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Volume 80 ♦ Number 7

The Happiness of Those Whose Hope Is in the Lord

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.

Psalm 146:3-5

The beginning of a new year is an occasion to look forward.

From a purely human point of view, the future is very uncertain. We are at war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The American economy is weak, leaving many people financially strapped. Our society is morally rotten, evidenced by the breakdown of marriage and the family. And these are only some of the troubles we face.

It is very easy to become apprehensive about the future.

Those who have the God of Jacob for their help, and whose hope is in the Lord, have no reason for anxiety. Their future is secure.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Put not your trust in princes or in the son of man. In them there is no help.

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.



The God of Jacob!

Princes, who are merely the sons of men.

What a contrast.

Princes are the rulers of this world. Israel dealt with many foreign princes in her history. Some wielded tremendous power, such as the rulers of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Most of them opposed Israel; some were willing for a price to help her against her enemies.

We can speak of princes also today. They are in high places of government, and by virtue of their position they wield great power. Often in history these princes have been antagonistic to the church, even persecuting the church. Others have been benefactors to the church, allowing her room to live in peace.

But then there is the LORD, who is the God of Jacob.



This terminology views God as the God of the covenant. He is the God of Jacob. It was with Jacob that God established His covenant, as He had with Jacob's father, Isaac, and grandfather, Abraham, before him. The God of Jacob, therefore, is the God of the covenant. Besides this, God is identified here as LORD. Wherever there is "LORD" in the KJV, the name "Jehovah" is found in the original. And Jehovah is God's covenant name.

In the Old Testament the nation of Israel belonged to this covenant of God. They were the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jehovah was their covenant God.

Also today Jehovah is the covenant God. His covenant is with all those who belong to Jesus Christ by faith. God's covenant is with Abraham and his seed. This seed is not a natural seed but a spiritual one. All those who possess the same faith that Abraham had and by that faith belong to Jesus Christ are counted as the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:7, 29). Jehovah is their God, just as surely as He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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Put not your trust in princes.

Hope rather in Jehovah.

To trust someone is to confide in him. When you have a burden or a concern, you take it to someone and tell him about it, trusting that he will help. The idea of hope builds on that kind of trust. It emphasizes expecting help from someone so that you wait for his help. You hope in those in whom you trust.

Israel was not to put her trust in princes. She often did. In spite of repeated warnings, she turned again and again to Egypt for help when enemies from the north threatened. And there were others in whom she trusted. Here again Israel was reminded by the Psalmist not to do this.

This also applies to us. We face many potential evils in the future. As citizens of a nation we face the threats of war, terrorism, and economic recession. As members of the church we face the threat of apostasy and persecution. We are warned here not to put our trust in the princes of this world to deliver and protect us. Certainly we may make use of the protection of our government. Government is an institution of God, ordained for the welfare of the church. Rightfully the church uses the protection the government provides for all her citizens. But as she does so, she is not to put her trust in princes so that she depends on them to keep and preserve her. Her confidence for the future must not rest on the princes of this world.

The church must rather put her trust in her covenant God to help her. Her hope must be in Jehovah, the God of Jacob. When there are wars and rumors of war, we must trust in Jehovah to keep us. When there is persecution and threat of violence for the church, we must confide in the God of Jacob. When there is poverty and scarcity, we must hope in the LORD. And certainly as we begin the year 2004 we must look to our covenant God, confide in Him, and expect our help from Him alone.



Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.

It would often appear that there is help in princes. Princes often hold great power. Some have tremendous ability. The history books are full of illustrious princes who have done great things. They have led massive armies. They have conquered mighty nations. They have persuaded the masses with a golden tongue. And so many look to them for help in the time of need. Their hope is in their prince.

But the fact is that there is no help in princes. Any help they provide is very limited in scope and of short duration. And any lasting help that provides for our real needs is not found in princes.

The obvious reason is that they are merely the sons of men. And being the sons of men their breath goeth forth, i.e., they expire. They die. They return to the earth, i.e., at death they go to the grave, where they return to the dust of the ground. In that very day their thoughts perish. By thoughts are meant all their dreams and schemes and all that they accomplish. In the day that they die, the thoughts of the princes of this world all perish.

What true, lasting help can they provide?

On the other hand, we have every reason to put our trust in our covenant God.

For as the psalmist makes clear in the rest of this Psalm, Jehovah is able to care for our every need. He it is that "made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is" (v. 6). As the great Creator, Jehovah also reigns over all forever. "The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations" (v. 10). There are two ideas here. First, Jehovah, in His almighty power, controls all things. There is not a thing, great or small, that God does not rule absolutely. Secondly, Jehovah God does not rule only for

a few years, and then pass away. He rules forever, so that His thoughts do not perish but are realized and stand forever.

Certainly, the God of Jacob is able to help us in all our needs.

And being our covenant God He is willing to help.

The basic idea of the covenant is friendship. As our covenant God, Jehovah is our friend. As our sovereign friend, Jehovah God loves us and will care for us. It is His eternal desire and purpose to care for us in our every need. So intent is He in this purpose that He gave His only begotten Son to the agony of the cross to secure our salvation and eternal welfare. In verses 7-9 the psalmist gives an indication of the kind of care Jehovah provides for us in His covenant. He executes judgment for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, looses the prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, raises them that are bowed down, loves the righteous, preserves the strangers, and relieves the fatherless and widow. There is nothing that our covenant God will withhold from us. It is all designed to keep us safely in this life as well as to bring us to Himself in eternal covenant bliss in a better life to come.

Certainly, our trust and our hope are well placed in Jehovah, the God of Jacob.




Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help.

Certainly those who put their trust in princes will not be happy. There is no help in princes. Those who rely on them will be without help. The hope they have as they wait for help is a false hope. Their hopes can only be dashed again and again. After repeated disappointments, those who trust in princes will ultimately perish in their misery.

But those who have the God of Jacob for their help shall be happy. For there is help in the God of Jacob. There is help in Him alone! And all those who both trust and

hope in Him will receive His help.
Where is your trust? In whom
do you hope?

In this New Year and for every
year of your life, put your trust in
Jehovah and your hope in the God
of Jacob.

Happy is he that hath the God
of Jacob for his help, whose hope
is in the LORD his God. 

Editorial

Precious Assurance

For a long time, I have wanted to write on the assurance of salvation. God willing, this editorial is the beginning of a series of articles on Scripture's precious doctrine of assurance and, based on this doctrine, the Christian's precious experience of assurance.

Assurance is a prominent teaching in Holy Scripture. The apostle teaches the assurance of the elect believer in Hebrews 10:19ff. We have "boldness" to enter the holiest. We are called to draw near to God "in full assurance of faith." There is an urgent warning against "wavering," casting away our confidence, and drawing back.

Assurance is precious. Certainty that I am saved in the love of God my Father in Jesus Christ is dear—dearer than earthly life. Doubt is dreadful—worse than death.

Distinctively Reformed

Assurance is a distinctive blessing of God in the lives of Reformed Christians.

Obviously, there is no assurance of salvation in the unbelieving world and in the pagan religions. As there is salvation only in Jesus Christ, so there is assurance of salvation only in Him.

But neither do members of the other churches enjoy assurance. The reason is that the other churches have a false gospel. Assurance is, and can be, a reality only where the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God alone is proclaimed and believed.

There is no assurance in the Roman Catholic Church. It is Roman dogma that there is no assurance in the Roman religion. Apart from special revelation given only to a few, no one may be certain of his justification, election, salvation, and everlasting blessedness in heaven.

No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he that is justified, either can not sin any more, or, if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it can not be known whom God hath chosen unto himself.

So also as regards the gift of perseverance, of which it is written, "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved," ... let no one herein promise himself any thing as certain with an absolute certainty.

If anyone saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end,—unless he have learned this by special revelation: let him be anathema ("The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent," Decree on Justification, Chapters 12 and 13; On Justification, Canon 16, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, Harper & Brothers, 1890, pp. 103, 113, 114).

Likewise, all who believe the doctrines of Arminianism, that is,

the teachings of universal, ineffectual, conditional grace, lack assurance of salvation. These include most evangelicals and fundamentalists. They can be sure, they say, that they are saved today, when they choose to believe in Christ. But they cannot be sure that they will be saved tomorrow, or everlastingly, because they may choose not to believe tomorrow. A salvation that depends upon the free, sovereign will of the sinner is highly uncertain. The Arminians themselves frankly admit their doubt. At Dordt, the Arminian party expressed the inescapable implication of their gospel of salvation by the will of man in these words:

True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish.

Indeed, the Arminians declared that assurance of salvation was of no great importance to them.

A true believer can and ought indeed to be certain for the future that he is able, by diligent watchfulness, through prayers, and through other holy exercises, to persevere in true faith, and he ought also to be certain that divine grace for persevering will never be lacking; but we do not see how he can be certain that he will never afterwards be remiss in his duty but that he will persevere in faith and in those works of piety and love which are fitting for a believer in this school of Christian warfare;

neither do we deem it necessary that concerning this thing a believer should be certain ("The Opinions of the Remonstrants [Arminians]: The Opinion of the Remonstrants with Respect to the Fifth Article, which concerns Perseverance," Articles 4, 8, in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, ed. Peter Y. DeJong, Reformed Fellowship, 1968, pp. 228, 229; emphasis added).

The cause of all lack of assurance of salvation among Arminians is the same as the cause of the lack of assurance on the part of Roman Catholics: They believe the false gospel of salvation conditioned upon something in the sinner. In the language of the apostle in Romans 9:16, Roman Catholics believe that salvation depends upon the sinner's running, or working; Arminians believe that salvation depends upon the sinner's willing. There is no assurance in a message of salvation depending upon the sinner. There cannot be. The sinner—man—is not dependable. He is unstable as water.

God will not bless such a message with assurance. He will give assurance only by the message of salvation that casts the needy sinner wholly upon His grace in Jesus Christ. Again, in the language of Paul in Romans 9:16, this is the message that salvation depends only upon God who shows mercy. This is the message of the Reformed faith.

Reformed Doubters

Nevertheless, there are also Reformed and Presbyterian churches that have gone grievously wrong in the matter of assurance. This too makes our treatment of assurance timely. The result of their error is that these Reformed and Presbyterian churches are filled with members who lack assurance of their salvation. What is even worse, these members suppose that their doubt is normal and right.

Not all Reformed churches and ministers agree with the theme that will sound, and resound, loudly

and gloriously through this series of articles on assurance: Assurance is God's will for *all* His children. Some Reformed churches and theologians teach that assurance is the will of God for only *some* of His children, indeed very *few* of His children. Even the few are taught by their churches and ministers to come to assurance only after a long period—perhaps most of their life—of doubt and uncertainty.

These are churches and theologians, especially in the Dutch Reformed tradition and in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, who are influenced by certain of the Puritans. The Puritans were mainly English theologians in the latter part of the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century who strove for the doctrinal soundness and liturgical purity of the church and for the holiness of the lives of the members of the church.

Some of the Puritans placed inordinate emphasis on religious experience. One's religious experience was more important than the truth of Christ in sound doctrine. In addition, the highly regarded and much sought-after religious experience was seriously misrepresented. Rather than the sober experience of faith in Christ, consisting of sorrow over sin, trust in the Savior presented in the gospel, the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins, and the desire to love this gracious Savior by doing His will, the religious experience urged by these Puritans was supposed to be an enthusiastic, mystical, mysterious, ineffable feeling.

Bound up with this strange "experience," according to these miserable physicians of the souls of men, was one's assurance of his salvation. For assurance, these Puritans encouraged an unhealthy introspection, a spiritual "navel-gazing." Rather than to look away from one's guilty, depraved self to the crucified Savior, the wretched people—confessing Calvinists—were taught to rummage around in their own soul for the proper expe-

rience. As if this were not bad enough, as soon as a poor soul dared to find some spiritual experience within himself that might prove his salvation, the Puritan minister would question the validity of the experience: "Are you sure that the sorrow for sin is genuine? that the trust in Christ is true faith? that the love for God is real?"

The result, inevitably, was doubt—lifelong doubt, doubt on a huge scale in the congregations, doubt handed down from generation to generation.

Whereupon the old Puritan teachers cheerily concluded, as their modern disciples conclude today, that assurance is the will of God only for a few of His children. Even the favored few expected to struggle with doubt for many years, although it is remarkable that most of the teachers exempted themselves.

In the paper he read at one of the old Puritan and Reformed Studies Conferences at Westminster Chapel in London, recently published in volume one of the *Puritan Papers*, J. I. Packer freely acknowledged that the Puritans taught that assurance was the will of God for only some of His children. He quoted the Puritan Thomas Brooks: "Assurance is a mercy too good for most men's hearts.... God will only give it to his best and dearest friends." Brooks is quoted again: "Assurance ... is a ... crown that few [Christians] wear."

The Puritan Thomas Goodwin taught that the few privileged children obtain assurance only after a long time of doubt: "Assurance is not normally enjoyed except by those who have first laboured for it and sought it and served God faithfully and patiently without it" (J. I. Packer, "The Witness of the Spirit: The Puritan Teaching," in *Puritan Papers*, vol. 1, P&R, 2000, p. 20).

The error of this doctrine of assurance stares one in the face in the last quotation. No one can

serve God faithfully, much less acceptably, who lacks assurance of salvation.

Those Reformed and Presbyterian churches that are influenced by this Puritan thinking on assurance are filled with members, including old members, who lack assurance of salvation. Ask them whether they believe the Bible to be the Word of God, whether they believe the gospel to be true, whether they believe Christ to be the Son of God in human flesh and the only Savior, whether they are in great need of salvation, and they answer "yes" without any hesitation.

Ask them whether they are assured of their own salvation, and they answer "no," also without hesitation. They never come to the Lord's Supper. They live and die unsure whether their eternal destiny will be heaven or hell—dreadful condition—although all their life they are faithful at church, defenders of the Reformed faith, regular in their conduct, students of Scripture, and, by their own testimony, desirous of salvation and assurance.

The truth about assurance, which they are not being taught, should be precious to them.

To a believer who, for a time, struggles with uncertainty, good instruction about assurance is vitally important. What explains this miserable condition? May he certainly expect deliverance from his doubt? How will he come to have assurance?

The truth about assurance is precious also to us who enjoy the assurance of salvation.

It is reassuring to be assured from Scripture and the Reformed confessions that assurance is the will of our heavenly Father for *all* His children.

— DJE 

Letters

Anon. No Longer

We do so appreciate your fine magazine, and are blessed by the thoughtful articles and your solid stands.

On page 85 of the November 15, 2003 *Standard Bearer*, attributed to "Anon.," is a verse of one of our favorite hymns. It was written by the Scottish pastor, Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne, in 1837. The verse you have quoted is verse 3 in most hymnals. The other verses are:

When this passing world is done,
when has sunk yon glaring sun,
when we stand with Christ in

glory, looking o'er life's finished story,
then, Lord, shall I fully know, not
till then, how much I owe.

When I hear the wicked call on
the rocks and hills to fall,
when I see them start and shrink
on the fiery deluge brink,
then, Lord, shall I fully know, not
till then, how much I owe.


(then your verse 3, followed by):

When the praise of heav'n I hear,
loud as thunders to the ear,
loud as many waters' noise,

sweet as harp's melodious
voice,
then, Lord, shall I fully know, not
till then, how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me, wak-
ened up from wrath to flee,
hidden in the Savior's side, by
the Spirit sanctified,
teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
by my love, how much I owe.

Again, thank you for the
blessed work you are doing.

Karl and Linda Rudolph
Hiddenite, NC 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

Eastern Ideas (4):

Their Influence on the Church

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

(Preceding article in series: November 1, 2003, p. 56.)

"And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."

I Chronicles 12:32

"We must rethink our ideas about God; we should place less emphasis on Christ as a person and a redeemer. We should put the Bible away for 20 years while we radically rethink our religious ideas."¹ Those words were spoken by Roman Catholic priest Father Thomas Berry, in the Cathe-

dral of Saint John the Divine in New York. In 1994 in that same cathedral the then Vice President, Albert Gore, proclaimed, "God is not separate from the earth."² Mr. Gore said this during a service in which nature was honored by parading a camel and elephant up and down the aisles while worshipers carried a bowl of compost and worms in a procession to the altar.

From the previous articles we have written about Eastern ideas, it should be clear that the references in the paragraph above have obvious Eastern overtones. Could it be that the Eastern ideas, which are becoming so much a part of mainstream American society, are also influencing the church? If so, what effect is it having? How could this have happened? Should these developments concern modern-day Issachar?

The Church under the Spell of the East

It is not difficult to demonstrate that the nominal church, along with Western society, has fallen under the spell of Eastern mysticism. In his book *Spirit Wars*, Peter Jones writes,

Does the average Christian know what is going on in our ostensibly civilized society? Pagan ideology, sometimes of the most radical and anti-Christian nature, is taught in university departments of religion, theological seminaries, mainline church agencies, feminist networks and wicca covens across the land. It adopts the name of Christianity, but will render our world unrecognizable.³

From Jones' perspective the average Christian does *not* know what is going on, and even if he did know, he is not prepared to present a viable challenge to it. Let's allow Jones to speak for himself:

Unfortunately the average couch-potato Christian, so often consumed by the great American

materialistic dream and nurtured by that moronic national baby sitter, TV—itself controlled by materialists and humanists serving New Age goals—would seem to be no match for the sleek, vegetarian, highly spiritual, well-read, occult-driven conspirators of the Aquarian Age.⁴

Could it be that Jones is seeing that which does not exist, and without justifiable cause is crying "wolf, wolf"? The evidence from some additional sources would suggest otherwise:

Liberal theologians are of course ready to join hands with channelers and the astrologers of this age, believing that spiritual experiences are of equal value. The Reverend Gene Seely, an ordained United Methodist minister, says he is quite ready to climb out on a limb with Shirley MacLaine—at least most of the way. One cannot watch her growth, he says, without recalling the parable of Christ about the new wine in old wineskins. Only stretchable wineskins can accommodate the ferment of new truth.

The minister says we must allow for the fact that God may be revealing Himself through experiences such as that of the famous actress. After all, he asks, "How then is the church to deal with such things as reincarnation, trance channeling, out-of-body experiences, clairvoyance, extraterrestrials, telepathy, intelligent energy fields, and non physical entities?"⁵

A few pages deeper in their book, Lutzer and DeVries further establish Eastern influence on the church when they write:

We should not be surprised to find that Schuller (Rev. Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, ck) has now taken the next step and accepted the techniques of Hinduism to find satisfaction and results through positive thinking. He argues that the meditation found in different Eastern religions is quite

compatible with the Judeo-Christian religion. Both, he says, desire to overcome the distractions of the conscious mind. He regards these methods, regardless of their origin, as neutral from a religious point of view and hence beneficial to all. "The most effective mantras employ the 'M' sound. You can get the feel of it by repeating the words, 'I am, I am' many times over.... Transcendental meditation is not a religion nor is it necessarily anti-Christian."⁶

After reading that, it does not surprise us when we also hear of Rev. Schuller's conciliatory meetings with Muslim leaders. In fact, in a meeting with Iman W. Deen Mohammed, Schuller is reported to have said to the Muslim leader that if he was absent from the earth and came back after a hundred years to find his descendants Muslim, it wouldn't bother him—so long as they weren't atheists. Remember now, this is from a graduate of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Remember, too, that Rev. Schuller reaches twenty million viewers from his Crystal Cathedral.

Effects of this Eastern Influence

As this openness to Eastern religions has increased in the churches, so also have many Eastern worship practices become more prevalent. For example, those who live in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area (and we suppose in many

1. Fred Gielow, *You Don't Say* (Boca Raton, Florida: Freedom Books, 2000), p. 63

2. Gielow, p. 64.

3. Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars* (Escondido, CA: WinePress Publishing, 1997), p. 35.

4. Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), p. 96.

5. Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan's Evangelistic Strategy For This New Age* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989), p. 114.

6. Lutzer, p. 120.

other areas around the nation) have observed over the years a significant interest in Taize worship services. These services have no preaching, only prayer, song, and Scripture and are "intended to awaken one's inner spirituality." As reported in the *Grand Rapids Press*, numerous Taize services were held in Western Michigan last year. A few snippets from the *Press* article will give a taste of the Eastern flavor of these services:

Taize (pronounced ta-zay) worship services, named after a Christian community in France, are growing in popularity across America.

A Taize chant and time of silence will be part of the annual community interfaith Thanksgiving service.

The repetitive choruses of Taize and its emphasis on personal reflection incline worshippers toward deeper prayer....

It's kind of a way to center yourself, to go deeper within yourself to feel God's presence....⁷

Gene Edward Veith connects the Eastern influence on the churches to the increasing decadence of Western culture in general and the mainline churches of the West in particular. Veith writes:

As Christianity becomes less of a presence in our culture, the ancient pagan religions are rushing in to the void. Progressives had always assumed that once Christianity faded, people would do without religion entirely. But this was naïve. Without an advanced religion like Christianity, people are reverting to what came before, to nature worship, neo-animism, and primitive superstitions.

...the culture's moral shifts may be a cultural reversion to paganism, which sometimes used prostitution and homosexuality as means of religious awakening and which often tolerated euthanasia and infanticide.⁸

A rise in paganism in America does appear to be evident. As our society seeks more and more to distance itself from anything that would connect it to Christianity, it has been adopting practices that have their roots in paganism. The example of "The Burning Man" practiced every Labor Day weekend in Black Rock Desert in northwestern Nevada is a case in point:

Severed animal heads are roasted over a flame; people dressed as demons perform pagan rituals; men and women dance nude before fiery idols as a starry night softly illumines the flat desert around them.... The festival is called "The Burning Man," so-named because of the celebration's centerpiece: a towering, 40-foot, wooden, faceless being erected in the middle of the pagan campground and burned on the final night....

The festival's finale is on Saturday night, as the attendees observe and participate in a drama which celebrates the knowledge that they will all one day enter hell. The crowd follows the actors from one huge structure to another, simulating their descent into the abyss.⁹

As bazaar as it may appear, "The Burning Man" is a growing phenomenon in "Christian" America. The celebration has grown from 10,000 participants in 1997 to 30,000 in 2000 with other "Burning Man" celebrations beginning to take place in other parts of the country. Furthermore, many of the participants once professed Christianity, but now have turned their backs on God.

While the movement toward paganism is growing in the United States, Veith believes that "the main religious shift in American culture is not so much to overt paganism as to syncretism, the attempt to combine a biblical faith with a pagan one."¹⁰ In agreement with Veith is Peter Jones, whose book *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* emphasizes that same point, and

demonstrates how today's conflict with the New Age movement is very much like the ancient church's struggle with gnosticism; thus the title of his book. Veith, however, makes the point that this syncretism is manifesting itself on an institutional level as well. To illustrate the point, he informs us of the Agape International Spiritual Center in suburban Los Angeles. This organization of some 7000 members calls itself a church but "makes no pretense of being Christian at all."¹¹ Rather, Agape International is a multi-religious group of Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Buddhists.

Closer to home, Veith assesses the ecumenical movement. In so doing he notes that in the 1960s the ecumenical movement "...tried to reconcile various Christian traditions. Today, it tries to reconcile the various world religions." Closer still, Veith writes, "Even many ostensible evangelicals are showing signs of pagan flirtation. The 'openness of God' theologians are jettisoning the attributes of the transcendent God who has always been worshipped by Christians in favor of a lesser god who is not all-knowing, outside of time, or all-powerful."¹²

If that is representative of New Age influence on the national religious scene, what does it look like on the international level? Even worse ... at least if half of what Mr. John F. McManus writes in *The New American* is true! McManus describes an organization called United Religions, which "would have all faiths abandon their core beliefs and join together in a worship-the-earth form of religiosity."¹³ McManus further informs us that "Support for the entire undertaking came from former UN Assistant Secretary General Robert Muller, now chancellor of the University of Peace in Costa Rica." The organizers, with its more than 700 supporters from leaders of the world's religions, hope to have the United Religions fully functioning

by 2005. Rather ominously, Mr. Muller has remarked that peace among the world's religions "will be impossible without the taming of fundamentalism through a United Religions that professes faithfulness only to the global spirituality and to the health of the planet."¹⁴ (SB readers may want to check out the progress of this movement on the Internet.)

How must modern-day Issachar view these Eastern influences on the church? Lutzer and DeVries may very well be on target in viewing it as part of Satan's strategy to deceive the nations of the world:

To do this he must redefine mankind's definition of God. Rather than thinking of God as the

personal Creator, Satan would like man to think of God as everything that exists. Then man can think of himself as God too.

Second, Satan wants to redefine death so that people think of it as a pleasant transition without any accountability to a personal God. You just go around as many times as you need to, and eventually you will get to nirvana.

Third, he wants us to come to our own definition of what is good and evil. Moral relativism serves his purpose because it breaks down the fiber of a nation and leads to personal emotional entrapment.

Fourth, he promotes esotericism, the belief that reality can be reduced to a personal experience of enlightenment. Man can feel initiated as an enlightened

one if he has the right mystical encounter.¹⁵

...to be continued. 

7. Matt VandeBunte, "Hearing God's Voice," *The Grand Rapids Press*, p. 23 Nov., 2002:B 1.

8. Gene Edward Veith, "A God in Their Own Image," *World* 6 May, 2000: 16.

9. *AFA Journal*, September, 1997: 6.

10. Veith, p. 16.

11. Gene Edward Veith, "The New Multi-faith Religion," *World* 15 December, 2001:16.

12. Gene Edward Veith, "A God in Their Own Image," *World* 6 May, 2000:16.

13. John F. McManus, "United in Godlessness," *The New American* 14 April, 1997:44.

14. McManus, p. 44.

15. Lutzer, p. 28.

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

The "Being, Shape, Form, and Several Offices" of Nitrogen

Article 12 of our Belgic Confession of Faith begins "We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures as it seemed good unto Him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that He doth also still uphold and govern them by His eternal providence and infinite power, for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God."

This article of the Belgic Confession is significant because of the many valuable truths of Scripture it brings to our attention. We could

look at the truth of Scripture that God created all things by the second person of the Trinity — the Son; that is, that the creation was created by Christ and for Christ. Or we could focus on the truth that God created all things out of nothing — a truth denied by those who hold to any form of evolution. Another perspective of the article that we could consider is the sovereignty of God shown in His creating of all creatures so that nothing can claim to be independent of His work. God's sovereignty is further demonstrated in that He created "as it seemed good unto Him." In wisdom He determined how each creature should look and function. Although one could consider Article 12 from many doctrinal points of view, we hope in this article to focus on the truth that God created

the entire essence of every creature for the ultimate purpose of His own glory.

It is of no small significance that Article 12 points the child of God to the truth of God's creating all things, including His giving to each creature its "being, shape, form, and several offices (roles or functions, JM)." The idea of the word "being" is that God gave to each creature its existence (read Job 38:1-12; Ps. 33:6, 9; Ps. 139:13-16). By the word "shape" we should understand that God gave to each creature its structure and unique characteristics. And by the word "form" we should understand that God gave to each creature its own unique nature and mode of existence (read Job 39:13-25; 40:15-24; Ps. 139:14). These first three words that Article 12 uses have the intent

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of communicating to us that the entire essence of the creature is created and maintained by God — even its offices, or its roles and duties in the creation (read Ps. 104:10-24). God led our church fathers to make such a statement and summary of the teaching of Scripture to teach us to look more closely at God's work of creation in the light of Scripture, in order that we might grow in our knowledge of Him and so worship Him.

To study the "being, shape, form, and several offices" of various creatures is also important because too many in the church world today might confess that God created each creature, that is, gave it its being, but deny that He is sovereign in giving to each creature its shape, form, and calling within the creation. Many will attribute these other aspects to some evolutionary process. I believe that many of the ethical issues we observe in the scientific community and in society at large result from an evolutionistic and humanistic perspective that is in utter rebellion against the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, who with wisdom beyond that which we can fathom gave to each creature its being, shape, form, and several offices. For this reason, too, I think it is vital for us to observe the creation and, using our "Spectacles," look to see in each creature the hand of our Almighty Father. We need to do this more often than we do. We are not immune to the temptations of our natures to view issues from a perspective that denies the work of God in creating *every* aspect of a creature's essence. We do well to be reminded of God's complete work in the creation of *all* things.

The Being, Shape, and Form of Nitrogen

Generally, when we consider God's creative work of giving to each creature its being, shape, form, and several offices, the things we readily see with our eyes, such

as, ants, bears, or trees come to mind. But to appreciate God's wonderwork in some of His tiniest creatures is to appreciate it in *all* of His works. Thus, I think it is valuable to share with you the being, shape, form, and several offices of one of God's microscopic creatures, the element nitrogen and its compounds, that in the study of such a tiny creature we might stand in greater awe of God's creative work!

Without going into an extensive study of the characteristics of nitrogen and its compounds, we should look closely enough at it to see that God not only gave to nitrogen its existence, but also gave it all of its special characteristics in order to fulfill specific purposes. Two main characteristics of nitrogen atoms and its compounds are significant. Nitrogen, different than most elements, is designed by God to receive many electrons or to give up many of its electrons. This characteristic gives nitrogen the ability to make a large range of compounds. The second major characteristic of nitrogen is that two of its five outer electrons are often not used in bonding with other atoms (bonding is a sharing of electrons between atoms). Many compounds formed from nitrogen have two electrons that are not shared with its neighboring atoms. This outer, lone pair of electrons becomes significant in terms of the various unique properties that the compounds will then exhibit. For example, these two electrons are a part of the reason why some nitrogen compounds dissolve well in water. These two characteristics constitute a small beginning of an understanding of the shape and form of nitrogen and begin to help us see the marvelous work of God in creation — a work we too often fail to examine closely.

The Place and Functions of Nitrogen in the Creation

The air that we breathe contains several important molecules.

Obviously, we recognize that air contains the molecule oxygen. Without it we would perish in minutes. But another important molecule exists in the air we breathe. About *eighty percent* of air molecules are nitrogen gas molecules. Because of their makeup, these molecules cannot be used directly by our bodies for any of our living functions. Nevertheless, our bodies are indirectly dependent upon them. The need that our bodies have for nitrogen warrants a closer study as to how God "fits" nitrogen to be used by us and in service to us that we may honor His name.

The nitrogen gas molecules in the creation are part of a God-ordained cycle that man has named the nitrogen cycle. God has placed the nitrogen gas molecules in the air as a rich storehouse of nitrogen that is needed in other places of the creation. These nitrogen gas molecules are used by creatures within the creation for basic living processes and are returned to the air when the organism dies, completing the cycle.

Nitrogen in its many roles is found throughout the creation. Nitrogen atoms bonded with oxygen atoms form a group of atoms called "nitrate ions." Nitrate ions are a vital form of nitrogen that God uses to provide plants with the source of nitrogen they need to grow and develop. These ions are taken into the plant via its roots and are used to make larger molecules, such as amino acids and proteins. Nitrogen atoms bonded to three hydrogen atoms form ammonia. Ammonia is used in preparing a variety of useful things such as fertilizers, fibers, plastics, and even explosives. In addition to those uses, most mothers know from their everyday experiences that ammonia is also an excellent household cleaner.


Nitrate ions and ammonia molecules demonstrate some of the tiny compounds in which nitrogen is found. However, nitrogen is also

found in very large molecules of hundreds of atoms. Just over 50 years ago, James Watson and Francis Crick wrote about their model of the double helix of DNA, the massive molecule that carries genetic information and is crucial to our understanding of modern genetics. Basic to their work on the structure of DNA was an understanding of what things were necessary to form DNA. Scientists had learned that special molecules containing nitrogen (nucleotides) were the structures that tied one "ladder" or helix of DNA to another. Even the massive molecule of DNA was designed by God to be put together by structures that have nitrogen atoms as their key component.

Not only are nitrogen atoms used to make DNA, but other large molecules, such as amino acids and proteins, are dependent on the presence of nitrogen in their structures. Amino acids are put together within living organisms to make larger molecules called proteins, which contain many nitrogen atoms. We can begin to understand the importance of proteins when we realize that they are a vi-

tal molecule found throughout all living organisms. Proteins are found in certain body tissues, such as cartilage, bone, and muscle. Proteins are found in hormones, which regulate many of the bodily functions of plants, animals, and humans. There are also proteins in antibodies which protect us and animals from disease. Even enzymes, which control certain complex chemical reactions, are proteins. Is it not amazing how God created nitrogen atoms to be used by our bodies to make everything from muscle tissue, to hair, to components of our blood — even to DNA, the basic genetic molecules of our body! This emphatically demonstrates the value and importance of nitrogen atoms. Simply put, we could not live without it. We can only marvel at the vast amount of uses God has for such a small element within His creation, and how it displays His providential care over us and all creatures.

How amazing! God gave to nitrogen and its compounds all of their various characteristics, and He upholds them in their functions every moment of every day. God gave this creature such "being,

shape, and form" that it has a tremendous impact on all living substances as it is weaved into the very fabric of all living things. We ought to be humbled to see how mighty God is and how in His wisdom He makes our earthly existence dependent, in part, upon such a tiny creature, which He sovereignly controls and directs. We see the work of a sovereign God in the movements and roles of these molecules. This is obviously not the work of any mere creature, nor the happenstance of some evolutionary process. We see the deliberate and providential hand of a sovereign Ruler. May we bow before Him as we see His power and wisdom in the intricate movements and activities of each molecule. May God give us grace to see more and more His handiwork displayed in *all* of His creatures. May we rise each day and take more time to consider how other creatures have been given their being, shape, form, and functions by God. May we grow in awe of our Creator God, who gives to each creature its work and upholds all of them by His providence for our service and care that we may serve our God. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Love for the Church (3)

God loves His church — so must we. The church is precious to God — so ought she to be to us, her members. The question is, How can we actually love the church? In what ways can we show our love for her?

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To love someone or something involves seeking the welfare of that person or thing. That is how it must always be with the object of our love.

A husband who truly loves his wife seeks her welfare. He does this by providing for her needs, especially her spiritual needs. He strives to be the spiritual head he must be in marriage and seeks, above all else, to guide and

strengthen her in her life as a child of God. The same is true of a wife in relation to her husband. In fulfilling her calling as a wife she seeks always her husband's spiritual welfare. If either a husband or wife fails to do this, if either is selfish and seeks instead his or her own welfare, he or she fails to love. True love is evidenced in seeking the welfare of the object of that love.

We need only consider Christ's love for His bride, the church, to understand the truth of this. His love for His church is expressed by the fact that He always and only seeks her good. That is His purpose, and it is that which He accomplishes in all He does.

This is what we are to do in relation to the church. Because we love her, her welfare is a matter of the greatest concern. The church and her needs do not come after other things in our lives, but first. If we love the church as we ought, her welfare is a priority. The church is then at the center of our lives. We are ever seeking Zion's good (Ps. 122:9).

A love for the church and a concern for the church's welfare will be evident in the fact that we pray for her, and do so every day.

This begins with prayers for the local congregation.

In that connection we pray especially for the ministry of the Word, for without faithful preaching the church cannot survive. Without the true gospel of Christ, the church and people of God are in serious danger. The church needs the truth. In fact, without the true preaching of the gospel the church cannot exist and has no right to call itself the church of Christ. We pray that God would keep the church faithful to His Word and truth.

We pray for the consistory. We ask our Lord to direct the officebearers so that they faithfully carry out their work as representatives of Christ in His church. They need to be men of God who themselves love the church and seek her welfare. It is our desire that God give these men a rich measure of His Spirit and grace so that they will be instruments in Christ's hands for the eternal, saving good of His people.

We pray for all the other members of the congregation. They need our prayers because of the struggles and trials of life. But they need especially the prayer that God

may work mightily by His Word and Spirit to humble those who are His and lead them in a life of thankful obedience to Him. Your fellow believers need your prayers.

And we pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). What a blessing peace is! What a terrible thing strife and disunity are! We therefore ask that Christ so rule in the hearts of His people that they might be kept from sin and strife and might love each other in the love of Christ.

We also pray for the denomination. We may not be parochial, thinking of and praying only for our local congregation. If we love the church of Christ, we pray for each congregation.

We are mindful of the vacant churches. We consider the congregations that have struggles. We keep in mind the specific needs of both the large and the small congregations. And we pray for them all.

The seminary, including both the professors and students, is remembered in prayer. This includes our request to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest by providing the churches with men for the gospel ministry. Presently the need is great. This ought therefore to be a matter of much prayer among us.

The mission work of the churches is also remembered in prayer. We pray for the missionaries and their families, especially in light of the fact that they are often far from loved ones and friends. We also seek the Lord's blessing on their labors. It is our desire that the preaching of the gospel on the mission field be used by Christ to gather to Himself His church from every nation under heaven.

The labors of the synod and classes are not forgotten, either. As these broader assemblies of the churches prepare to meet, and when they actually do meet, we pray for the Lord of the church to give wisdom so that decisions may be made

for the glory of God and for the welfare of the church of Christ.

In all of these requests for our denomination, our earnest desire is that the Lord preserve His truth in our midst and be pleased to cause it to continue to be proclaimed in every congregation for the salvation of believers and their seed.

Finally, we pray for the church universal. We are interested in the welfare of our fellow saints in other nations, for they are fellow members with us of the one body of Christ.

Not all of God's people have it as easy as we do as members of the church. Some are not privileged as we are to gather for worship and to hear faithful preaching of the gospel. Others are persecuted for their faith. Others suffer because of poverty or disease. Others are afflicted through war or natural catastrophes. Mindful of these fellow saints and their needs, we pray for them. Our prayer is that God will be pleased, through His Son, to continue His work of gathering, defending, and preserving His church wherever she is in the midst of this wicked world.

Prayer for the church ought to be a significant part of our prayer life. It ought not be only a part of the congregational prayers on Sundays, but also a part of our daily prayers as individuals and families. We may not forget the church and her needs and simply bring all kinds of requests to the throne of grace for ourselves. We must pray for the church! And when we do so, thus demonstrating thereby our love for the church of Christ, such love will also grow, by the grace and blessing of God, in the hearts of our children.

Especially as we approach the end of time the church needs our prayers. Many things threaten the true church's existence and future. Worldliness creeps in and affects the members, including you and me. On account of the difficulty of the work and the opposition to it, officebearers are tempted to let


discipline slip. Pressure comes from the pew to soften the preaching and make it more palatable, or more practical. The church world of today wants to do away with doctrinal distinction and unite all churches regardless of belief. Apostasy is on the increase, with fewer and fewer church-going

people interested in maintaining the truths of the Word of God.

What we see in all this is Satan attacking the church of Christ. He goes about as a roaring lion. He rages against Christ and His church. He is making an all-out attempt to destroy the faithful rem-

nant of God's people.

In light of all these things, we who love the church pray earnestly for her. May the Son of God gather, defend, and preserve His church and lead her to eternal blessedness and glory!

Do you love the church? Do you pray for her? 

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (2)

The Four Prophecies

We have seen in the previous article that the book of Haggai contains four prophecies, each introduced by the date on which it was delivered. The first prophecy is a call to be busy with the work of building the temple, accompanied by a warning against further neglect of the work. In that warning God points out the sins of His people and shows them how He was punishing them for those sins. Though they did not recognize the fact, many of the troubles they were suffering in Judah were God's chastisement.

Attached to that first prophecy is a historical notice of the people's obedience to God's Word and a further word of encouragement to them in their work of rebuilding the temple. Haggai does not tell that part of the story, but the Jews, to the consternation of their enemies, obtained a decree from the king allowing them to build and providing them with the necessi-

ties for building and for the worship of God in the temple (Ezra 5:3-6:13).

The second prophecy, found in chapter 2:1-9, is the most important of them all. In it God addresses the discouragement of the people, who could see, now that the work was progressing, that the temple they were building was not much in comparison to Solomon's temple. God not only encourages them with the promise that He would live in the temple as in old times, but also points them forward to the coming of Christ, to the building of the true temple, and to its glory, which would be far greater than the glory of Solomon's temple. This second prophecy, therefore, concerns the future history of the temple and carries us all the way to the end of the world, to the day when all things will be shaken and destroyed and only the true temple remain.

The third prophecy is a reminder to the people, through an example taken from the law of Moses, that because the work was God's work, they must be holy and work with holy hands. That warning is reinforced in chapter 2:13-19, with a reminder of God's former judgments and a promise

of future blessing.

The fourth of these prophecies speaks again of the coming of Christ as the one in whom all the promises of God concerning the temple would be fulfilled. Christ is spoken of in the figure of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and under that figure God not only promises His people complete deliverance from their enemies, but also speaks of His great and eternal love for them as the motive for all His dealings with them.

These prophecies, then, take us into the New Testament and have to do not only with Old Testament events, but with those things that are now taking place between Christ's coming as the Desire of all nations and His return to shake all things. The book of Haggai is quoted only once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:26, but is very much a book for New Testament believers, a book that may not be neglected and forgotten, a book that concerns the church of Jesus Christ in the world and the calling of believers in relation to the church.

The First Prophecy: Haggai 1:1-15

1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the

first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

This first mention of Darius is a reminder that the Jews, at the time of Haggai's prophecy, were no longer an independent nation, but under the dominion of foreign and heathen kings. They even dated events now by the reigns of these strange kings who ruled from far-off Persia. The fact that this king is not the same king who sent them back to Judah is a reminder that many years had passed and the work of the temple was not yet finished. It was Cyrus who had sent them back, and now another king, named Darius, was on the throne of Persia, and the temple was still in ruins. It was also a reminder that circumstances had changed once again and that they could no longer use the hostility of former kings as an excuse for their neglect of God's house, as Haggai points out in verse 2.

There is some controversy about whether the sixth month is the sixth month of the reign of Darius or the sixth month of the Jewish year, but the question seems of little significance. The main reasons for carefully dating each of the prophecies are threefold: (1) to show how long the people had been remiss in their calling; (2) to show their quick obedience to God's command when rebuked for their sloth and indifference; and (3) to show God's faithfulness in encouraging them and helping them in the work. He is always quick to encourage their willingness to work and quick to see their troubles and discouragements and to assist them.

This first verse, then, reminds us that the word that Haggai brings, whether a word of rebuke or of encouragement, is God's word, literally "the word of Jehovah," Israel's covenant God and the one whose covenant faithfulness

never fails. The phrase "saith the Lord" is found over and over again, as often as three times in the same verse (2:4, 23). Judah had to know that their calling to rebuild the temple did not depend on the whims of earthly kings, however great they might be, but came from the King of kings himself. Nothing and no one might stand in the way of their obedience. God, not Cyrus or Darius, had commanded the building of His house.

That reminder is very important today. As we shall see, the calling to rebuild God's house is for us the calling to labor faithfully in and for the church. That we will do, as Judah did, only when we are certain that the calling comes to us from God Himself and concerns His house. If we do not understand that the calling is from God, we will be as neglectful and indifferent as Israel was before the word of God came to them through Haggai.

A quick glance at the book of Haggai will show that God most often identifies Himself in the book by the name Jehovah, and that Jehovah is used many times in this very short book. It is used 34 times in 38 verses and very often appears as "the Lord of hosts" or, more literally, "Jehovah of hosts." In comparison, the only other name used is the name "God," and that only three times.

God uses His name Jehovah to remind us of the fact that the temple, called here His house, is a part of His covenant with His people. It is in that house that He chooses to dwell with His people, to reveal Himself as their God, and to take them as His people. That dwelling together is what His covenant is all about, and so He uses His covenant name time and time again.

This first word of God is addressed especially to Zerubbabel the governor (also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:11; 5:14, 16) and Joshua the high priest (also referred to as Jeshua). That does not

mean that God is not speaking to the rest of the people. He addresses them all through these leaders. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David, the grandson of Jehoiachin, the second to last king of Judah, and would have been king himself if Judah had been an independent nation and if the throne of David had not fallen from its former glory. He is mentioned also in I Chronicles (3:19), Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew (1:12), and Luke (3:27). In Matthew and Luke he is identified as one of the ancestors of Jesus. Joshua was a descendant of Aaron and is mentioned also in the prophecy of Zechariah (3:1-9; 6:11).

The mention of these two men is evidence of God's faithfulness to Judah, a faithfulness that makes Judah's unfaithfulness all the more inexcusable. God had preserved both the line of David and of Aaron through the awful years that led to and followed the Babylonian captivity. He had preserved those lines, not because there was any merit in the house of David or of Aaron, but that His promises, especially the promise to live with His people and be their God, might not fail.

More importantly, however, these men in their offices of priest and governor represent Christ Himself. It is really through Him and from Him that this word of God concerning the temple comes, and it is by His grace that the word of God through Haggai bears the good fruit of obedience in the hearts and lives of God's people. Even in the Old Testament He was the great temple builder, and nothing could or would be done without Him.

Christ, then, is the governor or king by whom the true temple of God is built. It is as King that He describes the building of the true temple in John: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). He is also the great high priest in the house of God (Heb. 3:1-3; 8:1,2), through whom and in whom God is wor-

shipped in His temple and the worshippers themselves sanctified. Through Zerubbabel and Joshua, then, as figures of Christ, this word of God comes to God's people to insure their obedience.

It is possible, as some suggest, that this first prophecy was made in the temple area, since the first of the month was a Jewish feast or holiday (Num. 28:11-15). This would have meant that Haggai had a large audience and could point to the unfinished temple itself as evidence of the people's failure to honor and obey God.

2. *Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.*

To understand the book of Haggai and its relevance to the New Testament church, we must see that the Old Testament temple,

called here the "Lord's house," prefigures the instituted church, or what is sometimes called the visible church. The instituted church is the church on earth as we find it in different congregations and denominations. It is the church organized according to the rules of God's Word with its pastors, elders, deacons, and members — the church busy with the work of the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline, worshiping God and living together in fellowship.

That this church is identical to the Old Testament temple — the spiritual reality of which that temple was a figure or type — is clear from the witness of the New Testament. It is clear from the passage we just quoted in John 2, where Jesus says that the true temple is His own body (John. 2:22), which body is further identified as His church in Ephesians 1:22, 23. Even

clearer proof is found in I Timothy 3:15, where the instituted church, the church in the world, is given the *same name* as it is here in Haggai:

But if I tarry long, that though mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the *house of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

We know that Paul is speaking of the instituted church in I Timothy 3:15 because he recommends proper behavior in the church, in this case the church or congregation of Ephesus, where Timothy was minister. That church, not the building but the members and officers organized according to the rules of God's Word, like the temple in the Old Testament, is the house of God. Of that church Haggai is speaking when he speaks prophetically of the house of God.



All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Thanksgiving to Whom?

Thanksgiving Day has come and gone. According to custom and in harmony with the requirements of our Church Order, we assembled together as congregations to express thanks to God for all of His benefits bestowed on us for Jesus' sake. Our thanksgiving was not just for things, but for all that God gave (including even sickness and poverty). Whatever He provides for Jesus' sake and for our spiritual profit is good and deserving of our thanks.

Apart from Christ there would be no blessing—only condemnation. Whether one received much

in the way of material gifts, or little, it could be only in the wrath of God. For when one's "eyes stick out with fatness," when one has all that his "heart desires," he is in slippery places, on which he is cast rapidly into destruction (Ps. 73). So, though Thanksgiving Day in our country is universally considered a holiday, it is only those who belong to Christ that can properly give God thanks.

Many disagree. The *Grand Rapids Press*, November 25, 2003, presents a front-page account of a joint service of thanksgiving held at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Grand Rapids, MI. The title of the article was: "United in Faith – Various cultures, beliefs share prayers of thanksgiving."

The article explains:

It was a Thanksgiving service few would recognize.

There was an Arabic reading from the Quran and a Sikh prayer sung in Punjabi.

A rousing black gospel song echoed from the same walls as an American Indian Prayer to the four directions.

Statements were read from Baha'i, Jewish, Unitarian-Universalist, Quaker and free-thought traditions.

In all, more than 500 people from across West Michigan gathered to give thanks Monday night—overcoming ice-covered roads, centuries of religious separation and the pullout of the annual event's organizer.

The interfaith Thanksgiving service at Trinity United Methodist Church was the first since the area's leading ecumenical organization — the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism — withdrew after some churches and clergy criticized it as a compromise of their faith.

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Monday night's 80-minute event attracted Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and a smattering of other faiths. Some participants said the gathering could have been bolstered by the flap, which generated widespread publicity for the fourth-annual service.

"It's miraculous," said the Rev. Ellen Brubaker, a Trinity minister who helped organize the service after GRACE dropped out. "People really wanted to be here."

Bluma Herman, a longtime member of the Jewish congregation Temple Emanuel, said the criticisms strengthened her resolve to attend.

"If we're not together on this issue, then we're in trouble," Herman said. "I'm very grateful these people decided to do it and not let someone else take over."

GRACE announced in September it was suspending its role in the service due to criticisms from member churches and disagreement on its own board about whether it is appropriate for Christians to worship with non-Christians. Some churches threatened to withhold their financial support if the services continued.

The article's conclusion?

"What we are doing tonight is indeed quite radical," Stella said. "We are sharing an intimacy that few would dare even think about."

Rabbi Michael Schadick of Temple Emanuel said the turnout was encouraging.

"It shows this community can look beyond their differences and understand the importance of giving thanks together," he said.

The Rev. Steve Cron, rector of St. Andrew's Cathedral, called it a "wonderful" event consistent with Catholic teaching.

"The official Catholic position does honor a diversity of experiences of God and expressions of that experience," Cron said.

Liz Hennes brought her 12-year-old daughter, Naomi, who said it was "so cool to hear so much different stuff that I've never heard."

"This is what's going to heal

the world, right here—this energy and this attitude," Liz Hennes said. "It's all about love, no matter where we worship."

It is surely a picture of things to come. No one minds if a person is "Christian" as long as he does not insist that Christ and His cross represent the only way of salvation. As long as one is willing to recognize other religions as legitimate ways in which to thank "god," there is no problem. It is indeed the solution of the world's problems: it will "heal the world." It is all "about love, no matter where we worship." But this "love" is not that love of God taught in John 3:16. It is a sad reminder that in the end of the age the faithful church will be just a "little flock."

■ The "Jackson case"

Though one hesitates to write of it, perhaps because of the media attention to this case, some things ought to be stated.

Almost everyone knows of the charges made against Michael Jackson recently (similar to those made about ten years ago and settled for millions of dollars out-of-court). People are horrified. How could this popular singer be engaged in such awful crimes? What's wrong with parents who permit their children to stay with this man overnight—and sleep with him in his bed, no less!

The media frenzy is remarkable. Almost without exception the media condemns the action of this man (if he is indeed guilty). Surely the child of God is horrified by the very idea of pedophilia.

But the media? One is appalled by the hypocrisy. Under the guise of "freedom of speech" all sorts of sexual sins are portrayed. It is part of the drama of the movie and television programs. It is part of much of the advertising materials of the day. It can be found on the internet. It is included in the songs that have

become so popular. It has become part of the "sex education" in public schools. The media has the "freedom of speech" to portray all of this corruption in the most vivid way—but is horrified when an individual acts out what the media has glorified?

Cal Thomas (frequently quoted in this rubric) writes of this. The *Grand Rapids Press* printed his article in the November 29, 2003 issue. I quote it in part:

If Michael Jackson did, in fact, as it is alleged, have sex with a minor boy, what's wrong with that? The question is not meant to be cute; I am serious. If a male child was fondled or sodomized by Michael Jackson, why shouldn't he and the boy be allowed the orientation of their choice? If you disagree, who are you to impose your morality on them?

Are you outraged by this? Do you think we have gone too far? Not far enough, some say. Yesterday's unacceptable (divorce, premarital sex, abortion, homosexuality, group sex, domestic partnerships and, soon, same-sex marriage) are today's acceptable. It's just a matter of conditioning. Groups exist that promote adult-child sex. Expect an alliance—composed of academics, theologians and cultural commentators—to ram this home through the media, crushing whatever resistance remains.

Nothing shames us. In pursuit of freedom we have embraced license and now licentiousness, throwing off all restraint.

Thomas continues by pointing out various instances of this shamelessness. It is found in catalogs, promoted by clothing manufacturers, taught in the schools. Then Thomas points out the professional approach to this terrible trend:

Professional organizations are trying to catch up in the race to normalize what we once called "depravity." The American Psychiatric Association (APA), which

declared homosexual practice normal, has recently entertained the notion of similarly downgrading pedophilia. The APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) once contended that merely "acting upon" one's urges toward children was enough to generate a diagnosis of pedophilia (DSM-III). But in the revised DSM-IV, a person who molests a child is considered psychiatrically sick only if his actions "caused clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning."

That seems to mean that if the molester is OK with it and the child doesn't complain, it's healthy. It can't be wrong if it feels so right, right?

The article points out that others likewise basically agree. The state governments in many instances mandate sex education as early as kindergarten. The conclusion of the article is worth careful thought and consideration:

English philosopher Roger Scruton has written, "The hysteria over pedophilia is indicative of a society that has come to the brink of self-destruction and stands there accusing the void. People reach for their old certainties: words like 'pervert' and 'perversion' suddenly seem right to them; they look round for the culprit with a view to shaming, humiliating and ostracizing him. And they recognize the vastness of the evil that is around them and within them, an evil they only imperfectly confess to." (Published in "Modern Sex: Liberation and Its Discontents." Edited with an Introduction by Myron Magnet. Ivan R. Dee publishers, 2001, Chicago.)

It's too late for any of that now. For some, Michael Jackson is not a pervert but a pioneer.

This ought to give us also pause. Has all of this emphasis upon sexuality affected our own

thoughts and actions? There is the real danger that one finds time for and pleasure in all of the emphasis upon sex in the media—and in recent years, with the emphasis on this found on the Internet. There is the seduction of that which appeals to the fleshly lusts. Dress styles within the church too show influences of this emphasis on the sexual. How easy to ignore or forget the instruction on the seventh commandment presented in the Heidelberg Catechism: "...therefore [God] forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto."

We can truly give thanks to God that we still have the "freedom of speech" to preach and teach the truths of Scripture. But how shameful when this same "freedom" is used as guise to present the most lustful, corrupt, devious, wicked, and sexual, in order to pander to the corrupt desires of the flesh — and then to have the media label as "deviate" one who acts out what is portrayed regularly in the same media!!

■ "Wheaton College slates historic dance"

That was the headline in a number of newspapers—a news bulletin from Associated Press. The *Grand Rapids Press* printed the article, as did also the *Loveland (Colorado) Reporter-Herald* (Nov. 14, 2003). What was so unusual? Wheaton College, since its beginning (143 years ago), had had a ban on the dance. In the 1960s the school had lifted the rule prohibiting students from going to movies. In the 1990s students and faculty were permitted to dance with spouses or relatives at family events such as weddings. What was some of the reasoning for the current changes?

"It is really going to improve

the outlook the rest of the world has of our students," the 21-year-old Jones said. "It makes Wheaton into a place where people don't do so much thinking about what we aren't allowed to do."

Administration officials say that lifting the dance ban will help get students ready to deal with the real world after they graduate.

"Students need to learn how to make responsible choices," said Sam Shellhamer, vice president for student development. "We want to make students learn how to think critically, be discerning and learn how to make wise choices."

So what's the big deal? Over the past 40 or more years, one Christian college after another dropped its rules against movie attendance, drinking, and dancing. In some cases this was with denominational sanction. At first there was some opposition—but that has well nigh faded away.

The question is: have movies and the dance become so much better in the past generation, so that what was forbidden in the past can now become a matter of individual discretion? Also: has the spiritual character of the church members grown to such an extent that now they are strong enough to decide these matters spiritually?

Christianity cannot be merely a matter of negatives. (One must recognize, however, that of the Ten Commandments, eight are negative.) But must the negatives be discarded so that it will "improve the outlook the rest of the world has of our students"? Is there to be less and less of the "antithesis"? By increasingly engaging in those activities formerly condemned by virtually all of the churches and church fathers, will the young people and we become spiritually stronger? This all has the appearance of a slippery slope that only leads to greater and greater license and licentiousness.



Thou Renewest the Face of the Earth

Spring

Scripture does not know *spring* by name, any more than *autumn*; only once, at the very end, in Jude's brief epistle (12, autumn trees, Dutch version), it is noted more in passing than described in its dying glory.

The country accounted for this. In Palestine the transition from winter to summer, and from summer to winter, took place more quickly, more as it were at once, and the almost six months' absence of rain, of itself led to placing over against one another the *rainless* half year and the half year that began and ended *with rain*, as the two great seasons of the year.

From April till October there was dew, but no rain. That was called *summer*. Before and after this fell the former and the latter rain. And that season was called *winter*.

A striking contrast, as everything else in Israel and in the revelation to Israel appeared in bold sharply outlined antithesis. Death and life. Darkness and light. Impure and pure.

So here the season of the year *without* and the season of the year *with* rain. "Thou, O God, hast made summer and winter" (Ps. 74:17).

But though there is no separate *spring* in Israel as interlude be-

tween winter and summer, the Scripture is very well conversant with the spring-idea and the fact of spring. Israel came to this loveliness of spring with the *feast of firstfruits*. To the covenant people the triumph psalm of Passover was one with the song of spring.

The people themselves had been quickened by Jehovah from the *sleep of death*, which once they slept in Egypt, *that was their Passover*.

So the land flowing with milk and honey, which God gave them, passed every year into *winter-sleep*. But when the sun poured forth richer beams again, it returned to life, and that was its *spring*.

Spring, not three months long, but concentrated as in one span of time, and centered in that single act of God's almightiness, of which in Psalm 104 so exultingly the psalmist sang: "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth."



So the faithful in Israel lived through these transitions with their God.

They did not shut themselves in, and were not afraid of light, as though the life of nature did not concern them.

On the contrary, scarcely had the moment come of the rich renewal of life in God's creation, but from their villages and hamlets all those that were at liberty went out through dales, by the side of brooks, across the hills, to Zion's sanctuary.

And though at the Passover the lamb that was slain, and therewith the deliverance from Egypt that had come and the deliverance from

Satan's bands that was to come, appeared more prominently in the foreground, yet God's goodness in the life of nature was not forgotten, and for the people and in their name the firstfruits of the land were offered unto Jehovah.

But what they refused to do, was that they would make no *distinction*.

They would not in the sanctuary taste the mysticism of God's presence, and presently amidst the wealth of nature forget Him.

No, they lived through that transition from season into season with their God.

It was not nature that had gone asleep and had wakened again. All that you call nature is nothing of itself and can of itself do nothing. In nature also, and in her mighty transitions, there is nothing that God does not work.

He, the Lord our God, doeth all these things.

When from leafless branches spring-birds sing again, it is God who sends them.

And when the soft winds blow from the south, and what seemed dead begins to bud again, it is God Himself who sent forth His Spirit, and as with His own hand renews the face of the earth.

As in the hour of creation the earth was first without form and void, but, as God's Spirit brooded over it, presently all life went forth, so, from a distance always, it is every time when spring returns.

First the land bare and the flowerbed unkempt.

But God sends out His Spirit.

And now what seemed withered sprouts and buds, what seemed faded colors itself, what

was dull begins to glisten, and what was silent as in death begins to sing.

And when God so makes nature live again, *it is spring*.



This appeals to the human heart.

Most of all because winter is unnatural to you. For though winter is as one who is *beautiful* in death, it is dead, and our heart calls for life. Winter drives us out from God's free nature, in which an inner voice declares that we are at home. Winter even attacks us as an enemy, makes suffering of cold and want, and carries every year a vast number of his vanquished ones to the pit of the grave.

Hence winter *depresses*. It limits and distresses us. And when at last his power breaks, young and old are glad to speed the parting guest.

Winter held us closed in, now doors and windows reopen, and busy hands are at work in every house to remove winter stains from floor and walls. Everything must be clean and be made to shine and glisten. A whole house embracing cleaning.

And where winter compelled us to protect our sensitive bodies with heavier clothing of less artistic outlines, now that spring returns, even that winter garb is laid aside, and they who have the means provide themselves with a *new outfit*.

A feeling of freedom and delight must thrill through heart and members.

It is our God who prepares us joy again.



But this is not all.

Our inner and our outward life hang together.

Nature and grace mutually affect one the other. In the visible, God puts a speech of the spiritual life.

It is God who sends out His Spirit and renews the face of the earth, for, according to Scripture,

the Holy Spirit is active in the work of creation (Gen. 1:2), and likewise in the work of the renewal of life when spring comes (Ps. 104:17).

It is not the Father in nature, and the Holy Spirit in the soul, but it is God triune, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who in all your life, after the inward and after the outward side, reveals His wondrous divine power.

So that sleep of *nature* speaks to us of a sleep in the *spiritual* world, and spring in God's creation of a waking up again of those who fell asleep, that Christ might give them Light.

There is a rise and fall in nature, from the emptiness of winter to the horn of abundance in autumn, and so there is a rise and fall in the faith-life, from the barrenness of the desolate soul to the wealth of gladness in God's hidden walk.

Therefore Passover is placed at the opening of spring.

Thus from Easter and spring together goes out one voice of God's urgent compassion, to lift every one of you out of your condition of depression, to pour out upon your dullness the glow of fresh oil, to tune what was silent in you to a song of praise, to make the withered branches bud again, and where deathliness had covered the soul, to make the life of faith gloriously active again.

When winter is severe, every one feels that it neither can nor will continue such for long, and everything in you prophesies that spring is at hand.

So no one can say peace, when it is winter in his soul. Winter sleep of soul is equally unnatural and resists grace.

He sins, he hardens himself, who rests content in that winter sleep of soul.

See, the Sun of righteousness shines out gloriously again from the throne of grace.

Therefore awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light (Eph. 5:14).



Even to such as have never yet known the sweet and the beauty of a spiritual spring in the soul, every return of spring is a voice of their God.

Your first spiritual spring is your conversion to Jesus, your turning to the living God, when He sends out His Spirit to you also, and renews the face of your heart.

To this first conversion every soul is called, especially those who in infancy received the mark of holy baptism. It is dreadful to see how many grow up in Christ's church and reach maturity without ever having opened the windows of their soul, that the light of the Son of God might shine in upon their inner life.

And for this conversion your time is always ready.

But in spring is a speech of God, which reproaches you with double sharpness for continuing in your barrenness and deathliness.

God lets you see with your eyes how life *can* spring from death.

And when you hear the rustling of life, in the hardness of your heart will you resist yet longer?




Thus in that return of spring there is an impulse to life for all men.

There goes out from spring a new animation to life, to lift up the hands which hang down, and to strengthen the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12); to stimulate every one to a taking hold of oneself; to make exhibition of nobler seriousness, of diligence, of greater zeal in everything that is good.

Spring tells you that seed must again be sown, that presently the full corn stalks may rustle. And so each in his own position in life, in his calling, in the department of work appointed him of God, must harness again the weakened elasticity, reach out again toward the ideal, be impelled to mightier activity and to greater perseverance of action.

It must become Easter and spring together, not merely round about you, and in your soul, but also in your all-sided life.

A seeking anew, with new urgency of the things that are above, and *in* those things that are above

a taking of one's stand with rejuvenated, with renewed, and therefore with heightened, with sanctified power. 

Morning Glories

If you are a Grace Life person, you are a morning person. You are a lover of morning. For it is the time of glories. You just have to get up. You have to be there among those morning glories. To observe them, smell them, listen to them, touch them, and drink them in. To *enjoy* them. So those glories become yours. So you are glorified for another day.

What are those morning glories? Why do we not want to miss them? Why especially in the morning of our grace life, our youth, and of this *new year*, do we want to *learn to be* morning persons? Here's what, and why, and why....

Teacher Morning

Morning is a teacher. She has lessons. She talks. She gestures. She makes lots of power points. She makes the lecture circuit, even round the world.

Now this, of course, is no ground for our getting up to hear her. She may, after all, be a bore. She is, we suspect, a bothersome disciplinarian—who not only would rouse us from our slumber, but call us to attention, before, even, the coffee is made.

But wait. Morning is a teacher appointed by God. She is qualified by *Him*, and tenured, methinks, till the time when there is no night. She is old, to be sure, but she never just

turns the pile of her lessons over, and to drone on. And she's never out of touch. She is a lovely lively teacher of glories. She expects a lot, to be very sure, but children of God love to hear her reveille and her bell, and they do run to her class—sometimes in their pajamas.

God Himself would teach us by His Adjunct Professor Morning. He has declared in His Word that His mercies are new *every morning* (Lam. 3:23). That salvation joy comes *in the morning* (Ps. 30:5). And that the Grace Life woman who has the heart of God resolves that the Lord would hear her prayer *in the morning* (Ps. 5:3).

Noble Professor indeed! For wonderful instruction!

Good Lesson

What is it, the lesson of Morning, God's own lesson?

It is simply this: the gospel. Morning is a preacher teacher of the good news!

For consider: morning is the end...of the night.

Night is bad time. Rats scurry about. Lions bite. At night. Foolish men stagger about. Lecher women of the night bite. At night. The devil, the Bible tells us, is the Prince of this night. The persons of his good pleasure and darkness are there, in the dark, doing their unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:8ff.).

Bad time, the night! And especially because Some One shows His hatred of it and wrath in it.

Darkness is the misty place and appointed nighttime where and when God deals, in holy anger, with sinners. The darkness of God's wrath, once a plague upon Egypt, is His blinding of twenty-first century sinners. It shall be hell, outer-darkness, for all lovers of night!

But morning! The end of the darkness. That is the principle lesson of the Teacher Morning. Morning light! The end of the darkness. Decisive time. The light *dispels* the night. There cannot be both. Light, morning light takes over. Darkness must give way, and be gone.

Lesson of Christ, this breaking of day. When He comes, the people who sit in the darkness of God's wrath, and in the long dim Old light, see a *great* light. When He dies, *yes even when that Light goes out under the extinguishing wrath of God*, we see the great light dispelling the debt and the depth and the depravity and the danger and the demise of our darkness, our sin. And then that Sun, gone down, *also rises!* He rises, dear readers, as the Life-giving Sun. Our Sun, our Life. With healing in His wings. It is the dawn of Grace and Truth which come by Jesus only, with that Sun Rise only. He is our Morning, and our Life. Without His coming there is still the chaos of devils and the night life of death. Because of His coming...*light and life!*

You know that, young reader, do you not? Then you must know

this: Morning will teach you *in many ways* this gospel of Christ.

The Spirit and the Morning,
Teachers Two,
yet One,
Will speak of the Savior,
the Risen Sun.

Dew of the morning? That mystery moisture quietly appearing in the dead of night? Picture of grace, this—Christ grace. To us blades of grace and wilted flowers grace comes like dew while it is dark, while we are dry. And that this morning dew clings, so beautifully, so delicately, so *graciously* to the bent and to the wilted? That is God who bedecks. God who clings. God who will not let *us* go till He has blessed us. God whose blessings renew the face of our parched ground, of our dying life.

Morning. Time when the sun slaps the cold away, or allows it to linger and to slap us awake—either way to invigorate, and to rouse us for the new day. Just like the Holy Spirit, no? Lord and Giver of Life. Revelator. Revivalist. Sent forth to rouse and renew the sleepy Christian. To throw the covers off. And to get up and going!

Calm of the morning? That there is. The time when lakes are the best paintings of mountains and sky and cloud. The time when the rush of life is hours at least forgotten and not yet resumed. Time of our own reflection. Time to think, as believers, not first, what would Jesus do?...but *what has He done?* To think of the great salvation. Peace of the morning to think of Christ our peace. Peace quiet. Enjoyment of blessings and the freeness, the fullness of it all. Oh...what a beautiful peaceful morning! Oh...what a beautiful peaceful day...!

But this too in the morning: the song of the birds. Birds sing, to call, to warn, to mate. To say hello. Or just to sing. Just because they are birds. Always, as song always does, to lift us up from the earth—

singing, to remind us of the life of the soul, of the new poem, the new creation that we ourselves are by the indwelling Spirit. That we are to sing. And that we are to fly....

And morning glories. They are closed at night. In the morning, because of the morning, they show themselves flowers. Around our poles, along our fences. Coloring our world grace. Out they come. After the night. To begin the day. And we know their gospel. God is in heaven. And on earth. And all is well. Even glorious.

Eager Students

Now dear reader, we just have to be morning persons!

For

If Christ be the Morning...

If He be the risen Sun...

If He be *our* Morning and *our* Sun...

If He from heaven has sent His Spirit ray

If to rouse me from the bed of my iniquity...

If He has shouted in the gospel preaching,

If this we heard: Awake thou that sleepest and Christ shall give thee light...

If then and now *we are children of that Morning and that Sun...*

Then

We know this Morning gift; we recognize this wise, never-missed-a-day Teacher.

We think of dew and grace; first light and first love; calm and peace with God; birdsong, and heaven's gospel song...

And

We can see the wisdom.

That earlier

To rise,

If for this,

Only to hear...

Might make *even us*

Healthier...

And yes *wealthier...*

And certainly wiser.

Then

By God! Morning will be our Teacher, and we its eager students!

And none of this correspon-

dence course stuff! Oh no! We want to be at Morning's feet. We want to hear her lively teaching. Be sitting in her class. Be up with her. Squinting at her glistening dew, delighting in her calm, hearing what next will be her song, her warble, her chirp, her coo.

This will mean, for many of us, that we will *sanctify* real mornings, real morning time. That is, we will be receiving and consecrating morning time, when we first get up, as special holy time when we will be seeking to exercise ourselves unto godliness.

In light of the Word of God, and with prayerful thanks, we will receive Morning as a good gift of God and a hand-maiden to our devotion (I Tim. 4:3-5). Then and there, first thing upon waking up (or maybe after a bracing shower), we direct our prayer to God and look up (Ps. 5:3). We are not looking ahead, planning this and that and the other thing about work, or play, or school, or lunch. We are not moms in the kitchen rushing about getting lunches ready. We are not young people lounging, waiting till the last minute, and having banged on the snooze button one more time till we get up and go go go wherever fast. But in the morning we are, first thing, looking up. We are engaging (grace engaging us!) in our best good work. We are doing the best thing first thing. In that first time, Morning having mocked the night, we rise and mock with her, and shine in her. There in the quiet, among the dewdrops, listening to birdsong and Moses' song, and to the Lamb song we are helped and do help ourselves to think of God and our relationship with Him, of the gospel, and of blessings and joys that earth cannot afford. There is His most elegant Morning book open, fresh, just off the press, a new edition—again! There is His greater Bible Book, in our hands, in our minds. There is Spirit light within and opening sleepy eyes. Such light, all around and within!

And in that light we see, and we hear, we speak to our heavenly Father.

Good morning!

To be sure, we must not press this morning time devotion slavishly. It is not a prescription. Israel's feast days are not ceased in order that now we must (as in 99th commandment "must") have our mornings. Getting up in the morning doth not necessarily holy a man make. It might just make you sleepy if you were up all night with a sick child. And if you are a nurse on third shift you do not *get* up in the morning; you *are* up. Your morning is afternoon or evening. Jesus Himself, after one of His nights all night in prayer, might not have gotten up to pray in the morning. And no Elder would have been at His door....

Think Blessing

But don't you think Morning is one opportunity we will not want to be missing, if at *all* possible? Don't you think, in light of the Morning Light and Morning's wonderful lessons, that you will even rethink (what was never even thought of in the first place in better earlier less anxious and less greedy days) third shift? Or that Christian employers would give dawn back to the workers—at least fifteen minutes of it, risking losing the competitive edge by slowing down production, for time with God? Don't you think that looking forward to morning, and to get-

ting up with and directing prayers to God, might be good for our resolving to do less frivolous night things? Or that parents would stress, even more than evening devotions...morning time visits of their children...to God? And don't you think a writer for Christian youth would want his readers *in the morning of their lives* to learn the life with God and for God by availing themselves of all opportunities—*like mornings*?!

Blessings, Grace Life reader, are the things to think about. Morning is for blessing! Morning with God is for great blessing!

Weekly Sabbath is given, the stellar day, the first day of the week, given for us to begin our week in the enjoyment of and for our laboring to enter into the rest of God all week.

Morning? Why that is the Sabbath of the day, each day! And when Sunday comes around, it is the Sabbath of the Sabbath! For rest. All day. To slow us down in the rush of the day. Or at least to sanctify our rushing. For worship-full. For peace-full day.

Morning? When wisdom *for the day* is asked for, and received.

Morning? When believers show who is first, and what is most important. When thankful saved sinners offer, first thing in the morning, the first-fruits of their time, their thoughts, their lips, their life.

Morning? If we would seize the day, redeem the time, *knowing and desiring the coming of the Lord*, it

would start then. If we would seize the year, this new year, *for fruitful service to God*, it would be then—day by day, morning by morning.

Morning? If you, youthful reader, in the morning of your life, would know forgiveness for your sins *early*, then morning time with God is when you will know truly. For then, seeking to express that you and your day are His, you will confess your grief about your besetting and dark uglinesses of the day and night before. And then you will know what the good Word says when it says mercies, the mercies *of the Lord* are indeed new every morning.

Morning? For courage. When even the crows have courage to chase the owls home. When even bruised reeds receive blessing not to break under the stresses of another day, and to chase, yes to chase, their prowling hooting haunting sins away!


Morning? If you have ever cried, or shall, on any night, then as God's dear morning child you will have hope and know the joy that comes in the morning.

Morning? Here's to Protestant and Reformed and Godly Morning matins! Our utmost for the Highest. For a glorious year! Grace Life all year! Morning by morning. God and you meeting together.

Morning!

When the morning glories come out.

And God is there.

And you. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

On Friday evening, November 21, and then again the next morning, November 22, the Evangelism Committee of the

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

Hudsonville, MI PRC hosted a seminar entitled, "Defending Creation in an Evolutionary Age." Friday featured a video by Answers in Genesis entitled "In the Beginning," followed by Prof. H. Hanko speaking on "Evolution: Its Effect on Your Life and Your Beliefs." Saturday featured a

video by AIG entitled "The Grand Canyon Catastrophe" and Rev. R. Kleyn, pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, speaking on "Believing by Faith."

The Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC arranged a viewing of the recent debate between Prof. D. Engelsma and Dr.

R. Mouw, "Is the Doctrine of Common Grace Reformed?" for a couple of nights in early December.

School Activities

School Board members of the Loveland Christian School in Loveland, CO recently handed out an information packet on the feasibility and cost of forming a Loveland PR high school. They gave it to all members of their School Society, as well as to parents sending their children to the grade school. On the last page of this report was an anonymous high school interest and participation survey form that the Board asked to be filled out and returned by early December to help give them some direction.

Mission Activities

The last couple of months have been especially busy ones for our churches' mission work in Ghana. Mr. and Mrs. Justin Koole, members of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, arrived in Accra on November 20 to take up their work as missionary assistants for a period of one year. Their arrival was followed four days later by that of Elder Alvin Bleyenbergh from the council of the Hull, Iowa PRC, the calling church for the mission work there, and Mr. Jim Andringa, representing our churches' Foreign Mission Committee, for their annual visit. They planned to observe the mission work for nearly two weeks before returning home on December 10.

Rev. A. Spriensma, our denomination's missionary to the Philippines and the Berean Church of God Reformed in Manila, writes that the work there continues to grow and expand with numerous new contacts. A recent Sunday saw another visitor to the fellowship, who came as a result of hearing about their church on the Reformed Witness Hour. The RWH continues to be

broadcast in Manila and in the Bacolod region, and we can be thankful that the Lord uses this means of proclaiming the truth in the Philippines.

Prof. and Mrs. H. Hanko arrived safely in Ballymena, Northern Ireland on Saturday, November 29 for a two-week visit with our missionary, Rev. A. Stewart and his wife, Mary, as well as the members of the Covenant PR Fellowship. Plans called for Prof. Hanko to preach Sunday evening, November 30, to speak at two mid-week studies on the 1953 controversy in the PRC, and to lead a mini-conference on the Antithesis. On Friday evening, December 5, he spoke on "The Idea of the Antithesis," followed the next day with speeches on "The Antithesis and the Truth" and "The Antithesis and the World."

In an effort to get better acquainted with the membership of the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC, the members of Grace PRC in Standale, MI have organized a Fellowship of Fayetteville Liaison Committee, whose purpose will be to encourage both groups in the faith. Early plans called for increased correspondence among the families and the children. Grace was also looking to set up a sermon video system, and perhaps to organize a family conference sometime next spring.

The members of Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ are excited about working together with the members of our Pittsburgh mission to plan for an eastern missions retreat July 1-4, 2004. The Evangelism Conference there in early November also went very well, with visitors both from the area around Wyckoff as well as from contacts in the Allentown work.

Congregation Activities

The Randolph, WI congregation enjoyed a Talent Night Program Friday evening, November 21. This program included a wide variety of God-given talents.

Randolph's members were encouraged to share their talents, whether they be in song or musical instrument or perhaps some art work, craft project, photography, or other talent that could be displayed and shared with others.

The deacons of two of our churches, Georgetown and Hudsonville, again this year sponsored their annual Thanksgiving Food Drives. Members were asked to drop off their donations of food or gift certificates in the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, at which time they would be distributed to the needy in their congregations.

The members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC were invited to join together on November 30 after their evening service for a time of informal congregational singing around the piano in their fellowship hall.

The Choral Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL presented their fall concert Sunday evening, November 23.


Sister Church Activities

Rev. and Mrs. C. Haak, of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, traveled to Singapore on October 28. Rev. Haak was asked to speak at the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore Reformation Celebration on November 7 & 8. Rev. Haak also planned to preach for our sister churches there.

Minister Activities

The newest trio from which the Byron Center, MI PRC will call a pastor is made up of the following three men: Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. G. Eriks, and Rev. C. Haak. Byron Center will call, the Lord willing, on December 17.

Rev. C. Terpstra declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC.

Rev. D. Kleyn declined the call to Immanuel. The new trio for Immanuel is Rev. W. Bruinsma, Rev. A. Brummel, and Rev. C. Haak. 

THE STANDARD BEARER

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Announcements

REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its 3rd year of operation, teaching a full course load as a four-year high school. As we plan for the 2004-2005 school year, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of one additional staff member. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [Ralph.medema@heritagechs.org] or Education Committee Chairman Andy Birkett, at (708) 895-8214 [andy@preferredwindowanddoor.com]."

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Randolph PRC mourns the death of

JACOB REGNERUS, SR.,

whom God took to glory on November 30, 2003. We express our sympathy to his wife, Rena Regnerus; to his children, Jake and Rena Mae Soodsma, Jack and Sue Regnerus, Steve and Evelyn Oosterhouse, Rich and Jan Regnerus, and Norbert and Sandee Alsum. May they find their comfort in the Word of God in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Pres.
Eugene Braaksma, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Charles and Grace Loux in the death of Charles' brother,

MR. ROBERT LOUX.

May they be comforted by God's Word, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Dan Key, Assistant Clerk

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 2004 (not January 4 as was reported in the last two issues), at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Scott and Jill Riemersma in the death of Scott's father,

NELSON RIEMERSMA.

May they find comfort in this Word of God. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?...But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:55, 57).

Rev. William Langerak, Pres.
Doug Mingerink, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Bill and Alice Joostens and family in the death of Alice's mother,

MRS. HENRIETTA HOLWERDA.

May they be comforted by God's Word, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:26).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Dan Key, Assistant Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KARI	Lynden, WA	550AM	8:00 P.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN	1050AM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA	88.5FM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KCWN	Pella, IA	99.9FM	3:30 P.M./Sunday
WMRH	Wauupun, WI	1170AM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	102.9FM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	1570AM	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA	101.5FM	10:00 A.M./Sunday
WFNC	Fayetteville, NC	640AM	9:30 A.M./Sunday
KGA	Spokane, WA	1510AM	7:30 P.M./Sunday
KCRO	Omaha, NB	660AM	4:30 P.M./Sunday
CJCA	Edmonton, AB	930AM	6:30 P.M./Sunday
KLTT	Loveland, CO	670AM	1:30P.M./Sunday
GOSPEL	Northern Ireland	846AM/MW	8:30A.M./Sunday

Topics for January

Date	Topic	Text
January 4	"God's Wise Leading of His Church"	Exodus 13:17-22
January 11	"The Marks of God's Children (1)"	Matthew 7:21-23
January 18	"The Marks of God's Children (2)"	Matthew 7:21-23
January 25	"Entering the Kingdom by the Strait Gate"	Matthew 7:13, 14