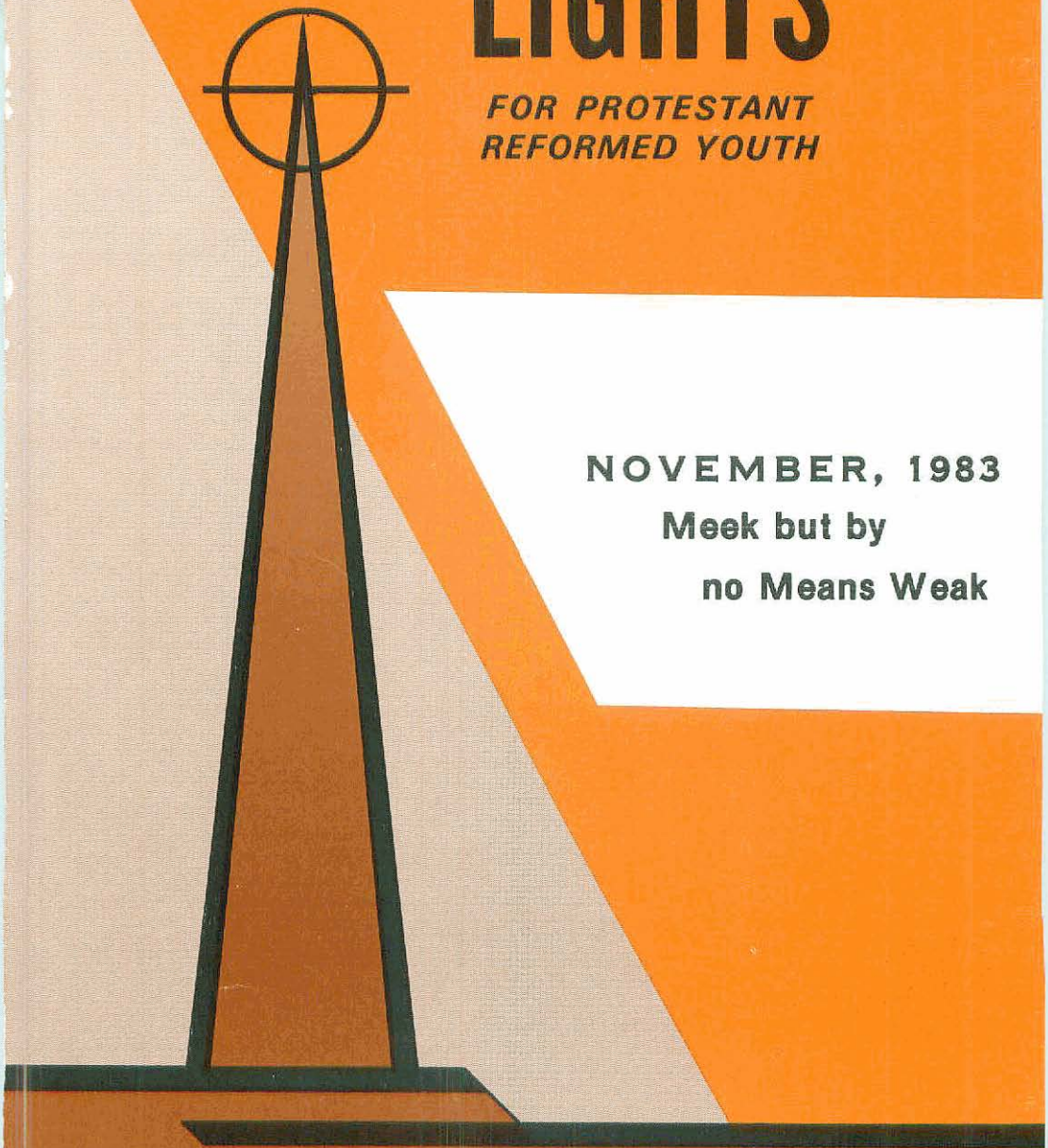
BEACON LIGHTS

FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH



NOVEMBER, 1983

Meek but by no Means Weak

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Editorial

A LETTER ABOUT LETTERS

by J. M. Faber

As you can guess, I am going to write about the a-b-c's. Our alphabet which consists of twenty six letters which can be combined into thousands of ways, words and, of course, sentences. You probably learned your a-b-c's from your Mom and Dad; or if you are a younger child in a family, from your older brother or sister. At first you wrote them in block letters like, A B C. And soon you began writing them like, a b c. And can you imagine that you used to spell out each word and say, c,a,t = cat; d,o,g = dog; b,o,y = boy. But soon you learned to see the whole word at a glance. Now when you see the word, cattle, you are not confused by the first three letters, you know it has nothing to do with a cat, but with cows. When you see the word, dogwood, you know it has nothing to do with dogs, but with the trees which have such pretty blossoms in the Spring.

Then we got older, and got better and better at reading; and when there was so much to read in preparing our school lessons, we learned to scan whole sentences at a glance. I suppose that in your work for school you spend much time in writing. Older people (like you know who) spend very little time in writing and very much time in reading.

I don't know how much you appreciate the invention of writing and of the printing press. But you might think about that and wonder what we would ever do without writing. We do not know when the first writing was done, but it was a very long time ago; even long before your gramp's grandpa. Nor do we know what those first letters looked like. Have you ever seen Hebrew in print? Or the Egyptian? Or the Greek? You probably have seen on the newscasts some of the squiggles of the language of the Moslems or the Mohammadens. The Chinese language is very difficult to master. They draw their letters with a fine brush dipped in ink. They must be very carefully drawn in the school room.

Looking at those awful squiggles which are somebody's alphabet reminds me of a book I read when I was your age. In that story a few people would communicate with a code of letters they invented. With that code they could write to their buddies and no one else could read it. It was a sort of picture-alphabet in which the letters were pictured with stick-figures something like human beings. The A was. , the G was, , the M was, , the P was, , the R was, . So if you look carefully at these figures, noting the different positions of the arms and legs you will be able to read this sentence: "I gave to your and your a to find the in the fence where the broke out." Check each figure carefully and you will find that the message was, "I gave to your Pa and your Ma a map to find the gap in the fence where the ram broke out". So you see that any coded alphabet may be made to write to your pals that understand the code. In my childhood, we had no radios or television sets to entertain us so we had

lots of time to figure out codes and other puzzles. We thought it great fun!

Have you ever wondered how dull life would be without reading and writing? We would not be able to communicate with anyone outside our family and immediate friends. We would not know about the mighty oceans, the majestic mountains, the huge deserts - and we probably would still believe that the moon was made of green cheese. We would not know about penguins, polar bears, elephants, giraffes and other animals outside our vicinity. Your Mom would not be able to write to your aunt to come for a visit. You would not have a single book to read. No magazines, no newspapers, no advertisements to buy clothes, cars, or carpets. Remember the bedtime stories your parents read to you: Remember that silly little rhyme-riddle about Humpty Dumpty, and the question, Who is Humpty Dumpty? Do you remember Mrs. Vos' Bible Story Book from which your Mom read as you cuddled up to her on the davenport just before she tucked you in bed? Those interesting stories about Adam and Eve in their beautiful Paradise; the bad lie the Serpent told Eve, and their subsequent Fall into sin. The exciting stories of David and Goliath and the thrilling story of Samson! The fascinating continued story of Joseph and his brothers; how they sold him to be a slave in Egypt, and his life in prison, his rise to be the man next to the king; the history of his brothers' visits and the reunion with his aged father. Talk about a rags-to-riches story!

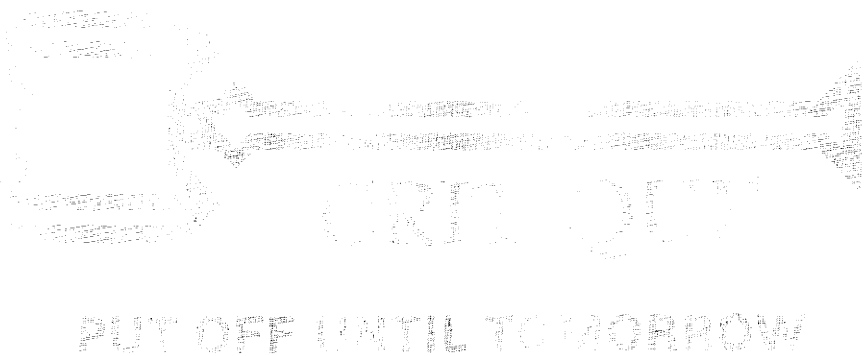
I bet you have already guessed why the invention of writing was given by God in time. I can point to one of the prime reasons. Remember how Moses was hidden in the reeds by the riverside to be hidden from the death ruling of the king; how the king's daughter found him and adopted him. The reason in God's Providence for that find was that Moses might be instructed in the schools of Egypt **in order that he might write the first five Books of the Bible.** Moses, the servant of God must write, "In the beginning God" and all that follows in those five Books. Without that record we would not know of the Garden of Eden, our Fall, the Mother Promise that Christ would come to save us from the death of sin. And the New Testament writers told us about the star above the fields of Bethlehem to guide the shepherds to the stable to find the baby Jesus. They also told us about His life, His burial, His resurrection. Without that written record we would not know of His glorious resurrection to ascend into the Heaven of glory, and the promise of the Angel that He would some day come back to take us up into heaven with Him. Dull, did I say? Not dull, but dead! It is by the gift of writing to the Holy writers of the Bible that we learn of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which we must be saved to Life Everlasting! I find that the Bible has but two stories that are so very important. The First is the creation of the world. The second is that of the destruction of that world by the Flood. The third must still be written. But I think instead of reading that one: that of the New Heavens and the New Earth we will not read, but we will experience it!

Now that it is a fact we can read and write, it is very important that we read the right material. We must choose and reject the abundance of print that comes to us. We can read good books, news magazines, Readers Digest (but we must even be careful of that one), and other materials from which we learn about the world round about us. If for no other reason than to learn how rapidly the world is developing in sin. One can compare it to Noah's time when it was ripe for destruction. Then God could not stand it any longer but prepared a great Flood to destroy the earth and all life thereon. In our newspapers we can see that this, our world is getting ripe for judgment-this

time not by water, but by fire.

We are surrounded by printed material and TV entertainment that is so vile that if we should find enjoyment in that we would grieve the Holy Spirit of God. So we must pick and choose. But we are too young to do that faithfully, so we must ask our parents and teachers to help us find the good and reject the evil. We are told that if you read some of the vile stuff the world puts out one cannot rid one's mind of it, it sticks there! So don't take the risk. Read only what is edifying, that which is to the glory of God and for your eternal welfare. So, read, read, and read some more. There is always room in your head for more. It never gets too full. Read for pleasure, read for education, read for your welfare. And lastly, read your Bible every day. That is a must!

Love,



PUT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW

by Ben Wigger

Now that most of you have had about a good month to get back into the daily routine of school and achool work, I can not help but wonder if there is something about school that you dislike as much as I did when I was in school. Although it has been just a few years since I left school, looking back, the one aspect of it that I miss the least is homework; of how I disliked having to do homework.

I was thinking about this dislike for having to do homework as I prepared this Critique article for this month's **Beacon Lights**. Perhaps there are some aspects of our childhood that we never outgrow, no matter how long we live.

I have been writing these Critique articles for several years now, but there is one thing that never seems to change with just about each one of them. I always seem to put off writing them until I absolutely can no longer avoid it. I have a Critique schedule sent to me each year. I know when each article is due, but the pattern is always the same. Each article gets put aside until it can no longer be avoided. I find all kinds of excuses not to get down the basement and begin to organize and write these articles.

The reason for all of this may be in part my dislike for doing homework. These articles are a burden imposed upon me by outside obligations; and like the kid I am, I put off tackling them until it is simply unavoidable.

Thinking about this now, it all seems

so senseless. But habits and frames of mind from our childhood persist. Years after we think that we have matured, the resistance is still felt in doing assigned homework.

This attitude is no doubt a lasting effect of my school years. Having no proof other than my impressions, it seems that homework is generally regarded by most school kids as the most unpleasant part of the educational process, because it is always there, it has to be done, it is involuntary, and it forces us to think.

Now you may be wondering why the reference to homework. The point I want to make you consider with me is the whole idea of putting things off until tomorrow.

We all do it; me with my Critique articles, you perhaps with your homework, others with work that has to be done around the house; but each of us has something that he or she will put off if at all possible.

And what problems that creates for all of us. Just staying with the idea of homework; if you don't keep up from day to day, it doesn't take too long and you will find yourself behind to the point where you can never hope to catch up, there just aren't enough hours in one day to do it.

The whole idea of being a procrastinator is not limited to just schools and homework. The idea carries over into the area of our church life as well.

How many times haven't we all said we would do better in preparing for our church society's Bible discussion, and we really do mean it. But when that time rolls around the next week we find ourselves in the same old rut; we just keep putting it off until there are no more tomorrows left. Let's face it and admit that our society life would be a lot better if we all just put a little time into preparing for it. The Bible discussions that go the best are the ones where there is a good exchange of ideas and thoughts, and that only comes with preparation.

Our catechism classes are yet another area of our church life which can so easily be put off until later. Have you ever found yourself trying to memorize the week's questions and answers on the same day as your class? It is really too bad that we have to end up doing as little as possible to get by. Perhaps we can get by that way week after week, but what lasting benefit do we get from "learning" anything that way?

There is one other area of our church life where we often procrastinate as young people, and that is the area of our making public confession of our faith. I am afraid that as young people we often get the feeling that as long as we hold off on making confession of our faith, we are somehow free to do as we please. We tend to feel that the church can do nothing to us as long as we stay away from public confession, and anything we do up to that point is not going to bother the church too much.

Of course nothing could be further from the truth. God regards sin as sin; there are no "gray" areas into which a young person falls simply because he or she has not made confession of his or her faith.

Being a procrastinator is another one of the many faults that we have to fight against daily. We are old enough by now to know what is required from us by our parents, teachers, and ministers. Before the Word of God we have no excuse. Yet each day finds us conveniently putting off things until tomorrow.

We all have a calling here on this earth, and whatever that may be, as Christians we have a responsibility to do that work to the best of our ability and that means among other things doing it on time. Pray that God will give you grace to do that, for we all realize the weakness of our own selves; and we know all too well that without God's help we can do none of this.

"I BELIEVE . . . ."

by Everett Hoekstra

"I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe an holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

The Apostle's Creed, most of us commit it to memory in our youth as part of our catechism instruction. When confronted with the question "What do you believe?" We are all quick to respond with this brief summary of our faith. Certainly this would be an appropriate response under the circumstances; however, circumstances are not always such and in many cases lead to further, more detailed, discussion of our faith. It is precisely this "discussion" which I wish to address in this article. From the time we are able to first speak instruction in the faith of our parents begins; Sunday school, catechisms, eventually the minister's sermons on Sunday. These are all essential and important forms of instruction in the Word. However, each stresses instruction in our faith, with little, if any, emphasis on our ability to discuss this faith with others. Society is the one form of instruction which not only instructs us in our faith, but also teaches us how to "discuss" our faith and understand the word of God on our own. Our young people's societies are the start of their instruction in the art of "discussion", and it is this societal group which I wish to address.

When I was first asked to write this article the idea was for me to give the young people a "pep talk" for the upcoming society season. My immediate reaction to this request was, "Wow! that should be tough!" Being only 24 years old, I could still remember when I sat like a "bump on a log" in society (when I was there anyway). However, after thinking about it for quite some time I decided that the task was not all that difficult. Particularly since I can still recall the excellent discussion groups I had the pleasure of participating in at the 1982 young people's convention. Putting all this aside, however, I want to note that, although this "pep talk" is certainly directed toward the young people, it applies to each one of us regardless of

which society we belong to or should belong to.

As I pointed out earlier, discussion is the key factor in society. We must all be able and willing to discuss our faith, and the best way to learn is in society. Learning to discuss our faith in society prepares us for those numerous situations when we are called upon to witness. When such a situation arises, and we are unable to freely express our faith with others, the inevitable impression that is left on those around us is that we are not truly excited to be a Christian. Think about it for a moment. If you were to ask someone who professed to be an avid baseball fan what he thought of the designated hitter rule and he responded, "What's that?" what would your reaction be? The answer is obvious, the man is bluffing you. This may be an extreme example, but the lesson remains, we can not bluff our way into heaven, nor can we bluff those around us into thinking that we are truly excited to be a Christian when we do not show that we are; or can not show that we are.

So, we have determined that society is an important aspect of our instruction in God's word and also why it is important. Next, it is necessary to make society interesting so as to generate enthusiasm for good discussions and attendance. This responsibility is, or should be, shared by both the society leader and its members. Society can not be interesting if either one, or both, is not prepared. Preparing for society should be a five step process. First, you should read the lesson carefully so as to grasp the main theme being brought out within it. Sometimes, in the case of Bible texts it helps to read the chapter preceding your lesson or the chapter following. Second, formulate any questions that arose in your mind as you read the lesson and jot them down. Third, obtain the views of one or two commentaries on the lesson. It is important to get some different views, because this opens up your mind to really consider what the lesson is trying to bring across. Fourth, review the questions you generated in step two. Some of them you may have answered yourself and other questions may have come to mind as a result of step three. Finally, read the lesson again in the light of all the things you have learned from your own study. This may seem like a time consuming process, but it really does not have to be. If you approach the task (if it can be called that) with the right attitude it will not take long and will seem like time well spent. Remember, the rule of thumb, is to spend two hours preparing for every one hour of society. Two hours is hardly going to ruin your whole week and it can turn one hour of staring at each other into something really worthwhile.

The next question that is raised is "What shall we study?" Certainly, what we study is as important, if not more important than how we study. The Psalmists said, "How shall the young direct their way? Thy word O Lord, will safely lead, if in its wisdom they confide." This does not mean to say necessarily that we must study directly from God's word, certainly there are several sources of study material within, and without, our denomination. The important factor to remember is that in the final analysis we must confide in the wisdom of God's word. When all is said and done God's word, and it alone, should direct our way. Further, on the subject of what to study, I encourage societies to keep in touch with the Federation Board. After all, we are all one society, not several individual societies which stand alone. Let them know what your intentions are so that ideas can be exchanged. Everyone benefits when everyone gets involved, even when several miles separate us.

With society season just around the corner, let's try to keep some of these things in mind so the next opportunity to witness that arises we can all, young and old alike, be able to enthusiastically say, "I believe. . . ."

An Open Letter Concerning Reformed Higher Education

by David Engelsma, James Lanting and Lamm Lubbers

This open letter is addressed to all members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and to all others who have a concern for the instruction of the children of the covenant in all aspects of earthly science on the basis of the truth of the Reformed Faith as set forth in the Reformed Creeds.

It concerns Reformed higher education, i.e., college-level instruction.

It is sent on behalf of a group of Protestant Reformed men that calls itself the "Conference on Reformed Higher Education." At a meeting held in Grand Rapids, Michigan on March 4, 1983, the group decided "to have a committee of Rev. D. Engelsma, J. Lanting, and L. Lubbers draft. . .an article for publication in **The Standard Bearer** and other periodicals." It was stipulated that, among other things, the article should outline "the purpose and provisional structure of our Conference group."

The history of the "Conference" is quickly told. The immediate cause was conversation among men who were gathered for a meeting of Classis West, mostly laymen. Contact was made with other laymen who shared the concern for Reformed higher education and who would be able to attend meetings, for a day or two, to explore the idea and its possibilities. The result was that a number of Protestant Reformed men from the eastern and western sections of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the U.S. and from Canada met in South Holland, Illinois on January 12, 13, 1982. A second meeting was held in Grand Rapids on June 8, 1982. The third meeting was held in South Holland on March 4, 1983; a fourth September 6, 1983.

These meetings reflect a longstanding concern of Protestant Reformed people for Reformed higher education, especially the training of prospective Protestant Reformed schoolteachers.

The Conference has no official standing, whether ecclesiastical, educational, or otherwise. Nor does it seek this. It has been a free association of some who thought that the possibility of giving Reformed instruction at the college level, especially to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers, was worth looking into. As part of its investigation, the Conference has studied the history of Reformed higher education; curriculum; accreditation; organization; finances; and other areas. We have conferred with our teachers. It is this purpose, this cause, and some of the fruit of our study that we now lay before you and ask you to consider.

The purpose of the Conference is indicated in the brief, working "Statement" which the participants drew up and signed at their first meeting: "We believe that higher education based on Reformed principles as set forth in the Reformed Creeds is a legitimate concern for Reformed people. We. . .resolve that in

order to preserve Reformed higher education in our age, especially as it relates to teacher training, we will promote the cause of a Reformed teacher education program. We agree to form committees to study the possibility, and the ways and means, of reaching these goals."

The Conference has concentrated on realistic beginnings. An able, interested Protestant Reformed teacher could be called, full-time, to give instruction to college students in certain, fundamental subjects. These courses, although of special value for the would-be teacher, would also be beneficial for other college students. Investigation has shown that such courses could be accredited through existing Christian colleges. While giving these courses, the teacher could also work at developing a more complete program. In time, yet another teacher could be added to the staff.

It is our conviction that college-level instruction of prospective Protestant Reformed Christian schoolteachers in the truth set forth in the Reformed Creeds, as maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches, is part of our calling in the covenant, to the extent that God enables us to provide it. This Faith is God's own truth that must be the foundation of all teaching.

The education of our teachers in State universities and colleges is unsatisfactory, since the Word of God is not the light in which these students teach the students to see light. The teaching of existing Christian colleges is widely and seriously weakened by the errors of the doubt and denial of the infallible inspiration and full authority of Scripture ("higher criticism"); of theistic evolution; of the philosophy of the A.A.C.S.; of common grace; of socialism, if not Marxism; of the current "liberal" dogmas of revolution, feminism, pacifism, and sexual permissiveness; and of the lack of zeal for godliness of life.

No one ought to dismiss the matter out of hand as no concern of his, on the ground that it is a matter of college-training and his children do not attend college. Since it is training of those who will be teaching Protestant Reformed children in the grade schools and the high schools, it is a concern of us all. Those without children as well as those with children can embrace and support this cause, as a cause of God's covenant and truth. Nor do we see even the first courses that might be offered as limited to prospective teachers. Other college students would benefit as well. Indeed, students from churches other than the Protestant Reformed might well enroll, if they are desirous of the perspective of the Reformed Faith.

It is the intention, now, of the Conference to hold public meetings in various areas of the U.S. and Canada, where there are Protestant Reformed Churches, in order to present this cause to our people, and to others who may be interested, so that they may take steps, if they are so inclined, to organize as an association, to carry out this work. We ask that you attend the meeting that may be held in your area and give the matter a careful hearing. Our hope is that Consistories, School Boards, and others will promote the cause, as they have opportunity. All who desire more information, have suggestions, care to comment, or desire a meeting in their area can write the Conference in care of our secretary:

Mr. James Lanting
Box 156
South Holland, IL 60473

The task is large; the cost is high; our resources are small. But the need is also great; and the benefits are precious—the welfare of the children of the covenant and the glory of God's Name in the knowledge of His truth. Let us make a beginning, trusting in the Lord, Whose we are and Whom we serve, to bless the small beginning, as He has done before.

The Sorrows of Conception:

NECESSARY FOR THE JOYS OF CONCEPTION

by Mrs. H. Brands

Of course! Of course!

Of course sorrow is not the final word on conception. When we talk about conception, we talk also about a subject involving joy. . .of course!

But first:

The conception and birth of a child is not **in itself** a joy. Study that statement a minute. It is not a morbid statement; it is a Scripturally realistic statement. If you don't recognize and believe that statement, I suspect you cannot have understood this whole series of articles.

Yet the conception and birth of a **covenant** child is a great joy. Even in the tears accompanying the death of a covenant child there is joy. That also is the Scriptural realism which is part and parcel of this series.

Let us review briefly the six articles which have formed this series.

Article I was: "The Sorrows of Conception: They Are Really Real!" This article was a reminder that God placed on the woman following her fall into sin a curse, which curse was the placing of sorrows on those areas of life that should have been only joy, her relation with her husband and her conception of children. God's Word is always powerful, bringing infallible results, and so also this Word of the curse resulted in abundant sorrows for the woman in her conception.

Article II was "The Sorrows of Conception: How the World Would Void Them!" We saw how the world chafes and kicks and tries in wicked ways to void this temporal curse. . .but fails, of course. God's Word on conception abides.

Article III was entitled "The Sorrows of Conception: The Christian Woman's Comfort". We acknowledged the basic startingpoint for a Christian woman: she goes into all these sorrows not in her own strength but as a child of her heavenly Father, knowing that He leads and strengthens. The Word of God and these articles as a whole extend comfort **only** to such a woman, one who is God's child by grace.

Article IV was entitled "The Sorrows of Conception: We Deserve Them!" and returned to the basic truth of the fall into sin and its results. This article had some erroneous paragraphs which, D. V., we shall yet correct later, but the basic truth remains: in Eden we fell into sin in our first parents so that we now inherit and deserve all the sorrows which resulted.

Article V was entitled "The Sorrows of Conception: Deserved, Yes! Judgment, No!" Here we reviewed the glorious doctrine of our deliverance from sin and justification through the blood of our LORD Jesus, which completely removes from us all wrath of God on sin, both now

and forever. This truth of justification means no suffering now is any longer wrath but a totally new thing, God's mysterious way of working blessing in our lives.

Article VI was entitled "The Sorrows of Conception: They Result in Blessing!" We looked at several ways in which God uses suffering for our blessing, following especially Romans 5. The emphasis was that in **all** suffering God is drawing us closer to Himself, teaching us the greatness and sufficiency of His love in Christ preparing us for our Home in heaven with Him forever.

Now in Article VII we ask, "But what about conception itself? Are there no joys in conception? Is sorrow the last word as relates to conception and birth of children?"

And our answer is, Of course not! Of course there is joy! But this joy is **only** for the believer who knows the blessedness of the love and fellowship of God. The joy is never in conception itself but in the work of grace which God works in covenant conception, covenant birth, and covenant child-rearing. Apart from God's covenant blessing there is only sorrow. . .but with God's covenant promises and His blessing there is joy, joy so great it floods our hearts and overflows.

In the second series of articles, entitled "The Joys of Conception", we plan to discuss these joys of child-bearing in seven articles. For now, we end the series on the Sorrows of Conception with one final thought. The **sorrows** of conception are **necessary** for the **joys** of conception to be really joys!

(to be finished next time)

Looking Away From Self — TRUE THANKSGIVING

by Phil Dykstra

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." This easy to understand, but very difficult verse to obey, is found in Luke 9:62. It has to do with our walk of life, young people, in the midst of this pleasure seeking, lust filled world in which we live. You and I confess Christ, either by our public confession of faith or by the sign of baptism we received. We are, by God's wonder work of grace in our hearts and lives, marked out as His people. And Almighty God has ordered us to walk as fit citizens of His kingdom, never to take our eyes off Christ, for that would show that we are unfit ploughmen.

To really know and enjoy true thanksgiving with self denial, we must know Who the King of this kingdom of God is. It is God Himself! If we let Scripture tell us about God, we **will** stand in awe before Him, we will see ourselves as nothing, and by His grace we shall look away from self and thankfully praise Him now and in all eternity.

We certainly cannot comprehend God. He is incomprehensible. Let us think about some of the following terms and meditate upon the greatness of our God. God is invisible, we cannot approach Him. God is transcendent, we cannot reach out to Him. God is eternal, we are creatures of time. God is infinite, we are finite. God is incomparable, He cannot be **classified** or **defined** — think about that! How great is the God of our salvation! How unsearchable He is to our puny little minds. Let's list some more virtues of God; don't just skim over these, let them sink deeply into our minds and hearts, because if we don't know these terms, we don't know God. Remember, we **know** God by His Names and virtues, or attributes. God is the unchangeable One — He is Jehovah, the I AM. God is immeasurable, infinitely immense. God is omnipotent, He is all-powerful, He is **Lord**! God **is** light, God **is** truth, God **is** life, God **is** holiness. God **is** Triune, He is the Living Covenant God.

Young people, and myself also, how thankful we should be to know and confess that we belong to this Sovereign, Almighty God. It is He that reached down and took us into His covenant fellowship, by the work of Jesus Christ. We are citizens of His kingdom. We should not even dare to "look back" when our "hand is on the plough", but so often we do. God forgive us all of our sins!

There is blessedness and peace in the way of self denial. No, the world with all of its enticements will not and cannot give you and me contentment and joy. The more we look to God and know Who He is, the dimmer and less important this world will become to us. Look away from self and look to God and to His Christ; all that He endured on the cross for you and for me. **This** is self denial with thanksgiving. If we live before God in the deep awareness of Who He is and what He has done in and with our lives, thanksgiving shall flow from within. Then we as citizens of His kingdom will know that whatever He sends us is done for our salvation. Do you have trials and sufferings? Look to our Almighty God. He **is** our strength. Are there temptations that plague you every day? Look to our Deliverer, keep your eye upon Him.

Finally, if we have a right relationship with God, it must follow that this will be evident towards others also. If we love God we will love the brother also. This too, involves self denial. This certainly means that a citizen of God's kingdom will not find friends with those who do not belong to that kingdom. Light and darkness, Christ and Satan cannot stand together, neither can or may believer and unbeliever. Young people, find your friends with those who know and love the Creator of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel — His church. To do any different is to reveal that we are "unfit ploughmen" and therefore "not fit for the kingdom of God". Read verse 62 of Luke 9 again.

We could ask ourselves many questions as to how we deny ourselves and how we view fellow Christians. Do we really esteem one another better than ourselves? Are we tempted to look "down" at one in school who is not so popular? If so, ask yourself, "Does God of Heaven look "down" on that person? Are we tempted to make fun of one of God's sheep who might be physically or mentally handicapped? This is a serious sin you know, because God is the Maker of us all. Let us look at one another, and act toward each other with the thought in our minds, "This is also one of God's precious children".

All of our life should be a "Thanksgiving Day", because of the knowledge that the Infinite God has given us about Himself, and the knowledge that all of our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. And, for all of that, we will deny ourselves and love Him, and those who belong to His kingdom. Give us grace for this, O God!

MEEK BUT BY NO MEANS WEAK

by Rev. John A. Heys

"The glory of young men is their strength" Solomon assured his son according to Proverbs 20:29. And indeed, as parents and friends of you young people, we do desire to see you physically strong, psychically strong, that is, with strong characters, and spiritually strong. Although you may not have given much thought to it, we prayed before you were born that you might be sound in mind and in body and might grow up to be strong in the faith, with a vibrant spiritual life that would carry on the battle of faith and preserve the truth for the coming generations. The glory of the church is having strong men and women who are ready and able to further the cause of Christ in the midst of this world of sin and unbelief.

But Jesus says in the third Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5. And this would seem to contradict what God gave Solomon to write. It would seem as though Jesus prefers weak, non-aggresive young people who, if they have physical, psychical and spiritual strength they hide them, withdraw from the battle of faith, and just sit around waiting for this earth to be given to them.

This is, however, far from the case, and there is no contradiction here at all. Indeed, by the world, meekness is considered to be weakness. And if you are thinking of getting as much of this world's goods as you can, you had better not be meek but use all your strength of character, of mind and muscle to wrest it from those who have it, or from the bowels of the earth, or wherever it is.

Can you imagine a meek basketball team, or for that matter a meek athlete of any kind? Would one not soon be put off the team, if one in meekness let the other team take the ball away, and made no attempt to keep the other team from scoring? Would not meekness object even to having opposing teams? Why not concede victory to the other team and not exert all that strength in a competitive sport?

But consider once that Jesus declared of Himself in Matthew 11:29, "I am meek and lowly in heart." And not only did He have tremendous, almighty physical power, infinite strength of character and spiritual strength far above any one before Him or after; but remember that He with a whip drove out the money changers and sellers of cattle from the temple, and cast the mob, that come to capture Him in the garden, backward to the ground!

We ought, therefore, to look a bit

more closely at these words of Jesus so that we do not misunderstand them and draw wrong conclusions from them, and of our calling in the midst of this world as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. What we ought to see is that meekness is strength, a spiritual strength that is found in very few upon the face of this earth. And what we ought also to see and understand is that meekness in the first place is meekness before God. Yes, we will surely be meek before men. But all meekness that is not rooted in meekness toward God is due to spiritual weakness, and in fact to a lack of spiritual life. Even as all love toward man that is not rooted in love toward God is a sinful love, so all meekness that is not the fruit of a meekness before God is a sinful meekness, no matter how attractive it may look to men who are profited by that meekness.

You see, young people, God created man as a meek creature. Yes, he was created physically much stronger than the strongest of those born after the fall. He was created spiritually strong. And he had strength of character that enabled him to be king of the whole earthly creation. He was by no means a weakling in any sense of the word. Weakness came after he lost his meekness before God.

Wherein did that meekness consist? First of all in this that he was completely submissive to God. He was completely submissive under God's law so that he obeyed Him perfectly, but also in this that he accepted all the works of God's providence without the slightest thought that God was not doing what He had a right to do, and was not working for his good. And that meekness was rooted in an unshaken faith in God that He is God and must be served without question, whatever His will might be.

But Satan deceived him and caused him to find fault with God's law, and to believe that he could be like God. Satan made him believe that meekness before God was a weakness which could be overcome by disobeying Him. And today man, having fallen in Adam from his meekness and into a state of revolt and unbelief, considers meekness before God to be weakness; and consequently that meekness before men likewise reveals a weakness of character, and that the meek are born losers. Do not believe the world. The unbeliever is wrong. Meekness is basically submission to God's will. And he who is meek before God will display a meekness before men that is due to spiritual strength.

The meek are citizens of the kingdom of God. And remember that this kingdom is the one that exists for God's glory and in which all revolves around and is directed towards His glory. When Adam began to go against God's will and to do what God forbade, he revealed a nature that does not fit in that kingdom, or even want to be in that kingdom. He began to seek the earth for his own glory, sought what God gave him as means wherewith to glorify his God, and sought it now for his own flesh. Such the holy God cannot have before His face, and will not have in His kingdom when it is fully come in the day of Christ.

Losing his faith in God, believing the lie that he may do as he pleases, and that a higher glory would be his by disobeying God, and that this earth is his, not God's, he began to walk in hatred against God. He initiated rebellion against all authority in those God placed over him. He started man on the way that takes another man's life and wife, robs him of his earthly possessions, deceives him and covets what God has sovereignly given to his neighbour.. He refuses to accept situations into which his sinful flesh has gotten him, and therefore he sanctions and finances the murders of abortions. He is not meek before God, and so cannot and will not be meek in his dealings with his neighbour. He will fight him for his goods, will lie to get his possessions, trample him under foot, take every advantage of him that he

can. He does not mourn over sin as rebellion against God. He will speak of the good that is still in fallen man, and fail to see how destitute, how completely without any righteous deeds, or thoughts and desires the natural man is before God.

The result also is that he cannot take any adversities from God without complaint, and cannot be patient when the going is rough. And remember, young people, that even to complain about the weather, because it does not suit the flesh, is not being meek before God Who determines our weather. That is arrogance. It is being hard on God, giving Him a rough time, not dealing gently with Him, and not having kind thoughts in regard to Him and His works.

Remember too when you seek employment that, in a lack of meekness before God, men form unions to do violence, and to curb the income of the employer, so that he ceases to get his usual income of the goods of this earth, while in violation of God's fifth commandment they go on strike. They are going to hurt the employer so that they get more of this earth's goods, and because they covet what God has given others. You cannot join them and walk in the meekness of which Jesus speaks.

True meekness, as I stated, rests in an unshaken faith in God. As Isaiah declares in chapter 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Meekness is not simply submission to God's law. It is patient waiting, trusting in the Creator of all things that He will send His Son at the end of time to create an indescribably beautiful earth for us, and in the confidence that all will work together for our good.

A blessing it is to be meek. A blessing in this life it is to have that spiritual strength to wait and not seek the world in deeds of rebellion against God's holy law. A blessing it is to know by such a meek walk that our citizenship is in heaven.

But get one thing straight, young people; the meekness of which Jesus speaks by no means rules out fighting for the truth and against evil practices. The meek will not fight their fellow men for earthly possessions, but they will fight for the glory of God. You can push them around as far as the things of this life are concerned, and they will turn the other cheek. But you cannot make them back up to accept meekly the lie, and let others teach their children false doctrines, or steer them in the way of evil practices. Such activity is not meekness before God. He tells us to fight the good fight of faith, to put on the whole armour of God, to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And He does not mean that we take that sword as an ornament but as a weapon wherewith to fight. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven will fight for the glory of their King and of the kingdom.

Note, however, that they will fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. In meekness they fight, not with sarcasm, name calling, or their flesh, but with God's Word. They come not with a tongue-lashing but with what Scripture declares, quoting it and expounding it, and leaving the fruit to the Spirit and His almighty power.

And these meek shall be blessed with inheriting the new earth. We must stress that word inherit. Their meekness does not earn a place for them in the kingdom of heaven. The new earth is theirs as a gift of God's sovereign grace. Christ earned places for them by His cross. And He also gives then this meekness, so that they have nothing whereof to boast. And boasting would be so contrary to their meek nature. No, they in meekness wait for the new earth that therein they may live to the glory of God and praise Him forever for their salvation.

V. Earnestly Contend For The Faith

Man in His Original State

Man was created in original righteousness. Man's righteousness was originally a creaturely reflection of God's uncreated and independent righteousness. This latter righteousness is the supreme and final authority to which all rational creatures, men, angels, are obligated. As no creature can be naturally independent of God, so no moral creature can be morally independent of God. Such a creature is responsible to acknowledge the Creator and His law as a reflection of His perfect attributes. That law is the standard to which the moral creature is responsible; and as the law itself is a clear reflection of the very nature of God, so the moral creature is bound to reflect and conform to God's law. Man, therefore, as a rational, moral creature, was subject to that law of righteousness, for it was revealed to him and he understood it. God made man upright (Eccl. 7:29). This implies that man in his creation was conformed to the image and law of God. God's word was law for Adam. He observed God's law in all its points. In God's word to Adam in Genesis 3 we have the essence and basis for the ten commandments.

This original righteousness was evident in **man's understanding**. For he had a perfect knowledge of the will, word and law of God, since he was created in God's image, and knowledge was a part of that. He understood God's standard of righteousness, so that he could and did render obedience to it. This was his practical righteousness, namely, obedience to known and revealed law. Adam understood the creation (his environment) and understood the meaning of all things (God's interpretation of all things.) This is evident in Adam's naming the creatures, which names expressed their nature. Also he exercised dominion, as earthly king, over the creatures, doing so in subordination to that law of God which he loved. His dominion was dependent upon the divine standard. He was not a law unto himself. God alone rules independently (sovereignly). A king under God was Adam. His rule was in subservience to God; otherwise rule would be rebellion against God.

But that came later, with the fall of man.

Original righteousness was evident in **man's will** which was perfectly conformed to God's will. Adam's will was not created independently, in a state of equilibrium, in perfect balance, neutrally, between good and evil, free to go in the direction of either. Adam's will was not created indifferent, but upright. An upright will is inclined toward God as man's chief end. For Adam to be inclined in any other direction would be for him to be a god to himself. But in his rectitude, God alone was his God. So then Adam's will was in perfect harmony with his understanding. He perfectly willed what he perfectly understood. This we maintain against all humanism and evolutionism which grant no place for man's original state of rectitude and perfection. Therefore, man's knowledge before the fall was not self-acquired; he was not a self-made man. It was knowledge with which he was created and which also kept coming to him through the revelation of God, and that revelation was in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. The law is holy, just and good.

So man's knowledge was sinless, yet only a creaturely reflection of God's, so that man's thoughts were (are) finite. God's understanding is infinite (Ps. 145:5); man's thoughts are a mere breath (94:11, Heb.); and just as man's being is finite and dependent, so man's knowledge is finite and dependent. This is plain and acceptable enough to the Christian, for the Bible teaches it. But the agnostic believes that "man's mind is the measure of all things" (Dr. H. Bavink, D.D., **The Doctrine of God**, 30). The atheist also believes this: cp. Ayn Rand, "Objectivist Epistemology," 10. But it is only God, not man, who has the attribute of omniscience. Original man understood this too. He knew that he never could in any sense outgrow or overcome either his dependence upon God or his creaturehood. He knew that he could not be like God in His independence or infinity. In that regard, he knew God as "the wholly Other." So for man, and the church, not for God himself, there is the doctrine of His incomprehensibility. (Belgic Confession, I). The infinitely good God created finite man with a finite goodness. Man's knowledge, though also finite, and therefore not comprehensive, was nevertheless also good, that is, not sinful, but holy. So that **what** man knew was the truth, insofar as God had revealed it to him. Knowledge from God is the truth.

Man in the Fallen State

Man fell from his original knowledge, righteousness and holiness into a state of sin, misery and death. Why is the world today characterized by that state? This question cannot be answered apart from the doctrine of the fall.

Two early results of this dreadful state, prevailing to this day, make men "the children of disobedience," for which the wrath of God comes on them Eph. 5:6) and remains on them (Jn. 3:36) until saved from it (Rom. 5:9). One such result was the sin of mixed marriages, or the intermarrying of believers (the sons of God, of the line of Seth) with unbelievers (the daughters of men, of the line of Cain). Believers have the right to marry "only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39), lest they intermarry with the profane, cursed race of Cain. They did not consider the will of God in their choice of mates. They were solely motivated by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. This is the way the heathen live, changing their gods as easily as they change their married state. This sin is a direct fruit of original sin. A second early result of the fall was that man became giants of corruption and violence (Gn. 6:4, 11). Of gigantic stature and mighty physique, they became monsters of iniquity. Their great feats of wickedness quickly filled the earth with "swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery (so that) they break out (in a deluge and) blood

toucheth blood" (Hos. 4:2). These two evils also characterize these last days. Man has become the reverse of his original: his mind became perverse, the thoughts of his heart only evil continually; the will enslaved to sin; the affections wholly polluted. Man was incapable of doing any good and prone to all wickedness. That "all" means that there is not even a smidgeon of good in man, for he is only evil and that continually. There is nothing in him acceptable to God. When he does change he only changes one set of sins of evil behavior for another set of sins. All that the natural man can do is sin. His ordinary actions are sins: his eating and drinking are only for himself (ct. Zech. 7:6 with I Cor. 10:31). The performance of his work, in his occupation, is sin. (Pro. 21:4). His most spiritual actions are sin. (15:8). Although we do believe that "there remain. . .in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light" (canons of Dort, III-IV, 4), yet not a glimmering of the light of holiness remains. Nor can his corrupt mind produce one holy thought. Such is man's heart and totally depraved nature until that divine miracle of regenerating grace changes him.

So man lost sight of the relation between Creator and creature. But even after the fall he could not escape that relation. He still had to proceed with his mere natural knowledge within the bounds of that relation, yet, insanely, he chose to think and work as though that relation did not exist. Doing so, he departed from reality. For he conceived of the world as functioning "out in the blue" of nothingness. In his humanistic denial that he is a creature of God and that God is God, he assumed that man is all the god there is or needs be.

Holding this conception of things man makes his whole life a blasphemy. For his every breath is to wipe God right out of existence. Created a king-servant of God, he now desires to be no more than a playboy-autocrat. He imagines something higher than his creaturehood: he is owner of all. So, in effect, he fires God from His own workshop and pushes Him off the edge of the world. He is capable of running things as he dictates. Give him time, and he will control the weather, volcanoes, earthquakes and all the galaxies in space!

This is exactly where Eve went wrong. She knew and believed what God had said, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou **shalt** surely die." But when the devil contradicted this with, "ye shall **not** surely die," she began to wonder, Who is right? She began to judge on her own the Minority who said one thing and the majority which said the opposite. For now the devil, herself and Adam formed a majority against God. She assumed that the majority can't be wrong. She listened to a supposed "expert" on "authority" to become the first humanist and "scientist," weighing God and the devil in the balance of the finite mind. She has "advanced" to making herself the expert, the judge, the measure of all things. She did all this on the scale of her 2 x 0 mind!

These fundamental doctrines of Reformed theology (the Being of God), and Reformed anthropology (the creation, man in the state of rectitude, man's temptation and fall, etc.) must be tenaciously held and preached according to the Bible, or we have no defense of the faith against perverted socialist anthropology, nor against one of the most dangerous of modern religions, the religion of secular humanism, "the coming universal religion of mankind."

Suggestions for Further Study

1. Read the first 30 pp. of H. Bavinck's **The Doctrine of God** on "God's Incomprehensibility."
2. Read in "The Attributes of God," by Arthus W. Pink, "The Solitariness of God."

HUMAN ENGINEERING: A Christian's Concern

by John Kalsbeek

In 1932, Aldous Huxley published a novel called **Brave New World**. In the early chapters of the book he describes the baby hatchery of this brave new world.

"Next to the Liners stood the Matriculators. The procession advanced; one by one the eggs were transferred from their test tubes to the larger containers, deftly the peritoneal lining was slit, the morula dropped into place, the saline solution poured in. . .and already the bottle has passed and it was the turn of the labellers. Heredity, date of fertilization, membership of Bokanovsky Group—details were transferred from test tube to bottle."

"On Rack 10 rows of next generation's chemical workers were being trained in the toleration of lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine. The first of a batch of two hundred and fifty embryonic rocket-plane engineers was just passing the eleven hundred metre mark on Rack 3. A special mechanism kept their containers in constant rotation: 'To improve their sense of balance,' Mr. Foster explained. 'Doing repairs on the outside of a rocket in mid-air is a ticklish job. We slacken off the circulation when they're right way up so that they're half starved and. . .learn to associate topsy turvydom with well-being; in fact, they're only truly happy when they're standing on their heads.' "

When Huxley wrote this back in 1932, it was science fiction about 400 years in the future. Later, in another book **Brave New World Revisited**, his prediction was only a hundred years in the future. As events have proved he was still off about 50 years. Many of the science fiction ideas expressed in his book are no longer science fiction but reality. They have already happened.

The geneticist is not attracting a great deal of attention as yet but he is taking prodigious leaps in the area of biochemistry (living chemistry) or genetics. Things are happening so fast that in 1975 geneticists called a stop to their work to have a moratorium or discussion on how to regulate their work and safeguard humanity. Never before had scientists agreed to do something like that. They have, to a large extent, discovered in the genes and in the substance called D.N.A. (for dioxyri bonucleic acid) the very key to life. They practically hold the power of God over life in their own hands. Dr. Robert Sinsheimer, professor at Cal. Tech. in Califor· has said, "For the first time in all · ·ı living creature understands its o . and can undertake to design its future." He continued by adding "Who can know what man may become as we choose our way across the endless future? The next step for evolution is ours." p. 350 **Ethical Issues in Human Genetics.**

The work of geneticists today covers the broad field of research known as and called "genetic engineering". According to the Oct. 22, 1979 issue of "The Business News"; "The most potent tool in

genetic engineering is recombinant D.N.A. By itself D.N.A. stands for dioxyribonucleic acid, the family of immensely complex molecules that carry the genetic code common to all life forms. Recombinant D.N.A. is produced when genetic material from one living organism is combined with that of another. The ability to move genes from one organism to another, allows biotechnologists to give organisms. . .capabilities that they do not have in nature."

Genetic engineering has moved ahead so fast that there isn't a book printed about it that is current. (The books that I've been able to find, copyrighted as late as 1977, are outdated). What the most recent of these books in substance have predicted has already come to pass. This becomes abundantly clear when one reads recently printed periodical articles.

By using recombinant D.N.A., scientists have "already accomplished some startling feats and accomplished them much sooner than even the most optimistic predictions of a few years ago. Bacteria have been induced to make for us two human hormones we have not heretofore been able to synthesize: human growth hormone and insulin." (The Nation, Oct. 13, 1979, p. 326) Geneticists predict that in the near future they will be able to produce plants that will fertilize themselves, eradicate genetic defects and disease from human fetuses and a host of other unbelievable wonders.

Through the manipulation of genes by the recombinant D.N.A. method, scientists have produced a multicolored mouse that has six parents; a mouse with three parents— a father, a mother, and a cancer; seven mice with only one parent, conceived without a father; a cloned frog and who knows what else by now. Dr. Robert Sinsheimer has said, "that a human clone will be produced by 1980." (**Genetic Revolution: Shaping Life for Tomorrow**, D.S. Halacy Jr. p. 164). I don't believe this prediction has come true.

The whole field of genetic engineering is extremely broad and complicated and has many ethical implications. My chief concern is the field of Human Engineering. This is but one facet of the whole and of tremendous importance to us as Christians.

Scientists are quick to point out the 'blessings' of human engineering.

By using a recently developed technology called amniocentesis, doctors are able to test a fourteen to sixteen week old fetus for genetic diseases. This test can conclusively spot quite a large number of genetic defects including Mongoloidism. When these tests prove positive, the mother and father will be advised to abort the fetus. They will also be advised to submit to a tubal ligation to prevent the birth of any other defective children. Theologian Ramsey says that anyone who would opt to have such defective children are "genetically imprudent and that such imprudence is immoral." Obviously, the so-called 'blessing' of this advance, is enjoyed by the parents and the world community. It's also a 'blessing' for the unborn aborted fetus. Apparently one of the geneticist's chief concerns is to do away with the effects of the curse and produce the perfect human being. To me such information is a curse because it would bring with it the very real temptation to rationalize the way the scientist does and permit an abortion. What a terrible decision to have to make and then under extreme social pressure.

Joseph Fletcher—a Massachusetts moral philosopher— at a recent National Symposium on Law and Genetics said, "The right to reproduce is a privilege. Our gonads and gametes are not private possessions." (**Science News**, "Questioning the New Genetics" by Joan Arehart Treichel) He also "flatly asserted. . .that those of us with genetically defective pedigrees do not have the right to reproduce." Under such conditions of pressure should we allow our wives to

submit to amniocentesis?

A couple of years ago I read, for the first time in my life, the word "clone". I didn't know what it meant. I discovered that to clone means to reproduce genetically an exact replica of another organism. In the magazines and books I've read in regard to this subject, most scientists are convinced that they will be able to clone humans. They've already done so with frogs and bacteria. Dr. Robert Sinsheimer, as I quoted earlier, said that a human clone will be produced by 1980. His collegue, Dr. James F. Boerner predicted in 1971 that "human mass production would be possible within fifteen years". (**Genetic Revolution** p. 163) That gives us until 1986. Lord Louis Rothschild, an English scientist, says, "The cloning of humans is a near possibility soon to be realized." (**Genetic Revolution**, p. 163) The process is a fairly complicated one but most of the needed technology is already available. Apparently all that would be necessary is to transplant the nucleus of a body cell of the person to be cloned into a newly fertilized egg cell after removing its nucleus and before the egg cell begins to divide.

We should face squarely, in this regard, the question: is cloning ethical? What about the soul? Would such a cloned creature share the soul of the person he cloned? I'm assuming that cloning will become an eventuality soon but maybe it really isn't possible. Will God really permit man to go this far? Another question we could face is—What does it mean to be created in God's image if man selects and shapes human intelligence and personality?

Finally, I'd like to consider the idea of in vitro fertilization. This means fertilization that takes place in glass test tubes. We already have a number of test tube babies in this world. There are at least ten hospitals or university facilities in the U.S. that could carry out in vitro fertilization and are anxious to begin. So far they do not have the technology to raise the fetus for nine months in a glass jar but some scientists are confident that these problems will be solved in the near future. An Italian scientist kept a human embryo alive for fifty nine days outside the womb and the Russians have claimed to have kept a fetus alive for six months.

In the book **Genetic Revolution: Shaping Life for Tomorrow**, Mr. Halary Jr. says "The artificial womb is a reality. . .a chamber filled with synthetic amniotic fluid. . .has kept lamb fetuses alive for two days. . .An enlightened female should not put up with nine months of physical suffering to produce a child, one argument, goes. . . . Procreation. . .would be replaced by clinical techniques for joining sperm and egg in an artificial womb and would take place where it could be scientifically nourished and carefully monitored to guarantee a perfect product." (p. 154) Women would now be saved not "in child bearing" but by the mighty god Science. Again we see an obvious attempt and effort on the part of man to do away with God's curse.

What do we as God's people say about all this? Do we close our eyes, ignore what's going on and try to convince ourselves that these things will never happen?

As children of God we must certainly marvel, as we alone can, at the mighty creative work of God. As each new mystery about life is unraveled before our eyes we bow in humble reverence and awe before Him.

We are going to have to take a stand either for or against the various advances that are being made. We had better be knowledgeable on the subject. I predict that if God allows man to proceed and to accomplish what man has set out to do, that in the near future our consistories, classis and Synod will be forced to grapple with the moral, ethical, spiritual issues that these advances force upon us.

Discussion Outlines for I Samuel Chapters 5 and 6

by Rev. R. Hanko

A. The Ark in Philistia.
   1. The ark in the house of Dagon:
      a. How did the Philistines account for their victory over Israel? Cf. Judges 16:23.
      b. What was the real cause of their victory (Deut. 28:25, 26; Judges 2:14, 15)?
      c. Why did they place the ark in the house of their god, Dagon? What did this reveal of their attitude toward Jehovah? Cf. Isaiah 36:18-20, 37:10-13.
      d. Did the Philistines treat the ark this way because they were ignorant of Jehovah's power (I Sam. 4:6-8, 6:6; Rom. 1:19-25)? Is idolatry ever a matter of ignorance?
      e. What was the significance of the fact that Dagon fell on its face before the ark (Is. 19:1, 46:1, 2; Ex. 20:3)?
      f. Why were Dagon's head and hands broken off the second time (Ps. 115:4-8)?
      g. What was the reaction of the Philistines to these things? Did they recognize Jehovah's power?
   2. The ark in the cities of Philistia:
      a. Why were the Philistines so relectant to return the ark and why did they keep moving it from city to city (Psalm 10:4, 14:1)?
      b. Look up emerods in a Bible Dictionary and describe this plague.
      c. When the Philistines returned the ark why did they include five golden emerods and *five golden mice?*
      d. What was God teaching the Philistines by these signs and miracles (Is. 43:11-13; Dan. 4:25b)?
      e. What does He teach us by these things (Ex. 20:5; Is. 42:8)?
      f. What was the effect of these mighty works upon the Philistines (Rom. 1:25; II Cor. 4:4)?

B. The return of the Ark.
   1. The plan of the priests:
      a. Is the length of time that the ark was in Philistia an indication of the hardness of their heathen hearts?

b. What was the advice of the priests with regard to the return of the ark and why did they mention Pharaoh and the Egyptians in advising their Lords?
c. Was the trespass offering of golden mice and golden emerods a proof that some of the Philistines had been converted? Cf. I Sam. 7:7.
d. How did the plan of the Philistines to use two milk cows which had recently calved to pull the cart with the ark prove the hardness of their unbelief? Cf. Ex. 17:7.

The result of their plan:

a. Did this plan proceed as the Philistines expected and hoped? Why do you think the lords of the Philistines followed the ark all the way to Bethshemesh?
b. How do vss. 12 & 14 emphasize the miracle that took place?
c. What was evident from the behaviour of the cows who pulled the cart to Bethshemesh (Ps. 50:10)?
d. Estimate on a map the distance the cart travelled on its trip to Bethshemesh.

C. The sin of the men of Bethshemesh:

1. The terrible wrath of God revealed:
   a. How did the Lord punish the men of Bethshemesh that day?
   b. What sin did the men of Bethshemesh commit that warranted such terrible punishment from the Lord (Numbers 4:5, 6, 15)? Cf. also II Sam. 6:1-7.
   c. How was the attitude of the men of Bethshemesh toward the ark and toward Jehovah like that of the Philistines (Deut. 4:12, 12:30-32; Acts 17:29; I Tim. 6:16)?
   d. What was lacking in their attitude (Ps. 89:7; Heb. 12:28, 29)?
2. The reaction of the inhabitants of Bethshemesh:
   a. Was their reaction correct (Ez. 33:11)?
   b. What was the correct answer to the question of the men of Bethshemesh when they were smitten by the Lord (Ps. 15:1, 2, 24:3-5, etc.)?
   c. What does the sin of the men of Bethshemesh teach us about our worship of God (Deut. 4:24; John 4:24)? May we ever decide for ourselves how we shall worship God? What is our standard for the worship of Jehovah?

THANKSGIVING DAY

by Rev. Ron Cammenga

November 24 is Thanksgiving Day, at least for those of us who live in the U.S. For our Canadian friends Thanksgiving Day will by this time be past, since the Canadian Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the second Monday in October. Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday. It is also a day on which we hold special worship services. The holiday and worship services are designed to be expressions of thanksgiving to God expecially for the completed harvest. It is a day on which we give special thanks for God's care of the seed that was sown in the Spring, His causing the seed to sprout and to grow, and His providing another harvest in order to meet our earthly need for food.

Thanksgiving Day has a long history. The civil authorities of Europe for many centuries had, on various occasions, called for special days of thanksgiving. One such day was called by the authorities in Leyden, Holland on October 3, 1575, the first anniversary of the deliverance of that city from siege. From Europe the custom was carried over into our own country. After the first harvest of the Pilgrims, in 1621, Gov. Bradford called for the observance of a special day of thanksgiving. He also sent four men out fowling, that they "might after a more special manner rejoice together." This celebration of thanksgiving by a great festive meal has been carried on down to our own day. In July, 1623, the governor appointed a special day of thanksgiving for rain which had brought an end to an extended drought. During the American Revolution a yearly day of national thanksgiving was recommended by the Continental Congress. It was in 1863 that President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving. Since then the day has been set aside and each president has issued an annual Thanksgiving Day proclamation. Custom has fixed that day as the last Thursday of November.

Not only is Thanksgiving Day a national holiday, but it is also observed by the church as a special day of worship. Our churches are bound to do this by our Church Order, which in article 67 included Thanksgiving Day among those special days which the churches are to observe in addition to Sunday. This means that on Thanksgiving Day our consistories are to call our people to an official worship service, like the services of worship on Sunday.

Historically there has been difference of opinion in Reformed churches regarding the observance of these special days. Many of the Reformers, including Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, favored only the observance of the Lord's Day. They called for the churches to set aside all of the special days which had been observed in the Roman Catholic Church. Van Dellen and Monsma, in **The Church Order Commentary**, give the following reasons for this stand of these Reformers: "The festive days are not ordained of God but are a human invention; they minimize Sunday, the God-ordained weekly day of rest; they lead to paganistic celebrations and promote licentiousness," (p. 273). In light of the present day observance of many of these holidays by the general

populace and even many church members. it must be admitted that the contention of the Reformers in their last point has certainly proved to be correct. The present celebration of most of these Days is more pagan than Christian.

Nevertheless, the churches have gradually moved away from the position of the early Reformers and made a place in the official life of the church for these special holidays, including Thanksgiving Day. It must be admitted that there certainly is nothing as such wrong in the observance of these days, at least in a sober and Christian way, as distinguished from the revelry of the world. Worship services on these days were introduced exactly in order to prevent the people from spending these days in idleness or worldliness.

As far as Thanksgiving Day itself is concerned, it is certainly fitting that the Church observe a special day of thanksgiving to God. Time and again the Scriptures call us to thankfulness. Thankfulness is something that we owe to God and something which we ought always to be giving to God. In I Thes. 5:18 the Apostle exhorts Christians, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." In Eph. 5:20 he writes, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Psalms are full of exhortations to God's people to be thankful and to give thanks. Psalm 92:1 is just one example: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High." In I Chron. 16:8, 9 David calls upon the people of God to give thanks to God: "Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works." Rom. 1:21 exactly lists the outstanding sin of ungodly men that, although they knew God, "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful." So thanksgiving to God is the outstanding mark of the believer. Really, this is why God has saved him, so that he may give thanks unto Him.

On Thanksgiving Day we especially thank God for those things which He has given us in the realm of our natural life. We thank God for food, clothing, shelter, health, strength, and work. These too are good gifts which come down to us from the Father of lights, James 1:17. For these too we are to be thankful.

In the Old Testament there were similar special days of thanksgiving. There was the Feast of First-Fruits, which marked the beginning of the harvest, and the Feast of Pentecost which marked the conclusion of the harvest. Now it was certainly the case that there was a spiritual, typical significnace attached to these feasts. But there certainly was also the unmistakable element of thanksgiving to God for His provision of the natural life of His people. God not only provides for the salvation of the soul, but also the life of the body.

Surely the thanksgiving of God's people does not end with their thanksgiving to God for the things of this natural life. Nor are these things even the main thing for which we are and ought to be thankful. Certainly the main thing for which we must be thankful is our salvation in God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not possess this gift of God, if this is not the main thing for which we are thankful in our life, no matter how many good things we may have received from the Lord, no matter how rich we are or how great our harvest is, we really have no reason to be thankful. Apart from salvation, these things in themselves are of no value to a man whatsoever. The Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes this in its explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. The Catechism says in Lord's Day 50 that neither our care nor even God's gifts can profit us apart from God's blessing. There are times, such as

the time recorded in Ps. 106:15, when God sends abundance of earthly things but at the same time sends "leanness of soul." Then inspite of all the abundance there is no reason, neither is it possible for a man to be thankful.

Just because our spiritual salvation is the main thing for which we believers are thankful, we can be thankful in all circumstances of life. We never lose our salvation. We may suffer the loss of our earthly possessions, the loss of our crops, the loss of our own health, but since we have our salvation it is still possible for us to be thankful, Our thankfulness does not depend on the outward circumstances of our life, as does the "thankfulness" of the world. We are able to say with the prophet Habakkuk in Hab. 3:17, 18, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Yet, we believers are to be thankful to God for His care of and provision for our earthly life. We look to Him for the preservation of our life. And when He is pleased to provide for our earthly needs, giving us our daily bread and all that is included in that daily bread, we ought to return thanks. This was something Jesus Himself did. Before He distributed the loaves and the fishes to the multitude in Matt. 15:36, we read that He gave thanks. Paul says in I Tim. 4:3 that God has created and given us meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

It is therefore fitting and proper that the people of God come together one day out of the year to render special thanks to God. The observance of Thanksgiving Day has a legitimate place in the life of the Church. But then let's use the day for that purpose. Let the day not be a day merely of fun and relaxation, certainly not a day of gluttony and revelry. But let us use the day for thanksgiving, expressing to God the thanks which He deserves for the bounties He has given us.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

NEWCOMERS:

God Blessed:

Mr. & Mrs. K. Lotterman, of Southwest, with a daughter, Kendra Ann, on July 12.

Mr. & Mrs. J. Brummel, of Southwest, with a daughter, Lori Sue, on August 19.

Mr. & Mrs. B. De Jong, of South Holland, with a daughter, Beth Ann, on September 24.

Mr. & Mrs. R. Boeve, of First in Holland, with a daughter, Jeanine Marie.

Mr. & Mrs. T. Mowery, of First in Holland, with a son, Alex John.

Mr. & Mrs. N. Meyer, of Hope, with a daughter, Annette Kay, on August 7.

Mr. & Mrs. L. Bertsch, of Hope, with a son, Jason Gene.

Mr. & Mrs. E. De Boer, of Hope, with a daughter, Marie Joy.

Mr. & Mrs. L. Meulenberg, of Hope, with a daughter, Julianne.

Mr. & Mrs. R. Buys, of Hull, with a son, Nathan Paul.

Mr. & Mrs. G. De Jong, of Hull, with a son, Grant Thomas.

Mr. & Mrs. D. Van Maanen, of Hull, with a son, Brent Evan.

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Mr. & Mrs. D. Mingerink, of Southeast, with a son, Richard Duane, on September 28.

Mr. & Mrs. P. Young, of Southeast, with a daughter, Susan Ann.

MARRIAGES:

Henry Kamps and Linda Hoekstra were joined in marriage on June 17.

David Schimmel and Michelle Miedema were joined in marriage September 9.

Dale Kraker and Ruth Haveman were joined in marriage September 15.

Bruce Westra and Laura Reekers were joined in marriage September 9.

David Carter and Julie Lamer were joined in marriage October 15.

Ken Feenstra and Glenyce Brummel were joined in marriage on June 16.

Jon Verduin and Jane Looyenga were joined in marriage October 8.

CONFESSION OF FAITH:

Elizabeth and Rachel Kamps made public confession of faith on September 18, in Hope Church.

Steve Holthouser made public confession of faith on October 2, in Loveland Church.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSFERS:

Hull Church received the paper of Mrs. Carol De Jong.

Southeast Church received the papers of Mr. and Mrs. P. Vander Vegte from our Southwest Church.

Hope received the papers of Mr. H. Kamps from our Southwest Church.

Hope received the papers of Mr. A. Van Dyke from our Redlands Church.

Southwest Church received the papers of Mrs. Glenyce Feenstra from our Edgerton Church.

Loveland Church received the papers of Mrs. Brian Dykstra (Carolyn) from our Faith Church.

First Church received the papers of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Van Putten.

At their request the membership papers of the following families were sent to their homes in order that they might become charter members of our new Byron Center Church; Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Booth and child, Mr. & Mrs. Art Knott, Mr. & Mrs. Don Knott and child, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Knott and children, Mr. & Mrs. James Koll, Mr. & Mrs. Larry Looyenga and children, Mr. & Mrs. Wm. Oomkes and children, Mr. & Mrs. Harry Rutgers Jr. and children. All from our First Church of Grand Rapids.

ACTIVITIES:

In September there was a Singspiration at Southwest Church.

On September 11 the Hope Heralds had a program at Hope Church.

In heaven, and earth, and air, and seas,
He executes His firm decrees;
And by His saints it stands confessed,
That what He does is ever blest.

Standard Bearer June 15, 1943