some of his theological reflections he was in advance of his age.... A man of daring thought and restless disposition, he was unstable in his mental beliefs and morally unreliable.

Soon Abelard took issue with Anselm also and left him to seek greener pastures elsewhere. He was sufficiently arrogant to describe Anselm as a man with a wonderful flow of words, but not thoughts; as one who lights a fire but fills the house with smoke.

The years that followed were Abelard's glory years. He went to Paris because William, who had retired, was no longer a threat, and he was invited to preside over the cathedral school. Schaff once again has an interesting description of these years.

All the world seemed about to do him homage. Scholars from all parts thronged to hear him. He lectured on philosophy and theology. He was well read in classical and widely read in sacred literature. His dialectic powers were ripe and, where arguments failed, the teacher's imagination and rhetoric came to the rescue. His books were read not only in the schools and convents, but in castles and guildhouses. William of Thierry said they crossed the seas and overleaped the Alps. When he visited towns, the people crowded the streets and strained their necks to catch a glimpse of him. His remarkable influence over men and women must be explained not by his intellectual depth so much as by a certain daring and literary art and brilliance. He was attractive of person.... To

these qualities he added a gay cheerfulness which expressed itself in composition of song and in singing....

### **Abelard's Mighty Fall**

The Scriptures warn us that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. So it was with Abelard.

His fall came about through what has become known in history as the "Heloise affair." The grim and sordid details are not necessary to relate. Heloise was the daughter of a canon, attractive, younger than Abelard by many years, and in need of instruction. Abelard persuaded her father that he was eminently suited to be her tutor. The end was a passionate love affair, an illegitimate child, a hasty marriage which really never was a marriage, and disgrace for them both. In a fury over Abelard's deceptiveness, Heloise's father conspired with others to have Abelard mutilated, and both he and Heloise ended in monasteries.

Abelard never changed from the proud man he had always been. He really wanted no part of marriage, fearful that it would spoil his career. He insisted on being married in secret and he spoke disparagingly of this divine institution.

What accord has study with nurses, writing materials with cradles, books and desks with spinning wheels, reeds and ink with spindles! Who, intent upon sacred and philosophical reflections, could endure the squalling of children, the lullabies of nurses and the noisy crowd of men and women! Who would stand the disagreeable and constant dirt of little children!

### **Abelard's Heresies and Final Days**

And yet, in a way, it was not his fornication which brought him down, but his heresies. It is well to be reminded of the fact that heresy in the church is deliberate. When an officebearer in the church

or a teacher in the school begins to teach false doctrine, it is not ignorance which leads to this sorry state. It is a deliberate perversion of the truth. And such deliberate distortion of the truth is almost always, if not always, rooted in intellectual pride. Pride in one's knowledge, in one's acumen, in one's intellectual abilities, in one's vast learning, leads to the desire to promote oneself in the eyes of others. What better way to promote one's great gifts than to be original in one's thinking? And what better way to demonstrate one's originality than by teaching doctrines which have not been taught before — at least in the form in which one now proposes them? Or what better way to show one's independence from other great theologians in the history of the church than by taking issue with them at certain points?

So it was with Abelard. It is the great temptation that comes to all who occupy positions of leadership in the church of Christ. It is a devil, for ministers at least, often worse than riches.

Abelard did deny the Trinity. We do not need to go into the heresy here, for, in fact, his heresy was an old one. He identified various virtues of God with the persons in the holy Trinity and thus denied the personal distinctions in God altogether. It was a kind of modalism, which teaches that God, one in person and one in being, reveals Himself in three different ways.

He was condemned in 1121 by the synod of Soissons. He was required to burn his own books. And he was sentenced to read the Athanasian Creed (which defines the doctrine of the Trinity; it can be found in the back of the Psalter used in the Protestant Reformed Churches) in public.

For a time Abelard became the abbot of a monastery in Brittany, but he was totally unable to control the wild behavior of the monks who lived in gluttony, drunken-

ness, and immorality. In fact, on two different occasions these monks, chafing under his efforts to reform them, tried to kill him, once by putting poison in his wine.

For a time he became the counselor of the monastery to which his wife Heloise had retired as a nun, but this did not work, and public opinion, scandalized by the idea, forced him to flee once again.


Much of his life from this point on is obscure, because his autobiography breaks off at this point, and he seems to have become a lost man. He wandered about from place to place, staying in each place for a while, teaching and gathering a circle of students. But his influence was gone.

In 1141 he was once again tried, this time by the synod of Sens, for other heresies. He refused to defend himself, but appealed to the pope. He was, however, condemned by Innocent II, who ordered him to be silent and to retire to a monastery. Innocent ordered his books to be burned and his followers to be excommunicated.

Abelard spent his last days in his studies, "reading constantly, praying often, gladly keeping silence." But he was broken by his sufferings and died in 1142. He was buried in the monastery where Heloise lived, and when she died, she was buried alongside him.

The heresies for which he was condemned by the synod of Sens were especially denials of the inspiration of Scripture. He taught that the same inspiration which brought into existence the Bible was present in the great Greek and Roman philosophers as well as in pagan holy writings. Degrees of inspiration are present in all writings and the degree of divine influence varies from one writing to another. Scripture, therefore, contained many human errors.

How modern Abelard was. Those who deny Scripture's inspiration today have not advanced much beyond Abelard.

... to be continued. 



# Balm


**B**alm was an ancient ointment or salve made from the resin of certain pine trees. Sometimes this resin was mixed with honey to produce an ointment of considerable medicinal value. The Old Testament several times speaks of the balm of Gilead because it was especially from the trees that abounded in Gilead, east of Jordan, that this balm was manufactured. It is also likely that people went to Gilead to be treated by physicians who were skilled in the application of this salve. The balm of Gilead was already well known at the time of Joseph, for his brothers sold him to some Ishmaelites who came from Gilead with spicery, balm, and myrrh, carrying it to Egypt (Gen. 37:25). Jacob commands Judah to take some balm, honey, and spices to Joseph, the ruler in Egypt, when he returns with Benjamin (Gen. 43:11). God warns Egypt that no balm of Gilead, or any medicine, shall cure her in the day of the Lord's vengeance (Jer. 46:11); nor would it do Babylon any good (Jer. 51:8). Balm was included in the merchandise of many trading nations (Ezek. 27:17). Only a few references to balm are made in Scripture, but the idea of healing various diseases is very prominent. We are interested in the figurative use that is made of the balm of Gilead.

Just before Judah is brought into captivity for her unfaithfulness to God, Jeremiah asks in astonishment, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jer. 8:22). Judah is sick unto death. There is no soundness in her, "but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Is. 1:6). By including the little word "then" in his third question above, Jeremiah indicates that the answer to his questions is *yes*. There is a balm in Gilead and there is a physician who attends to the health of his people.

This great Physician is Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the Sun of righteousness who arises with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2). The balm that He uses is the gospel of salvation which is in Him alone, working repentance towards God and faith in Himself. The balm is the Spirit of Christ, who applies the preaching of the gospel, rubbing it deep into the wounds of sin, healing the brokenhearted ones (Ps. 146:3; Is. 61:1). There is no wound or bruise that the Comforter cannot bind up and

heal. But for Judah there was not this balm because they held fast to deceit, they refused to return, no man repented of his wickedness. From the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealt falsely. "For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11).

It is in this light that we must consider the many miracles of healing performed by the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Each kind of disease spoke of some aspect of sin and its terrible power from which Jesus is Savior and over which Jesus is Master. When He healed the blind He showed that He is able to open the eyes of the spiritually blind to see the things of the kingdom of heaven. When He healed the lame He showed that in Him is the power to walk in the way of God's commandments. When He opened the ears of the deaf, He unstopped our spiritual ears that we might hear the Word of God to our salvation. In the healing of lepers is to be found the wonder of grace whereby the sinner is cleansed from the corruption and pollution of sin. And when He raised the dead He shows that He is able to raise the spiritually dead into immortality and life, both at our regeneration and in the day of His coming. The miracles of Jesus were not performed merely to deliver people from earthly pain and affliction. If that were all that Jesus did, He would be no better than the false prophets who healed the wounds of the people slightly. Jesus did not concern Himself with the outward manifestations of sin, but He went to the cause of it! He healed thoroughly. He makes whole those who are ravaged by sin and brought down to death.

Is there balm in Gilead for you? Is there a physician who is able to heal all your spiritual diseases, and even bring you from death to life? There is for all those who truly repent of their sins, who look in faith to the cross of Jesus Christ, and who find in the gospel the prescription for their healing. When we come to church to hear the gospel proclaimed by those who are anointed to preach good tidings, we are sitting in the waiting room of the great Physician. And as we wait for the sermon to begin we pray for the wonderful work of the Spirit, that he will take the balm of the gospel and rub it deep into all our wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores, binding them up, softening them with ointment. That is what we mean when we pray, "Father, *apply* Thy word unto us." And we are healed, renewed, encouraged that we may walk worthy of our callings, in the way of God's good commandments. 

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# Defending Sovereign Reprobation from Hyper-Calvinism (2) \*

**What are the dangers of hyper-Calvinism regarding the truth of reprobation?**

**T**here are errors that can be made with regard to reprobation, errors which must be classified as hyper-Calvinistic perversions of the gospel. They are just as deadly as Arminianism. Of them we must be warned. Pastors and elders may not allow their membership to promote or believe such sentiments. The Protestant Reformed Churches hold to no hyper-Calvinist doctrine. They have emphatically repudiated such charges and have shown carefully that they do not restrict the call of the gospel to the elect, do not look for signs of election before they will call to repentance and faith. But let us examine the broad range of hyper-Calvinistic possibilities, so that we may avoid them as strenuously and fearfully as we avoid Arminianism.

I only mention here, but do not discuss, the hyper-Calvinism discussed and warned against in Prof. David Engelsma's book *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*. The hyper-Calvinism discussed there is primarily (though not exclusively) that which would limit the preaching of the gospel to those

who can be identified as God's elect and would limit the call to believe to those who show signs of election. It denies the duty of repentance to any but the elect. Since reprobation is the inseparable and necessary counterpart of election, those dangers discussed in his book with regard to election necessarily and fully apply here with regard to reprobation.<sup>1</sup>

I also only mention the error that the *Canons* themselves warn against. If reprobation is the *cause* of unbelief in the reprobate, we must be extremely careful to understand that rightly. There is a real danger, unless reprobation is taught clearly and preached carefully—so clearly and carefully that especially the young people understand—that these errors will arise. It must be made explicit in the discussion of reprobation that reprobation is not the identical counterpart of election. No one may ever fail to know that reprobation does not cause unbelief in the same sense that election causes faith. Everyone must be crystal-clear that God does not infuse unbelief into good people, making them bad. The instruction in our catechism classes must leave no one wondering: "Does God really force the unbelievers to be bad?" This will take careful work by pastors, elders, and parents. If they are not willing to do that work, hyper-Calvinism will creep in by the careful and determined efforts of the evil one, who hates the truth of election and rep-

robation. From one side or another, he will seek to destroy it.

But my main interest in the last part of this paper is to explore those areas of hyper-Calvinism that might not be considered so among some orthodox, Reformed Christians (also and especially Protestant Reformed Christians). Indeed, what hyper-Calvinist would admit that he has misrepresented the Reformed faith?

It is my joyful and firmly held conviction that the PRC hold no doctrine that is hyper-Calvinistic. God save the PRC from such. Every pastor, however, can testify that there are always members who are inclined to take the truth into an area that becomes radical, that exaggerates the Reformed faith so that it is distorted and ugly, where it ceases to be the Reformed faith. When this takes place, the charges of hyper-Calvinism stick.

I mention especially these areas of concern:

1. *Attributing equal importance to reprobation and election*

Without due care by preachers, members will suppose that reprobation and election are of equal importance. Let all the saints understand that reprobation is not of the same weight as election, but lesser. Election is always on the fore-

\* A paper given originally for the officebearers' conference of Classis West of the PRC on March 2, 1999 in Redlands, CA. Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Hudsonville PRC in Hudsonville, MI.

<sup>1</sup> See especially his last chapter, called "The Threat of Hyper-Calvinism." To my mind, this is a chapter that ought to be read and re-read by all our pastors and elders.



ground; reprobation on the background. Election is the master; reprobation the servant. Election is served by reprobation as chaff serves wheat. Reprobate Pharaoh serves elect Israel. Reprobate Judas serves elect Jesus Christ and, through His crucifixion, the church. Let every believer defend the truth of reprobation for the sake of election, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

## 2. "Supras" preaching "infras" out of the Reformed camp

I leave others to lead us into the depths of the debate between supra and infralapsarianism. Here, I caution us against an error that is becoming more prominent in discussions of supra and infralapsarianism: that of supras supposing that infras are Arminian, and infras supposing supras are hyper-Calvinistic. Here we concern ourselves with the former—those who claim to be supra-lapsarian but consider infralapsarians somehow the weaker brethren, if not somehow suspect.

Let truth be told among us: though I was reared to believe, and many of our preachers have said, that supra-lapsarianism is the preferable view, we are confessionally, officially, infra-lapsarian! Let truth be told among us: infralapsarianism is Reformed, biblical truth! Let truth be told among us: the Reformed camp has always had room—much room—for those who hold to the infra-lapsarian view! Let it be proclaimed loudly: the debate between supras and infras is a debate among brothers, not enemies! Let every man tempted to damn infras to a lesser place in the kingdom be reminded: the *Synod of Dordt* was large-hearted enough to allow the *supras* place among them without condemnation, though the majority was infralapsarian. The *Canons of Dordt* are nothing if they are not infra-lapsarian.

This is not to say that the people of God among us should not be permitted and even encouraged to prefer the supra-lapsarian per-

spective and emphasis. However, let us be clear on a couple of matters. First, the order of elements of the decree in the mind of God has nothing to do with which is first or second in *time*. There is no time in God's eternal decree. Understanding this is essential to a willingness to allow a brother to hold either supra or infralapsarianism. Second, we ought to consider taking Herman Bavinck's lead in understanding neither supra nor infra to be the final answer, but finding in both an important aspect of biblical truth. Understand well, both views teach that reprobation is an eternal, sovereign, unconditional decree.<sup>2</sup> Supralapsarianism emphasizes the biblical truth that the main purpose of God in His counsel with election and reprobation is His own glory in Jesus Christ. Who would deny this? God's glory in Christ has the pre-eminence in God's counsel. First is Christ, then is election and reprobation. We are chosen "in Christ." God created all things "by Christ" and "for Christ" (Col. 1:15, 16). Infralapsarianism, on the other hand, emphasizes the biblical truth that those whom God chose and those whom God rejected appeared in the mind of God as fallen and depraved sinners. Who would deny this? He chose us in order that we might *become* holy (see Eph. 1:4). God did not choose good people, or even neutral people, but depraved sinners in need of redemption. Must the case be "either supra or infra"?

There are even hyper-Calvinistic dangers in the supra-lapsarian position, if one is not careful. Let no one say, as (if I remember correctly) one poet once mocked the Reformed faith, putting in her mouth the exclamation: "Oh, glorious fall!" Let no one be so cavalier with these holy things of God that he glories in sin because "on account of sin Christ came."

## 3. Judging an individual to be reprobate because of his unbelief

I consider this error a very easily adopted form of hyper-Calvinism. It is not uncommon. It comes in many different forms. Most common is the mistake of designating a sinful man as a reprobate when we mean "unregenerated" or "unbelieving." The people of God do not know God's decree with regard to the eternal state of any man living (except for Antichrist when he appears and those whom the Bible identifies as reprobate, as Esau). They must be careful when (and whether) they try to determine the eternal state of any man who has died.

When a child of believing parents leaves the fold, departs from the truth and life of holiness, and dies in his unbelief, what must be the God-glorifying disposition of our heart? Sorrow must fill our heart. Carefulness must characterize our thoughts. O God, spare me. Judge righteous judgment, Lord! And show mercy.

## 4. Refusing to express the desire for the salvation of an unbelieving man

A devastatingly wrong attitude that can be conveyed by those who misunderstand the decree of reprobation is the attitude that refuses to express desire for the salvation of a wicked man who rejects the truth of the gospel. There is no personal desire for the salvation of an unbeliever whom they may meet. This, too, goes beyond the Reformed faith and misapplies the truth of reprobation.

Just recently I heard of a woman who denied a request even to pray for a sinning individual with the statement: "God is sovereign." Where does this attitude come from? God's people may not conduct themselves according to

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<sup>2</sup> William Klempa is wrong when he says that "infralapsarianism ... represented election as unconditional but regarded reprobation as conditional upon human sinfulness." (See "Supralapsarianism," in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Donald McKim, ed.)

what may be God's hidden will, but according to what is His revealed will. To do otherwise is a gross form of hyper-Calvinism.

Let it be clear: we express no general desire of God for the salvation of all men or of any particular man. We do not say to everyone or anyone we meet: "God loves you, wants to save you, and has a wonderful plan for your life." In fact, does not *all* hyper-Calvinism come from this—a misguided desire to preserve Reformed truth in our own way rather than Scripture's? But refusing to say "God loves all of you" does not prohibit a Reformed Christian from saying: "I sincerely desire that you be saved."

Hyper-Calvinism's defense is persistent: "But the man may be reprobate; I certainly may not express a desire that is contrary to the decree of God." Calvinism answers with the words of holy apostle Paul who, after Agrippa refused to believe the preaching of Christ, said to this stubborn unbeliever: "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am (a believer!), except these bonds" (Acts 26:29). With Calvin, true Calvinists respond: "With what zeal to spread abroad the glory of Christ was this holy man's (Paul's) breast inflamed...and doth desire that (Agrippa) might escape the deadly snares of Satan, and to have both him and also his partners to be partakers with him of the same grace...."<sup>3</sup> Rather than being afraid of expressing this desire, Calvinism in its true form has heartfelt zeal exactly because a Calvinist loves his neighbor and desires the glory of God in his salvation.

##### 5. *Speaking of God's decree to the exclusion of His purposes in it*

Scripture rarely speaks of election without showing *why* God elected: "that we should be holy and without blame before him...." We were "created in Christ Jesus (according to his election of us)

unto good works, which God before ordained (according to his election of us) that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). According to Scripture, election must be taught in connection with God's purposes of works (fruit) to His glory. Likewise, reprobation must not be spoken of without asking why God reprobated. At the end of Canons I:15, the Reformed faith teaches that reprobation "declares him (God) to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof." The article begins by saying that reprobation's place is "to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election..." (Canons I:15). Beautifully, this is the Reformed guard against hyper-Calvinism: every mention of reprobation must be to magnify the unmerited grace of God shown to me.

Right here, we face the danger of "over-emphasizing the sovereignty of God." It has been said that it is impossible to do this. No one, they say, can emphasize sufficiently the sovereignty of God. That statement, I fear, though true in itself, may well miss the point. The point is not whether God's sovereignty is emphasized sufficiently, but whether it is so emphasized that the people in the pew do not hear anymore (if they are even mentioned) the *purposes* of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation, the *calling* they have in response to these truths and realities. They have heard the sovereign grace of election, but not that God chose "in order that we might be holy." If the call to a holy life is missing, the sovereignty of God has been *wrongly* taught. If the grace of God to us over against the dark background of reprobation as the most *humbling* reality is missing, the sovereignty of God has been *wrongly* emphasized.

For example, a minister who preaches on the commandments

does grave injustice to the truth if he does not point the people of God both to the reason for our obedience and the power for our obedience in Jesus Christ. So also the minister who preaches election and reprobation does grave injustice to the truth if he only tacks on to the end as an afterthought the truth of the purposes of God in His decrees. He fails properly to balance his presentation of the truth in both cases.

##### 6. *Taking casual and carnal delight in the doctrine of reprobation*

Finally, when a Reformed minister or member, with a kind of relish, looks for every opportunity to preach and mention reprobation, he betrays a spirit of hyper-Calvinism. He does not live in the spirit of Calvin who called it "that awesome (*horribilis*: astonishing, dreadful) decree." He does not live with the heart of Paul who, though he did not hesitate to teach it, cried at the thought of many perishing in their unbelief according to God's reprobation of them. But Paul's great heaviness and continual sorrow is not this man's. This man cannot wait to get to the coffee shop to exhibit his orthodoxy in a tenacious defense of sovereign reprobation. There he displays with his "orthodoxy" a cruel-hearted attitude towards those who perish. In a sick way he has perverted the teaching of the Reformed faith.

##### Conclusion

This attitude and these sentiments do as severe damage to the faith as does Arminianism. Arminians are greater in number; we fear them most. But let's not forget the enemy on the other side. Rather than delighting in the doctrine of reprobation with a kind of crazed relish, let the believer be quieted by it, and humbled. Let him always seek to magnify God's righteousness (in His righteous judgment of the reprobate) and undeserved grace (in His free salva-

<sup>3</sup> Calvin's commentary on Acts 26:29.



tion of him). Let him hear this truth preached and let him preach this truth with profoundest sense of shame and sorrow for his own sin. Let the result be greatest sense of hu-

mility: "I should have been rejected!"

Let him have this sense: were it not for the mighty, electing grace of God, I too would be an enemy

of righteous reprobation; either by denying its sovereignty and righteousness, or by becoming hyper-Calvinistic. God save us from both.



## Book Reviews



*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, by John Calvin. [Willow Street, PA]: Old Paths Publications, 1994. xi + 117 pp. \$7.95 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

**H**ow urgent that in this time of reunion with the Roman Catholic Church by bewitched Protestants many of the bewitchers and bewitched read this spirited defense of the Protestant Reformation!

How urgent that in this age of tolerance of false doctrine and impure worship many of the tolerant ones, fancying themselves good, indeed superior, Christians (so full of love, they mistakenly suppose), read this vigorous call to resist impure worship and false doctrine even unto death! Calvin ends on this very note:

But be the issue what it may, we will never repent of having begun, and of having proceeded thus far. The Holy Spirit is a faithful and unerring witness to our doctrine. We know, I say, that it is the eternal truth of God that we preach. We are, indeed, desirous, as we ought to be, that our ministry may prove salutary to the world; but to give it this effect belongs to God, not to us. If, to punish, partly the ingratitude, and partly the stubbornness of those to whom we desire to do good, success must prove desperate, and all things go to worse, I will say what it befits a Christian man to say, and what all who are true to this holy profession will subscribe.—We will die, but in death even be conquerors, not only because through it we shall have a sure passage to a better life, but because we know that our blood will

be as seed to propagate the Divine truth which men now despise (p. 117).

The book is Old Paths' reprint of John Calvin's defense of the Reformation to Emperor Charles V in 1544 at the urging of Calvin's fellow Reformer and friend, Martin Bucer. By this defense, Calvin hoped to ward off the emperor's persecution of the Reformed churches and even to enlist his support of the Reformation. In this, Calvin was to be disappointed. But the treatise would become a clear explanation to all of the fundamental issues in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation of the church and a ringing call to true Protestants to cherish and maintain the Reformation.

Calvin divided his defense into three sections: the evils that made the Reformation necessary; the remedies applied by the Reformation; and the urgency ("necessity") of the Reformation. Each of the three sections then treats of four matters: the right manner of worship; the source of salvation; the right administration of the sacraments; and the proper exercise of church government, particularly discipline.

Noteworthy is that the impure worship of the Roman Catholic Church—worship that is not regulated by the command of God—was for Calvin the primary evil that made reformation necessary. To be sure, impure worship was accompanied by false doctrine concerning the gospel of salvation by grace alone, but impure worship is mentioned first. Let the advocates and practitioners of "progressive worship" and the opponents of the

regulative principle of worship take heed!

One long, glorious paragraph (thank God for John Calvin!) sums it up:

At the time when divine truth lay buried under this vast and dense cloud of darkness—when religion was sullied by so many impious superstitions—when by horrid blasphemies the worship of God was corrupted, and His glory laid prostrate—when by a multitude of perverse opinions, the benefit of redemption was frustrated, and men, intoxicated with a fatal confidence in works, sought salvation any where rather than in Christ—when the administration of the Sacraments was partly maimed and torn asunder, partly adulterated by the admixture of numerous fictions, and partly profaned by traffickings for gain—when the government of the Church had degenerated into mere confusion and devastation—when those who sat in the seat of pastors first did most vital injury to the Church by the dissoluteness of their lives, and, secondly, exercised a cruel and most noxious tyranny over souls, by every kind of error, leading men like sheep to the slaughter;—then Luther arose, and after him others, who with united counsels sought out means and methods by which religion might be purged from all these defilements, the doctrine of godliness restored to its integrity, and the Church raised out of its calamitous into somewhat of a tolerable condition. The same course we are still pursuing in the present day (pp. 23, 24).

In this work is found Calvin's well-known appeal to the barking of a dog when its master is threat-



ened. "A dog, seeing any violence offered to his master, will instantly bark; could we, in silence, see the sacred name of God dishonoured so blasphemously" (p. 70; see also p. 76). This was Calvin's response to criticism of his sharp refutation of error and vigorous defense of the truth by members of the church who counseled tolerance. Nothing has changed!

And then, Calvin's exposure of this accursed tolerance:

There is something specious [plausible] in the name of moderation, and tolerance is a quality which has a fair appearance, and seems worthy of praise; but the rule which we must observe at all hazards is, never to endure patiently that the sacred name of God should be assailed with impious blasphemy—that his eternal truth should be suppressed by the devil's lies—that Christ should be insulted, his holy mysteries polluted, unhappy souls cruelly murdered, and the Church left to writhe in extremity under the effect of a deadly wound. This would be not meekness, but indifference about things to which all others ought to be postponed (p. 80).

This is one of the works that I could wish were in the hands of all our people, including the youth, as in the hands of every Roman Catholic who has enough interest in church history and concern for

fair judgment to read the Protestant defense of the Reformation. ■

*The Happy Mourner: Consolations of God & Sympathy for the Bereaved*, by William Jay. Willow Street, PA: Old Paths Publications, 2000. 220 pp. \$25.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by the editor.]

This is an Old Paths reprint of a nineteenth century collection of writings of the English minister William Jay on God's comfort of His children in their many and various afflictions. Much is biblical exposition and application.

Jay affirms the basis of all comfort for the Christian: God's sovereignty over all the evils in his life. He reminds the sufferer of God's wise and beneficial purposes with affliction. In view of these good purposes, he calls the Christian to submission, which is patient because it is hopeful: "a conviction that if we suffer, these sufferings are as necessary as the knife to the vine; as the furnace to the gold; and as medicine to the body. This, and this alone can enable us cordially to say, 'Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him'" (pp. 152, 153).


Particularly instructive and consoling is the chapter on "The Christian in Death." Usually, the peaceful death is the death of one who has been upright in his life,

not that of one who has had a last minute conversion. In effect, Jay is warning against ready acceptance of the triumphant announcement that a James Dobson has achieved the conversion of a Ted Bundy on death row. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

There is an intriguing chapter on "The Christian in Heaven," including an answer to the question, whether we will know each other in heaven, and a convincing argument, that we will work there. It is an altogether lovely treatment of the hope of heaven.

There is fine, and sometimes sharp, practical application. Jay speaks of the retiree who decides where he will live out the rest of his life on the basis of beautiful meadows, fine streams, and grand forests. The retiree ignores the tree of life, the wells of salvation, and pasture for the hunger of the soul.

In offering comfort to parents whose children die in infancy, Jay errs by insisting that all children who die in infancy, whether offspring of believers or of unbelievers, are saved.

There are obtrusive printing errors. Why the numbers every so often at the bottom of pages? What is the explanation of the superfluous definite article on page 194? On page 146, "ordidances" should be "ordinances." 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

The Reformed Witness Committee of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs, along with the Edgerton, MN PRC, has been updating their web site at [www.reformedwitness.org](http://www.reformedwitness.org). It now has available online all

of the pamphlets which they distribute in their evangelism efforts. Some of those included are, "The Foundations Are Shaking," by Rev. B. Gritters; Rev. H. Veldman's works on "The Well-Meaning Offer of the Gospel"; Rev. J. Kortering's works on "Eschatology"; and Rev. D. H. Kuiper's "Attributes of God" series.

In their on-going evangelism efforts, the congregation of the

Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ sponsored a conference on "Reformed Worship" on Friday and Saturday, November 10 & 11, at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Rev. M. VanderWal, pastor at Covenant, opened the conference on Friday evening with a speech entitled "The Regulative Principle." On Saturday Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, continued the conference by speak-

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



ing on "A Critique of Modern Forms of Worship," followed by Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, speaking on, "The Believer's Active Participation in Worship." Covenant's congregation was thankful to God for the contacts made and for the opportunity to meet with other believers. We could also add that Revs. Bruinsma and Terpstra spent the following Lord's Day in worship at Covenant, with each pastor preaching once for the congregation.

The Historical Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI is offering audio and video tapes of the presentation of Agatha Lubbers and Herm Ophoff on PRC history, "An Anecdotal History of the PRC." This presentation was given as a sectional at Holland on October 31. It would make a great addition to your home and or church libraries and would be a good way to remember our recently commemorated 75th anniversary. Audio tapes may be ordered by sending \$3/tape to Holland PRC, 3641 104th Ave., Holland, MI 49424. Video tapes may be ordered by sending \$18 (includes P&H) to Clare Haveman, 44 S. Pine, Zeeland, MI 49464.

### School Activities

In late September the congregation of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI met to discuss various building and ground improvements for their property. One proposal that they did approve was a request from Eastside Christian School to lease the circle drive area of their property for the erection of a school building. Presently Eastside meets in the basement of First and, like many of our schools, continues with God's blessing to see growth, making the erection of a separate building not only possible but necessary.

On Saturday, November 11, supporters of Adams Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to a dinner, auction, and open house to celebrate their

school's recently completed new addition. Last December we reported that Adams had scheduled a ground-breaking ceremony in early October for a proposed gymnasium, science class room, and additional rest rooms. We said that this new addition should be completed in about a year, and it appears that it was, much to the delight of the students at Adams.

### Mission Activities

The week of November 13 was an exceptionally busy one for our missionary to Ghana. Not only was Rev. R. Moore busy with his normal mission activities, but he and his wife were also able to welcome Mr. John Bouma back to Ghana on Wednesday and the delegates from his calling church and the Foreign Mission Committee on Friday. Mr. Don VerMeer and Mr. Jim Andringa, both elders in the Hull, IA PRC and members of the FMC, came to visit the field to gain valuable firsthand knowledge of the on-going work there, as well as to encourage the Moores in their labors on behalf of our churches.

### Young People's Activities

The Young Adults of our PR churches in the Chicago, IL area have been meeting together to discuss chapters of Prof. H. Hanko's book, *For Thy Truth's Sake*. Each meeting deals with a different chapter of that book. In late October Prof. Hanko, who was in the area for a Reformation Day Lecture, led one of those meetings, lec-

turing on "Common Grace or Particular Grace," based on chapter 4 of his book.


Young people from various of the west Michigan PR churches met together on Sunday, November 12 for a Thanksgiving Mass Meeting at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Rev. K. Koole spoke on the theme, "Hail to the Victor." According to an unsolicited report from an anonymous young person, Rev. Koole's speech was excellent — because it was short and to the point.

### Minister Activities

Since our last "News," Rev. M. Dick has declined the call he had been considering from the Randolph, WI PRC. Consequently, Randolph formed a new trio consisting of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, and B. Gritters. On November 13 they met and extended a call to Rev. R. Cammenga to come over and help them. November 15 the congregation of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI met to call a pastor-on-loan to send to our sister churches in Singapore. From a trio of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, C. Haak, and D. Kleyn, they extended a call to Rev. D. Kleyn.

### Food For Thought

"God is in our midst; He is now here. In Him we live and move and have our being. Our very bodies become His temples, and our lives must be daily fashioned after the pattern of His presence."

—J.C. Massee 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Notice

The Association for Protestant Reformed Secondary Education in Lansing, IL is seeking an administrator/teacher and teachers for our high school's inaugural year beginning with grades nine and ten in August, 2001. Interested individuals please contact:

Education Committee chairman  
Bill DeJong  
(708) 946-6126  
[bill@dejongequipment.com]  
or Board chairman  
Don Terpstra  
(219) 838-3600  
[dwterp@juno.com].



## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Our beloved foreign missionary, and his wife, **REV. RICHARD and JAN MOORE**, celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on November 23<sup>rd</sup>. Rev. Moore was ordained in 1968, and has served faithfully in five of our churches, and now, for 1½ years, has been proclaiming the word on the mission field in Ghana, Africa.

Rev. and Mrs. Moore have 10 children in various of our churches: Edmonton and Lacombe in Canada; Lynden, Washington; Hull, Iowa; Peace and Bethel in Illinois; and Grandville, Michigan. They have 32 grandchildren.

We are grateful for them, and rejoice with them. We thank God that He has given them these years together as faithful servants. We pray for His continual blessing upon them in the years ahead. "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen."

Ghana, West Africa

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of South-east PRC express their Christian sympathy to Jason Jabaay in the passing of his grandfather,

**JOHN JABAAY,**

of Redlands, California, at the age of 74.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.  
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Marion and Mel VanDyk and their children in the death of their father, father-in-law, and grandfather,

**MR. BARNEY WESTRA.**

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thessalonians 4:13,14).

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Pres.  
Tom Kiel, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of South-east PRC express their Christian sympathy to Irene VanderWal in the passing of her brother,

**ERNIE VOGEL,**

of Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the age of 73.

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Ephesians 1:11, 12).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.  
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to Arnold and Charlotte Bleyenbergh and their family in the loss of Charlotte's mother,

**FANNY MIERSMA.**

May they be comforted by the words of Deuteronomy 33:27a, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Pres.  
Allen Brummel, Clerk

## NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2001, at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 9, 2000.

Jon J. Huisken  
Stated Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to Art and Carrie Bleyenbergh and their family in the death of Art's sister,

**CHRISTINA VANDER WOLDE.**

May the Lord give comfort through His Word, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, Pres.  
Allen Brummel, Clerk

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

December 22, 2000 marks the 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our beloved parents and grandparents,

**FRANK and FRANCES deBOER.**

We, their children and grandchildren, thank our heavenly Father for the many years he has blessed them to be together, and for the covenant instruction and godly example that they have shown us throughout the years. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to uphold them and bless them in the years to come. "O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Praise ye the Lord" (Psalm 117).

- \* Albert and Sarah deBoer
- \* Bob and Thelma Cogdal
- \* Billy and Julie deBoer
- \* Art and Leann deBoer
- \* Joey and Deanna deBoer
- \* Larry and Christine Whitman
- \* Loren and Carolyn VanDenTop
- \* Ed and Charlene deBoer
- \* Linda deBoer
- \* Terry and Janey Westoff
- \* Marvin and Marsha Molenkamp
- \* Jim and Amy Courtney

40 grandchildren

Lynden, Washington

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Bible Study of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church would like to express their sincere sympathy to fellow members Abigail Nobel and Naomi Chesebro in the loss of their brother,

**SAMUEL NOBEL.**

It is our prayer that they will be comforted with the words of Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, President  
Rebecca Kleyn, Secretary