# BEACON LIGHTS

## FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

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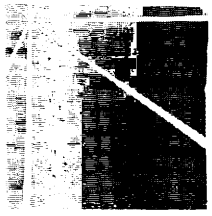
**Part II: Christians in the Soviet Union: Marked for Extinction**



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BEACON LIGHTS
c/o Roger King, 1651 Moelker Ave.
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**EDITORIAL OFFICE:** David Harbach
4930 Ivanrest Ave. S.W., Apt. B
Grandville, MI 49418

**NEWS EDITOR:** Paula Faber
4190 Burton S.E., G.R., MI 49506

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**SUBSCRIPTION DUES:**
MICHIGAN: Marcia Van Baren
6066 Wilson S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418

OUTSIDE Michigan: Brenda Holstege
7663 Bliss Court
Grandville, MI 49418

COLLECTIONS: Doug Dykstra
7928 Parklane, Jenison, MI 49428

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Editorial

# A HISTORY LETTER TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

**by John M. Faber**

Dear Grandchildren:

Every man or woman you see started life as a baby boy or girl. "Of course," you say. But when you look at your father or mother do you remember that they know what they are talking about when they teach you in the way that you should walk? They learned from their own experience what is good or bad for your welfare. In this letter I want you to look at the childhood of some of the familiar Bible characters. I said that every man started out as a baby, but there was one exception. Adam never experienced babyhood. He was directly made from earth material by the hand of God, his maker. And Adam's wife never was a baby, either, for she was made from one of Adam's ribs. First then, let's look back to Cain, Adam and Eve's firstborn.

CAIN was brought up by parents who had first-hand knowledge of God. They painfully knew of their fall into sin; their being driven out from the Garden of Eden; their punishment of hard labor; their private war with the cursed earth with its insect pests, and the cursed vegetation such as thorns and thistles to plague them. Oh, they surely knew what to teach Cain, and they most assuredly did, but Cain rejected their good counsel. He had rejected God's provision of animals for worship sacrifices, but Cain wanted to do his service his own way. He brought of the fruit of his work from the vegetable kingdom. And because God rejected that wicked substitution, and told Cain so, Cain also rejected God in every way.

ABEL at your age was taught by Adam, and as a boy he was obedient to him. He grew up to be a shepherd. Adam taught him that God must be worshiped with the sacrifice of an animal, shedding its blood as a type of the shedding of Christ's blood on the Cross. In his early youth he also learned that his sins, too, could only be forgiven by the shed blood. In the New Testament we find that Abel was a righteous man whose conduct was controlled by faith. When Abel's proper sacrifice was accepted by God, Cain became furious, and he killed his own brother, becoming the first murderer.

SETH was the baby God gave to Adam and Eve to take the place of Abel to be brought up as a covenant child. We know very little about his childhood except that he was a God-fearing boy who received a pious upbringing. That became very evident when he, himself, became a father, for he brought up his son, whom he named Enos, to be a God-fearing boy. Enos was the one who introduced the first public worship services, "calling upon the name of God;" even calling themselves "the people of God," in contrast to their

wicked unbelieving relatives.

NOAH - we have not learned much about his boyhood exeept how it ruled his life. You can well believe that his father, Enos, who led in public worship, also led his family in the way of the Lord. Little Noah was accustomed to attending "church" services along with his righteous uncles and aunts. When Noah was born the world was in a state of extreme wickedness. God said of that world that every imagination of the heart of almost everyone was evil continually. But Enos was given to know that his baby was to be a comfort to God's people, for he namd him, Noah, which means "comfort". Later Noah was known as a preacher of righteousness, giving comfort to God's people. The first comfort, or probably the greatest, was when God told Noah that in his preaching he could tell the people, God would never destroy the world again with a flood. The Bible tells us that "he walked with God". I believe that he did so in his very early age, as you, my grandchildren do. You also conduct yourselves as though God were walking at your side in "walking fellowship". The Bible records that "Noah found grace in the eves of God."

SHEM'S boyhood was in that time when the general population was steeped in evil, as we have already noted. So when little Shem came in from playing with the neighbor children, and copied their bad language and saying things about God that were not true, his mother probably had to wash his mouth out with soap to teach him that such uncleanness had to be washed out of his life. Much later, after the Flood, when his father fell into the sin of drunkenness. Shem's filial behavior was such that he received the blessing of God which promised him that the worship of the True God would remain in his family of descendants.

ABRAHAM'S birth was noteworthy in that his father, Terah, named his little baby by the name of Abram, which means, "exalted father." Wasn't it strange that a man would call a newborn baby by that name? In those early days men used proper names to be memorials of God's Word which was not yet in written form. The Apostle Peter, in his first Epistle explains that somewhat when he wrote, "The Spirit of Christ was in his people to look into the mystery of Christ who would die (be sacrificed) for his people." So now, Terah was given the insight that this baby would grow up to be the father of many nations, that he would be the exalted father of God's chosen family. The martyr, Stephen, in his famous dying sermon, told his persecutors that God called Abraham out of a heathen nation to be separated from them to head a separate people in a new place. In the Book of Joshua we learn that Terah's family served other gods. So God called Abraham out of that sphere of idolatry to serve the One Only True God.

ISAAC'S birth-story gives us many details. When his father, Abraham was 100 years old, and his mother, Sarah, was 90, two angels came to visit Abraham in his yard when he was sitting under a shade tree. The heavenly messengers came to tell Abraham and his wife that they, in their old age, would have a baby in a few months. Upon hearing that promise Abraham laughed questioningly, and Sarah, in the tent, laughed un-believingly. But when that promised son was born she confessed that God had provided laughter for her and her

friends. It was in commemoration of that joyful laughter that Abraham named the baby, Isaac, which in their language meant, "laughter."

When Isaac was still a boy he went with his father up a mountain path to worship their God with a sacrifice. On their quiet journey on the way Isaac noticed that his father had neglected to bring with him an animal for that sacrifice, and called his attention to it. When put to the question, his father could not bring himself to tell the boy that he was to be that sacrifice, but said, "God will provide a lamb". Upon arriving at the site, Isaac became aware of the awful truth that his father had been told by God that he must offer up his only son upon that altar. What a picture of God's only Son that was to be offered upon the cross! So Abraham tied his dearly beloved son on the altar, took up the knife, and was ready to plunge it into the heart of Isaac. At that very last moment God called to Abraham to put the knife down. Abraham's faith-test was now complete. God showed him a ram caught in a thicket to be sacrificed instead of his son. Truly, "God did provide!" Do you see the complete picture story now, children? In that same way, God our Father provided a sacrifice in our stead too. The faith of Abraham was tested, but notice that Isaac's faith was also tested. He meekly submitted to God's orders.

JACOB'S birth was more spectacular. Before he was born his mother, Rebecca, realizing that her pregnancy was different than usual because the coming twins "struggled within her," asked of God the meaning of this disturbance. God told her that the coming twins were to be the fathers of two nations who would always be at odds with one another. At that time God also told them that the younger (by a few minutes) would rule over the elder, and the most important part of the promise was that Jacob would be the covenant child to carry on the worship of the One Only True God.

MOSES' birth story is unique. At his very birth his life was threatened. It was at the time when the people of Israel were captive in the land of Egypt. Their birthrate was higher than that of the Egyptians and the king was afraid that his own people would be overcome by the Israelites, that he plotted to thwart that calamity. He ordered that all the boy babies of the Israelites had to be thrown in the Nile river to be drowned. Moses' mother was determined to save her baby from such cruel death. His mother was a woman of great faith who looked for the redemption of Israel. She thought that her child should become such a deliverer. But you know the story — how she made a watertight basket, placed him therein, put it in the water concealed by bullrushes, how he was rescued and brought to the castle to be taught in the best schools and university of Egypt. Under God's providence Moses' life was so ordered that he was able to lead God's people out of Egypt; now he could write the first five books of the Bible. But you know the whole story, and have learned that the extraordinary events surrounding his birth led to the preparation for the work determined for him.

SAMUEL'S birth was a direct promise of God to his sad mother who could have no children. She fasted and prayed that she might have a son, and if so she would dedicate that son to the service of Jehovah all his life. God answered her prayer, and when the

baby was old enough she weaned him and brought him to the temple for Eli and his wife to care for him. This pious couple gave him a Godfearing upbringing, teaching him the temple service, and a godly walk. While he was still a little boy God spoke to him audibly. During the night God called him by name. Samuel thought it was Eli calling him, but when this happened three times, Eli realized that it must be God who was calling the lad. Eil said that if he heard the voice again, Samuel was to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." That was the beginning of many conversations Samuel had with God. In that direct way God qualified him to be a prophet of great renown. Because of his close walk with God he became the chief authority of the land.

All the children we have been talking about were born before there was a Bible, and their parents were limited to the Word of God handed down from father to son and mother to daughter. So you boys and girls are much better equipped to walk with God. Your parents have the New Testament which begins with the Christmas story, the beginning of the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. It tells of the birth of the most important Boy that was ever born - our Lord Jesus Christ. His miracles testified of His deity and his death and resurrection tell you that your sins have been blotted out. And best of all, your parents can tell you of His Second Coming at the last day to take us up to heaven with all the rest of the saints. What a privilege you have above all those other children we have been considering! Of course we cannot imagine the boyhood of Jesus because we have never seen a sinless child. But you can imagine that He never had temper tantrums, never talked back to his parents; never disobeyed the household rules. You cannot imitate that perfect behavior, either, but you can see that when you behave sinfully against your parents you can see it for what it is: sin. Then you go to them and ask their forgiveness because you have already asked God's forgiveness. Are your nighttime prayers evidence of this? If you can say, yes, to that then you may know that He has adopted you as sons and daughters! Oh, I am so glad that you are my grandchildren!

Love, Gramps.

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The word "hitherto" seems like a hand pointing in the direction of the past. Twenty years or seventy, and yet "hitherto the Lord hath helped"! Through poverty, through wealth, through sickness, through health, at home, abroad, on the land, on the sea, in honor, in dishonor, in perplexity, in joy, in trial, in triumph, in prayer, in temptation, "hitherto the Lord hath helped us"!

But the word also points forward. For when a man gets to a certain mark, and writes "hitherto," he is not yet at the end; there is still a distance to be traversed. More trials, more joys; more temptations, more prayers;. . . O be of good courage, believer, and with grateful confidence raise thy "Ebenezer," for— 'He who hath helped thee hitherto will help thee all thy journey through.'

Spurgeon

Critique

# COPING WITH ANGER

by Ben Wigger

Today it is just impossible to avoid people, they are everywhere. And sometimes they are hard to get along with. If you are in school, your classes are full of them; and if you work, the same is true there. And sometimes as a result of this close contact, we become angry. Some people just rub us the wrong way. There are times when our feelings of anger can become extremely tense. We think we are offended, hurt, or taken advantage of by others. And the more we think about the particular situation, the angrier we get.

We all have to learn to cope with this emotional situation at one time or another. And if it is not properly dealt with, anger can become a damaging force, both to ourselves and to those God has placed around us. Let's take a closer look at this emotional force and see some of the ways we as Christians should consider and handle it.

Let's start by thinking of all the examples of anger that are found in the Bible. In fact, anger is about as old as the human race. Cain rose up in anger and killed his brother Abel. In anger Moses smote the rock while Israel was in the wilderness. The elder son angrily refused to go in to the feast his father has prepared for his younger brother. In anger Peter denied that he knew Jesus.

In almost every case anger is a very destructive force, both in us and in those around us. When we become angry, not only is our heart affected, but other organs of our body as well. Anger releases a powerful drug called adrenalin into the bloodstream causing our blood pressure to rise, the heart to beat faster, the eyes to dilate. Our hands become sweaty, our mouth becomes dry, and our muscles become tense. The person was right who said: "Every time we become angry we drive a nail into our own coffin".

Not only that, consider how those around you feel when you become angry. Perhaps you can't find your other tennis shoe. You storm around the house looking all over for it. And when you finally find it, get dressed, and leave, you have left the other family members extremely upset, maybe even in tears. Following a poor shot the golfer wraps his club around the nearest tree, embarrassing those he is with, to say nothing of the added expense of a new golf club. Or a glass of milk is accidentally spilled at the supper table and a child gets slapped across the face and is deeply hurt. Or you become angry for whatever reason, and you let loose an explosion of words that rip and tear everything and everybody within earshot. That is how anger works. It is a very serious evil which affects all of us. But it is also an evil which God tells us to put away. Anger is an evil which God lists

alongside of malice, blasphemy, adultery, idolatry, murder, and drunkenness. Gal. 5:20

Anger is a sign of emotional immaturity. We all can mature physically without much effort on our part, providing that we have a somewhat normal diet. This is not true spiritually or emotionally. We mature here only through growth in understanding, learning and in the development of proper attitudes. The trouble with those of us who are constantly flying off the handle is that we have never matured emotionally. Self-control and maturity take work, they don't come easy.

Anger is also a method that we use to dominate people. Children seem to learn this early in life. They throw temper tantrums to get their way. Adults who never grow up tend to do the same.

Anger is also a means of warfare. We use anger as a means of hurting people, of getting revenge. Pouting, for example, is one of anger's milder forms. It is used deliberately to make the other person wish he hadn't crossed us up. We use it as a means of punishing the offender.

Any one of us who intends to respect the rights and feelings of others and deal with them fairly does not need to resort to anger. Anything which can be accomplished by anger, if it's right, can be accomplished better by other means.

Maturity is the mark of a person who has his emotions firmly in hand. Immaturity is the mark of the person who becomes angry much too quickly. This is seen in the following passages of Scripture.

> "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger. . . . A wrathful man stirreth up strife, but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife. . . . He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Proverbs 15:1, 18 and 16:32.

Maturity, maturity, spiritual and emotional maturity is the overtone of the passages.

How can we overcome and handle this problem? For we have all sinned many times in this regard. First and most importantly we must confess it to God, and be ready to give it up totally. Any time we feel anger beginning to build, we should stop and pray asking God to give us the victory.

To the degree that we grow in maturity, to that degree we will experience victory over our anger and be able to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who despitefully use and persecute us.

We should never store up anger. We must learn to deal with the problems and irritations that we face on a daily basis. As Paul the apostle warns us: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath"; this prevents anger from building up on the inside.

We should also make every problem that we face a matter of prayer. We Christians confess that everything works together for our good. And God permits frustrating events to touch our lives to teach us patience and to help us grow. We should not miss those opportunities.

And it may also help to remember one more thing. No matter what we may think, no person has ever sinned against us more than we daily sin against God. And if He should mark our sins, who could stand? Yet God has forgiven us. Shouldn't we do the same?

# Current Events and Comments
# THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

by Ken Feenstra

As I was reading thru the year end '85 issue of U.S. News and World Report, I came across a reoccurring theme. The theme was "A Rekindled Spirit". This spirit is the American spirit. It is the spirit that says, "I am American and proud of it."

This spirit is also a 'Force that moves the World.' Ben Wattenberg's viewpoint of the same title has this to say.

> This is the "American Century" . . . It is our music people hear, our television they love and hate, our movies they see in theaters and on Japanese VCR's, our blue jeans that have revolutionized fashion. The American language, call it English if you must, is becoming the closest thing to a universal tongue. . .

Note how the American culture and language is such a powerful force. One could also easily show that America is the major economic power in the world.

Another interesting fact is, the world knows that what Wattenberg says is true. This causes them either to love (covet) or hate America.

Another quote from 'A Force that moves the World' really struck me with regards to this.

> Why are Americans principal targets for terrorism? Sometimes for reason of policy or ransom . . . But there is another rationale for terror directed at America. These are terrorists who want to change the global culture. If you believe that the modern world is corrupt, that the Great Satan has been unleashed and Satan believes in emancipation of women, sexy television, alcohol, literacy for the masses, political freedom for the masses - whom do you attack? If your target is modernism, you hit America. The terrorists believe quite correctly, that it is our culture that is regnant in this time. Their target is the American Century. In challenging it, they prove its existence.

Have these terrorists hit on something? Is this Great Satan possibly the Antichrist? Is the American cultural and economic empire the forerunner of the final Antichristian Kingdom?

Certainly we can see that America has become a great nation. Look at what we are as Americans; we are somebody. We are the epitome of what the world seeks after. Not only are we somebody, but we glory in being that somebody.

In another article from the same U.S. News issue, "For a Baby Born in 1986", John Lang and Ronald Taylor talk about the future and the many changes it will bring. What was especially interesting were the closing statements of this article.

> Yet for all the wonders in the future, Michael Smith still suffers from headaches, hangnails, indigestion, crime, taxation, mothers-in-law, and new products that don't work.
>
> And that's good. As a sociologist and futurist Wendel Bell of Yale University explains: "There will

be a certain amount of aggravation and grief, but that is what makes us dissatisfied enough to strive for better ways of doing things. That's why generation after generation will try to improve their lives, to do the improbable."

Not only do we glory in the image we have of ourselves, but we even glory in the grief and dissatisfaction this life brings. Do you understand what the above author is saying: Dissatisfaction is good because it drives us on, ah yes, it drives on the American Century and Spirit.

Christian friend, isn't this American Spirit (dream) your spirit or dream? Aren't you proud to be an American? Doesn't dissatisfaction spur you on in this dream?

Christian friend, if your answer is also yes, let's consider together whether we are truly walking and meditating as Christians.

Listen to the word of God with regards to the American Spirit:

> Vanity, Vanity, saith the Preacher, Vanity of Vanities, All is vanity. (Eccl. 1:2 KJV)
>
> And I saw that all labor and achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless (vanity), a chasing after the wind (vexation of spirit). (Eccl. 4:4 NIV)

And upon viewing all that he (King Solomon) has done in life this is what he says:

> I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.
>
> Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. (Eccl. 2:10 & 11 KJV)

What a contrast there is between man's (our) viewpoint and the Lord's!

Man sees his greatness, selfishness and strivings as good. He loves the curse he lives under and even uses dissatisfaction as a motivation, a drive to fill his desires. God sees these things as simply vanity.

Then how do we correctly and properly find satisfaction in our labors? What keeps us from despair of such emptiness? The Preacher seems to mock everything we hold precious, even hard work and achievement.

Hear the Preacher further:

> There is nothing better for a man, than, that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that is was from the hand of God.
>
> For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? (Eccl. 2:24, 25 KJV)

You can see from this passage that work isn't empty, but something to be enjoyed. But note the most important ingredient: God. Without God all our achievements are vain, the product of sinfulness and depravity. Fortunately for God's people He shows us what we are (miserable) and works in us salvation, the fruit of which is a broken heart. A heart that cries, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." And He does have mercy. Out of hopelessness and emptiness comes hope and true meaning to life.

Now we can see our misery as Americans. The grief and dissatisfaction we experience will be used by God to bring us closer to Him. Therefore our earthly dissatisfaction, instead of pushing us on to become enveloped in the American dream, pushes us to find

peace and contentment in the hands of God; making us strangers in America.

I would like to close with the words of Paul in Phil. 4:4-7.

> Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

# From the Pastor's Study
# FRUITFUL BRANCHES

**by Rev. D. H. Kuiper**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." John 15:1, 2

For some time now we have been examining the life of the young saint Joseph, from the double point of view that he is an example for the youth of the church today and that he stood in the Old Dispensation as a beautiful type of the coming Christ. Joseph was the Beloved Son, the Despised Brother, the Slandered Alien, the Prophetic Captive, the Prince of Life, and the Exalted Lord. In all this history the young man was "a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough whose branches run over the wall", even as his father Jocob had prophecied (Gen. 49:22). The question we want to face with you now is this: Are we fruitful branches?

Do we find it easy to serve the Lord and walk worthy of our calling? Perhaps you say it's not so hard to serve the Lord; we don't live in a country where there is fierce persecution, our government doesn't outlaw church services, prayer, and Christian schools. It's easy to serve the Lord! But the conscientious child of God knows that overt persecution is only a small part of the difficulty. He knows that the battle is against sin which knows no national boundaries, it is against the devil who needs no passport, and it is against unbelief and corruption even as those things cleave to him! In whatever land they live, Christians have crosses to bear, battles to fight, weighty duties and obligations to fulfill. Surely the life of Joseph as recorded in the book of Genesis makes that clear.

The reason why the life of the child of God is so fraught with suffering, opposition, disappointment, and affliction is ultimately a divine reason. Whatever the reasons the devil, demons, and wicked men have for doing what they do to the church, God, Who is sovereign over all the enemy, has His reason as well. God chastens us, God corrects us, God teaches us reliance upon Him as our Help and our

Strength, God sanctifies us and weans us away from the world. In the text quoted above the reason Jesus gives is that God purges every fruitful branch that it may bring forth more fruit.

Let's identify several elements in the passage. First, Christ says that He is the vine; all the millions of grape vines on this earth are but pictures of Christ Who is "the true vine." Secondly, God is the husbandman, or to use present day language, the nurseryman or the horticulturist. The Father of Christ has a vine which He has planted, for which He cares, and from which He expects abundant fruit. Thirdly, there are branches in the vine. These branches are of two types as we'll see later, but here we will simply mention that the branches represent the church of Christ, the generations of believers, who are grafted into Christ by the living bond of faith. (See Lord's Day VII and John 15:5) Finally, the passage speaks of fruit and the bringing forth of fruit; in fact, this is the main idea of Jesus in the passage. We read of this in verses 2, 3, 5 and 8 because the husbandman is interested in fruit. Why else would He plant a vineyard and care for it so faithfully? The emphasis of the passage is not upon the branches, not even upon Christ, but the emphasis falls on the fruit which Christ, through the branches, produces. Christ is the means in God's hand whereby He saves a people, in order that they might bring forth fruits of thanksgiving and praise to Him! All the Scriptures make clear that this is the purpose of the vineyard, the purpose of the church, and the purpose of her salvation. The greatest question is not, Are we saved? Are we going to heaven? The all-important question is, Are we **now**, and will we one day **in heaven**, bring forth well-pleasing fruit unto God? Do we live out of Christ, do we partake of His strength and nourishment spiritually, as does a branch out of the root and fatness of the vine? A vine is worthless without grapes, so is a church or a Christian worthless without fruit!

What are these fruits for which the divine Husbandman looks? Briefly, they are all things that are included in the fear and worship of God. The apostle Paul speaks of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Spiritual fruits are those good works which God has prepared for us to walk in: seeking the things which are above, confession of and sorrow over sin, trusting in God each day, keeping His commandments, being faithful in personal devotions. Where there is fruit upon the branches of Christ's vine, you may find humble submission to God's will, a hatred of sin and deceit and corruption, and a manful attempt to live a new and godly life. And not only does Jesus say that there is fruit in the life of the Christian, but very strongly He states that there **must be** fruit. It is not simply the case that God doesn't **like** or doesn't **want** unfruitful branches; He doesn't **have** them either! God always performs His good pleasure. Take note of verse 2 once more: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he (God) taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." God desires, and receives, fruit unto Himself!

In line with that, Jesus speaks of two kinds of branches: not of dead and living branches (though that is true in the deepest sense), but of fruitful and barren branches. It doesn't make any

difference what the type of soil or what the variety of vine, there are always some branches in the vineyard that are without fruit. There are always shoots (sometimes called suckers) growing out of the vine or out of other branches which have the appearance of true branches, but they never yield any fruit. Really, that's the only way you can tell the useless from the useful; this matter of fruit. What does the vine-grower do with those unfruitful branches? He takes his pruning knife, goes up and down the rows, and cuts off every one of them!

Now Jesus is saying that there are such fruitless branches in the church as she exists as an institute in this world. Of course, these branches were never really **in Christ**. If they were grafted into Him by faith, how could they ever fall from that faith, which is a gift of grace? No, they were members of the church outwardly. They went to church, but were not really **of** the church. Just as all citizens of this country are called Americans, even though some may not have any heart for this country, just as the whole plant of corn is called corn while we know only the kernel is corn, so with the church: all those belonging to her outwardly bear the name that its true heart and nucleus has. They are not all Israel that are called Israel.

Although Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that "by their fruits ye shall know them", He does not mean that we are to be judges of one another in this, nor that we can know these things absolutely. (In Matt. 7:15-20 Jesus speaks in the context of false teachers.) But the heavenly Husbandman **does** have perfect understanding of this matter of fruit. He allows for no barren branches in His vineyard, and therefore He takes them away! He cuts them off! This may come to pass when the church is brought into persecution and hardship; then the false branches leave! This takes place through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. When preaching is according to the whole counsel of God, without compromise, and distinctive according to our confessions, then fruitless branches are cut off! And this can happen, this taking away, by means of the discipline of the church, which ends, unless there is repentance, in cutting off or excommunication.

But let's not lose sight of the fact that there are branches which **do** bring forth much fruit. I know, there is a great deal of difference in these branches; some bring forth abundantly and some bring forth with scarcity. For there are the strong in faith and the weak in faith. There are those who reveal the power of God's grace in their lives powerfully, and others who manifest the life of Christ very weakly due to unfaithfulness and backsliding. Without exception, on these also, the Husbandman Who is God operates with His pruning knife. Unfruitful branches are cut off entirely; fruitful branches are pruned, shaped, and formed, strikingly by the same knife!

Have you ever seen a vineyard that has been pruned? A pathetic sight, really. There in the corner of the field is a large pile of useless branches, and then if you look up and down the rows you find that the living branches have been cut back and trimmed! It looks all wrong! But the owner of the vineyard knows that pruning causes the vine to put forth more grapes. Are you fruitful branches?

"My Father is the husbandman!" God purges His people! The reason why we as Christians often bring forth

so little fruit is that our flesh is present with us, and is against us. The flesh is not interested in fruit unto God, but only in the gratification of itself. Foolishly we occupy ourselves with, and pursue, those things which shall go up in the flame! And when God purges us, O, how that hurts the flesh! But God's knife makes no mistakes; the flesh must go down, it must be cut off, if we are to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance and consistent with the life of the Vine in us.

This purging takes place, also, through the preaching of the Word of God, that mighty two-edged Sword! True preaching condemns sin, commands repentance, and calls to obedience. Such purging goes on whenever the Word of God is faithfully preached. Young people must know that about the preaching of the Gospel. Does your minister sometimes step on your toes? As he is preaching along on a certain text, does he say some things occasionally (or often) that make you a bit uncomfortable, that come powerfully close to home? Does the Spirit of Grace say to you, during and after the preaching, **that's you**! Be thankful for that kind of preaching! God is addressing you and purging you that you may bring forth more fruit!

But you say, "Purging hurts!" Yes it does! For the flesh, the ways of God are always difficult. Do you remember the question we asked at the beginning? Is it easy for you to serve God? in the kingdom of God, where the Christian serves, the flesh is of no account! It has to go under. It has to **go**. Let it go! The only thing that matters is that there be abundant fruit unto the heavenly Husbandman whose vineyard we are! It may seem to us that we are doing our utmost for the Lord, then God purges us and shows us that He demands even more. It may seem only the weak in faith need this purging, and then God purges the strong in faith, as He did with faithful Job. From the natural point of view, our life is labor and sorrow. But from the spiritual point of view, it is purging and purifying. And remember, child of God, bringing forth fruit unto God is a little bit of heaven!

One question remains. Why does pruning of a vine bring forth more fruit? Wouldn't many branches bring forth more fruit than fewer branches?

The answer is that with pruning the branches are forced to draw their life sap from the vine as never before, and in that way they become stronger and more productive. Young people as well as adults are always inclined to imagine that they are strong and have need of nothing! Then God brings us under His wise pruning and preaching. **Then** we see our sin and weakness; **then** we cling to Christ our only Hope, as never before. Then we draw from Him, as branches out of the vine, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption! When we are thoroughly purged and comfortless, we live the truth that our only comfort in life and death is Jesus Christ!

God will continue His work in us until the day of Jesus Christ. Throughout the ages He is tending His vine. One day, when the eternal day dawns, we will see a beautiful vine, with many branches, loaded with precious fruit. There will be a host of worshipping, obedient, humble children who have learned that all things are for their heavenly Father. "Herein is my father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit." (John 15:8)

# Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention: 1986

by Rev. David Engelsma

The 46th annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention, hosted by the young people of South Holland, IL will be held from Monday, July 28, through Friday morning, August 1, in South Holland and on the campus of Valparaiso University, in Valparaiso, IN.

All Conventioneers will register at the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland (16511 South Park Ave.) on Monday, from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM. The first speech will be given in the auditorium of the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland. Activities are planned in the area for the evening. The young people will spend the night in the homes of the congregation.

On Tuesday morning, the Convention will move, by bus, to the campus of Valparaiso University. Valparaiso University is located at U.S. 30 and Route 49 in Valparaiso, IN, some 40 miles southeast of South Holland. This large (310 acres), lovely campus, associated with the Lutheran Church, has all the facilities necessary for a Convention—modern residence halls; meeting rooms; a chapel; and leisure time facilities, including those for tennis, basketball, softball, bowling, billiards, swimming, jogging, and many other activities.

The Convention theme is "Being Reformed in 1986: Heritage and Calling." Our purpose is that, by God's mercy, the young people will be reminded of their glorious heritage- the Reformed Faith- and will be stirred up to an energetic carrying out of the calling that comes to them with this heritage. Rev. M. Kamps, Rev. B. Gritters, and Rev. J. Slopsema will develop and apply the theme in three speeches on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings. By means of discussion groups, the young people will be able to respond to the speeches and to learn from each other. (The topics of the discussion groups appear elsewhere in this issue.)

We are making a special appeal this year to our older young people (young adults)—high school graduates and older, into the 20's—to attend the Convention. Many (unfortunately, we think) have dropped out of Young People's Society and the Convention; and we are urging them to "drop in," again. We are planning certain activities for them, by themselves, as well as separate discussion groups for them.

Everyone attending the Convention, without exception, must register. A pre-registration form can still be obtained by calling us at (312) 895-8549 or (312) 596-3113.

Adults who might desire to stay in the area during the Convention are invited to call us, to try to arrange lodging for them (campground, motel, etc.). We will do what we can to help.

Our one, great goal with the Convention is the glory of our Holy

God, in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we require all who come to have this purpose in their hearts. We expect godly behavior of every Conventioneer. Everyone must know and be determined to keep the few, basic rules that appear on the pre-registration form; and parents ought to impress upon their sons and daughters that they obey them.

See you in South Holland?

# Discussion Groups at the 1986 Convention

**by Rebecca A. Engelsma**

The Protestant Reformed Young People's Society of South Holland, IL is planning discussion groups around three, main topics, each of which is related to one of the three speeches. Our intention is that the groups be divided by age—high school students in one set of groups, and high school graduates and older in the other set of groups. All will be discussing the same topics.

The first topic for discussion (relating to the first speech) will be "The Calling of Protestant Reformed Youth to **Learn** the Heritage of Reformed Truth."

-Dangers we ought to guard against: apathy; anti-intellectualism; laziness; earthly-mindedness; not listening to the sermons or catechism instruction; not attending Young People's Society; not studying for Young People's Society; not reading; wasting time watching television.

-What is necessary: solid doctrinal preaching; good catechism-teaching; active participation in Bible study at Society; good reading habits (not only the magazines—**Beacon Lights, The Standard Bearer**, and others [how many read our magazines regularly?], but also religious books—theology, church history, devotional, etc.).

-Bible passages to consider: Psalm 119; Acts 17:11; Eph. 4:14, 15; I Tim. 4; II Tim. 3, 4; Rev. 2:1-7.

The second topic (relating to the second speech) will be "As to a Reformed Use and Enjoyment of Music."

-By the Congregation: exclusive Psalm-singing; the exclusion of choirs and soloists from the worship services; the place of choral societies in the organic life of our churches; organ accompaniment of the singing in worship; enthusiastic singing; is our **Psalter** the best version of the Psalms available to us?

-By the covenant young person,

individually: the real, prevalent evil of worldly, antichristian music (popular, country, and rock); the enjoyment of good music—what about classical?; singing at home, in the school choir, in the church choral society; the effects of bad music on the listener; the effects of good music.

-Bible passages to consider: Psalms 92, 95, 96. 98; Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16; James 5:13; Rev. 5:8-14; Rev. 14:1-5; Rev. 15:1-4.

The third topic (relating to the third speech) will be "The Comfort of Friendship among Young People in the Church."

-Problems: the misery of loneliness and isolation; temptations that threaten friendship, e.g., cliques (also at the Convention).

-Positively: the importance of friendship; basis of friendship in unity of doctrine and agreement in a holy walk; aspects of friendship, e.g., caring, help, support, conversation, etc.; need to show oneself friendly; how to express friendship towards one walking in sin.

-Bible passages to consider: I Sam. 18:1-4 and I Sam. 20; Prov. 18:24; Amos 3:3; I Cor. 12.

We ask that all the young people prepare themselves to discuss these topics. Look up the passages; be ready to defend your view on these matters; do some reading in articles and books that deal with these things. By lively, informed discussion, we can get to know each other, and the Truth, better. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17).

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Creatures, like deceitful streams, frustrate the thirsty travellers expectations. They delude us, like the monument of Semiramis, with many a promising motto, as if they would give peace and ease of heart; but when we come to look within, instead of contentment, they afforded us nothing but the conviction of our folly in expecting satisfaction from them, or from anything short of God.

A. Toplady

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Oh! happy are they who die in the Lord; they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. We would not shun toil, for though it be in itself a curse, it is, when sanctified, a blessing; yet toil for toil's sake we would not choose. And when God's work is done, we are too glad to think that our work is done too. The mighty Husbandman, when we have fulfilled our day, shall bid His servants rest upon the best of beds, for the clods of the valley shall be sweet to them. Their repose shall never be broken until He shall rouse them up to give them their full reward. Guarded by angel-watchers, curtained by eternal mysteries, resting on the lap of mother earth, they shall sleep on, heirs of glory, till the fulness of time shall bring them the fulness of redemption.

(Gleaning Among the Sheaves, Spurgeon)

# CHRISTIANS IN THE SOVIET UNION: MARKED FOR EXTINCTION PART II

**by Sarah Ondersma**

Even though it may not seem like it, there are some beneficial aspects of suffering. Suffering may be a sign of God's favor and trust in the Christian to whom the trial is permitted to come. One Christian in Russia said that it "seems that God has selected the church for a special assignment - suffering. Knowing this, of course does not mean that our sufferings are not agonizing. But it does provide healing and redemption in our sufferings."15

In camps under persecution, prisoners become deeply religious people. The discovery of spiritually compatible souls reinforces their own faith. Endless hours of conversation take place to tell of their own spiritual experiences, resulting in a strengthened bond with other Christians. One leader says that they learned that they can live without church structures but not without other Christians.16

Suffering and triumph are closely related. During suffering, the congregations give themselves completely to Christ and see the victory in Christ. The churches know the worth of God's Word and Christ, Who was raised from the dead and Who will return again. Even in prison God is inspiring radiant hope in their hearts that Christ is unconquerable and will return.

One significant result from suffering is the sharpening of spiritual perceptions and the clarifying of spiritual priorities. Another is the increased awareness of the power of prayer. Under suffering, the churches realize their feebleness and weaknesses. The constant analysis and appreciation of what Christ means to them - in order not to yield to temptation - brings the suffering believers closer to Christ than ever before. They really begin to know what Christ means to them. They begin to know, as never before, the love of God.17

One works better and accomplishes more when there is opposition than when everything is easy. Those Eastern Christians have a tremendous possibility of witnessing, worshipping, and serving the Lord! The terrible part is that millions have to live and undergo this cruel Communist system.

In the West, as Christians we have never been forced to become aware of the cost of belief. How much have we really suffered for our faith? Those Christians in Russia have suffered; "and their words and witness have an intensity and hope which make most of what passes for Christianity in the

15 "A Salvation of Suffering: The Church in the Soviet Union," **Christianity Today**, vol. 26, 1982, p. 20.

16 **Ibid.**, p. 20.

17 Rev. Haralan Popov and Rev. L. J. Bass, **Torture and Triumph in a Communist Prison** (Glendale: Underground Evangelism, 1967), p. 46.

West look pale and shallowly rooted."18 Through the Christians in the Iron Curtain, Western Christians can learn about suffering for the Bible. The persecuted churches have ". . . endured prolonged, unparalled persecution, and this experience of sustained suffering can provide instruction to the church everywhere."19

When we suffer a little trouble or persecution, by looking at their example of stedfast faith we can also learn to be the same way. We can realize how little we suffer after all.

Many people will raise the argument that this persecution is not a big problem. It is larger than it seems because the Russian government covers up a lot of the persecution so it is not known to the world. At conferences the Soviet Union tries everything possible to cut down the time to be spent discussing human rights.

Some people then will argue that evangelists like Billy Graham come back from Russia with all these reports of the freedom of religion and that it's not as bad as some say. This is not true, for Billy Graham is a hoax and the U.S.S.R. through Graham was pretending to demonstrate religious tolerance. Rushing from one appointment to another, Graham saw only what the authorities wanted him to see. Not only this, but it seems like Graham said only what his hosts wanted him to say. Graham said that believers who refuse to register with the state are likely to have "difficulties." The congregations of the churches Graham entered consisted of one third KGB agents, one third international participants in the disarmament conference, and one third older women.20

In one church when a woman draped a banner over the balcony that said, "We have more than 150 prisoners for the work of the gospel" and was subsequently hauled away, Graham just explained, "We detain people in the U.S. if we catch them doing things wrong."21 Director Jerry Goodman of the National Conference of Soviet Jewry called Graham's remarks ". . . a disservice to Jews and Christians who are being persecuted in the Soviet Union."22

Maybe the things he said were not so bad but the problem lies with the things Graham **didn't** say. Graham ignored the persecution subject because he didn't want to embarrass his hosts. Another reason why he didn't say anything about Soviet religious oppression is because then he wouldn't have further possibilities to preach in the U.S.S.R. "There's something wrong when in order to preach the gospel you turn your back on those who live the gospel."23 Graham betrayed the religious people in Russia. "Graham should have spoken out firmly, clearly, and specifically against religious repression in the Soviet Union,

18 J. Garvey, "The Trial of V. Poresh," **Commonweal**, vol. 110, 1983, p. 137.

19 "A Salvation of Suffering: The Church in the Soviet Union," **Christianity Today**, vol. 26, 1982, p. 19.

20 William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Irreverent Dr. Graham," **National Review** 34 (1982) :718.

21 "Questionable Mission to Moscow," **Time**, 1982, p. 60.

22 "The Russia that Billy Graham Saw," **U.S News and World Report**, vol. 92, 1982, p. 6.

23 "Graham in the Soviet Union: He Takes it on the Chin from the Press. Is Religious Freedom Relative?," **Christianity Today**, vol. 26, 1982, p. 49.

and he should have done it publicly."24 Graham was an "unwitting prophet of Soviet propaganda."25

Graham is not helping the people that are being persecuted and need help. Six people were seeking immigration to any land that would let them have religious freedom. They sought a visit from Billy Graham but he actually refused. Finally, Graham consented to go and pray with them but there were to be no reporters or photographers and there were to be curtains. After Graham left, one of the six was physically sick, (she had dared to hope that Graham would intercede for them).26 Many people who have tried to tell the story of how life is in the U.S.S.R. should and probably do feel the same way.

When these false evangelists, such as Graham, take trips behind the Iron Curtain, they do not raise their voices in objection to the suppression. By **not** raising their voices on behalf of the suffering millions, these leaders participate in and are guilty of suppression.

The first reaction of people when they hear about these suffering Christians is that they are glad they do not have to go through this. Then some people like to know how they can ease the situation. We must be aware that we can be used to help the many Christian prisoners and their families who need aid. Just a simple card sent to a prisoner or a family would provide the Soviet authorities with evidence of the publicity these prisoners have received and could help alleviate a prisoner's situation. There are organizations which have been formed to send aid and Christian literature to these needy people. Two of these are The Society of St. Stephen and Jesus to the Communist World, Inc. Write to me for further information concerning these organizations.

Because there is a great lack of Bibles and Christian literature, one work of organizations is to distribute the needed materials throughout the U.S.S.R. Churches with 200-300 people do not possess one single Bible. Bibles are selling on the black market for more than $100. This shows that Russians are willing to invest their hard earned money to obtain a copy of the Word of God, giving it priority over most material things.27 Believers do get Bibles. The Christians in Russia do not ask for much, they just need the tools (Bibles. . .) to work with. We must not abandon these people and forget about them. We must offer support to these Christians.

The believers are risking their lives by writing and signing their names to petitions sent to the government and world. This is the only way to be heard and they want help which is not available. These believers desperately need to be upheld by the believers in the West. The human rights stand taken by the U.S. and our government is rather profitable and important concerning the Christians in Russia. We should show everyone that we care and will not forget. This can be done by showing the Soviet officials the price of such behavior. The arrange-

24 "How the Press Got it Wrong in Moscow," **Christian Century**, 1982 :718.

25 "Questionable Mission to Moscow," **Time**, vol. 119, 1982, p. 60.

26 William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Irreverent Dr. Graham," **National Review** 34 (1982) :718.

27 Thomas W. Klewin, "Communism Just Can't Win This Battle," **Good News Broadcaster**, 1979, p. 19.

ments the Soviets make with the U.S. depends on the support in Congress from the U.S. people. This kind of persecution should end that possibility of support.28 American support does help. Pastor Georgi Vins says from personal experience, "Whenever there was support action in the West I was treated better by wardens and prison administrators. When there was no support, conditions immediately became worse."29 A few letters to our congressmen would make a great deal of difference.

The most simple and most important kind of help is prayer. We must share the griefs, and help the churches bear the heavy cross. Those Christians who remain stedfast amidst all the persecutions deserve our prayers. Offering our prayers is the least we can do for our fellow saints. As Richard Wurmbrand says, "One third of the world is entitled to one third of your prayers, of your concerns, of your gifts. . . . In prison I saw men with 50 lb. chains at their feet, praying for America. But in America you seldom hear in a church a prayer for those in chains in Communist prisons."30 Take heed to the words of Hebrews 13:3, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." Let us remember our fellow saints in all of our prayers and with our gifts.

28 Anthony Lewis, "Soviets Stepping Up Suppression of Judaism," **The Grand Rapids Press.**

29 Richard Shumaker, "Vins at Wheaton," **Eternity**, 1979, p. 23.

30 Sabina Wurmbrand, **The Pastor's Wife** (New York: The John Day Company, 1970) p. 212.

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# HIDDEN BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

(You should find at least 34 books hidden here)

While motoring in Palestine, I met Chief Mejud gesturing wildly. His fez, raiment and features were odd. I never saw so dismal a chief. On market days he pumps alms from everyone, a most common practice. A glance shows that he acts queerly. Excuse me for speaking so, but he was showing a crowd how they used revel at Ionian bouts and the brew seemed bad. A Fakir was seated on a hummock minus hose and shirt, and wearing as comic a hat as they make. He pointed up eternally towards a rudely carved letter J on a high cliff. His uplifted hand was stiff and numb. Erstwhile he held it, thus for several days. My companion excitedly cried; "See that J? Oh! now I know we are near the ancient Ai. Was this Ai a holy place?" "From answers given elsewhere, I'll say not." We asked the age of the big stone J. "O eleven centuries at least." O know that such a jam escort was necessary. Besides, our car was stuck in a rut here. So, leaving the sedan, I elbowed my way near the Fakir. A toothless hag gained access to his side and paused to rest herself. She hinted, "You have a treasure?" To which I retorted, "Not I moth, you know that rust corrupts earthly stone?" Mejud expressed a wish to accompany us, but I decreed: "Thy party we will not annex, O dusky chief. I am at the work of tracing a cargo of lost tobacco. That is my job." To the chiefs expression of sorrow over the tobacco loss I answered, "It would have all gone up in smoke anyway." My brother is a tramp B.S. from Harvard Tec. His name is Eugene. Sister is nursing him now. He asked; "where is the prodigal at?" I answered that it would be correct to use it that way but the flu kept Eugene at home this year. It really is too bad - I, a home-body roaming the Orient; and he a tramp, at home in bed.

**46th Annual**
**Protestant Reformed**
**Young People's Convention**
July 28 - August 1, 1986
At South Holland, IL &
Valparaiso University
(U.S. 30 and Route 49 in Valparaiso, IN)
**Theme:** Being Reformed in 1986:
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**Speakers:** Rev. M. Kamps
Rev. B. Gritters
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