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BY PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

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Fearfully And Wonderfully
Made by Rev. C. Hanko

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EDITOR'S NOTES JANUARY 1992

by David Harbach

Rev. C. Hanko gives us three scripture texts, Genesis 2:7, Psalm 139:14, and Ephesians 2:10, and explains the truth found in them that we are made by God to serve Him. It is my prayer that our young people will understand that part of that calling to serve God also includes supporting their own magazine by seeking to be part of the Federation Board and the Beacon Lights staff, and also by writing articles for their magazine. Look for a new editor-in-chief within the next five months. Although I would like to continue serving God in this capacity, the work as an elder in Grandville Protestant Reformed Church needs more of my time.

The last of the three speeches spoken at last year's Young People's Convention is in this issue. Rev. Russ Dykstra spoke on Experiencing the End. He divided his speech into three parts: Experiencing Persecution, Experiencing Victory, and Experiencing Eternity. As Rev. Dykstra puts it in his speech, "First, we think of persecution, the worst that the church has ever faced. Secondly, we will experience the victory of Christ over Satan and this wicked world. Thirdly, we will experience eternity after Christ returns - for us, eternal life, for the wicked, eternal death." Thank you Rev. Dykstra for your words of encouragement and wisdom.

Letter #14 by Mrs. Brands studies Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, which shows us that we have a Comforter when we suffer oppression at the hands of others. Oppression now is to prepare us for oppression in the future such as the church has never seen before.

Our faithful Church News editor, Lora Bouwkamp, supplies us with the latest in the life of our churches. Lora's faithfulness in giving us the church news is an encouragement to all of us. May God grant us other faithful writers such as Lora.

A year ago, Adams Street Christian School held a writing contest with the theme: Tending this Garden: Earth-keeping as a covenant friend-servant of our Creator God. Jeremy Thole, a ninth grader at the time, won the Jr. High Essay Division. You will find his interesting short article, "God's Earth," in this issue.

Any questions you would like to ask Mr. Dewey Engelsma can be sent to the Beacon Lights P.O. Box 375, Jenison, MI 49428. The staff is thankful for Mr. Engelsma's sanctified replies to previous questions and we look forward to more of his answers.

We hope to continue Prof. Hanko's excellent series on the Janssen Controversy when he sends us more copy.

Look for the details to the writing contest elsewhere in this issue. The staff has put a lot of work into this and we hope you respond with enthusiasm. We hope this provides the opportunity for many of you to write and to keep on writing for the cause of His Kingdom.

We pray for God's blessing on our young people, the Federation Board, the Beacon Lights staff, and all of you who support the Beacon Lights in your prayers, gifts, and time. By God giving us His grace and love and by God working in you to support us, the Beacon Lights is able to provide Christian articles for your benefit. May God grant us another year of being a faithful witness to His truths.It was a cool summer day in April. My father and I were walking along

"A soul in silence, or a silent soul! What a blessed gift of grace! . . . They that wait for the Lord shall never by ashamed!" Rev. Herman Hoeksema

GOD'S EARTH

by Jeremy Thole

It was a cool summer day in April. My father and I were walking along the banks of the Grand River looking for a good spot to fish. We rounded a bend and there we spotted a huge mountain like a mound of pop cans and bottles, along with other scraps of metal and broken shards of glass. This mound was about 10 feet high and it cast a great black shadow over the water. The sad thing about this, is that every bit of the "trash" was recyclable, and was in fact worth three or four hundred dollars.

People often throw things away because they do not know that they can get good money for turning them in. So much scrap metal is ignorantly thrown away, that if it were saved it could give all the U.S. car factories enough steel every year to supply the cars. They would not have to import anything. We also throw away enough glass everyday to fill the twin towers of Chicago with glass every day. Another huge problem is all of the paper thrown away in our country. Everyday thousands of trees die in order for the press to print our newspapers.

God has commanded man (when He commanded Adam) in Genesis 2:15, to keep the earth. By this God meant do not abuse our resources, to keep land and water and air clean for ourselves, the animals and most importantly for the glory of God. It is our duty as Christians to take care of the earth as best we can. We must tend the garden, God's earth.

CONVENTION SPEECH

EXPERIENCING THE END

by Rev. Russ Dykstra

Beloved young people and fellow believers, at this convention we have been privileged to hear and discuss many things about the end of time —— signs of the second coming of Christ, false teaching about His return, as well as how we must live as Reformed Christians with our spiritual eyes always open, watching for the end.

The topic "Experiencing the End" I consider equally as important because I think it likely that we, you young people, and many others of us, WILL experience the end. It is a little unnerving to think that WE may well be privileged to experience that for which the church of Christ has prayed and watched for almost 2000 years! Many of you undoubtedly wonder what this will mean for your life — will you have children? Should you pursue a career? How should we continue to live? Scripture's answer is that we must continue a normal (Christian) life —— but we must be prepared for the end.

When I think about the concerns you probably have about facing the end, especially three things come to mind that we will experience. First, we think of persecution, the worst that the church has ever faced. Secondly, we will experience the victory of Christ over Satan and this

wicked world. Thirdly, we will experience eternity after Christ returns —— for us, eternal life, for the wicked, eternal death.

Experiencing Persecution

Will we be persecuted? Emphatically, YES! That should not surprise us because the church has always been persecuted. Think of the persecution these people of God faced in Bible times: Abel, Enoch, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, and, of course, our Lord Jesus Himself.

You will find the same when you leave the pages of Scripture and examine the church's history in the new dispensation. Under Roman Emperors the church endured horrible persecution. You can read of emperors who lit up their parties with human torches —— the burning bodies of believers. Think of the cruel games in the amphitheaters in Rome where Christians were mowed down by chariots, slaughtered by gladiators, or devoured by lions.

In the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic Church instituted the cruel Inquisition to punish any one who spoke against the official Romish dogmas. The story of the great Protestant Reformation includes chapter after chapter of persecution. Millions of believers were butchered, were burned at the stake, had their bodies pulled apart on the rack, or were left to rot in dungeons. Many more, though their lives were spared, carried the scars of persecution to the grave. They could say with the apostle Paul, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). Persecution, not the peace we have today, is normal for the church. In fact, the inspired Paul wrote long ago that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12).

So will it be at the end —— God's people will be persecuted. Not only did Jesus warn His disciples (and us) of the sure hatred of the world against all who follow Jesus (John 15), He even fixed persecution as one of the signs of His return (Matt. 24: 9,10).

But this brings up a second question, namely, How will this persecution arise? Where will it come from? I am no prophet, and I cannot give details of what will happen. But certain lines can be drawn from Scripture.

Where will persecution start? From the false church. It will not arise first out of the heathen; nor will the first persecution be a law passed in Congress prohibiting worship of God on Sunday. I had that idea when I was a child. And I imagined that on the next day tanks would rumble down the street, and soldiers would go door to door, rounding up Christians. That, of course, will come, but that will not be first.

No, persecution will arise out of the false church, from organizations which are like churches outwardly. They will have office bearers, members, and worship services; but they will have lost the truth. Does that surprise you? It should not. The false church has always been the greatest foe of the church of Christ. Who killed Abel? Cain, his brother, of the same covenant family. Who persecuted the OT prophets? The Philistines, or the Moabites? No, Israel and Judah did after they had forsaken the ways of the Lord. This will emphatically be true in the last days. In Rev. 17 John records a vision of a hideous woman, a harlot. Now a woman is normally a picture of Christ's church, but this is the false church who will be the whore of the antichrist. In verse 6 John writes, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." So you see, the false church will spearhead the attack against the true believers.

Can you see why? One reason is that she knows the difference between the truth and the lie much better than the U.S. Congress. Congress has trouble distinguishing between the cults and Christianity; laws that protect Reformed believers also cover those who worship Satan. We might also note that the federal government does not particularly care about matters of Reformed doctrine. But members of apostatizing churches do know what you believe and how you live, and they know that it is different.

A second reason is that the witness of believers is particularly galling to the false church. It stings the conscience, it irritates, it reminds her of the hated doctrines and practices that the apostate church has put aside. That is already true today. Rebuke an unbeliever who works on Sunday or point out to him the evils of divorce and remarriage, and he will be far more tolerant, generally, than the member of a nominally Reformed church who is rebuked for the same. In the end, the false church will not tolerate the witness of the true church; in fury she will arise to eliminate this wretched people from the earth.

That is also why we can expect persecution first from those closest to us. In fact many of you may be already experiencing this. If you refuse to dance or go out drinking with your peers from school and/or your church, or if you admonish someone for such sins, suddenly those whom you thought were your friends turn against you. They hate you, they speak evil about you, and cut you off. You are not asked to go out with

them any more. You probably did not think of it as persecution, but that is what it is. And from whom? Church members.

But this persecution is small compared to what it will be, for it will build. Any church that sticks with her calling to preach the gospel of salvation from sin, by a sovereign, irresistible, electing grace of God, will be more and more in conflict with the church world about her. She will have no social programs for eliminating poverty or injustice in society; she will have no prayers for world peace or for church unity based on compromise; she will show no support for the antichrist and his kingdom. All of this will finally bring the wrath of the false church and of the world upon the faithful. They will say, perhaps, "You are not the true church of Christ, we are; you are not real Christians, you show no love, no compassion of Christ." Making the believers out to be evil, these hypocrites will seek to destroy them.

Jesus warns that for many this will strike very close to home —fathers and mothers will turn in their believing children, and children, their parents, and a man's enemies will be those of his own house (Matt. 10).

One word for persecution in Scripture literally means "to squeeze", and thus, to make one's place small on the earth. That is exactly what will happen. And it will be the worst persecution the church has ever seen. This will be true first of all because of the universality of the persecution. For the first time in history, the world will be able to give undivided consideration to the church. Wars, poverty, social problems, and diseases will be eliminated or so controlled that nothing will seriously divert the world's attention. All her time and resources will be directed to destroying the church. Add to that the fact that the whole world, all nations, will be against the true church. In earlier times of persecution, God always provided a place to which His church could run and hide. Some ruler would give Christians refuge; some new land would open to which believers could flee. This will not be true in the end. All nations will be seeking and killing God's people.

Other factors will contribute to the severity of this final persecution. One is the advanced technology the wicked will have at its disposal. Recently we had a grand display of this destructive power in the war in the Persian Gulf. We marveled at the ability to communicate, not only around the world in seconds, but of the different nations' ability to communicate together in the war against Iraq. We saw the satellite pictures with which the trained eye could find individual people. All this and more will be used against the church.

Last, but not least, in the end the depravity of man will have reached its peak. The first sin of Adam will have developed to the fullest extent. Sorry to say, the atrocities that man is capable of committing against fellow man will peak in the bloodbath of the final persecution.

All this we and the believers out of every nation and race, who are alive at the end, will experience. But that is not all that the church will experience. (And I am very glad we can say more about the end; otherwise it would be very gloomy and hopeless for the believer.)

Experiencing the Victory

We will also experience the victory of Christ in the end. And, we hasten to add, we will experience this victory IN persecution! In at least four ways this will be true.

First, we will know the victory of faith, an unshakable faith. Faith is that all—important gift of God as part of His work of salvation in you. It unites you to Christ and gives you such a sure knowledge and hearty confidence that you have no doubt but that the Scriptures' testimony concerning salvation from sin through Jesus is true, and true for you. Faith allows you to enjoy salvation —— to know for example, that your sins are forgiven, and to enjoy covenant fellowship with God.

Now our faith can be very weak. We can doubt that God's way is good for us; we can doubt our salvation; in our weakest moments, we might even wonder whether God exists.

But in the midst of persecution God will give us a strength of faith greater than any we have ever known. The promises of the Bible will be our unmovable rock, and an unshakable faith will tie us securely to it. You will have the faith of a Daniel, or that of his three friends who stood unflinchingly before the fury of wicked rulers and death, by faith! O yes, they struggled, but they obeyed God. And by faith they received the victory — all the promises of Scripture. I John 4:8 tells us, "And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

A second aspect of the victory experienced at the end will be the purification of the church on earth. Always in the history of the church the carnal seed, unbelievers, have mingled with the elect. Some are born into the church, some marry in, others join for wrong reasons. These hypocrites always hurt the church, however. They weaken her, and often lead her astray.

Persecution drives these unbelievers out of the ranks of the believers. They are not willing to endure the heat of persecution, whereas the believers remain. In the last fierce persecution of the end, you will know that those who confess Christ (the Christ of the Scriptures) under pain of torture and death, are true, fellow believers. The church at the end will be pure.

A third concrete experience of victory will be the almighty grace of God that will uphold believers. That grace will never let us down. There is no possibility that the believer will deny Christ, give up the truth, and lose his salvation in the end. I know that because our salvation is God's work. If you are alive at the end, you will be glad that you were raised Protestant Reformed; for you have been taught that God's grace is sovereign, that salvation is not your work to be kept or lost salvation is all of the Lord! The victory is guaranteed in Jesus Christ.

And if the day comes that you are summoned before magistrates to answer the charges which make you worthy of death, then you need not stay up all night thinking up a good answer. The Holy Spirit will speak for you! He will take the knowledge of God stored away in your soul through years of study and will give the most beautiful testimony imaginable. In fact, that grace is so powerful that you will go to your death (if it comes to that) SINGING! Can you imagine that? Through the physical pain and suffering, God will give you the grace to sing! That is victory.

And fourthly, we will experience the victory in that this affliction will work out our salvation. Paul describes persecution as "our light affliction" which he reminds us, is "for a moment, [and] worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:18). This means that we do not stand gazing in horror at the awful persecution, and try to comfort ourselves by the fact that someday it will be over and we will be in heaven. Rather, we understand that persecution is a necessary part of entering into heaven. It prepares us for our particular, God—ordained place in heaven, working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

These four aspects of Christ's victory we will experience IN persecution.

The rest of the victory the whole church will enjoy, because all believers will participate in the day of the Lord. What a glorious experience that will be! Not all the events and the exact order can be determined, but the events at the very end [as I understand them] will be as follows.

The true church of Christ will be all but extinguished. The wicked will think they have won. Antichrist will sit supreme in the earth in a most prosperous and peaceful kingdom. But soon cracks will appear in this great kingdom as conflicts arise between old foes. The troubles will be so bad that it will lead to the greatest battle the earth has ever known —- the battle of Armageddon. The traditionally heathen nations of the earth [in Africa and Asia, for example] will make war against the traditionally Christian nations [in N. America and Europe, for example]. The Bible indicates that as the nations draw near to battle, or are into the fight, the end will come!

Suddenly the "sign of the Son of Man" will appear in the sky. We are not told what this will look like, but it will be a sign or symbol of our Lord that all men will recognize. And, it will be seen by all people all over the world at the same time. Then, immediately afterwards, Christ will come, personally and physically, on the clouds. What a sight that will be! He will come in His glory as the Lord of lords and the King of kings and in the glory of His Father. With Him will be the angels and all the saints who have died.

The response to these events from those on the earth will be two opposite extremes. The wicked will be horrified! Their worst fears will be realized. They will weep; some will call out in terror to the rocks and hills, "Fall on us and hide us from the from the wrath of the Lamb!" —— to no avail. Their kingdom is ended; all will be destroyed. For Christ will consume it all with fire.

But for the righteous it will be a day of joy beyond description. Their redemption has come! Christ will call out of the grave the bodies of all the saints [a WONDER!], reunite them with their souls. Next He will call His people [who are still alive on the earth] to meet Him in the air.

VICTORY! The kingdom of antichrist will be destroyed, deliverance realized!

Experiencing Eternity

And then we will experience eternity, beginning with the final judgment. In this great event, all men and angels, both righteous and wicked, will stand before Christ the Judge. Why? You know that all things happen for the glory of God, and this will also glorify God in and through Jesus Christ. For it will reveal how just and righteous is our God, especially as He sends the reprobate away into hell, but takes His elect to heaven.

In this judgment, the glorified Christ will stand as the visible representative of God. The

"books" will be opened, and all that was ever spoken and done, and even thought, will be openly revealed. And Christ will separate the righteous from the wicked as a Shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

For the wicked it is the day of wrath which they have dreaded. Christ will show them their wicked lives, their secret sins as well as open rebellion against God and His law. At the same time they will be convicted by the Spirit of their sins so that they will know that they DESERVE eternal destruction! From the lips of Christ will sound the terrible judgment, "Depart from Me I never knew you!" All will be cast into hell with Satan and the fallen angels. The condemned will have bodies prepared for the torment of hell for an eternity. How horrible! They will be able neither to repent nor to sin any longer. The only experience they will have is the unending wrath of God —— physical torment (described in Scripture as burning and as the gnawing of a worm) and as well as internal, emotional and spiritual, agony. They have sinned against the infinite holiness and majesty of God; their JUST punishment is the suffering of His eternal wrath.

Believers also will be judged. But we will face Christ without terror, for the "trial" will be "stacked" in our favor. For the Judge has already paid our punishment. He has said that He loves us, and will save us from the punishment of our sins. And He has told us in advance what His judgment will be, i.e., "Innocent, worthy of heaven." The outcome is certain!

Yet He will show us our sins, too. And we will be unspeakably ashamed and know that WE DESERVE the eternal death of the wicked. But all this will we see in the cross, and know that our sins are forgiven because Christ paid for them! In total wonder we will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Can you imagine the joy and gratitude that will flood our souls when we realize that this is ours for Jesus' sake alone?

But that is only the beginning — the ushering into our new home. All the old, heaven and earth, will have been burned, cleansed by fire. Out of it Christ will create a new heaven and earth. They will, somehow, be one —- not two places any more. One, beautiful, glorious, perfect dwelling place.

You will love heaven! One reason for that is that all the evils of this life will be gone —— sickness, troubles, getting old. Never again will we be hurt, cry, or even feel sad. Best of all, our sins will be gone! No more failures! No more guilt! No more battles against temptations or our flesh!

Besides, you will feel at home in heaven. It will not be like coming into high school that first day — remember? — when everything is unfamiliar, and you do not know many people, and are not sure how you will like it? In heaven, you will immediately be and feel at home, because the life of regeneration came from heaven, and it seeks heaven all the time you are on this earth. So when you arrive there, it will be coming home where you belong.

Add to that the fact that there will be exciting things to do in heaven. Saints in heaven will not just stand around in choirs for an eternity — even though I am sure they (do now and) will sing! But there will be work, a blessed, enjoyable work without the toil of earthly labors. What this work will be like in a perfect heaven and earth, I cannot tell, but just as Israel was given the land of Canaan as a picture of heaven, and God told them to be busy there, so will we be (joyfully) busy in heaven.

But at the heart of all this, and the best part, will be the covenant life with God in Christ. We will know God as, now, we are known by Him. Living there, seeing Christ face to face, we will enjoy His love, fellowship, and grace. and have the pleasure of searching out the riches of His grace for ever —— and never get finished!

We could go on . . . ,but you search the Scriptures. Find out about your new, perfect mansion and the glorious life awaiting you. This I know, that heaven will be so great. that our reaction will be like that of the queen of Sheba to the wisdom of Solomon, the riches of his kingdom, and the majesty of his reign — "The half was not told me!"

* * * *

Protestant Reformed Young People, all these things are before you —— persecution, victory, and eternity. I am concerned for you; I pray for you. Understand, my concern is not that in the end God's grace will not sustain you, and you will fail. My concern is that you will not stand now in the little trials of your faith. You see, the pressures to conform to the world's standards and the many temptations are for your spiritual training. This is God's way of preparing you for the end. We must stand NOW for God's cause. For if we cannot endure a little peer pressure from our friends NOW when only our popularity is at stake, how will we stand when our very life is on the line? Stand now!

As we look to the end, let us follow the example of Jesus. He knew the bitterness of the cross that would be His —— infinitely worse than any suffering we will ever have. What did He do?

Hebrews 12 tells us: He looked beyond the agony to the glory that He would certainly receive in the way of His suffering! So will you! May God give us that grace!

BOOKS

Published by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies

Reformed Education by Prof. David Engelsma - 86pp. - **$2.50**

Originally published in 1977 by the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies, this excellent book was reprinted by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies in 1981. An excellent series of speeches on:

The covenant basis of Christian education
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An excellent short book on Christian Liberty in matters indifferent, concerning proper mutual respect, vs. judging and despising, in observance of days, occasions to fall, offenses, and the principle of faith.

NEW BOOK:

Jesus' Beauty Shining In You by Rev. C. Haak and Rev. R. Van Overloop, Don Doezema and Marybeth Lubbers - 187 pp. - **$6.50**

The three main authors of this book took each fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22-26 and wrote from a particular point of view. Don Doezema wrote on the fruit shown in the life of Christ; Marybeth Lubbers wrote about the fruit shown in the life a biblical character; and Rev. Van Overloop wrote on the fruit of the Spirit shown in the life of Reformed youth today. A superb study of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of Christ and in the lives of God's people.

Orders for books should be sent to:
Beacon Lights, P.O. Box 375, Jenison, MI 49428.

WRITING CONTEST

The divisions and basic themes of the contest are as follows:

Division	Theme	Pages
3rd - 4th Grades	Animals Showing God In Creation Lion, lamb, etc. (Draw a picture)	1 page written
5th - 6th Grades	Animals Showing God in Creation Lion, lamb, etc. (Draw a picture)	1 page written
7th - 8th Grades	History of a Biblical City Significance of this city then (in biblical history) and now. Cities - Jerusalem, Athens, Damascus, Rome Beirut, Alexandria, Baghdad	2+ pages
9th - 10th Grades	History of a Biblical City Significance of this city then (in biblical history) and now. Cities - Jerusalem, Athens, Damascus, Rome, Beirut, Alexandria, Baghdad	2+ pages
11th - 12th Grades	Cults and World Religions Description and its opposition to Christianity. Describe their publications, peculiar beliefs, and rituals. Tell who their great leaders are and who they worship. Explain any creeds or documents they hold to. Pick one from Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Transcendental Meditation, or Mormons	3+ pages
18 - 22 years of age	Witnessing in the Workplace (Active & Passive Witnessing)	3+ pages
23 - up	Financial Stewardship	3+ pages

The top three articles for each level will not only have their articles printed in the Beacon Lights but will also receive a book gift certificate.

Articles for the writing contest are due March 1, 1992. Please indicate your name, address, and division. Send your written or typed article to:

Beacon Lights
P.O. Box 375
Jenison, MI 49428

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

by Rev. C. Hanko

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Gen. 2:7

On the sixth day of the creation week God brought forth the highest of all the earthly creatures, and apex of the earthly creation, MAN.

Just think, the very first man and woman that God created were each a perfect masterpiece, not only without defect, but exactly as God intended them to be, exactly fit to serve their purpose, not only for themselves, but for thousands of generations to come, even eventually in a world of sin and death! "God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Gen. 1:31

We humans experiment for many years, and still we take the flaws out to improve a product. We have come a long way since the first Ford automobile appeared on the road. Many

improvements have been made on the radio, the television set, and the computer. Think of the tremendous advancement made in the war machinery since the days of the bow and arrow and the battering ram, as became evident in the recent war with Iraq.

But Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator perfect and complete with a strong physique, an intelligent face, an upright posture, and a dexterous hand. He was a rational, moral creature with many gifts and talents. Even more than that, He was created in the image of God in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, to love his God, know Him and devote himself to Him in love. He spent the first full day of his life keeping sabbath with his God, in intimate covenant fellowship. His delight was in his God and in serving Him.

Eve was another marvel brought forth from the hand of our Creator. Adam was formed by the twofold act whereby God formed his body from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the spirit that was destined for eternity. But Eve was formed from a rib of Adam, taken from the area near his heart. She was essentially like him in body and soul, for she also was created in the image and likeness of God. She also had a mind to know, a heart to love, and a body to serve her God. Yet Eve was distinctly different from Adam physically, so that she could bear and nurture children, and psychologically, that she could be a helper to Adam. Adam was lord over the entire earthly creation, and Eve was his assistant, in order that together they might use the earthly creation to the glory of God. Adam realized that his life was never complete, he could never have children, nor could he do full justice to his calling without his mate, Eve, who was a woman. And Eve's whole make up served to delight in filling her place in Adam's life. Eve needed Adam, even as Adam needed Eve to make their life complete.

* * * * *

"For I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139:14.

As the Psalmist writes these words he is filled with holy fear and awe at God's omnipotence and omniscience whereby we are wonderfully made.

We still marvel every time a baby is born. That little speck of life is so very complete, with everything in its proper place, down to its little finger nails and wee toe nails. It is a person, an individual, male or female, resembling its race and parents, yet different from all the millions of children born on this planet. There simply are no two alike. Each is an individual brought forth by the hand of our Creator.

We think back to the time of our conception. God chose our parents, determined the moment when another person should come into being. A fertilized egg began to develop, a single cell multiplied by the hand of the Almighty to become a brain, a heart, an eye, an ear, a mouth, or some other important part of the body. In divine wisdom, far beyond our comprehension, the Almighty intertwined a complex of tissue, bone, joints, nerves, arteries, veins and flesh into one new being.

As if that were a small thing, God forms a human being as destined for eternity. Those are solemn words spoken from our Baptism Form at the time of our baptism: "We and our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, in so much that we cannot enter the kingdom of God, except we be born again." How soon this "innocent" little babe, who can be so cute and lovable, reveals this by tantrums when he does not get his way.

God makes a rational, moral creature who owes it to his God to love and serve Him with his whole being, humbly devoting his life to the praise and glory of Him who alone is God.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according as he has done, whether it is good or bad." II Cor. 5:10.

May we question God's right to be praised?

* * * * *

"For we are His (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10

There is an even greater marvel to consider. In the above quoted Scripture passage the apostle refers to every child of God who ever sees the light of day, whether man, woman, or child.

We are God's workmanship, hand made, even custom made, only one of a kind. God made an Adam, but He also made an Abraham, a Moses, a David, a Peter, and a Paul, each according to the purpose he must serve in his family, in the history of God's church, and in the midst of the world. He made them for their own place that they now hold among the saints in glory. And God made you and me.

We are created in Christ Jesus. God gave us to Him from all eternity as the precious sheep of the good Shepherd. He laid down His life for those sheep. He knows us by name, and when he calls us we come to Him, so that eternally there will be one sheep fold and one Shepherd. John 10:16

Our rebirth as new creatures in Christ is far more wonderful than our first birth. We who were conceived and born in sin as children of Satan are transformed into the likeness of God's dear Son, made into sons and daughters of the most high God. We have our own character, our own abilities, gifts and talents, according to our appointed place in the church, the body of Christ. Some members are hands, others are feet, or eyes, or ears, or a mouth, or some other function, but each one is dependent upon the other, and the entire body is dependent on each member. I Cor. 12

Sometimes we feel so inadequate, so useless. If we had the gifts and talents of so-and-so, or the financial means of some other person, we would make ourselves useful to carry out God's calling in our lives.

Remember that there was an Abraham who served his own purpose in the kingdom of heaven. There was also a Hannah. And so many others. Each was custom made by the heavenly Architect to serve his or her unique calling. That is no less true of you, who has your work cut out for you. You are created in Christ Jesus unto those good works for which you were formed.

Imagine that. Not only are we divinely appointed to have a place in God's church, but we also have a personal calling to serve in our own unique way toward the gathering of God's church and the coming of His kingdom.

That lays on our shoulders a tremendous responsibility. It requires much prayer, daily asking: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" And then have the determination to do it. For it is in that daily routine of living that we carry out the divine mandate laid upon us.

That is marvelous even as such. But added to that is the fact that God formed us, not only for this life, but also for our place in the church triumphant. Are there hidden, unused talents, that may become evident there? We can only wonder. But we shall shine as the stars, each in our own magnitude. We shall join our voices in the majestic choir that eternally sings the song of Moses and the Lamb to the glory of the Father. Even as our works are works of grace, so also our final reward is the reward of grace. Soli Deo Gloria!

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3

LETTER #14

PEOPLE OPPRESSING PEOPLE

by Mrs. H. Brands

To get us back to where we are today, let's review.

(1) The whole book of ECCLESIASTES has as its purpose to evaluate all labor in life apart from God in order to lead us to labor for God alone.

(2) We finished the INTRODUCTION (chapter 1) and also Solomon's PERSONAL EXPERIENCES (chapters 2-3) along with the beautiful conclusion of faith which followed this.

(3) Now we are up to chapters 4-6 in which Solomon's purpose is to evaluate a bit more concretely some of the reasons for which men live and labor apart from God. Here he takes samples of various Godless ways of life and analyzes them to see if they contain any profit eternally, apart from God. He looks at four basic ways men seek meaning in life without God:

1- By trying to obtain favor of men (chapter 4);

2- By trying to manipulate God (chapter 5:1-7);

3- By trying to gain social power (5:8-9); and

4- By laboring for earthly riches (5:10-6:9).

Because the first and last of these four errors are the most common, Solomon also spends the most time on these. He gives four "study cases" of ways people try to please people and has five sections counteracting the all-important place most people give riches. Today and the next three studies we will deal with the futility of living to please people.

* * * * *

The first case of futility in trying to please people is people oppressing other people. Solomon does not specify the exact setting for this oppression. It may be a ruler oppressing his subjects. It may be a slave-owner oppressing his slaves. It may be a husband oppressing his wife. It may even be parents oppressing their children. It covers any situation in which people are oppressing other helpless people.

(4:1) "So I returned and considered
all the oppressions that are done under the sun:
and, behold, the tears of such as were oppressed and they had no comforter;
and on the side of their oppressor there was power, but they had no comforter."

The picture is poignant and pathetic. The people whom Solomon observes are under rulers and masters who are cruel and intolerant, giving them little if any reason to enjoy life. Their lot is labor without human reward, suffering and fear from day to day. The result is that they often give way to weeping and tears.

Further, these unhappy people have "no comforter". There is no escape from their lot of suffering, no way out. They must, all their lives long, remain without comfort under the oppressors.

Such situations have been widespread throughout history and still today. One hundred some years ago, the United States still had slavery and this description fit many of the lives of the slaves (though not all). In many Communist countries still today, the citizens are virtually slaves who live in terror of the government. Wherever Roman Catholicism or many tribal religions have ruled unrestrained, the people became objects of its oppression. And even in "civilized" countries, husbands or parents can be tyrants who bully and afflict their wives and children. All such people share Solomon's description: they have "the tears of such as were oppressed" and they have "no comforter", apart from God.

(4:2-3) "Wherefore I praised the dead
which are already dead
more than the living
which are yet alive.

"Yea, better is he than both they,
which hath not yet been,
who hath not seen the evil work
that is done under the sun."

In such situations, says Solomon, the person who is best off is the dead person. He is better off than the person who is still alive who spends all his days in fears and tears. He is also better off than the person still to be born because all that unborn child faces is the same future misery.

There is no pleasing an oppressor. If a person's hope for happiness rests in the favor of men, then the lot of the oppressed is the worst on earth. Apart from God, there can be no value, no meaning, no hope or joy in such intolerable situations. If there were no God and no future life, what possible happiness could there be in the miserable life of the oppressed person?

Solomon does not at this point give the "conclusion of the whole matter" but we as believers draw the Biblical conclusion constantly. If we are Christians not under oppression, we realize that we are no better than the oppressed person but simply placed by God under different circumstances. If we are Christians under persecution, we find that we do have a Comforter, God Himself, Who promises us an eternal reward if we remain faithful in the difficult lot He has given us. And if we meet those under oppression, we seek to show them also that value in life is not dependent on our circumstances now in this life but rather on our eternal destiny.

Although most of us do not live under the constant oppression which Solomon pictures here, yet we all suffer degrees of oppression at various times. We, too, often feel we have no comforter and give way to bleak despondency.

May God lead us as Christians through these vales of despondency and up to the level plains of daily walk in faith with Him. As He uses our tears to bring us to our knees, may these tears be not just tears begging deliverance from our lots in life but rather tears that confess our sins and unworthiness. May they lead us to the Cross of the Redeemer, Who will guide us by His Word and comfort us by His Spirit.

Then also we can see the bright hope of heaven before us and walk in contentment and

joy. With Paul, we confess that this suffering is "light" in comparison to the joy of eternity which God has prepared for all those who love Him. There is value to the Christian's life, and there is joy, too, even in oppression and suffering!

Letter #14. Theme: ECCLESIASTES 4:1-3: "People Oppressing Helpless People"

True or False?

1. Solomon is describing people under cruel authorities, not just people with unkind neighbors.

2. Solomon feels sorry for these oppressed people and encourages them to try to escape.

3.The dead person is better off than the person living hopelessly under oppression.

4. This hopelessness applies to both Christians and non-Christians under oppression.

5. The Christian hope is not in earthly escape from oppression but in heavenly reward.

CHURCH NEWS

by Lora Bouwkamp

SOUTH HOLLAND, (Illinois)

The Young People's Society sponsored a hayride on November 15.

The marriage of Karen Buiter and Robert Ensink was solemnized November 30.

The sacrament of baptism was administered December 1 to Andrew James, infant son of Jim and Leah Lenting and to Justin Charles, infant son of Pastor and Verna Terpstra.

Keith and Mary Vooys rejoice in the birth of Olivia Grace.

We express our sympathy to Tony and Bertha De Young in the death of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Pearl De Young.

FIRST, Grand Rapids

Mr. Mart Doezema celebrated his 93rd birthday November 24.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Hunter rejoice in the birth of Ethan Christopher.

At their request the membership papers of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Doezema have been transferred to our Southwest PRC.

The congregation welcomes Mrs. Timothy Kaiser (Joan Doezema) and Mrs. Sarah Hoolsema into their fellowship.

HUDSONVILLE, (Michigan)

The consistory received as confessing members from First Church in Grand Rapids, Prof. Robert and Marilyn Decker and their son Jon.

Mrs. Lisa (Koop) Lubbers was transferred at her request to our Grandville PRC.

We express our sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Dowie Vander Schaaf in the loss of their brother-in-law Mr. Fred Van Engen.

Mrs. Don Dykstra celebrated her 87th birthday November 13.

The sacrament of baptism was administered November 17 to Whitney Rachel, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lubbers; and to Danae Lynn, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Todd Lubbers.

Mr. and Mrs. Todd Lubbers give thanks to God for the birth of Amanda Jenae November 20.

At their request the membership statement of dismissal was sent to Mr. and Mrs. Randy Moorman to affiliate with Cornerstone CRC.

At her request, the membership statement of baptism was sent to Mrs. Cindy (Hoekstra) Van Dyke so that she may affiliate with the Netherlands Ref. Church.

Mr. Ted Miedema Sr. celebrated his 88

birthday December 11.

Mrs. Al Garvelink celebrated her 84th birthday December 14.

HOPE, (Walker)

Shar Besselsen and Kathy Hop made confession of their faith November 10.

The membership papers of Mr. Dan De Vries were sent to Southwest PRC at his request.

SOUTHEAST, (Grand Rapids)

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Brandon Robert, son of Peter and Vicki De Kruyger.

We extend our sympathy to Roland and Jane Petersen in the death of his father.

Bethany Kuiper was received as a confessing member from Immanuel PRC in Canada.

BETHEL, (Illinois)

The membership papers of Rog and Florence Key have been transferred to Southwest PRC.

FAITH, (Michigan)

On November 10 Stephen Bylsma, Tricia Dykstra, Scott Hoekstra, Michael Holstege, Chad Huber, Erika Kalsbeek, Cynthia Kaptein, Holly Ondersma and Kari Velthouse made public confession of their faith.

HOPE, (Redlands)

Mrs. Hilda Meelker went home to be with the Lord. Sympathy is extended to her family.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Verbeek and family were received as members from Kalamazoo, MI PRC.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Span and family were received from Lacombe, Alberta PRC.

The baptismal membership papers of Tim Bleyenberg were received from Edgerton, Minn. PRC.

The Lord took Mrs. Jennie Feenstra home to Himself. Sympathy is extended to her family.

Mr. Bill Karsemeyer celebrated his 79th birthday, November 21.

SOUTHWEST, (Grand Rapids)

The membership papers of Mr. Bennett Kamps and his baptized daughter have been sent to his home upon his request.

The membership papers of Miss Joan Kuiper have been sent to Hull, Iowa PRC.

The baptismal papers of Jay Van Baren and Jeffrey Van Baren have been sent to Faith PRC upon their request.

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Dave Rau on the birth of Renae Christine.

PELLA, (Iowa)

The membership papers of Jerry and Judy Fynaardt and son have been sent to Peoria CRC upon their request.

We rejoice with Jim and Sheila Van Donselaar in the birth of Tina Dawn.

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Keith Richard, infant son of Marvin and Marcia Gritters.

Lynn Bekkering and Steve De Boef were united in marriage November 23.

The motives of all you do and strive to do may never be found in your desires, but always and unconditionally in the Lord. . . .

When you have learned thus to obey, the battle for the Lord goes on without pause, yet calmly and steadily. it is labour that looks not upon the results.

You are no longer striving for what <u>you</u> want or deem necessary: you are not impatient, not wearied with complaining or unmanned by disappointment. You simply obey. You are not less zealous but more: not less constant, but more persevering.

And God, Who is merciful, will crown your efforts, in home and heart and church, with his blessing.

A. Kuyper

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