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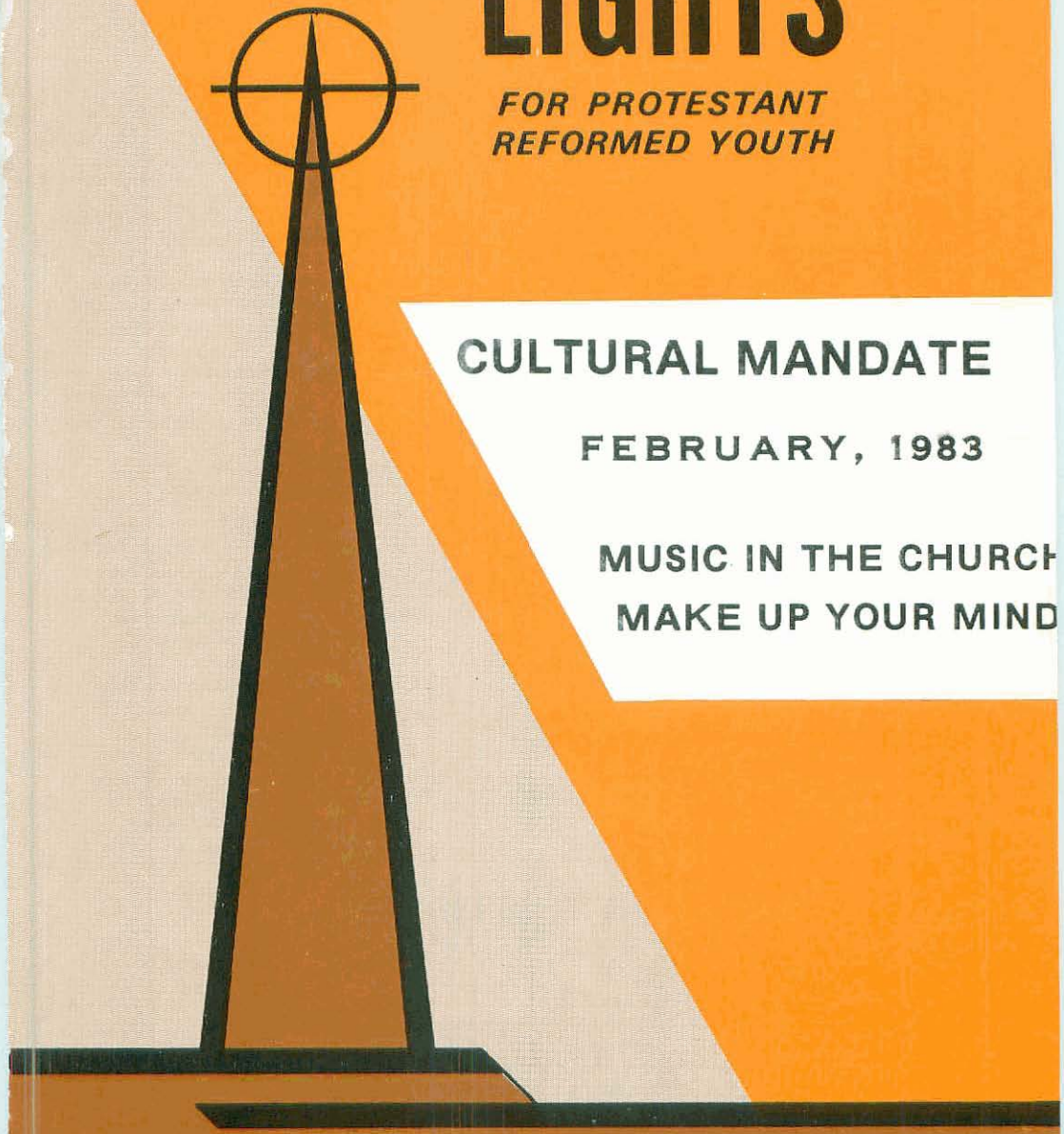
FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH



CULTURAL MANDATE

FEBRUARY, 1983

MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

BEACON LIGHTS

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Mrs. H. Brands, Rev. C. Hanko, Rev. R. Harbach, Rev. G. Lubbers, Ben Wigger

Collections should be sent to: Mike Lotterman
1382 Su-Lew Dr. S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504

BEACON LIGHTS
c/o O.P. Bookshop
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All material for publication should be addressed to:
Dave Moelker 4625 Juleon S.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

News Editor: Karen Vink
1422 Linwood S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Michigan subscription dues to Grace Faber
4190 Burton S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Subscribers outside of Michigan please forward subscription dues to
Jan Dempsey
3519 Senora S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508

Forms 3579 should be returned to:
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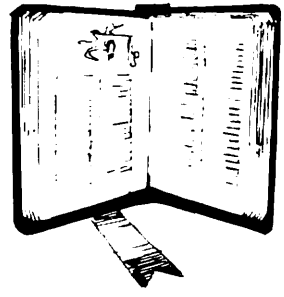
Editor's Notes

In this issue of Beacon Lights we call your attention to "Music in the Church", by Rev. David Engelsma, pastor of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois. This is the first of three on this very important subject and we would encourage our readers to take special note of them. Quoting from the article we heartily agree: "God will be worshipped as He prescribes in His Word, and no otherwise" and "It is exactly the worth of the Psalms that they are Christ's own Word about Himself. They are not a religious man's words about man's religious feelings, problems, and aspirations; but they are Christ's Word about Christ. Since Christ is the revelation of Jehovah God, the Psalms are God-centered and God glorifying."

Society after recess program committees, take note. In this issue is an article by Rev. G. Van Baren entitled, "The Cultural Mandate". It is important that we consider this subject together from time to time. To make that possible in an orderly way he has provided questions for thought and discussion at the end. If you check Beacon Lights index issues (December) of the past couple of years you will find he has included questions on other articles of his in the past as well.

Consider this from this issue's Truth vs. Error by Rev. Harbach. "Think of Joseph in the pit, in Egypt, in prison. He was not in the habit of thinking, "this is the pits!" He thought, Surely God is in this place! Joseph first made the pit the palace before he went from the pit to the palace."



EMILY

by David Harbach

Hi! My name is Emily Joy. My friends call me Em and sometimes Emil which I don't mind because they're my friends. Now that I am fifteen and full of energy, I pay attention to what people do, what they wear and especially what they say about me. That's why I want to relate to you what Bruce called my friends and me three awful days back.

I was excitedly talking to Marybeth and Sue, my girlfriends, near the baseball backstop when brown haired Bruce pointed his shiny new baseball bat at us and shouted,

"You girls talk too much! I can't concentrate, so be quiet!"

Marybeth looked at me with amazement and then we both began to giggle which made us laugh even more forcefully. Thin six foot Bruce is a good second base player but he is a very poor batter, which is what made us laugh. I know now that we shouldn't have laughed at Bruce, because he was trying to improve his batting and we were mocking his efforts. Probably nothing beyond this would have happened, but Sue couldn't resist teasing Bruce in a mocking way,

"What you need is a canoe paddle and a softball so you can hit something, Mr. Homerun King!" she said with both hands on her hips and her blond colored head tilted to one side.

Well that did it for us because Bruce became furious after that. I knew Sue's words hurt deeply and I wished she hadn't said them, but by then it was too late. Bruce whipped the bat against the backstop and marched over to us swiftly with his hands clenched. He stopped in front of Sue, pointed his long skinny finger at her face, and shouted,

"Big nose!"

Next he pointed to Marybeth, sneered and laughed, "Scar face!"

Frozen with anger and fear, I heard him call me, "Frog face!"

As we watched the triumphant back of Bruce move away from us, the three of us reacted in different ways. Sue laughed outloud. Marybeth began to cry and I boiled inside. You know the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me," just isn't true. I know because we spent half our lunch period quieting Marybeth who bawled so that her eyes turned red and puffy.

She kept saying, "Don't look at me, I'm ugly! My scar makes me ugly!"

We tried to comfort Marybeth with words like, "He didn't mean it. You're beautiful! Nobody notices your scar," but sometimes this made her cry all over again. It was while this was happening that I decided Bruce was going to pay for his mean words to all of us.

I knew that our plotting of a way to get back at Bruce was wrong and against all that our parents and teachers taught us, but I was angry, uncontrollably angry.

The next day our plan worked perfectly. Bruce came over and started talking to us in a haughty way, making fun of our names again. Sue and Marybeth moved carefully on each side of unsuspecting Bruce, while I remained in front of him receiving his fusillade of insults.

He started to say, "Well Frog Face did you catch any bu...," but before he could blurt out the word 'bugs' Sue slammed a stinking green mess in his face. The smell was nauseating. I can still see Bruce standing there, his mouth hanging open, looking at the flattened dead frog in Sue's hand.

You would have expected us to have gotten into a lot of trouble, but we didn't. Bruce's friends told him he got what he deserved for speaking nasty to us. I wasn't happy about this and in fact I felt worse inside than I had before. My conscience bothered me about our terrible deed of vengeance and how deeply hurt inside Bruce must have been.

While we stood outside with our girlfriends the next day before school, Bruce came over to Sue and me with downcast eyes.

He said quietly, "I want to say I'm sorry for calling you those bad names yesterday. I know Marybeth is hurt and you too, and I'm real sorry. Wil. . .will you forgive me Sue and Emily?"

The dead silence was broken by my whispered, "Yes" and Sue's relieving, "You're forgiven Bruce."

"Good," he said with a smile on his face, "What a relief!"

I knew that his repentence wasn't enough, so before he managed to get too far away I said,

"Bruce!"

"Yes, Emily?"

"We're sorry too. Will you forgive us?"

"Oh yes! Thanks."

I know that this may not sound important to you but I'm glad we cared enough for each other to ask for forgiveness. Now we can go on being friends.

Amicos habere gratum est

The idea of writing about Emily and her friends, suggested itself to me as I thought about the importance of a person's name. I portrayed Emily as a caring young person who becomes incensed and deeply hurt when Bruce calls her and her friends by derogatory names. This happens in real life and many times we go home from school having been the object of a classmate's belittling remark.

The bold vengeance that the three girls seek is often the first reaction we

have against our good name being mocked by others. Although Bruce's friends say he deserved the frog in the face, we would not have reacted this way openly. However, we often use another terrible tactic and that is talking behind the person's back, both of which are wrong and lead to worse sins.

Usually you would expect Bruce to retaliate, but I didn't allow that to happen because I wanted to show you the benefit of accepting an apology and also asking forgiveness yourself. The question is now what will you do in a similar circumstance?

What does God say you should do as one of His children?

He says in Ephesians 4:29-32, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying,that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." And also in Colossians He says, verses 8-10 and 12-13, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

by Ben Wigger

Whether we like it or not, this life requires us to make a lot of decisions. We are quite literally faced with making decisions every minute of every hour of every day of our life.

If you just stop for a moment and consider how many decisions you make

each and every day, it is enough to cause a certain amount of worry and possibly even dread. You had to decide to read this article in this issue of the *Beacon Lights*. And may I add, I hope that you decide to read the rest of this, as well as the remainder of this month's magazine.

Of course many of these daily decisions are rather routine in nature. But on the other hand, there are times when having to make a decision, a major decision, can lead to many sleepless nights.

There is one very major decision which you as the young people of the Church have either faced or will have to consider in the future. This will in no way be an easy decision to make, for the answer you give will remain with you the rest of this life as well as through all eternity. I am speaking of your decision to make or not to make confession of your faith before the Church, the body of believers.

I am afraid that there are many of us who do not consider this to be much of a decision at all. After all, confession of one's faith seems to follow in a natural course of events. For the most part, we are born and raised in the church. We attend catechism for a number of years; and then we, along with several of our friends and classmates, decide to go and make confession of our faith before the consistory and then before the entire church.

Now it is true that by God's grace we all grow and develop in spiritual things. You may have believed in God and Jesus Christ as your Saviour at a very early age, but only time and education will reveal to you just what that all means.

However, I dare say that the further along you get in life, the more important this decision becomes. There comes a time when you have to decide one way or the other.

There is no greater event in the church than to see its young people stand in its midst and confess that yes, they too desire to be counted with the body of believers. For we all know that the Church progresses from generation to generation, and confession of faith by the young people points to the truth that God is indeed keeping His covenant with His people.

But young people, regardless of how many years of effort you put into your catechism lessons, and no matter how nervous you may have been (or will be) when you went before the consistory, this will show itself in time as the easy part. There is nothing this world hates as much as you, a confessing believer; and the more you live that confession, the more this world will hate you.

Perhaps you have experienced some of this already. You are well aware that confessing Christ as your own Lord and Saviour means there has to be some changes in your life. And there are times when you are not so willing or eager to make these changes.

The prophet Elijah challenged the indecision and double-mindedness of the people of Israel, and that challenge confronts us as well. "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God follow him: but if Baal then follow him." I Kings 18:21

What this all comes down to young people is the truth, as God's Word so

strongly puts it, of making a choice. You are terribly mistaken if you think that you can get by in this life without making a decision in this matter. To simply drift through life is not the answer, as a popular poster a few years back so nicely put it: "Not to decide is to decide".

As I said earlier, the real work comes after you have made confession of your faith. Just as it took (or will take) real effort on your part to make that confession, so it will take just as much, even more, to maintain that confession in today's world. It takes effort to maintain your walk through this valley of the shadow of death.

Never forget that all of this is not of yourself, but of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. It is only by grace and more grace that you will be able to stand and continue to grow and mature in your Christian walk. If for a moment you think you can do it on your own, it is in that moment that you fall. The moment Peter took his eyes off Jesus while walking on the water was the moment he sank into the angry sea. He couldn't do it on his own and neither can we.

Your desire to make and live this confession has to be a whole-hearted decision. Things do go better when you put your heart into them. Make "I ought" into "I will". Let your decision to follow Christ permanently mold your habits and your character. Decide now that you will read and study God's Word, pray to Him daily, and worship His as your Lord and Saviour.

When you give yourself over to these decisions, these decisions in turn make other problems more easily solved. Your one decision to confess Christ causes many of the lesser decisions you will be faced with easier to make.

If your employer tells you to break God's Law or face losing your job, that decision will be easy. The decision was already made when you confessed your faith before Christ and the church.

It was the complete whole-heartedness of their decision that made Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego strong enough to refuse to bow to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. The king even offered them a second chance lest they be thrown into the fiery furnace, but they needed no second chance. They said: "O Nebuchadnezzar we are not careful to answer thee in this matter". Daniel 3:16.

When you by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit have decided to serve God in all things, and let's not forget that that is exactly what we do when making confession of our faith, you have peace in your heart, even in the face of a furnace. You can even sing hymns in prison. The decisions are made from the beginning. If you know what is right, there is no more question about what to do.

It is my prayer, and I am sure the whole church joins me in this, that God will work in each one of your lives; if you have confessed Him, to continue in that confession and stand as a believer who knows and defends the truth; and if you have not yet confessed Him before men, that you will be led in that path, and that in the fulness of God's plan for your life, you will make that confession.

Truth vs. Error

REV. ROBERT C. HARBACH

The Christian and the Omnipresent God

"Surely the Lord is in this place. . . ." — Gen. 28:16

It often happens that covenant children, as Jacob did, leave home the result of their own foolish decisions. There is a redeeming feature about this if those who so leave, also as Jacob, still unite with worshipers of the Lord. Covenant young people, in the right way, may leave home, just so they pass from one oasis to another. Jacob, of course, was confident that God was in these oases, but somewhat as his grandfather he likely thought that in between, "Surely the fear of God is not in *this* place!" Gen. 20:11. So that when Jacob cried, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not," the implication was not that he learned for the first time of God's omnipresence, but rather that since Luz was a heathen Canaanite city, he was surprised that God would reveal himself to him where there were no altars of Jehovah. There is great parental concern when covenant young people leave the parental home, however legitimately, especially doing so when not very mature in doctrine, or not yet developed in a strong faith and firm godly life. But blessed and comforting it is when the new adventurer can believe that the Lord is always watching over his way, even though he is not always aware of that fact. Have we not often been so happily surprised on our pilgrimage as to exult, Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not!

The true church's doctrine of God's omnipresence was attacked by heretics, deists who denied this truth, denying what Reformed theologians call God's immanence, according to which God "is wholly, with His whole being, in the universe, and in every part, relation and moment of it." (Reformed Dogmatics, 56). They seemed to think that we would have to space-shuttle our way out of the world of nature completely in order to reach the realm of God's

presence. They put such a great distance between the Creator and His creation as to interpose a great fixed gulf which would effectively prevent prayer ever reaching Him. But we agree with the psalmist (in Psm. 139) that God is even in hell as well as in heaven and earth. For God there is no vacuum where He is not. He fills all outer space, permeates all matter. He is in the chasms and black holes of the universe. "In Him we live and are moved and have our being." At any point in the whole realm of nature you will have to say, Surely God is in this place! God is in every drop of blood coursing the veins and arteries of the passengers on the space-ship Earth.

As for the sphere of providence, surely the Lord is here too; surely in blessed Eden, yet also in cursed Eden, after the Fall. After that, sin increased; wars brought grimy sweat, blood and tears; battlefields gouged the earth with bodies blown to bits, covering "no-man's-land" with smoke, fire, gore and twisted armor, so that most would say, "the devil is here," but truth says, Evil is here; yet God is here, though we knew it not! For of invaders, guerillas, terrorists and threatening armies the Lord says, "Thou are My battle-axe and weapons of war; for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms" (Jer. 51:20), until Gog and Magog and Antichrist are no more. Where there is the most sin and blasphemy, there the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. There He is God and King; there He punishes sin with sin. More present is God than vile, wicked sinners. More King is He than the kings of the earth who set themselves against Him and against His Anointed. More Lord is He than warlords and human despots themselves. Read the dark pages of history through the interpretative lenses of holy and divine scripture and you will see and conclude, "God was in it all." God is in our own personal history. Fire destroyed our house. Home from school, we found the place in ruins. Yet God was in the fire, in the ruins and in the way He led us to a new home. Then the Great Depression came. There were no jobs, no father to look for a job, no coal in the coal bin, no gas for light, no food. Yet God was in the cold, dark house, in the empty cupboard. It was hard for an ant to find a crumb. But the presence of that tiny creature told us God was there. Doth God take care for ants? He does! He is also there in their secret, benighted labyrinths!

There is the swine-swilling prodigal, destitute and hungry enough to eat the shucks fed the snorting hogs. Is God in the pig-sty? Does He tread the lonely trail to the far country, winding and meandering through the back streets of wasted substance? Is He ever in the bars and taverns of riotous living? God is there; if not, no prodigal son or daughter would ever be returned to sanity and sense to resolve, "I will arise and go to my Father." You see, God is surely in the place we call the kingdom of grace, and of it many have had to say, "and I knew it not!"

So then, in order to gain a sense of, or to recognize, the presence of God, should we not begin with where lies His shadow or reflection? Are not the two to be seen everywhere? Will not nature lead us to nature's God? Are not the two so closely related that a man has no excuse for not leaping from the one to

land immediately on the other? No; you will never recognize God's presence in nature until you learn to see Him in and by grace. To go up by nature from nature to nature's God is absolutely impossible. Man is now much closer to reaching Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Pluto than ever before, but he is still just as hopelessly far from reaching heaven as ever he was. One may as well till blue in the face strain at his shoe-laces to lift himself to heaven. For to the natural mind there is an infinite chasm between nature and God. Anyway, to make such a leap would only spring one into the void. He would by leaping from the dark into vacuity. Man, in his approach to nature must go at it by grace from grace. Only then can he understand nature to be inseparably related to God. To attempt to look at nature, in and of itself, apart from God, apart from grace, would be to view it as having no relation to God whatsoever. To do this is to annihilate nature. But first see Emmanuel, God incarnate with us, then, and only then, will you see the true and triune God in the creation which He made. There are many who never attend church, never need to, they will tell you, since they worship God in nature, usually on the golf links, or while out fishing or sailing. We often hear this, but there is no truth in it. Adherents to this natural worship really do not worship God at all. They are no nearer to God and heaven than the American Navajo who worships the sun. No one really understands the s-u-n who has not first learned to know the S-o-n. Begin with nature and you will end with nature, without ever coming close to grace. Begin with grace and you will immediately say of all nature, Surely the Lord is in this place!

The old Reformed theologians believed in an ever-present God. Modern man thinks in terms of his "laws of nature," while he blocks from his mind the Lawgiver. He delves into the essence of matter as though it existed independently of the being of God, which is never the object of his study. He searches for the power latent in matter, or revealed in the laws of matter. But our Reformed fathers always presupposed the omnipotent and omnipresent power of God whereby He upholds and governs heaven, earth and all creatures. (Catechism, A. 27). These men were always occupied with God and God alone. We, however, before we leave the house first look at the barometer, or we dial the weather phone number. They put it this way: "Saith the Lord. . .I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain on another city" (Amos 4:7); or they said, "He *maketh* His sun to rise. . .and *sendeth* rain . . ." (Matt. 5:45). Happy the man who lives in God and who believes and knows that God is always present with him!

"Surely the Lord is in this place" is a very practical truth. Doesn't it also apply to the young people's convention (or similar function)? Surely He is there, too. Then let that truth and reality be a check to any extremes of conduct. Let it guard us against foolish talking and jesting, or worse, chambering and wantonness (debauchery and immorality). Then in your social gatherings after church, surely there you can say, The Lord is in this place. Then why don't we talk more of Him? Why is it so difficult to converse in a spiritual vein? It seems there are all too many who would just as soon

immediately plunge right into totally worldly conversation, but that would be too obvious. So they talk about other Christians not present. That is supposed to put the conversation into a spiritual vein. Recently in one social circle we got to talking about the devil in a rather light theological discussion about Satan, which is infinitely better than a profane discussion of an absent person. Doing the latter is to do that which belongs to the proper works of the devil (Catechism, A. 112). When it is true in the deepest spiritual sense that "the Lord is in this place," then the air there is pure.

Is there trouble at home? Does that trouble make it difficult for certain members of the household to go home to its strained, painful atmosphere? Do you then dread going home? Nevertheless, do so, approaching your door with the prayer, "Surely, Lord, Thou art in this place." He is there because *you* are there, and Christ dwells in your heart by faith. Then work for and believe in your heart that God will remedy the trouble in the way of Eph. 4:17-32; 5:1-8, 22-25; 6:1-4; I Pet. 3:1-9. Think of Joseph in the pit, in Egypt, in prison. He was not in the habit of thinking, "This is the pits!" He thought, Surely God is in this place! Joseph first made the pit the palace before he went from the pit to the palace. As the three children of Israel in the fiery furnace, say, God is in this place!

Believing this also concerning God's house, will we not be better prepared to enter it on the Sabbath? Often, preparing for church, we are quite aware of being decked out in our "Sunday best," but unaware that the soul is naked for lack of spiritual preparation. See Rev. 3:17; 16:15; 7:14. As we sit in church do we remind ourselves, Surely the Lord is in this place, or are we as buyers and sellers mentally going over business transactions? Are housewives there cleverly scheduling next week's busy household routines? Do farmers who will not on that day go out to their fields and look at their crops bring their crops and fields into God's house to look at them there? Do bookkeepers and accountants bring their ledgers in their minds to work and rework them in God's house?

Finally, when we sin, we do so (O horrors!) right in the presence of the Judge of all the earth! He is then both witness and Judge of all our crimes. The Lawgiver himself catches us in the act! When a man commits adultery, he turns his back on God to do so and sins before His face. He must confess as to the place of sin, Surely the Lord was in that place and I knew it not! Safety lies in meditation on God's omnipresence. See Psalter No. 383.

Know that He thy ways beholdeth; He unfoldeth
Every fault that lurks within;
Every stain of shame glossed over
Will discover, and discern each deed of sin.

Pray that He may prosper ever each endeavor,
When thine aim is good and true;
But that He may ever thwart thee,
And convert thee, when thou evil wouldst pursue.

—F. R. L. Von Canitz, 1700

MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

by Rev. David Engelsma

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Colossians 3:16

Music has always been an important part of the worship of the church. Its place in the worship of the early church after the apostles comes out in the earliest description that we have of a Christian worship service. Speaking of the Christians, a contemporary observer wrote, "they are accustomed to come together on a fixed day, before dawn, and to speak with themselves mutually in a song to Christ, as it were to God." This dates from the reign of the Emperor Trajan, who ruled Rome from A.D. 98 to 117.

Nothing needs to be said to those familiar with the Old Testament about the place of music in Old Testament worship.

The book of Revelation teaches that the congregation of the redeemed will sing in the new world: "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne. . ." (Rev. 14:3).

Colossians 3:16 makes clear that music is to have a vital place in the worship of the church now, on earth. The reference is to the congregation of saints and their gatherings for worship. Verse 15 has reminded us that we are called to the peace of God "in one body." This body, this church, has its life; and it is vital that the Word of Christ dwell richly *in the body*. "You" is plural in the Greek, not singular—the reference is to all the members as they make up the congregation. "In you" means 'among you.' In keeping with this reference to the church, the apostle speaks of our teaching and admonishing each other. The singing, therefore, is the united singing of all the members, from their hearts (note again the plural), as a church. The Holy Spirit teaches and exhorts us as to music in the church.

WHAT WE ARE TO SING

It might seem that the text, as well as the similar scripture in Ephesians 5:19, overthrows one of our cherished positions, as Protestant Reformed Churches, regarding music in the church, namely, that only Psalms be sung, to the exclusion of hymns. Does not the apostle mention Psalms, *hymns and spiritual songs*? Our position is expressed in Article 69 of the Church Order of Dordt: "In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten

Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer before the sermon shall be sung." Our stand today is the historic, traditional Reformed position—that of Calvin; of the Synod of Dordt; and of the Reformed churches generally, until recently, when the Reformed churches have been amusing themselves by abandoning the Reformed tradition wholesale. The exceptions to the Psalms mentioned in Article 69 (some of which are quite unknown to most of us) find their place there through curious, historical circumstances: the popular Dutch songbook of the time of the Synod of Dordt contained also these hymns; rather than to disturb the people, Dordt made allowance for these hymns. But the spirit and principle of Article 69 is: "In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung." Period!

This stand on Psalm-singing does not depend only on a few New Testament texts about singing, the interpretation of which is disputed; but it is based also on an important Biblical truth about the worship of God, namely, that we may not worship God as we see fit ("will-worship"), but only in the manner which He prescribes in His Word. This is called "the regulative principle of worship." It is laid down in the Second Commandment of the Law, as the Heidelberg Catechism explains in Q. 96: "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, *nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.*" Apart now from the "hymn question," this regulative principle of worship—obedience to the Second Commandment!—is well-nigh lost sight of in Reformed churches today. The ruling question for worship is not, "Does God command this particular aspect of worship in the Scriptures?" But the controlling question is, "Do we think that this would be a nice liturgical innovation? Does this or that move us emotionally (for a month or two)? Will this be popular to draw our unspiritual young people to the evening service?" Altogether apart from the preaching of false doctrine, or the absence of preaching, as becomes more and more common in the second service, blasphemy is regularly done in the worship of the churches; and strange fire is offered up to the Holy Father on the altar of the worship of the church.

God will be worshipped as He prescribes in His Word, and no otherwise. This extends to our music. The music with which we praise God at church must be His Word. Just as we preach His Word and pray His Word, so are we to sing His Word. Now God has given the Church one, inspired songbook: the Psalms.

But even if the issue of exclusive Psalms-singing versus the singing of hymns also were to be decided on the basis of Colossians 3:16 alone, the churches would sing only the Psalms. "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" are not three different kinds of songs: the inspired Psalms of David; uninspired hymns based on the New Testament; and uninspired spiritual songs treating of various religious themes. Rather, they are all the inspired Psalms of the Old Testament. The inspired Psalms are of two different kinds: hymns and spiritual songs. "Hymns" are the Psalms that explicitly praise God, e.g., Psalm 150

("Hallelujah! Hallelujah! In His temple God be praised"). "Spiritual songs" are the Psalms which deal with other aspects of the believer's life and experience, e.g., repentance (Psalm 51: "God be merciful to me") and the duty to obey God's Law (Pslam 119: "How I love Thy law, O Lord!").

The proof of this, namely, that "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" in Colossians 3:16 are all Psalms, is immediately plain to all: the church of Paul's day, specifically, the congregation at Colosse, Asia Minor, had no other songs than the Psalms! She had no "hymns" in the sense in which we are accustomed to speak of hymns today, referring to such songs as "Glory be to the Father," or "Rock of Ages." Besides, the meaning of the Greek word, "hymn," is 'song of praise to God.' Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word, "hymn," is clearly used to refer to a Psalm which consists of the praise of God. Such an instance is Matthew 26:30: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went into the mount of Olives." The reference is certainly to the Psalms; undoubtedly, the reference is to Psalms 113-118, the "Great Hallel" (Song of Praise to Jehovah), which the Israelites customarily sang on the occasion of the Passover. In addition, in the Greek Old Testament used by the apostles, the Septuagint, the Psalms were exactly labelled, "Psalms and Hymns, and Spiritual Songs."

When we sing the Psalms, the Word of Christ is dwelling among us, in our music. The Word of Christ is the Word *about* Christ—His Godhead; His humiliation; His redemption; His salvation; His glory. It is also the Word that Christ Himself speaks. This Word, and this Word only, is to dwell in the church, for she is the body of which He is the Head.

The Psalms are this Word of Christ. They are inspired; they are part of the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament that was "breathed forth of God" (II Tim. 3:16). The Holy Spirit spoke them; David and the other writers were only instruments (Acts 1:16). Remember, they are the inspired Word of Christ, expressly for the purpose of being the songs of the Church.

Also, they are *about* Christ. All of the Psalms are "Messianic." This is Jesus' own analysis of them in Luke 24:44: "...all things must be fulifilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, *and in the psalms, concerning me.*" This is questioned by some. The alleged lack of references in the Psalms to Christ and His saving works is one of the main reasons why some suppose that we should also have hymns in our songbooks of worship. They find *The Psalter* deficient especially for the Christian holidays, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. This is a mistake. We may take Christmas, recently celebrated, as an example. Leaving aside the question, whether these seasonal celebrations are in order (certainly, they are not required by the Scriptures, as is the keeping of the Lord's Day), and leaving aside also the question, whether our celebration (even our concern for a week or two with peace and joy!) is the Godly, spiritual celebration that it ought to be, we may truthfully assert that the Psalms are *rich* with the gospel of the Coming of the Christ—His Coming from God; His Coming as man; His Coming in lowliness; His Coming for the redemption of sinners; and the like.

We may assert further that many of the popular Christmas hymns not only lack the solid, Biblical truth about the birth of Christ that characterizes *The Psalter*, but also are empty and even frivolous. "Silent Night, Holy Night" (which I would not classify as frivolous, or empty) certainly cannot stand comparison with numbers 3 and 4 in *The Psalter* (based on Psalm 2), or with number 243 (based on Psalm 89).

It is exactly the worth of the Psalms that they are Christ's own Word about Himself. They are not a religious man's words about man's religious feelings, problems, and aspirations; but they are Christ's Word about Christ. Since Christ is the revelation of Jehovah God, the Psalms are God-centered and God-glorifying. Just for this reason, they do justice to the hopes and fears, the struggles and victories, the sins and salvation, the shame and glory of the man, or woman, of God. There is a depth, a profundity, a reality about the Psalms that is commonly missing from even the better hymns. This, not only when the Psalms are talking about Jehovah, but also when they are talking about *man*. As you sing them, you say to yourself, "Yes, *this* is my sin; *this* is my fear and doubt; *this* is my feeling; *this* is my only salvation; *this* is my hope;" and the like. For the Psalms know man in relationship to God, whether in covenant friendship or in covenant-violating rebellion; and this is really man.

Today, there is a noticeable conversion to the singing of the Psalms by those whose tradition was not that of Psalms-singing or whose tradition has moved away from the singing of Psalms. They recognize the unique worth of the Psalms in the singing of the church, as well as the weakening of the church by many hymns. *The Biblical Educator* of January, 1980 points to the worth of the Psalms:

> The reason Christian kids so often go for 'rock' music is that their musical taste is completely unformed. The violence in today's music is but the reverse side of the sentimental, goopy, syrupy, popular music of a previous generation. 'Champagne music' leads to 'marijuana music.' Too many gospel songs are nothing but sentimental goop, and children brought up on these are starved for music with some real meat in it. They find such 'strong' music in 'rock.' It would be better if they had been brought up on strong Christian music, such as the psalms.

Writing in *The Banner of Truth*, October, 1982, J. R. de Witt states:

> I have an idea that the superficiality of much evangelical Christianity in our day may be traceable to a long neglect of the Psalter as an instrument in public praise. When one lives with the Psalms, those wonderful worship poems of Scripture, with all their marvellous variegation, displaying as they do the whole range of the emotions, aspirations, and wrestlings of faith, tend to become formative for one's experience of spiritual reality. On the other hand, when one turns from the Psalms to merely human expressions of religious sentiment, one immediately runs the danger of descending to another

level of religious feeling, a level not nearly so much shaped by the Word of God itself.

We ought to appreciate our heritage. We ought to know and understand it, first of all; but, then, we should appreciate it. We should not be embarrassed by our liturgy, particularly, singing Psalms at church; we should not grumble about it. We should be thankful for it and exploit it. We carry on a long and honorable tradition; we represent the historic Reformed position, here. But above all, our heritage and worship are Biblical.

Next: our singing.

NEW YEAR'S MUSINGS AND ASPIRATIONS

by Rev. G. Lubbers

"The LORD is my shepherd I shall not want. . . ." Psalm 23:1

Yes, another year has become history, never to return. The pages of the time-space of three hundred sixty-five days are written full. Seemingly man wrote these pages, but really it was the work of the firm and guiding hand of our Father in heaven; He wrote with His pen each page, each day. It was the fulfilling of what was in the Scroll in the right hand of God on the Throne, covered by a rainbow, and which Scroll was given to the Lamb, who had the right to open the seals thereof!

All things in heaven and earth are busy, are working together to the realization when God's tabernacle which shall be with man, and when all "will be done". It will be the last day of history!

Blessed thought!

Earnest and living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Yes, the LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . .

As I sit here musing, on this last day of Anno 1982, my heart is glad, full of joy unspeakable, full of glory, expecting the end of our faith, the faith of the church of the ages, the salvation of our souls. Maranatha, Jesus Comes! Behold the Son of Man shall come, is coming, with the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. Fear then unbelieving Sanhedrins in a petrified church, quake with fear, all who deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But fear not ye, my people, my little flock in the world. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!

Comforting word of the Gospel as we look into the New Year. For this "new year" is the year of our Lord Jesus. It is *Anno Domini.* He is the central focus-point of all history; yea, his coming is history. I hear his foot-steps. Yes, I hear him in the thunder and see him in the lightning, and I perceive him in the quaking of the earth in many places, in floods and storm. And I know that by Him were the ages formed, and after having brought about the purification of the church by Himself, He went on high and sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.

The LORD is my shepherd!

He the Lord, Jehovah God revealed, gathers the church each year. Not one, who should have been brought to conversion, is left unconverted. All the elect will be brought to repentance, and they came one by one to confess their sins, and they were forgiven. All who came to Christ were saved, and no one was cast out. . . . He has fulfilled the will of His Father in heaven. And He cried in *Anno Domini* 1982 "I came to do Thy will, O, God! In the Volume of the Scroll it is written of me! And is not this Jesus the same, yesterday, today and forever? And is He not the Lord God Almighty in the flesh, now at God's right, the effulgence of His glory, the expressed image of His Being? Did God in all times and ages ever say to any angel: thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

Yes, He is the almighty Shepherd. Great in power and abundant in mercy, He. He alone is great!

The LORD is my Shepherd. Now I shall not want. I shall receive each morning mercies new and abundant. Never shall the Manna from heaven fail, from which eating I hunger never more. O, that is what was true now at the end of 1982. The church-bells ring at midnight-watch, their music sounds clear and strong over hill and dale, finally dying away in distant echo, joining the music of the heavenly firmament, and in my soul reechoes the joyful sound: The LORD is my Shepherd. Maranatha, Jesus comes. . . .

O, then I do not know exactly what the "future" holds in store, but I lift up my eyes unto the hills, and I know that He who created heaven and earth, rules all things by His Counsel and Providence, and that He so holds the "future" in His almighty and merciful hands, that rain and sunshine, hail and tempest, fruitful and barren years, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance, but come by the omnipotent will of our heavenly Father!

Yes, be still my soul, you shall not want!

Be still, my soul, the LORD is on thy side. . . .

The Lord, My Shepherd holds me within His tender care, and with His flock He folds me, no want shall find me there; in pastures green He leads me, with plenty I am blest, by quiet streams He leads me, in paths of righteousness.

Anno Domini 1983. . . .

What a blessed thought, what portion Divine. The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places. A goodly heritage is ours!

All the days of the years of my earthly pilgrimage the Shepherd has led

the way. He gathers the flock for which He laid down His life. And gathers the entire flock, those near and those far, from the East and West and North and South. And He goes on conquering and to conquer, as He rides on the white horse through history. And He breaks the seals and says, in this year of His, to the horses and to the horsemen: go forth. And the powers of God's throne are efficacious to make history, in war, social upheaval and revolutions, and in death. And in the midst of this all He lays His hand on each of His sheep and comforts with His Word and Spirit, saying: fear not, I am the First and the Last, I am He that was dead and am alive forever more, and I have the keys of hell and of death! For you, my little sheep, death at last lost its sting!

Anno Domini, 1983?

It is no great question-mark, forsoothe. . . .

Will this be the year that angels come to carry me away into Abraham's bosom from the church militant to the church triumphant? The Shepherd knows! His assuring word is: let not your heart be troubled; I go to prepare a place for you. . . .

Mansions of glory, home over there; regions celetial, radiant and fair. No pain or sorrow, no sickness or gloom. And there shall be no night there.

Yes, when that place is ready, He will come again to receive us that we may be where He is, to behold His glory, such is His high priestly intercession.

The LORD is my Shepherd. He is the great Shepherd who dwells between the Cherubims of glory of the mercy-seat.

No I shall not want, not here, nor into all eternity.

It will be streams of mercy never-ending, rivers of God's good pleasure. And the River of God is full of water.

Anno Domini, 1983?

It is the straight and narrow way which leads into life.
Few find it; may I find it daily, even in the night-watches.

Blessed prospect.

The Shepherd's supply never fails!

I shall not want!

THE CULTURAL MANDATE

by Rev. G. Van Baren

The so-called "Cultural Mandate" can be found in Genesis 2:28, "And God blessed them and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." The "mandate" is twofold: to multiply and to dominate creation. This "mandate", given to Adam in paradise, is a command of God. It, therefore, is not something which may or may not be observed; it *must* be obeyed. Nor is man excused from this command because of the subsequent fall into sin. He is required still to deal with God's creation properly to God's glory.

However, let it be noted immediately, that after the fall, man is no longer able to obey and serve God. He will ignore God's commands and walk contrary to them. Even the regenerated Christian still possesses a sinful flesh. Though he does obey God's commands in principle, still he does not perfectly obey.

The "Cultural Mandate" is, however, taken today to mean that man, by virtue of the common grace of God in him, can still carry out much of what this mandate requires. He can subdue creation correctly. He can make use of art forms to produce what is good and pleasing to God. He can make of this world a utopia where there exists peace and harmony among men. If the church helps and cooperates, this world can be made to be a beautiful place. Thus the "mandate" is observed.

Or, it is maintained that the church is called to fulfill this "mandate" on the earth in order to establish a glorious world order. The "mandate" is taken to mean that if the church tries hard enough, it will be able to "Christianize" all things: labor organizations, political parties, news media, entertainment, etc. Because of the "mandate", a postmillennial approach is taken. The church, thus, can and will improve this world so that Christ can return.

The "Cultural Mandate" was indeed a wonderful command to Adam in paradise. He could obey with a willing heart. He could bring forth children of God's covenant, children without sin who could serve God also in perfection. Adam could work within God's creation, subduing it properly. Surely, in subduing creation, Adam would not have destroyed, polluted, or corrupted that creation in any way. Adam, in perfection, would have known what to do in creation and how to govern it. What a glorious place could have

developed—had Adam remained in the state of righteousness! Present-day scientific developments, likely, would have been nothing compared to that in paradise!

All that was the blessing of God upon Adam. God would have man, the highest of the earthly creation and head over it all, to reflect His own perfections. And God had given to Adam everything necessary to fulfill the "mandate". He had perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. He had the intelligence which he could rightly use. He was in the ideal position to observe God's demands correctly in every respect.

However, this "cultural mandate" must not become some sort of idea upon which a system of doctrine or life is built today. A post-millennial idea of end-time can use the "cultural mandate" in its system of teachings. One can soon direct the church in the wrong way if this "cultural mandate" becomes the governing principle of the church. Then, soon, the effort of the church becomes not the preaching of the gospel and conversion of sinners, but of providing social reform and change in this world. Thus the "cultural mandate" has often been mis-applied to our situation today.

There are several facts which must be borne in mind in connection with this "cultural mandate". First of all, there is the entrance and effect of sin in this world. Man himself, because of Adam's transgression, is dead in sin and misery. This means that man is not in a spiritual state necessary to observe the command properly. Man will have dominion, all right; he will multiply all right—but in sin and for self. Thus man twists the mandate that himself becomes the goal which it must serve. But also, sin has affected the creation itself. The perfect harmony and unity within creation does not now exist. That too affects the carrying out of the "mandate".

A second factor which enters into the question of keeping the mandate is that which is presented in II Cor. 6. There may be no union between light and darkness; between Christ and Belial. The wicked and the Christian have different points of view; different goals; they have different life styles. These two can not cooperate in order to carry out a certain "mandate". Thus the notion that this "mandate" can somehow be fulfilled if we gain the cooperation of unbelievers is nonsense.

A third factor to borne in mind is that a misunderstanding of the "cultural mandate" after the fall might easily lead into an ignoring of the Scriptural truth concerning the new heaven and earth which we are to seek. The desire of the child of God now is the return of Christ and the establishment of the new heaven and earth. One must not allow his attention to be diverted from that glorious objective.

The child of God does have a calling and has God-given duties on this earth. One may never destroy nor misuse that which God has entrusted to man's care. The earth is not ours to abuse in our generation as we see fit. One has a calling to recognize that God created the earth for man's sake—not just for those men who live in our generation, but for mankind who must live on this earth through the ages.

The Christian must, then, use the earth and all that it contains to the glory of God—but also as those who seek the new heavens and new earth. He does not now seek to obey a "cultural mandate" as one who only sees a continuation of this earth—but as one who understands that a new heaven and earth shall come.

If we recognize all of these things which have affected the earth since the fall, if we confess that there shall be the new heavens and earth—then we can perhaps properly obey a certain "mandate" concerning the present earth too. But be sure that we understand well how everything has changed since that "cultural mandate" was first given.

Questions:

1. How have the views of "common grace" and the "cultural mandate" been related?
2. What has affected this "cultural mandate" since it was first given to Adam?
3. What might be wrong with the claim that the wicked in some ways can fulfill this "cultural mandate"—and therefore we can enjoy what they have done?
4. Are not the various environmental movements a part of man's attempt to fulfill the "cultural mandate?
5. Are Christian young people not obliged to use this creation rightly and not pollute it—because of this "cultural mandate"?
6. What kind of "mandate" do Christians have with respect to this present creation?
7. Why can, or can not, Christians cooperate with the wicked in this "mandate"?

News From, For and About Our Churches

by Karen Vink

BIRTHS

Mr. & Mrs. Carey Kamps of Faith were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Anna Lynn.

Mr. & Mrs. Frank Van Baren of South Holland were blessed with the birth of a girl, Melanie Ann.

Mrs. Pete Nobel & family of Southwest rejoice in the birth of a boy, Samuel Peter, on October 19.

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Feenstra of Southwest rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Jacqueline Marie, on November 12.

Mr. & Mrs. Peter Kamps of Southwest rejoice in the birth of a son, Peter, on November 17.

Mr. & Mrs. Chuck Terpstra of Hope were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Kimberly Sue, on December 2.

Rev. & Mrs. R. Flikkema of Hope were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Heidi Sue, on December 10.

Mr. & Mrs. Ed Ophoff Jr. of First rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Erin Noelle, on December 24.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Scott Boverhof, Mark DeKraker, Laura DeYoung, Cheryl Groenendyk, Earl Kamps, Henry Kuiper and Joan Vander Woude of Southwest made public confession of their faith on October 17.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The membership papers of Linda Feenstra were transferred from Southwest to Redlands.

The membership papers of Mrs. Mark Ophoff were transferred from Holland to First.

The membership papers of Dorothy Dozema were transferred from First to Hull.

The membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Heemstra and their 3 baptized children were transferred from Holland to Faith.

The membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Kaptein and their 3 baptized children were received by Faith from the Christian Reformation Church.

ACTIVITIES

South Holland held a Christmas Singspiration on December 19.

The Hope Choral Society gave a program "Lessons and Carols" on December 26 at Hope Church.

Adams Boosters Club held a Pancake Supper on January 15.

MARRIAGES

Steve Manning and Diane Kuiper were married on December 3.

Mitchell Dick of First & Ellen Hanko of Faith were married on December 29.

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