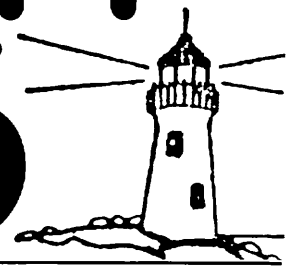
BEACON LIGHTS



FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

DECEMBER 1990

May our celebration of Christmas this year remind us of two truths. First, let it remind us of the marvelous grace of God, Who provided for us unworthy sinners, salvation in the Person of His only-begotten Son. And second, may it remind us that this Christ Who was born in the fullness of time will come again . . . soon, when all things are ripe for His coming. Then we will receive fully the salvation Christ has already merited for us on the cross.

From "Preparing The Church For Christmas"
by Rev. Bruinsma.

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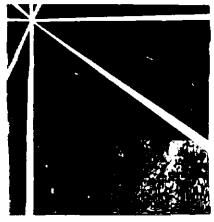

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EDITOR'S NOTES DECEMBER 1990

by
David Harbach

At this time of the year, with the world spewing forth its putrid stream of commercialism all in the name of Santa, and the perversion of the birth of Christ all in the name of Christmas, no wonder some of us might take the heartfelt attitude "Let's do away with the celebration of Christmas, lest we practice that which is founded on the imaginations of men'." Rev. Bruinsma, pastor in First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan has written a very enlightening article on why our Reformed pastors prepare the church to celebrate the birth of Christ. With the correct motivation, Christmas as celebrated by the church is for her benefit.

When the staff decided that the second feature article for the month of December should be on the Christian's responsibility to the environment we had no idea that Sarah Ondersma had taken a summer course at Au Sable Institute that dealt with our attitude and responsibility towards the environment based on biblical principles. We thank Sarah for providing us "The World We Live In, Naturally" which is a look into her personal experience at Au Sable and what she learned about the creation that God has made us to be stewards over.

Think of a tavern at five o'clock

in the morning. The air is filled with the stench of liquor and smoke. Men and women are staggering about and some lie under the table in drunken stupor. This is not a pleasant scene and neither is its comparison to the world of lawlessness of our day and age. Once again, Rev. C. Hanko provides a vivid and informative article on "Lawlessness."

The battle wages on in Prof. Hanko series on "To Lose The Battle And Win The War: Chapter III - The Issues In The Battle (4)." You will be amazed at how Dr. Janssen explained away miracles such as the falling of the walls of Jericho, water bursting from the rock that Moses struck, and the sun and moon standing still at Joshua's command, by purely natural explanations. The false view of miracles is a result of Janssen's false views of inspiration.

Mr. Engelsma answers two questions. What is the difference between obedience and honor to my parents? Isn't there a time when I honor my parents but do not have to obey them, e.g., when I move out of the house? His answer to these questions will probably surprise you. We encourage our young people to write questions for Mr. Engelsma to respond to. Don't let this golden opportunity slip by to write questions to and read the heartfelt answers of a wise elder. Send your questions or letters for Mr. Engelsma to Beacon Lights P.O. Box 375 Jenison, Michigan 49427.

Mrs. Brands provides us with Letter #9 Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, "God Plans Each Detail Of Our Lives." In this issue we study faith's response to meaning in labor and the beautiful doctrine of God's sovereignty.

With the emphasis in political elections on the issue of abortion, we do well to consider whether or not organizations such as Right To Life are correct in their understanding of the vileness of abortion. Karen Hanko looks into this organization and its stated purpose. May we be benefited by this information so that we discern those organizations that are worthy of our support with prayer, time and monies.

Lora Bouwkamp has been keeping up to date on the Church News through October. We remind our reader that the news from our churches is only as up to date as our bulletin clerks send in the bulletins from our churches.

At our last staff meeting we reluctantly received the resignation of Lisa Langerak (Van Koevering) who handled your subscription if you were from the state of Michigan. The staff knows that we have lost a major worker and planner in Lisa. Those of you who know Lisa and her encouraging spirit understand why we are sorry to see her leave the staff. Virtuous young women are few in number and Lisa is one of them. We thank Jehovah for providing the Beacon Lights with a highly motivated and spiritually mature member for the last several years. We pray for God's blessing on Lisa and her new life as the faithful wife of John Langerak.

Replacing Lisa is going to be difficult. But as God takes away so He also provides for the loss. Such godly provision is seen in Angie DeZwarte, who will be the new subscription manager for the Michigan area. Welcome to the staff, Angie! We look forward to your contributions as we plan each issue.

PREPARING THE CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS

by Rev. W. Bruinsma

How do I, a minister of the Gospel, having my roots in the Reformation (in particular the Reformation under John Calvin) prepare my congregation for the celebration of Christmas? At first I felt that such a question placed me in somewhat an awkward position; especially considering that John Calvin among other prominent Reformers encouraged a rejection of Christmas along with all the other holy days sanctioned and celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church. Now, here I am being asked, how do I prepare the church to celebrate this occasion? This prompted me to do a little more research into the whole subject of the celebration of Christmas in order to give a proper answer to the question asked.

Rev. Gerald Vanden Berg in his rubric of the Standard Bearer, "Decency and Order" (volume 38, p. 114) cites the reasons our Reformed fathers felt the celebration of Christmas ought to be abolished in the church.

It was not that the Reformed fathers felt that the celebration of these days was in itself wrong but they favored setting them aside for these reasons: (1) These days are institutions of men but not God. There is no injunction in the Word of God requiring the church to observe them. (2) These days tend to force aside the Sabbath and cause it to lose some of its significance. It is more important that the proper commemoration of the Sabbath be retained than anything else. If these special days detract from it in any way it is better that they be abolished. (3) These days tend toward looseness of morals and heathen modes of feasting.

Now, rather than simply giving these reasons a wave of the hand and simply going our merry way, we ought to give them some serious consideration. One need only to look around us today at the way Christmas is being celebrated by many in the church world and it is not hard to see that our Reformed church fathers were correct in their assessment.

There is no evidence that Christ's birth was celebrated by the Apostolic and early post-Apostolic church. This celebration began, as close as one can tell, in the fourth or fifth centuries when the Roman Catholic Church began to formulate its religious calender of holy days. At that time the church felt that just as the nation of Israel had celebrated festal days throughout the year so also should the New Testament church celebrate certain days throughout the year. So the church set itself to the

task of dividing the year into days and seasons in which were to be celebrated various events that took place in the life of Jesus (e.g. His birth, passion week, death, resurrection, ascension, etc.). Christmas was one such holy day. It along with the other special holy days were sanctioned by the church, that is, they were declared sacred and therefore a binding part of Christian worship. If one would not keep the celebration of these days they were declared accursed!

The date for the celebration of Christmas, December 25, was made to coordinate with the Roman pagan holiday of Saturnalia and Brumalia. This pagan holiday was meant to celebrate the shortest day of the year (Brumalia) followed by the beginning of the lengthening of days (Saturnalia). The celebration of Christmas therefore, was confused with this pagan festival. This did not seem to disturb however, the majority of the laity. The pagan festival with its riot and merry-making was so popular that Christians were glad for an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner." (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Volume 3, p. 48).

To corrupt the celebration of Christ's birth even more the Romish Church declared that on that day there be a special celebration of the mass. We need not go into a description of the "popish mass" and its error since we do this every time we study Lord's Day 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism. But it was on account of this special celebration of the mass on this day that it became known as Christmas (Christ - mass).

We can well understand why the early Reformers wanted to do away with these man-made celebrations of the Roman Catholic Church! They represented practices which were "founded on the imaginations or institutions of men!" ("Heidelberg Catechism", Lord's Day 33, Q and A 91); and were, therefore, exemplary of the work-righteousness of the Romish Church!

So why then do we celebrate Christmas? What would I as a Reformed preacher attempt to prepare the church for a celebration of this sort?

Because the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches requires it of me. Article 67 reads:

The churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, the Day of Prayer, the National Thanksgiving Day, and Old and New Year's Day.

Monsma and Van Dellen in their Church Order Commentary (Third edition) uncover the reason for such an article in our Church Order. They tell us that the churches in the Netherlands did not want these days given over to the "danger of abuse and frivolity". It was felt if worship services were held on these days that this could "turn a fruitless and harmful idleness into a holy and profitable exercise." We certainly cannot disagree with this reasoning especially since celebrating this Christian holiday is a matter of Christian liberty. There is no law of God that dictates against celebrating it and if celebrating it in a proper, spiritual way can benefit the church then why not? This is certainly the opinion of Rev. G. Ophoff an early Protestant Reformed minister

1921-1959) when he writes in his "Church Right", p. 149:

Certainly, there can be no objection to Christian holidays if they be rightly kept. The Old Testament Church had her religious holidays on which the people of God concentrated on the salutary works of God that had taken place on those days. Such was Jehovah's will. The Old Testament holy days were His institutions. The Old Testament holy days waxed old and vanished away with the law. The realities of the kingdom are now before us in the Scriptures. For God has sent His Son in the flesh and through Him has wrought salvation. Christ suffered and died for the sins of His people, was raised unto their justification and they with Him were set in heaven and blessed with all spiritual blessings. These works of God took place in time, were wrought on certain days of twenty-four hours and with these days they are associated in the mind of the church, associated with dates, points of time, in the year. And though there is no express command, yet certainly there can be no objection to God's people repairing to God's house at the annual return of the dates or days of those events to be occupied in their mind with those events. The idea is not certainly that Christian people have before their mind these events only at the annual return of the day on which they took place. We must have God`s works before our mind always, for then only do we have God before our mind - the God and Father of Christ - for through His works God revealed Himself. It is only in these works that we see Him and through these works that we know Him.

For these reasons, then, we as churches today celebrate Christmas and other religious holidays.

And in them I find how I as a minister am able to prepare the church for the celebration of Christmas. Even before this holiday arrives I begin preaching a number of sermons (no set amount needed) which stress for God's people the wonder work of God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Attention is drawn to Old Testament prophecy and therefore the hope of God's people in the Old Dispensation. Historical accounts of Christ's birth are preached on recounting for the congregation the events which surrounded Christ's birth. The preaching turns the attention of the church to the gift of salvation found in the very Person of the Son of God, and it directs us to the covenant faithfulness of God as He fulfills all the covenant promises in the very birth of our Savior into this world. On the other hand, the minister from the pulpit and in the catechism room reminds the people of God that when this day is celebrated it is not done so because the day itself is sacred and holy. We are not slaves to the celebration of sanctioned holidays. We need not follow set times and seasons or be declared cursed in God's eyes. We celebrate Christmas as a special day in which we remember the wonder of God in the birth of our Savior.

And more, the church is prepared also when it is reminded that Christmas is not to be remembered for the same reasons the heathen celebrate it, that is, in order to enjoy the wanton revelings of the flesh - eat, drink, and be merry. We do not fill our celebration with emotionalism and senti-

mentality with which so many wish to remember Christ's birth. The story of the birth of the Christ child is not to us just one, or even the best, of many stories that are told around Christmas time - stories which speak of the inherent goodness of fallen man. This too is the calling of the church toward its members in preparing them to celebrate Christmas in the proper sense of the word. This must be emphasized because it is better not to rate this day at all than to do so improperly. We agree with A. H. Newman (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. 3. p. 48), when he writes,

The religious significance of Christmas has been too commonly minimized among Christians, the day among adults being degraded into one merely for the exchange of presents, often neither given or received in affection, but out of a sense of obligation or barter. In too many homes the children, whose day it more particularly is, are not taught to link their merrymaking on Christmas with the gift of God to the world in the person of His Son Jesus Christ.

If this was true back when this book was published in 1950, then certainly it is true today the more. We live in a world that commercializes every holiday, especially Christmas. Some people spend so much money that it takes them all year to pay it back. And in doing so they forget completely about the true, spiritual celebration of Christmas. The church, in preparing its members for the celebration of Christmas must point this out in order to avoid the frivolous, materialistic spirit that possesses our world.

May our celebration of Christmas this year remind us of two truths. First, let it remind us of the marvelous grace of God, Who provided for us unworthy sinners, salvation in the Person of His only-begotten Son. And second, may it remind us that this Christ Who was born in the fullness of time will come again . . . soon, when all things are ripe for His coming. Then we will receive fully the salvation Christ has already merited for us on the cross.

Even the fruitfulness of the marriage of believers belongs to the symbolism of marriage as a picture of the marriage of Christ and the Church. Marriage is the mystery of Christ and the Church. Christ begets many sons and daughters by His Word and Spirit. He has a large family, a multitude no man can number. To them, He is willing to devote His care. Christ even gave His life for them. Christ brings these children forth from and rears them by the Church, His Bride. The union of Christ and the Church is fruitful in many children of God. The Church is the Mother of the saints by the power of the grace of Christ.

Marriage, by Rev. D. Engelsma, p. 80

IS RIGHT TO LIFE RIGHT?

by Karen Hanko

Cal Thomas, moderator of the 1986 Americans United for Life conference in Chicago, summarized the rising confidence of the prolife movement stating that "the momentum is inexorably in the direction of the prolife side." The success of the prolife movement has continued in spite of the failure of the Supreme Court to overturn Roe vs. Wade. In spite of the success of the prolife movement, joining Right to Life is not the answer to the problem of abortion.

It is not my purpose, however, to condone the evil of abortion. In Britain, the United States, and Australia, one child out of every three or four conceived is deliberately put to death in the womb. Between 1973 - when the Supreme Court ruled that abortion was legal—and 1983, as many as fifteen million unborn died in the United States. The number of babies killed through abortion in four months is approximately equal to the number of Americans killed in World War II. The book Open Your Mouth for the Dumb sums it up well, "The womb has become more deadly than the battlefield."

The Right to Life members have been in the front lines of the battle against abortion. Their ultimate goal is to persuade the Supreme Court to rule that abortion is illegal so that the murder of innocent children may be stopped. This is a worthy and proper goal. However it is my firm belief that joining the Right to Life organization is not the Christian's calling in his obligation to condemn the evils of abortion.

Why is joining the Right to Life organization wrong?

The view of the Right to Life people is becoming increasingly humanistic. Randy Frame, writer for Christianity Today said, "Another reason for the prolife movement's growing confidence is its broadening base of support. No longer can it be considered exclusively religious in motivation. In fact, two of the five major speakers at last month's (October, 1986, KH) AUL conference, syndicated columnist Nat Henthoff, and physician Bernard Nathanson are avowed atheists. However, they are among an increasing number who see abortion not as a strictly moral issue, but as an issue of civil rights for unborn humans."

Another objection to joining this organization is the fact that the Right to Life people use force in their attempt to get legislation passed against abortion. We as citizens of the United States are not required to obey the government if

it passes laws that conflict with the law of God, but we must always submit, even in our disobedience. Romans 13:1 says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

Because the Right to Life organization is wrong in these ways, joining the Right to Life would be joining an unscriptural organization. We should remember the words of Paul to the Corinthians in his second epistle, chapter 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

How then should we as Christians fight the evils of abortion? Chiefly by uniting as the Church of Christ to preach the Word. And what a powerful Word it is, for the simple reason that it is the Word of God and not of man. May God use our witness as it goes out from the pulpit, in the printed page, and over the radio to be a light in the darkness of the present days.

From the Pastor's Study

LAWLESSNESS

by Rev. C. Hanko

We live in an age that is characterized by the word `lawlessness'.

56,700 persons were murdered in 1989.

6,774 children were abandoned by their parents in that same year.

A step-father holds his two year old head first in the toilet and beats it to death because it dirtied its diaper.

Not only adults, but even teenagers walk around with knives and guns, wounding and killing at the slightest provocation.

Drunks and drug addicts form a threat to society on the highways, on the streets, and even in our homes. No one's life is safe anymore anywhere.

The prisons are crowded beyond capacity mainly by second offenders, who were released before they had served out their previous sentence.

Corruption abounds in the legislative as well as in the executive branches of the government.

Home life, with the family gathered together in intimate fellowship, is a thing of the past.

Scripture refers to this as the lawlessness that will characterize the last days.

Jesus is speaking of the end of the ages when He says: "And because iniquity (there the word `lawlessness' is used in the Greek) shall abound, the love of many

shall wax cold." Matt. 24:12.

Paul warns us in II Thess. 3:3-8: "Let no man deceive you by any means: For the day (of Christ's return) shall not come, except there be a falling away first, and that man of sin (the lawless one, according to the original) be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. For the mystery of iniquity (the same word, lawlessness) doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked (that lawless one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

Notice that the antichrist is twice referred to in this passage as the Lawless one, and the days before the coming of the Lord are referred to as a time of lawlessness.

A strong evidence of this total disregard for God's law is seen in the fact that there is not as much as a semblance of repentance. We read in Rev. 9:20,21, "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood, which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

It is true that a disregard for God's law has been practiced by the entire fallen human race since the fall in paradise. The apostle John writes in I John 3 : 4, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law (the word is is guilty of lawlessness'); for sin is transgression of the law (lawlessness)."

This lawlessness develops throughout the history of the world. God in His righteous judgment, visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him. Ex. 20:5. The world becomes increasingly hardened in her sin. Therefore the voice of conscience still speaks, and there is still a show or pretense of sorrow (II Cor. 7:10), but this is entirely lacking as history draws to its close and the world is ripened for judgment.

We read for example, that Pharaoh had moments of weakness, when he wanted to compromise with God, allowing Israel to leave Egypt under his conditions. But finally the hardening process reaches a point where he drives Moses from before his face, refusing ever to see him again. Then the time of Israel's deliverance has come.

Likewise in the life of Ahab. When Elijah assures him of God's just punishment upon him for slaying Naboth and stealing his vineyard, Ahab walks in sackcloth and ashes before the people in a pretense of humility and repentance. At that moment the measure of his iniquity is not yet full. But soon after he went to war, in spite of the divine warning that he would die.

So also throughout history the measure of iniquity in a world of lawlessness is filling up, and now is almost full. God sends such plagues as the recent epidemic of Aids. How obviously this is aimed

at a very concrete sin. Yet no one repents. No one puts forth an effort to root out the cause of this dread disease, but every effort is put forth to find a cure or a preventive from spreading any farther. The lawless ones continue in their vile lusts.

From the lowest slums to the highest echelons of society the sin of covetousness prevails as the root of all evil. Where law and order are trampled under foot chaos and total ruin must follow. In many other respects, but also in this respect the world is driving herself to a dead-end road, to complete disaster.

Years ago Dr. Schilder from the Netherlands compared the world of the last day to a tavern at five o'clock in the morning, where the air is filled with the stench of liquor and smoke, where profligates are staggering to leave in utter confusion or otherwise lie under the table in drunken stupor. There may be something to that comparison.

God will prove Himself just in His righteous judgment. Matt. 13:41, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity (lawlessness)."

See also Matt. 7:23, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (lawlessness)."

The wonder of grace is that we as God's people are delivered from the bondage of lawlessness and corruption.

That is possible, first of all, because Christ took the burden of our sin and guilt upon Himself. Mark 15:28, "and the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors (lawless ones)."

Also in Titus 2:14 we read, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity (lawlessness) and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous in good works."

Our deliverance is possible, in the second place, because of the work of God's grace in our hearts, changing us from sinful rebels to obedient sons and daughters of the Most High. In Rom. 4:7 we are told, as a quote from Psalm 32:1, "Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities (lawless deeds) are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

Paul warns us in II Timothy 3:1-5, that these last days are perilous times for the church of God. Among the many sins of these days he mentions: "Men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

It is our privilege, but also our high calling: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness (lawlessness)? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

A disciplined tongue is a gracious mercy to the Church
- Charles Bridges

To Lose the Battle and Win The War
The Janssen Case
Chapter III
The Issues In The Battle (4)

by Prof. H. Hanko

(In the last articles which we wrote on this subject, we were discussing Dr. Ralph Janssen's views of Scripture. We discussed his views of Scripture's inspiration and how those views of inspiration affected other ideas he had about how the Scriptures came into existence. In this article, we are going to discuss how Janssen's views of inspiration affected his ideas of miracles.)

Probably no views of Dr. Janssen aroused the fear and suspicion of the church as much as his views on the miracles of Scripture. In order to try to explain this in as simple a way as possible, it is probably best first of all to explain just what Janssen said about some individual miracles.

In fact, Janssen did not discuss individual miracles all that much. It seemed as if he preferred to discuss in a general way what he believed was the explanation behind his interpretation of miracles. But once in a while he did describe how, in his opinion, miracles took place. And this was extremely revealing.

On a few occasions Janssen talked about the falling of the walls of Jericho. He did not believe that these walls fell in any miraculous way in the sense in which we would believe in a miracle. But he believed that these walls fell because at the moment when the trumpets of the priests sounded, a severe earthquake shook the city so strongly that all the walls fell before Israel.

How it was that all the walls fell inward on the top of the city; and how it was that just that part of the wall on which Rahab's house stood did not fall, Dr. Janssen made no effort to explain.

When God brought water out of the rock for the children of Israel at Rephadim in the wilderness, this was not a miracle in the sense in which we think of it. Rather, the water was always present in the rock and was covered only by a very thin layer of stone. When Moses hit the rock, he broke the protective layer and the water gushed out.

How it was possible for there to be enough water in that rock to satisfy the thirst of over 3 million people plus all their flocks and herds, for a very long period of time, Janssen makes no effort to explain.

When the sun and moon stood still at the command of Joshua when the armies of Israel were fighting the kings of the south, the sun and moon did not in fact stand still, but the sun emerged

after a very bad storm in which the sky was black, or the sun emerged because of an eclipse.

How it is to be explained that the Bible tells us that there has never been a day like that in all the history of the world, Janssen does not tell us.

The feats of Samson were not really performed as they are described in the Bible. But every nation needs its heroes about which legends and stories filled with exaggeration arise. Israel had to have her heroes too, and found one in Samson. So the stories in the book of Judges about Samson are the heroic legends and myths which were invented to help make Samson a hero in the nation.

There are three or four ideas of Janssen implied in his views of miracles that we ought also to understand.

For one thing, Janssen firmly believed that a proper approach to Scripture meant that we tried to explain Scripture as much as we possibly could in terms of God's regular and usual providence. Janssen believed in providence. That is, he believed that God controlled all things. And so, in the interests of the truth of providence, Janssen thought we ought to explain everything in terms of that providence.

How we would do that with the birth and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a question to which Janssen did not address himself.

But, in the second place, to try to explain all the miracles in terms of God's ordinary providence, is to try to explain away the miracles and give them a purely natural explanation. And this is exactly what Janssen did. He took away their miraculous character and effectively denied that anything miraculous happened. And he did that because he tried to explain everything in terms of means. He insisted that God used means in all the miracles and that, therefore, they had a very natural explanation. Just as God used an east wind to separate the waters of the Red Sea, so He used an earthquake to knock down the walls of Jericho.

Yet Janssen insisted that he truly believed in miracles. When, e.g. he was talking about the fall of the walls of Jericho, he claimed the miracle was not in God making the walls fall, but in the fact that just at the right moment, in a very useful way, an earthquake came to destroy the walls. The miracle was in the fact that the earthquake came at just the right moment.

In keeping with this same idea, Janssen believed that no miracles of God could involve a new work of creation. That is why he believed that the water in the rock of Rephadim was already there. God finished His work of creation on the sixth day, and nothing more could possibly be created.

Why this should be so I fail to see. If this whole world is God's world, and if He has the right and power to do with it as He wills, He may surely create more water if He wishes to do so. Just as Jesus created more bread and fish when he fed 5000, God created water in the wilderness for His people.

But the interesting thing is that Janssen denied the miracles of Scripture because of His views of inspiration. And if one miracle is denied, then all the miracles are eventually denied, including the great miracle of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN NATURALLY

by Sarah Ondersma

My intent in this article is to present to you some of my experiences and thoughts concerning the natural world within which we live. I define the natural world not only to be the living creatures of this earth but also that which supports these creatures: the living plants, the soil, the air - without which these creatures can not live!

This past summer a major portion of a course I took dealt with our attitude and responsibility towards the environment. This was a learning experience for me because at that time I had no clearly defined attitude; I had never seriously thought about concrete issues dealing with the environment! The school at which I studied for six weeks this summer was Au Sable Institute, a Christian environmental stewardship Institute located in the north woods of Michigan. The mission of Au Sable Institute in formal words is "the integration of knowledge of the Creation with the biblical principles for the purpose of bringing the Christian community and the general public to a better understanding of the Creator and the stewardship of God's Creation." Simply put, the students study both creation and the Bible in order to better understand God the Creator and the stewardship of His creation.

It was here at Au Sable that I truly experienced the creation of God! Let me briefly describe to you the setting of the Institute. Au Sable Institute is tucked away in an aspen and pine woodland at the edge of a crystal clear lake. Trails lead to the lake shore, a nearby beaver pond and more distant bogs, swamps, and marshes. There is plenty of area to explore; the classes take full advantage of this opportunity!

One field trip brought us to a Jack Pine burned area. Earlier this past spring a fire had swept over the area leaving the Jack Pine forest in an array of burnt trees, sooty soil, and fallen charred branches. Yet life was industriously struggling to become established! Through the layer of soot covering the ground came the first sprouts of sedge (similar to a grass) and aspen and maple. Through even the worst of conditions God sustains his creation! In Psalm 104:13-17 we read,

"He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth. . . . The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars

of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests; as for the stork, the fir trees are her house."

God upholds all things. Sometimes we overlook the fact that God was the reason the sedge was able to grow and establish its roots in the poor soil.

An outing for my Field Botany class took us to the Hartwick Pines State Park in Grayling, Michigan. One of the highlights of this State Park is a foot trail through the Virgin Pines forest. This forest is one of the few that escaped the ax of the lumberjack in the latter 1800's. During this time Michigan produced more lumber than any other state - the source of wood being the white pine stands that covered some 18 million acres of land in Michigan. As I walked amidst the 200-300 year old trees I felt very small and insignificant. My eyes were directed upward towards the tops of the trees which were 100-155 feet away!

As the class walked through the forest we discussed our feelings. One thing we agreed we could not ignore was the presence of the Creator God. A walk through the Virgin Pines is quite a spiritual experience! Your attention is focused upward, toward the heavens, toward the Creator. We realized the awesomeness of God's creation. We realized our dependency on God not only for our existence but also for our salvation. I thought to myself how pleased God must be of His creation! Many times we read in Genesis 1 that what God created was good. When God declares that His creation is good He is making a statement about its value. Richard T. Wright, in his book Biology Through the Eyes of Faith aptly describes creation's goodness. He says (p. 23), Good means having inherent worth; value is intrinsic - it is built into the things God created. In declaring creation good, God was also declaring His pleasure with all of His creative work. Why was He pleased? Possibly because He saw the unfolding of creation as an obedient response to His Word, one worthy of the covenant between God and His creation. Also, He might well have been pleased because what He saw was an expression of His wisdom; God recognized that the creation was majestic enough to show His glory. In other words, the goodness of creation reflected God's own goodness."

At the time of the Fall, sin entered the world. Is the creation still good? Scripture gives us a clear answer: Creation's goodness has persisted and continues to the present. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day after day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." (Psalm 19:1-3). Other related passages of the Bible are Acts 14:15-17 and Romans 1:20.

Late one evening (back at Au Sable), a few of us who were feeling adventuresome took a walk through the woods, the moon providing us light. We were in search of foxfire, an organism that grows on decaying organic matter and emits a phosphorescent light. One of the instructors had told us that he had seen foxfire on an old stump near the beaver's pond, and so we headed in that direction. Sure enough we found the foxfire! And yes, it was glowing in the

dark! The stump looked quite normal under the light of a flashlight but in the darkness it emitted a soft white glow.

The foxfire was exciting to "discover." In reflection I thought that God did not create these things to be seen of men. Even if we had not gone out in the woods that night, the foxfire would have been there. With a little effort though, we had found the foxfire and enjoyed the existence of one of God's creations. Nature is like that - the wonder and beauty is always there - it is up to each individual to "discover" this goodness of nature.

Although in comparison to the stature of the Hartwick Pines foxfire is very small, it too in its own way praises the Creator. "The creation praises God by its very existence and activity. This is the highest purpose of the creation: to bring glory to God. Our responsibility as creatures in His image is not only to praise Him, but also to recognize that the rest of the creation is praising him" (Wright, p 25) "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6). (Sometimes I think we don't even see half of how these creatures praise him.)

"In spite of the clear testimony of Scripture that the primary purpose of the creation is to bring glory to God, there is a prevailing attitude, even among Christians, that the only purpose of the creation is to satisfy our needs and wants. The flip side of this attitude is to question the value of anything that apparently serves no useful purpose for humanity (what good are slugs, or slime molds, or mosquitoes, or swamps?). This is a potentially destructive attitude, for it allows us to treat nature as if its only purpose was to fuel the engines of progress - a completely utilitarian approach that translates nature into human resources. Not only is this attitude indefensible from a theological point of view, it is clearly part of the network of causes for the environmental problems that are plaguing us" (Wright, p 26). God is pleased with His creation and declares it good. Do not forget this. The natural world was created for man but it was not created for man to abuse. Man is responsible to God for his actions.

One last thought to remember: "Only God can make a tree."

Work Cited

Wright, Richard T. Biology Through the Eyes of Faith Harper and Row, Publishers, San Francisco. 1989.

The purpose of this commandment is: God wills that we hallow the majesty of His name. Therefore, it means in brief that we are not to profane His name by treating it contemptuously and irreverently. To this prohibition duly corresponds the commandment that we should be zealous and careful to honor His name with godly reverence. Therefore we ought to be so disposed in mind and speech that we neither think nor say anything concerning God and His mysteries, without reverence and much soberness; that in estimating His works we conceive nothing but what is honorable to Him.

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QUESTION FOR MR. ENGELSMA

by Mr. Dewey Engelsma

Dear Mr. Engelsma,

"I would like to know the difference between obedience and honor to my parents. Isn't there a time when I honor my parents, but do not have to obey them, e.g., when I move out of the house or get married?"

Your question (s) are of great importance and timely. Important, because they have to do with law of God, and timely since there are those of our Protestant Reformed young people who do separate themselves from their parents to live independently, for reasons other than marriage. I hope that I can help you and other young adults with my reply.

As concerning the difference between obedience and honor, I submit that the command of God for children to honor their parents is a gracious means of God to establish His covenant in the line of continued generations. I believe also, that this command holds until parents depart this earth. It is so necessary that children be instructed from earliest childhood that God has given parents the authority and superiority over them. This authority and superiority must be diligently taught so that children see that God is honored by honoring their parents.

Further, when children are trained to honor their parents, it follows that obedience to them is the proof of honoring them. Honoring parents, in all that it implies will bring forth a beautiful relationship in the home; parents ruling in love and children obeying with respect to God and parents.

In connection with this honor of parents, it is very important and necessary that parents are always consistent in exercising the authority God has given them. They must not by their actions make themselves dishonorable. They should apply their authority wisely and fairly over all their children. This is especially urgent in things spiritual. They cannot honestly demand of children what they fail or neglect to do themselves. Still, children must honor and obey even if parents are not always what they should be. Let's look at the second and I surmise the main part of your letter that asks, "Isn't there a time when I honor my parents, but do not have to obey them, e.g., when I move out of the house or get married?"

Young adults do not always leave father and mother for good reasons. Those who find it necessary to move away to seek employment or a life's mate, I do not fault. But, there are some who do

so to get from under the authority and supervision of the home. This is always dishonoring to God and parents. It is rebellion, and surely rebellion is not honorable.

I believe when you leave the care and love of the home, whether for marriage or any other reason, you have taken upon yourself the responsibility to continue in the Christian training that was received from godly parents. Young people must build upon the good instruction and authority of parents and not forsake it. Proverbs 4:28 states, "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established."

My urgent advice to all young people is, if at all possible, stay with your parents until you marry. It is in the home that you are with true friends, who care for you in love. There too you are probably needed, and in various circumstances and situations you will be able to contribute. And this reciprocal arrangement will prove to be mutually beneficial to both parent and child.

In conclusion, and to answer specifically the question, "do I have to obey my parents when I move out of the home?" No, you don't, pertaining to the things mundane. You have chosen to live independently, but, remember, if you do not strictly observe to do all that your parents taught and demanded of you which was right and proper in God's sight, you have become disobedient. You, then, dishonor God and them. Concerning spiritual matters, your heart with that of your parents should be in one accord. Our prayer is, that the young people of our Protestant Reformed Churches and sister churches do honor father and mother in thankful obe-

SONG OF CHRISTMAS

by Sue Looyenga

O, Jesus, Word made flesh to dwell among us,
How can I thank Thee for Thy Gift? What way
Can I in human frailty find to praise Thee best,
Who came the price for my dread sin to pay?
Thou wert despised, rejected for Thine Own,
A man of sorrows from Thy day of birth.
And grief, it was Thy closest of companions.
Who was there found to love Thee on this earth?

My sorrows Thou hast borne, though I, ashamed, turned from Thee.
For my transgressions Thou wert wounded sore.
My peace, it brought to Thee chastisement.
Thy stripes did heal me. Who could have loved me more?
I was a wandering sheep turned to his own way,
But Thou hast carried me within Thy arms.
To feed in pastures green, beside still waters,
And here I rest, safe from all earthly harms.

My cup now overfloweth with Thy goodness!
What can I render to Thee in my thankfulness?
I'll take this cup of Thy salvation, calling on Thee,
The greatness of this wondrous love confess.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

LETTER #9

God Plans Each Detail of Our Lives

by Mrs. H. Brands

I would suspect that you have at one time or other heard the parable of the weaver. As he wove his rug, he weaved into it many colors, some ugly and dark, even using blacks and grays, some colors bright and startling, some soft and soothing. To the person observing his work for only a short period of time, his choice of colors often seemed all wrong. To the person observing his work for a longer period of time, something of the reason for his choice of colors began to be apparent. But it was not until the entire weaving was finished that the beauty of all the blending of colors became obvious so that the viewer understood the choice of colors.

That's the way it is also in our lives. God puts into our lives a blend of the dark and the light and the bright: difficult days that we can hardly make it through and also joyful days when everything seems right; tasks that are painful to carry out and other tasks that are delightful. We cannot know on earth the purposes that He has in it all, yet still, little by little, we begin to see faintly the reasons for the difficulties, seeing that the dark colors make the bright colors all the more beautiful. And . . .oh, wonderful hope of the Christian! . . .someday He will in heaven show us the whole picture and we will see His perfect plan and wisdom in it all. "That will be glory, be glory for me!"

This is also the underlying concept in the beautiful section of ECCLESIASTES which we study today and next time, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Let's review briefly how Chapter 3 fits in our outline of the whole book so far. The outline looks like this:

CHAPTER 1: Solomon's Introduction of Theme & Purpose.

CHAPTERS 2-3: Solomon's Search for Meaning in Labor.

I. The Search Itself (2:1-10).

II. The Conclusion Apart From God (2:11-23).

III. The Conclusion of Faith in God (2:24-3:22).

A. (2:24-26) Only God makes possible any joy in labor,

B. (3:1-15) God controls everything to be beautiful in its time.

C. (3:16-22) God will judge all arguments against this.

So, today we study the middle of these three sections of faith's response to meaning in labor and we begin to see that God has created time and controls it also so that all that happens is beautiful in its time, under His plan. We must see also that within this plan for time we have our own responsibility to use time in its God-ordained way.

How beautiful is the doctrine of God's sovereignty! If you've never read Pink's book on THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, I would highly recommend it to you. The longer a Christian lives, the more precious this truth becomes to him. Nothing, not one thing, happens by chance! All things are under the plan and control of our all-wise Father! God controls each moment of time! He has ordained every ebb and flow of events, everything that occurs in history as well as in our individual lives! He has a plan, a purpose, a goal for . . . yes, for my life, too!

While we cannot know this plan now on earth, and while sometimes it must seem to us that God is surely making a mistake here and there, we yet labor in the trust that God's plan and control really do exist. This trust gives us peace and contentment. We labor also obeying whatever God does reveal to us so that in each moment of time we are seeking to use the time wisely, as God wills it to be used.

Those ideas are the thoughts underlying Ecclesiastes 3:1-15. I want next to go through these verses one by one but, even doing this briefly, it will make this letter far too long. So for today I will just encourage you to read them to yourself, review them if you've ever memorized them before, and rest in their truth. Next time I will go through verses 1-8 verse by verse, quite briefly, and then the next letter I will go through verses 8-15 verse by verse.

May God bless you with the conviction that He truly does control all time and its events for your blessing in Christ.

Letter #9. Theme: ECCLESIASTES 3:1—8: Introduction "God Plans Each Detail of our Lives"

Questions:

1. How does ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8 fit into the overall outline of ECCLESIASTES?

2. What does the parable of the weaver have to do with ECCLESIASTES 3:1—8?

3. Does God predestine and control <u>everything</u> that happens, even the "evil" things—or only the "good" things? (Define the words "evil" and "good".)

4. Do you think these verses refer solely to God's eternal predestination and control of all things or do they also refer to our proper decision-making within time?

Since therefore God wishes nothing to be changed in His worship, as the principal part of His worship is obedience, which He prefers to all sacrifices, (I Sam. 15:22,) let us learn that things which we might tolerate ought to be detested by us, because God condemns them so severely.

- John Calvin

WHAT'S HAPPENED

by Lora Bouwkamp

SOUTH HOLLAND

Tammy Lenting made confession of faith Oct 7.

Jim & Leah Lenting rejoice in the birth of Lauren Judith Sept. 13. She was baptized Oct. 14.

Todd Van Baren made public confession of faith Aug. 26.

Janet Haak & Darryl Kooy were united in marriage Aug. 17.

The membership papers of Mrs. Rebekah Trozzy (nee Haak) were transferred to Kalamazoo PRC.

DOON

On Sept. 23, Stephanie Bleyenberg, Crys Bonestroo, and Brad Postmas made confession of faith.

Mr. and Mrs. D. Burgers rejoice in the birth of Danielle Lynn.

Mr. and Mrs. G. Van Bemmel rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Jessica Kay.

SOUTHEAST

Erik and Laura Lubbers rejoice in the birth of Megan Leigh.

The papers of Mr. and Mrs. Dirk Monsma were received from First PRC Grand Rapids.

BYRON CENTER

The church picnic was held Sept. 8.

John and LeAnn Streyle were blessed with the birth of Patrick Jay.

Dave and Julie Hiemstra were blessed with the birth of Jordan David. Megan Elizabeth, daughter of Rick & Jill Elzinga, was baptized Sept. 16.

The consistory has received the papers of Mr. and Mrs. Leroy DeVries from Hope PRC, Mr. and Mrs. Scott Haarksma from Cornerstone CRC and Rusk CRC, and Mr. Dan Van Dyke from Faith PRC.

The consistory transferred the papers, of Mr. and Mrs. John Zandstra and their 2 daughters to Hudsonville PRC.

FIRST PRC (Grand Rapids)

Mrs. C. Booth celebrated her 86th birthday Sept. 10.

Miss A. Van Til celebrated her 92nd birthday Sept 16.

Mrs. Mina Bouwman and Mr. Roy VanderBerg celebrated their 90th birthdays Oct 1.

We extend our condolences to the Pastoor family in the passing away of Mr. Ralph Pastoor.

We also extend our sympathy to Mrs. Lena Baar and family in the loss of her sister.

HOPE (Redlands)

The congregation extends its sympathy to Rev. and Mrs. Den Hartog in the death of her father and step-mother.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Gritters celebrated their 40th anniversary.

Mrs.Ann Van Meeteren celebrated her 75th birthday Sept. 7.

Mr. Clarence De Vries celebrated his 75th Birthday Sept.8.

The consistory received the papers of Shari Besselsen from Hope PRC (Walker)

HULL

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Heath William, son of Mr. and Mrs. Veryl Heynen.

Mr. and Mrs. Marv Van Den Top were blessed with the birth of Kelsey Ranae.

HUDSONVILLE

The consistory received the papers of Tom and Jessie Spriensma from Jamestown CRC; Joy Timmer from Blythfield CRC; Barb (Moelker) DeYoung from Faith PRC; Dave Kramer from Hudsonville Reformed; and as baptized member, Terry Koekoek from Allendale Reformed.

The papers of Mr. and Mrs. George Yonkers and Mrs. Grace Boeze were transferred to Kalamazoo PRC.

Mr. and Mrs. Ron Schut rejoice in the birth of Joel Michael.

Baptism was administered Sept 16 to Mitchell Dean, son of Mr. and Mrs. Duane Veele, and to Nicole Jean, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Westing.

WYKOFF

The church picnic was held on Labor Day.

SOUTHWEST

The papers of Mr. and Mrs. Randall Feenstra have been sent to Hope PRC (Walker).

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Schipper rejoice in the birth of Dale John.

The Jim Schipper family mourn the death of Char's sister and brother-in-law.

FAITH

Keith Noorman's papers have been transferred to Hope PRC (Walker).

Carol and Cheryl Rau, and Gwennan Kalsbeek made confession of faith July 8.

Doug Dykstra and Pam Kuiper were united in marriage.

Andrew Mark, son of Mr. and Mrs. Tim Talsma, was baptized on Sept. 2.

Randy Van Dyke made confession of Faith Sept. 2.

Rog and Kathy Berens mourn the death of his father.

Mrs. Anna Schut celebrated her 90th birthday Aug. 15.

The father of Gerrit Van Den Top and grandfather of Arlen and Ruth Ter Avest, Mr. Tom Van Den Top, passed away in Iowa.

HOPE (Walker)

Mr. and Mrs. Neal Meyer rejoice in the birth of Tabatha Joy. Baptism was held Sept. 23.

Mrs. Anne Norris celebrated her 78th birthday Aug. 20.

Lori King and Bill Smeda were

united in marriage Aug. 25.

Baptism was administered to Jaycen Lee, son of Bruce and JoAnn Klamer.

Jeff Kalsbeek made confession of faith Sept. 16.

The papers of Tim and Linda Van Dyke were transferred to Faith PRC.

We extend our sympathy to the Gerald Van Den Top family in the death of his father.

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Kleyn have been received as members from the Evangelical Church of Australia.

Mrs. M. Veenstra celebrated her 85th birthday Sept 14.

Dean Dykstra, Joseph Kamps, Brent Klamer, and Marsha Engelsma made confession of their faith Oct 21.

The papers of Karen Buiter were transferred to South Holland PRC.