
Beacon Lights

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*“I know, O Lord, that thy
judgments are right, and
that thou in faithfulness
hast afflicted me.”*

Psalm 119:75

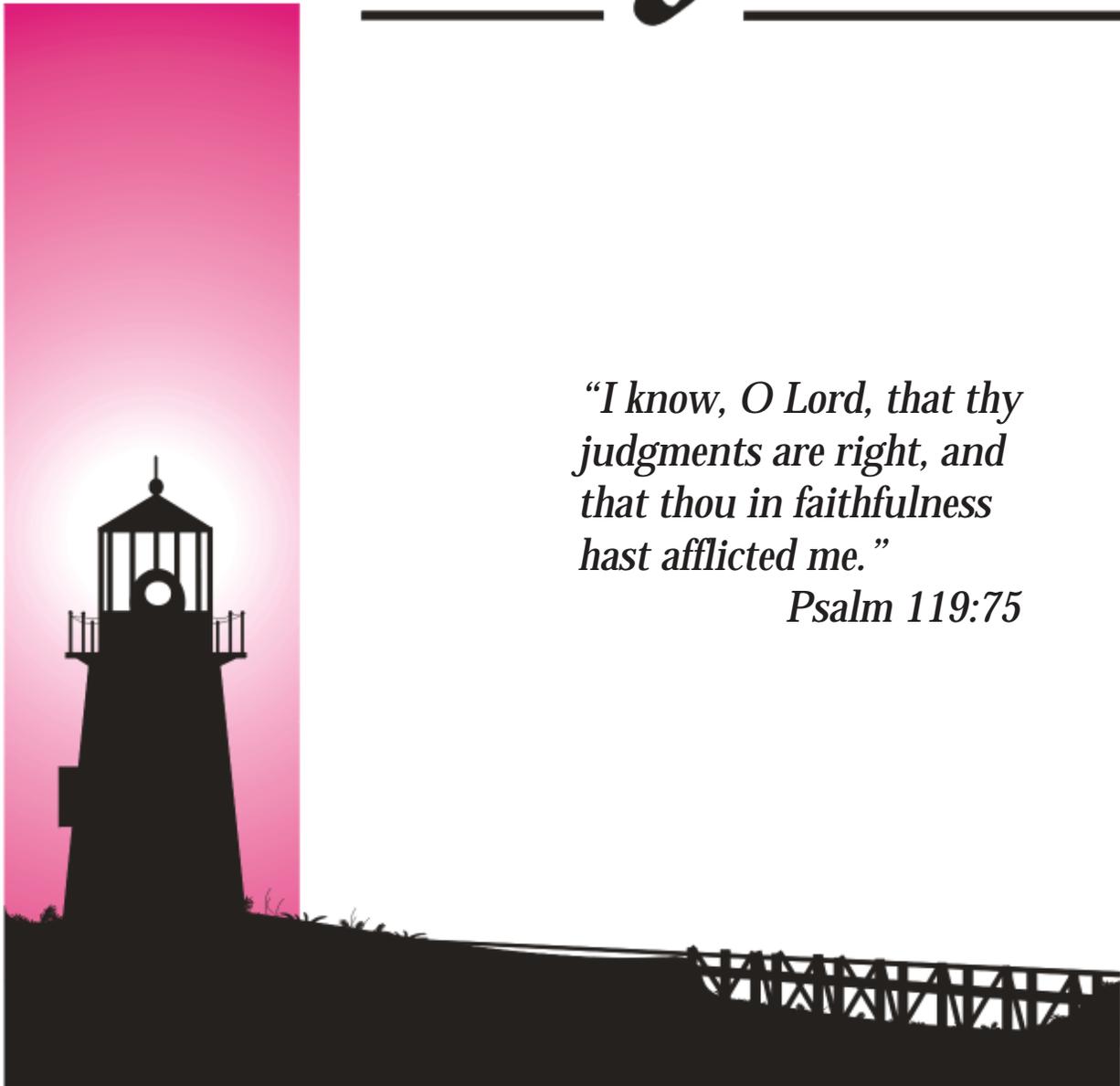


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BUSINESS OFFICE

Beacon Lights
P.O. Box 144
Randolph, WI 53956
Phone: (920) 326-6186
Email: huizenga@powercom.net

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Sam Copple
659 Lincoln Ave. NW
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Affliction For Our Profit (2)

by Aaron J. Cleveland



In the previous article we examined God's sovereign control over affliction and the difference between His judgment of the wicked and of the righteous. We saw that God's people experience various afflictions as chastisements from a loving heavenly Father who is faithful to His covenant and who will not allow His people to walk in ways of sin.

Before we examine the question: "Why are we afflicted?" let us remember that suffering, pain, sorrow, distress, and death are a reality in this world because of sin, our sin. Because we are in the world, these evils come upon all of us. Yet, we acknowledge God's hand in control of these evils. We know that they do not come upon us by chance, so that every once in a while we are randomly plagued by evil. Rather, we confess that our heavenly Father so controls our afflictions, that He rules when, how, and why we are afflicted.

Our Father demonstrates His *faithfulness* to us in the way of affliction. We confess in Psalm 119:75: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." This is true because God's afflictions of us are chastisements. One who is chastened is corrected. He is restrained from falling deeper into sin and restored to obedience. Spiritually, we are like sheep, always going astray. Yet, our faithful Shepherd always keeps us in His care. Further, the Lord's faithfulness is demonstrated when, after enduring the Lord's chastening, we emerge spiritually refined and purified.

When we are chastened by the Lord and when we endure His chastening, we know that God loves us as His sons (Hebrews 12:5-11). Just as an earthly father must discipline and correct the son he loves, so does our heavenly father correct us in the way of chastening us through affliction. What a terrible thing it would be if our heavenly Father allowed us to walk in the ways of sin without correcting us in love. How miserable our life would be without the assurance that all of the evils which come upon us are from our covenant Father who deals with us as His dear children.

Our Father chastens us for a number of reasons. First of all, we may be chastened as God's direct response to a specific sin we were walking in or presently walk in. David, after he confessed his sins of murdering Uriah and committing adultery with Bathsheba, was chastened by God with the death of his son. We read in II Samuel 12:14, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." David knew this act of God to be the direct result of his sins.

What a terrible thing it would be if
our heavenly Father allowed us to
walk in the ways of sin without
correcting us in love.

That God answers our disobedience with His rod of correction is the language of Psalm 89:30-32. Speaking of His covenant faithfulness, God says to the seed of David, “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Psalm 89:30-32). When the Lord sent fiery serpents among His people in the wilderness it was because of their sin of speaking against the Lord (Numbers 21:5-9). After the serpents bit and killed many of them, the people confessed, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee [Moses]” (vs. 7).

Our affliction ought always to be a cause for self-examination. We know that when we are walking in a particular sin, we can expect a certain punishment from God for that sin. Take, for example, the young man who persists in the sin of being drunken. When that young man loses control of his car late at night, smashes into a tree, and ends up in the hospital, he had better understand that God is speaking loudly to him about his sin of drunkenness. God often chastens us with judgments appropriate to our sins. To close our ears to this clear speech of God is a great evil.

Secondly, we are chastened to spur our spiritual growth. While we may not be presently walking in any sin, yet it is the case that our sinfulness stunts our spiritual growth. We never walk in God’s ways as we should. Our faith becomes weak and our light becomes dim. We so easily become lazy and distracted by this world. We waste our time and do not make full use of our abilities. God then sends affliction upon us to bring us to His Word and draw us out of the world and away from our own selfish pursuits. Perhaps, God sends the evil of family strife into our life. This affliction causes us to examine ourselves and brings us to a renewed study of His Word in order that we may know His will and have wisdom and patience to endure the affliction. Perhaps the affliction He sends us causes us to better use our time and eliminate from our lives that which is unprofitable. It may be that the affliction God sends causes us to use a God-given gift which we had neglected. Then we confess, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psalm 119:71).

Thirdly, we may experience affliction as the direct result of our obedience. “Take, by brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (James 5:10). The prophets experienced the afflictions of poverty, hunger, pain, loneliness, sorrow, and persecution because of their obedience to God. This is our experience in life also. It is often the case that confessing the truth about Christ will cause us much difficulty in this life. We will be mocked. We will have to endure the hatred of many, even close family members. The way of the believer in this world is never an easy way. Yet, our heavenly Father uses also these afflictions to draw us closer to Him and remind us that we are His sons.

While our afflictions must always be the occasion for self-examination, we must be careful in how we judge God’s affliction of others. It is easy for us to view the afflictions of others as God’s punishment of them for their sins. How we view God’s dealings with others ought to be restrained by the lessons taught in John 9:1-3. There we read:

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

In his commentary on this passage, John Calvin writes that one of the lessons to be taken from it is that we “learn to be quick in discerning our own evils rather than those of others” (Vol. 17, p. 364). Later in his commentary on this passage Calvin writes,

that God has sometimes another object in view than to punish the sins of men, when he sends afflictions to them. Consequently, when the causes of affliction are concealed, we ought to restrain curiosity, that we may neither dishonour God nor be malicious towards our brethren.

Therefore, when observing the afflictions of fellow believers, our main concern ought not to be why God deals with them in the way He does. Rather, we ought to see the glorious works of God in strengthening them in their afflictions and in delivering them from their afflictions. Just as the sickness and death of Lazarus was “for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby,” so does God use all of the afflictions of His people for the glory of His name in Christ (John 11:4).

Knowing that our afflictions serve the purpose of the glory of God, we are able to endure them. We know that they come from His hand. We know that He sends them in love to chasten us. We also know that the purpose of God in those afflictions is good. Our confession is that of James 5:11, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Next time, Lord willing, we hope to focus more on how God deals mercifully with us in our afflictions and how we benefit from them to the glory of His name. ❖

Aaron is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Gem of the Month

The Mercies of Christ

*The place I inhabit, God's footstool is called;
The soil, the sea, and the air.
When the earth yields its fruit, it belongs not to me;
It's a gift for God's creatures to share.
If He sends to me millions, or only a bit,
He's entrusting it into my care,
Whether money or talent or kindness to show,
For His glory I know it is there.*

*Lord, help me to show the mercies of Christ
As upon this, Thy footstool, I tread.
May I not view as mine the blessings bestowed,
But strive to serve others instead.
Give me grace that humility shows, never pride;
May I seek by my Lord to be led,
Esteeming my neighbor far above self,
So to glorify Jesus, my Head.*

Thelma Westra

When I In Awesome Wonder...
Michigan's Golden Coast
Passenger Pigeon

by Deane Wassink

In the middle of Ottawa County, where I now live, and near the shore of Lake Michigan is a small lake called "Pigeon Lake". It is connected to the big lake by a small river. Now the area is pretty much overwhelmed by a gigantic, coal-fired, electric power plant. In the past, however, the area was known for being one of the primary roosting sites of the passenger pigeon, now extinct.

My interest dates from my visits to the Holland Museum as a young schoolboy. It filled all the rooms of an old house next to Central Park. In one of the cases was a stuffed passenger pigeon. It was one of the last of the species to die. I remember it to be very similar to the morning dove, but, slimmer and with more of a russet color to the feathers. That dusty old bird made quite an impression on my young mind. I can still clearly recall it today.

The passenger pigeon was one of the most amazing examples of a creature with an instinct to flock together in large groups. The flocks would number in the millions. When moving from one roosting area to another men testified to the fact that it took over an hour for one flock to fly over them. There were also claims that the sky would appear to darken like twilight because they would block the sun over such a large area.

Scientists estimate that there were up to five billion of these birds in North America. They lived in the oak and beech forests in flocks that covered thirty square miles of woods. They laid only one white egg in the spring.

Such an incredible collection of birds soon caught the attention of the meat hunters. Year after year these gentle birds were slaughtered for market. One technique that impressed me was the use of a long pole waved in

the air to knock the pigeons down. As fast as they dropped the packers would grab them, clip their throats with their teeth and pack them with salt in barrels to be shipped by rail to the big cities. Also the young pigeons, called squabs, were taken from their nests and sold as a special culinary delicacy.

In spite of their incredible numbers, it wasn't long before the combination of hunting, habitat changes and low reproduction greatly decreased the numbers of the flocks. In fact, when men realized what was happening they tried to save the pigeons, but, the population continued to fall. By the last part of the nineteenth century their numbers were nearly gone. Interestingly, it seemed that they could only survive in large flocks. Finally the one last lone male died in captivity in the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens in 1914.

What a shame that we could not have seen the awesome spectacle of the flocks flying over. It takes quite an imagination to think of them in the deep woods around my home when it is now open farms, blueberry plantations and young forests. It is always a sad thing when one of God's creatures disappears so that its daily witness to His handiwork and greatness is silenced.

Did you know that the history of the passenger pigeons shows us a very important lesson about our own spiritual health? The passenger pigeon needed the flock in order to survive. The same is true for us from a spiritual point of view. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we cannot be a Christian alone. We need other believers. In fact, so true is that that one of the marks of a child of God is that he or she will seek to join with other believers, become part of the body of Christ, in a local congregation. The modern day independent spirit is de-

stroying God's people. T.V. church is not enough. We need to join a church in order to be ministered to and to minister to fellow saints. We need to hear the preaching of the Gospel in our own church. If we neglect this part of Christ's teaching we will die away just like the passenger pigeon.

I Hear His Voice

I hear His voice in the waves' crash.

I hear His voice in the rustling grass.

I hear His voice in the robin's sweet song.

I hear His voice when frogs sing the night long.

I hear His voice in the lamb's sweet bleat.

I hear His voice in the grouse's wing beat.

I hear His voice in the winter's still.

I hear His voice in the gurgling rill.

I see His beauty in the sunset's hue.

I see His beauty in the sparkling dew.

I see His beauty in the rolling hills' green.

I see His beauty in the volcano's steam.

I see His beauty in the horse's run.

I see His beauty in the otter's fun.

I see His beauty in my dear wife's sweet smile.

I see His beauty in the face of my child.

Though His beauty in His creatures I see,

His voice is most clear in His Word to me. ❖

Deane is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

The Reader Asks

The New Heavenly Earth

by Rev. James Laning

Dear Rev. Laning,

In our morning devotions, our class came across Psalm 104:5, a reference to God as Creator. "Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever." How is this verse connected with II Peter 3 where we read that "the earth shall be burned up" and "look for a new heavens and a new earth"?

Mike Booth, Courtney Rus, Mr. Tom Bergman
Covenant Christian High School

Dear Mike, Courtney, and Mr. Bergman,

I very much appreciate your question. Many commentators have passed over this question when writing on the Psalms.

You are certainly correct that Psalm 104:5 must be in harmony with passages such as Matthew 24:35, where Christ says that this earth will "pass away," and II Peter 3:10, which speaks of the elements melting with fervent heat.

As is so often the case, our creeds point us in the right direction. Article 37 of the Belgic Confession says that on the last day "our Lord Jesus will come from heaven ...; burning this old world with fire and flame, to cleanse it." It is important for us to know and confess

that the new earth will be the same earth that is here today, but that it will be cleansed by fire and made to be heavenly. Through this judgment by fire that cleanses the earth, the foundations of the earth will continue to stand.

This was pictured for us in what happened at the flood. We read that “*the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:*” (II Peter 3:6), and yet the world emerged from this judgment. It was the same heaven and earth, and yet there was something different about it, so that we read of “the heavens and the earth, which are now” (II Peter 3:7), which are said to be different from the heavens and the earth which were before the flood. Similarly, in the new heavens and new earth we will stand upon and rule over the very same earth that we see today. But then the earth will be cleansed, freed from the bondage of corruption, and made to be heavenly. What an amazing and glorious truth this is!

Thanks again for your very interesting question. May the Lord continue to bless and strengthen you as you dig into the heavenly riches that are revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

Fraternally in Christ,
Rev. Laning ❖

Do you have a question that has been on your mind? Something that came up at school or during a discussion with friends or co-workers? You can be sure that there are many more people reading these words who have had the same question and are looking for answers just like you. Rev. Laning of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan is waiting to answer them. Don't worry, if you would rather your name was not published with your question, we will honor your request. We do, however, ask that your name and either your home or email address be included so that Rev. Laning can respond privately if need be.

Please send your question to:

Rev. James Laning
1550 Ferndale S.W.
Walker, MI 49544
E-mail: jlanning@msn.com

Story Time

When the Liberation Came

by J. P. de Klerk.

“**W**hat would you like me to tell you about?” Grandmother Brouwer sat in her easy chair in the bow window of her living room, with a happy smile on her deeply lined face. A white lace ruff on her graceful dark dress gave her the dignity that her three grandchildren liked so much.

James, who last week became 16 years old, said, “You choose the subject yourself, Grandmother.”

“Well,” she said, “what is the topic of the day? Did you look at the calendar?”

James’ sisters, Nelly and Liesbeth, had straight away a look at the calendar next to them on the wall and said surprised, “Oh, it is May 5 today—Liberation Day!”

“Yes, indeed. That day was in 1945 in The Netherlands the end of World War Two, after five years of a brutal occupation by the German army of Adolf Hitler.”

“Tell us, Grandmother, how was that day. What happened?” asked the girls.

She looked quietly at them for a moment and they saw that her eyes were moist. She drew a breath. The grandchildren came to her for a visit each Saturday afternoon since Grandfather had died, and they enjoyed her narrative skill.

Grandmother had become the center of several children and grandchildren over the years.

“Did you ever have a good look at this picture?” she said, and pointed to a photograph in a frame next to her.

Liesbeth, who was 14 years old, could recognize grandfather, but not her grandmother, who in the picture was such a young, happy girl. Nelly, 13, saw no affinity at all. But, indeed, they were their grandparents.

“That photograph was made on May 5 by a friend of Grandfather, just after the announcement was made that we had peace and Grandfather came outside, leaving his underground hideout in the small town of Leidschendam.

The clothes we are wearing there were made by me out of a parachute of a British pilot, who had jumped out of his burning plane half a year earlier. The Dutch flag you see on the roof of that building was made by me with a girlfriend. It was a warm day, because that year it was an early summer. Your grandfather had yet to become used to all the sunlight.”

“What was he doing every day in the cellar?” asked James.

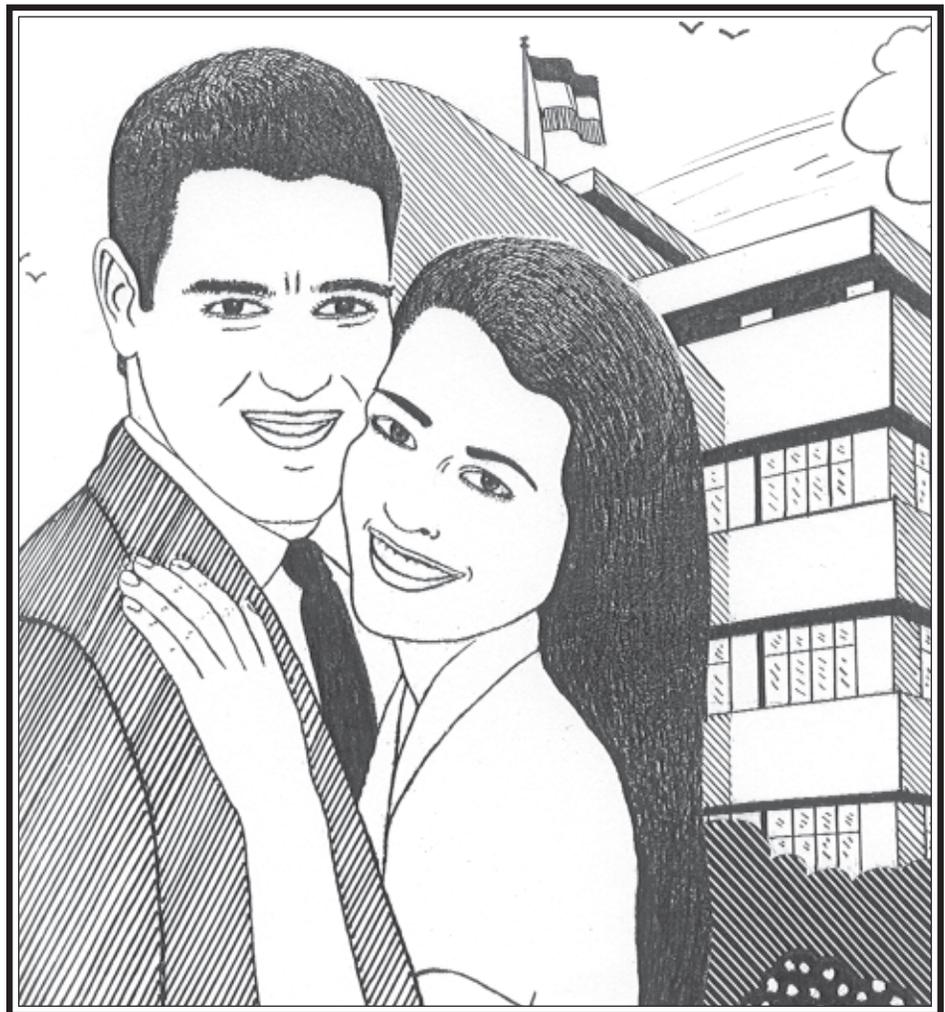
“Well, perilous work, together with three other young men. They came outside for a while only at night to get fresh air. It was their job to listen to all the messages and news items of the British Broadcasting Company in London, write them down and pass it on, and what was free for publication they wrote out with a typewriter on stencils for the people in the neighborhood and others. That was not allowed by the Germans. They could execute you for it. They found it very important that

the public only listened to their news and believed all that they told them.”

Liesbeth said, “Grandmother, why did you look glad in the photo. Hadn’t you seen each other for a long time?”

“No, because it was too risky. The enemy was searching everywhere, trying to catch someone yet before the war would be over. There was much hatred against those who did not obey them. Often they tortured people who were arrested with these stencils in their pockets. Sometimes a whole lot of them suddenly appeared in a street and went searching every house, looking for young men, which were brought to Germany and forced to work in the munitions works where bombs and grenades were made. If someone tried to escape, he would be killed on the spot.”

“And Grandmother, who brought the stencils away which were made by Grandfather?” James wanted to know.



She smiled and told him, "That was me, together with some friends."

"And you were never caught by the German police?" asked Nelly.

"No, but one time it was a narrow squeak. I had to hide under a dustbin lorry. On the footpath stood a screaming lieutenant, but he did not look in my direction. You see, the Lord protects His children wherever they are."

"And did you have a list with addresses with you, where you had to deliver the stencils?"

"No, these we had learned ourselves by heart, for security reasons. Nobody could take them from us and bring the readers into danger."

Grandmother looked through the windows and said, "You should have seen the Statenplein that 5th of May, crowded with jubilant, singing and jigging people of all ages, waving the national flag and orange garlands. It looked like the whole long winter of starvation was suddenly forgotten, when the occupied western part of The Netherlands was running out of food because of the war."

"Did you always have enough food?" asked James.

"We did manage. Our whole garden was full of potatoes and we swapped them for other food with people we knew of the church."

"Most people don't have a garden," said Liesbeth.

"Exactly. Many of them were starving. I saw some supported by friends or neighbors joining the crowd, who could barely stand on their feet, and still they were delighted that the war was over. When it became midday there were the jeeps and freight carriers coming in from the American, British and Dutch military on their way to Scheveningen. They had traveled the whole night, over roads that were in very poor condition and destroyed bridges, which were more or less repaired with pieces of other bridges so that they could be used with much care. These soldiers were embraced and carried around on the shoulders of happy fighters of the underground forces."

"Were they not exhausted?" asked Nelly.

"Sure, they were. There was a soldier who fell asleep behind his driving wheel and his commander replaced him with someone else. They distributed some food in tins, but also cheese, milk powder and cake—nothing that had to be cooked, because there was no gas, no electricity and no coal. In this same room many people were standing to watch what was going on. On the wall we had a picture of Queen Wilhelmina decorated with flowers."

"Where were the German soldiers?" asked Liesbeth.

"Locked up in their own occupied buildings, schools and warehouses. Their bunkers were opened and everybody was removed, and the fanatic S.S. troops went to prisons, where Dutch prisoners were liberated; some of them had to go to a hospital, nearly starved to death. Traitors and members of the National Socialist Party were arrested by the police; they would be judged by a tribunal later on."

"Were there no stencils made anymore?" wondered James.

"One yet, with messages from the queen, the Dutch government, some churches and orders of the commander who was the military authority, organizing a return to normal living. There was much to do. A couple of days later the first newspapers appeared again, in a very small format because there was not much paper available."

They looked together at the square, as though they saw it all again from the past, but the square was quiet, with only a couple of parked cars, a young man walking with a briefcase and a streetcar passing by.

Grandmother said, "That first Sunday after the liberation, all the churches were packed to the very roof. In the Reformed Church there was not room enough and some people stood on the stoop. The minister was an army chaplain. Never to be forgotten."

"Wasn't your father an elder at that time?" asked Liesbeth.

"Yes indeed. And he did a lot, too, to keep the people alive with food. There were no elderly people, because they had been forced to leave the city; the Germans needed to use their houses for people who worked for them. But there were many sick people, and those who were in hiding. It was quite a job and usually done in the dark."...

It was late that night before the children went home.



J. P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.

Watching Daily At My Gates

By Chester Hunter

May 1 Read Jeremiah 32:16-19; Belgic Conf., Art. 1

There is only one God! Is that your confession people of God? Do you believe that with the heart and confess it with the mouth? That is quite a statement for us to make! Do we really believe that? Do we live lives that confess that? Or are we apt to put our trust in other things? Do we make of God less than what He really is? Look at the list of attributes again. Is this our confession or do we have some manmade conception of God? That God is our God is a wonderful idea. We must bow before Him and acknowledge Him as God. Let us pray for the grace to do this each and every day of our lives. Sing Psalter 266.

May 2 Read Romans 1:18-25; Belgic Conf., Art. 2, Par. 1

How do we know that God is God? Do we look at creation as His most elegant book? Do we teach our children to do this? If we do not, we miss out on the means God has placed before us to learn about Him. Reread Psalm 8 sometime. There the Psalmist confesses the very idea found in this article of the confession. One of the purposes of God's creation is to show Him to us. Are we looking? For what do we use the telescope or the microscope? Is it not to see the wonders God has placed before us? As we walk through forests and up mountains do we not see the grandeur that is God's? The rainbow is God's testimony to us of His covenant faithfulness. Do we remember it? Look at the creation, people of God, and learn of God. Sing Psalter 15.

May 3 Read II Timothy 3:15-17; Belgic Conf., Art. 2, Par. 2

Once we have seen God in creation we must go to His Word to more clearly see who He is. We will never find the way of salvation in creation. We find enough to leave us without excuse, but to find Christ we must read His Word. That word is the lamp unto our feet and the light upon our paths. By using that Word we can take care not to trip on the obstacles that Satan puts before us. Young people, do you use the lamp God has given to us? Do you read it daily as your guide in this world? If you are floundering along in this world, look at the clear light of Scripture to find your way. Oh, this is more than a casual perusing of that Word. We must study it. We must delve into it to see what it has to say to us. Let us seek the Lord while He may be found by using His Word throughout all of our lives. Sing Psalter 334.

May 4 Read II Peter 1:16-21; Belgic Conf., Art. 3

We can believe what is said in that Word because we believe that it is His Word. Only faith can help us with that idea. It is by faith that we understand the idea of inspiration in all of its fullness. It is faith that helps us cling to that Word as the Word of God. It is faith that causes us to hold the Scriptures dear and to not try to change them. What a blessed treasure the Bible is to us, for in it we can find the way to salvation. God's word is truth, and we must never try to change any of that truth. Manmade documents may fail or be lost, but God has and will preserve His world until the end of time. Thanks be to God for the gift of His Word. Sing Psalter 322.

May 5 Read Revelation 22:16-21; Belgic Conf., Art. 4

What a wonderful thing the canon of the Scripture is! God has guided the church in the collection of that canon. This too is most wonderful! And now many years after the canon was put together we may believe that it is God's will that we have it and use it. Some may say that memorizing the books of the Bible is needless. And yes, just memorizing the names is needless. But knowing them in order to use them is very needful for the child of God. We need to know that Bible better than we know any other document in our lives. We must know it because it contains the only way of salvation. As we confess what the Bible is, let us resolve every day to seek to know it in its entirety. Sing Psalter 325.

May 6 Read Hebrews 11:1-6; Belgic Conf., Art. 5

After confessing what the Bible is, now we confess how we may believe it. That believing is by faith alone. This faith is not of us but rather by God's will. We believe the Bible as the Holy Spirit puts it in our hearts and souls to believe. This is a wonderful gift, for in the Bible are found all things necessary for our salvation. The Bible is our guidebook to lead us through this life. Young people, are you more than acquainted with your Bibles? Do you know them? Do you believe that it is the Word of God? If you do study it daily, rest assured that God will use His spirit to open it to you to use in your life. Sing Psalter 152.

May 7 Read Psalm 19:7-11; Belgic Conf., Art. 6

There are many false religions with their false Bibles. This article speaks about these. It mentions the Apocrypha. These books were used in the church for many years. The reformers understood that they were not the Word of God and must not be treated as such. Today some will use "holy books" from other religions such as the Koran from Islam. This we may not do either. To do this is not to give to the Bible its proper place

in our lives. Even though we may not be tempted to use the Apocrypha, we might be tempted to use other so-called holy books thinking in them to find the way of salvation. Let us not do this. Rather let us study the Scriptures as God has given them to us. Sing Psalter 333.

May 8 Read Romans 15:1-6; Belgic Conf., Art. 7, Par. 1

We have been looking at the Scriptures as they have been given to us by God. In this article the author Guido DeBres points out to us the Scripture's importance. This is a serious matter. As Paul states not even an angel from heaven can show us a way to salvation other than what is found in the Bible. At the end of time there will be many who will try to mislead us in many aspects of our spiritual life. Other ways of worship than what the Bible teaches will be proposed. Others will proclaim a different Christ. Still others will trumpet another way of salvation. We must know our Scriptures well to combat such attacks upon our spiritual lives. Young people, this is why catechism is so important. Be thankful that your consistory, minister and parents demand that you attend and learn your catechism. In doing so they are helping you know the Bible given by God for your salvation. Sing Psalter 342.

May 9 Read Galatians 1:6-12; Belgic Conf., Art. 7, Par. 2

Yesterday we saw from this article that the way of salvation as well as many other aspects of our spiritual lives is to be found in the Bible. We saw that we must be warned against other so-called ways to salvation. We saw that these are attacks upon the holy Word of God as it is found in the Bible. In this paragraph we are called to "try the spirits to see whether they be from God." Every type and particle of doctrine that we hear must be held up in the balances of the Scriptures. Yes, this takes time in our lives. But how better can we spend our time? What is more important to us than the way of salvation? Once we have weighed these doctrines using the perfect standard, we must reject that which is false. We cannot let it affect our lives. Parents, you must remove such offenses from your children and young peoples' lives. Young people, you must learn how to apply the standard of the Bible to all that you hear. This takes grace. Let us pray for that grace needed to try the spirits. Sing Psalter 21.

May 10 Read Matthew 3:13-17; Belgic Conf., Art. 8, Par. 1

One of the more difficult aspects of doctrine to assimilate is that of the Trinity. How can one be three in one? What is this idea of three persons in one godhead? Yet this is a doctrine which God made known to us at creation. It is one that is shown during Christ's life on this earth. It is one which concerns the whole of our salvation. Only when we reach our heavenly home will we truly understand God's covenant life within Himself in the Trinity. But yet it is a doctrine that we must seek to try to understand. We must do that because God has revealed Himself in this way in the Bible. It is a doctrine about which there have been many errors throughout church history. We must learn to combat those and more as Satan seeks to attack our

faith on this issue. Let us learn about the Trinity and pray for the full revelation of it in heaven. Sing Psalter 391.

May 11 Read John 1:1-5; Belgic Conf., Art. 8, Par. 2

Throughout the book of John the Holy Spirit gives to us glimpses of the truth of the Trinity. But these are more than glimpses; they are nuggets of pure gold! We learn about our Father in heaven. We see the Son who has given to us salvation. And we can know about the Spirit who is our comforter and abides with us day by day. In learning about each of the persons of the Trinity, we learn about the various parts each plays in our salvation. This should be precious to us and of utmost importance since our whole salvation rest upon a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. This understanding only comes by much study and prayer. Let us seek to learn about God Triune—the three in one! Sing Psalter 200.

May 12 Read Genesis 1:26-31; Belgic Conf., Art. 9, Par. 1-4

In the last article we learned about what the Trinity is. In this article we learn about the proof for this doctrine. First of all as we have said before, we have the testimony of Scripture. This article impresses upon us the importance of knowing and believing the Scriptures. Yes, we must do this about all doctrine, but we can especially do it with this one. By searching the Bible we can find many places which give to us much instruction about the Trinity. Secondly, God uses the working of the three persons of the Trinity in our lives as witness to us about its veracity. As we examine the way God has led us, we can see the working of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Examine Scripture, people of God, and then examine your lives. God will leave no doubt in our minds that He is really three persons in one Godhead. To know this is to know about the covenant that He first of all has within Himself, but also that covenant of grace which He has established with us. Sing Psalter 287.

May 13 Read Acts 2:29-36; Belgic Conf., Art. 9, Par. 5-6

As we have stated before, this idea of the Trinity has been under attack since sin first entered the world. Satan does not like this idea. Satan wants nothing to do with that which gives only God the glory. Throughout church history man has sought to weaken this doctrine in order to weaken the importance of God Himself in our lives. The church of the new dispensation has been speaking about this doctrine. Peter did on Pentecost. Other church fathers composed creeds which set forth this doctrine against errors that had reared their ugly heads. We, too, must seek to know this doctrine, to identify error against it, and to fight against such errors in our lives and in the life of the church. Sing Psalter 326.

May 14 Read John 1:6-14; Belgic Conf., Art. 10

The second person of the Trinity is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in His person that our salvation was accomplished. He is, as Scripture testifies, true and eternal God. But He, for our salvation, took upon Himself a weakened human nature yet without sin and suffered all the torments of this earthly life for us. When we make Jesus less than God we void our own salva-

tion. What an evil that is! What disastrous results that will bring to us! With the church of all ages we must confess that Jesus is the Son of God. We must do this in the realization that God ordained this way for our salvation. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 302.

May 15 Read John 14:25-31; Belgic Conf., Art. 11

In this article we confess that the Holy Spirit also is true and eternal God. This has not always been the testimony of every one in the church. The Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, has repudiated this doctrine. The result for them is a lifeless church. The Holy Spirit gives to us life. He is the breath of God. He was present at creation. He was present at Jesus's baptism. He has been given to us as our comforter. He never leaves us. By the operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts we believe all that God has imparted to us in His Word. By the operation of the Holy Spirit we have assurance of our salvation. People of God, do we not feel the comfort of the Holy Spirit? Thank God who gives to us the comforter through Christ. Sing Psalter 389:4-6.

May 16 Read Isaiah 40:25-31; Belgic Conf., Art. 12, Par. 1

One of the most attacked doctrines in recent years is that of creation. Did God create all things by the word of His mouth or did He not? If He did not, how sure is our salvation? Not very sure! If you read Scripture and keep track of the many times creation, as this article teaches, is mentioned, you might wonder why people do not believe Biblical creation. I think the answer is that they simply do not want a sovereign powerful God who created all things. What do you want, people of God of all ages? Do you want a powerful God who with His breath created all things, or do you want a weak God who may not be able to accomplish your salvation? You cannot have both. By God's grace let us know and believe in and confess a God who created all things by His word. Sing Psalter 85.

May 17 Read Hebrews 1:1-7; Belgic Conf., Art. 12, Par. 2-3

People of God, what do you know about angels? Do you have wings and feathers and perch on your shoulders? We believe that God created spiritual beings called angels. Some with Satan fell and work against God and His church. Others serve as ministering spirits at God's bidding for the elect's sake. The angels are interested in our salvation. They desire to see the church brought together in the new heavens and new earth. They fight with Satan over the very believers' bodies, as is the testimony of Jude. They fight for our good as we read in Daniel. Someday we will join they angels praising our most excellent God. Sing Psalter 279.

May 18 Read James 4:13-17; Belgic Conf., Art. 13, Par. 1

How does God uphold the creation? Has He just left it to fend for itself like a wound up clock? That was the belief of many early American leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and others. These Deists had a very shallow view of God's care for His creation. No, according to this article we believe that God

upholds all things so that not even a hair cannot fall from our heads. We believe that He controls every step that we take. We also believe that nothing is left to chance, fate, or luck. All things are in God's hand. Do you believe that people of God? Do we live that way? Do we teach our children and young people to live that way? If we do not, we take from God a part of His majesty. Let us never be guilty of that sin. Sing Psalter 286.

May 19 Read Genesis 50:15-21; Belgic Conf., Art. 13, Par. 2-3

What a comfort it is to know that all things are in the hands of God! If we did not believe this, we would have no hope at all. If we thought things happened by good or bad fortune, where would that leave us? We would not be able to have confidence in even our next breath much less than in our salvation! We would believe that Satan might be able to defeat God and that we would all go lost? What kind of comfort does that dualistic belief have for us? None whatsoever! God's providence affords to us the confidence that as we live our lives in this earth God will take care of us. We teach our children this. Our littlest ones can believe that God will take care of them. Do we? Sing Psalter 11.

May 20 Read Genesis 2:1-7; Belgic Conf., Art. 14, Par. 1

In this article are treated three aspects of man. First of all we have his creation, secondly, his fall, and finally, his total depravity. As God finished creation week, He ended with the crown-man. Man was created in God's image out of the dust of the ground. Like all the other works of creation he was created good. But man was different. He was created with the goodness, righteousness, and holiness of God's image. He was created as the king of creation and the friend-servant of God. In his creation he was to subject his will to God's will. Imagine, if you can, that day in Eden. And then imagine, again if you can, that day in paradise when we will be renewed to God's image, not in principle as we have it now but in the perfection which will be found in heaven. Sing Psalter 268.

May 21 Read Genesis 3:1-7; Belgic Conf., Art. 14, Par. 1

From the perfection which we considered yesterday we now go to the blackness of sin. Adam did not stay in the state of perfection, but rather, took things into his own hands and tried to be as God. Just as Satan rebelled in heaven, so Adam rebelled on earth. He took those most excellent gifts and ground them under his heel. In doing so he subjected himself and all mankind to the blackness of sin. Is there no hope? By God's grace there is. As we will discover, God would provide His Son for all of His people. What Adam spoiled, Christ would renew by His obedience and blood. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. Sing Psalter 103.

May 22 Read I Corinthians 2:11-14; Belgic Conf., Art. 14 Par. 2

As we saw yesterday Adam's sin left the whole human race in sin. In doing so we have become slaves to sin in our old man. There is nothing that we can do to rescue ourselves. We

are in a pit of which we have no ability to extricate ourselves. Is there no hope? Indeed of ourselves there is not. But thanks be to God who provided a way of escape from that pit! While it is true that the way of escape is impossible to us mere mortals, with God nothing is impossible. Christ is the way even as we read in John 14:6. What we cannot do ourselves; Christ has accomplished for us. Thanks be to thee, O heavenly Father. Sing Psalter 140.

May 23 Romans 5:12-16; Belgic Conf., Art. 15

The confession continues on and instructs us about our sin. Some may feel that sin has too much emphasis in the creeds. If that is you, I urge you to return to the Scriptures and read what the Scriptures say about sin. Read both the Old and New Testaments. Each of them testifies to the genuine character of sin. Each will show us how sin has overcome our natures. We read that even our best works are polluted with sin. We are sinners at birth, and we die in our sin. But those same Scriptures do not leave us without hope. As we have discovered before, we will be delivered without spot or wrinkle before the throne of God's majesty. This is not of ourselves but only through the blood of the Lamb. Sing Psalter 143.

May 24 Romans 8:28-30; Belgic Conf., Art. 16

We have been considering our escape from sin. This is a very personal matter. God does not just save anyone. No, He does not consider our lineage, He does not consider our worth, and He does not consider our future value. God, out of His good pleasure, chooses some from mankind to be His people. This is not a popular notion today. This does not fit with many people's idea of God. But these people do not consider the truth of God's Word. As we study that Word we can find many texts which are very explicit about the truth of the doctrine of election and reprobation. It is nothing of man's doing. It is all of God. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 166:1-3

May 25 Read Genesis 3:8-15; Belgic Conf., Art. 17

Today's text contains the first promise of the Savior. Genesis 3:15 is often known as the mother promise. From the black depths of the first part of today's reading verse 15 provides a shining light for God's people. God promised a Savior to those who had thrown themselves into the black pit of sin. But this Savior was for more than Adam and Eve. This Savior was for Abel and Seth and all who would follow in their spiritual line. People of God, this is the gospel. This is the good news of salvation. Young people, does this good news have any meaning for you? It should if you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Sing Psalter 82.

May 26 Read Matthew 1:18-25; Belgic Conf., Art. 18

The Belgic Confession goes on to detail what kind of Savior God would provide for His people. This Savior would be truly God and truly man. He would be the only begotten son of the Father. What love God has for us sinners that He sent His only Son to die the accursed death of the cross. But this Savior would also be man. Why? Man had sinned; those sins were required of man. Jesus, through the Virgin Mary, took a human nature upon Himself for our sakes. Does that leave us

speechless and extremely humble? It should. Let us confess the true nature of our Savior and never exchange it for another. Sing Psalter 243:1-2.

May 27 Read John 17:1-5; Belgic Conf., Art. 19, Par. 1

As we read through this part of the confession we may want to throw up our hands in despair for a lack of understanding. But as we read John 17 we see the depths of this truth. God sent His Son who was divine to this earth and had Him assume a human nature in order that we may obtain salvation and a final resurrection. Jesus earthly body was necessary in order that we might have a heavenly body in the final glory. Does this not tell us how great our God is? Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised! May this be our cry now and forever. Sing Psalter 303.

May 28 Read John 20:11-18; Belgic Conf., Art. 19, Par. 2

The first paragraph of this article deals with the abstract theology of Christ's redemptive work on our behalf. This second paragraph details Christ's actual work on the cross. While we were not present in body, in principle we, too, heard Him cry out to His heavenly Father. Each of His cross words not only condemns us in our sins but also gives to us life. Christ in His human nature bore the wrath of God for our sins into the depths of hell, Christ's divine nature made it possible for Him to bear that wrath of God. In His divine nature He commended His spirit to His Father. Why? There is only one reason. He loved us so much that He endured all the pains of the cross on account of our sins. Are we grateful for such a sacrifice? Sing Psalter 29.

May 29 Read Romans 8:31-34; Belgic Conf., Art. 20

After confessing the truths of the past two articles, we may wonder what type of God we confess. This article answers that question. Our God is one in which both justice and mercy are present. God's justice had to be met because man had sinned and had become worthy of death and hell. But God is also merciful in that He provided a way for His elect. That way was Christ. People of God, again we must pause and ponder the wonder of our salvation. It is completely undeserved. Let us rest in the comfort of God's mercy each and every day of our lives. Sing Psalter 232.

May 30 Read Isaiah 53:1-7; Belgic Conf., Art. 21, Par. 1

From man's point of view what an awful picture is shown here and in Isaiah 53. It is a picture which should reduce the most hardened man to tears. By nature we are all hardened criminals. By nature we chant "Crucify Him!" By the grace of God we see in this awful picture the beauty of God's way of salvation. Can we understand the depths of the suffering Christ underwent for us? Not in this life as each day we fall into sin. But the day will come when all things will be made new and we will see the glorious Christ who emptied Himself for us. Let us await that day watching and praying for the return of our Lord. Sing Psalter 47:1, 4 & 5.

The Passion of the Christ

Why A Reformed Believer May Not Attend The Movie,
“The Passion Of The Christ” And How To Witness To
Those Who Defend This Movie

by Prof. David Engelsma

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Galatians 3:1).

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

Many professing Christians will attend, praise and promote the movie on the basis of a “religious experience.”

No one should attend this movie. Attendance would be a sin against our precious Savior, Jesus Christ. Following are the reasons why:

I. This movie is blasphemous and we become guilty of that blasphemy by viewing the movie. We also become guilty of supporting this work financially by attending.

- A. It is blasphemy for a sinful human, the actor, to impersonate the sinless, glorious Christ.
 - 1. We cannot separate Christ’s divine nature from His human nature; therefore an actor who portrays Jesus also portrays God. This violates both the 1st and 2nd commandment.
 - 2. Christ is now risen and in heaven with His Father. It is wicked to portray Him in His earthly flesh when he is now glorified. II Cor. 5:16 refers to those who knew Jesus in the flesh, that they could no longer know him in that way (in the flesh.)
- B. It is blasphemous to portray or dramatize the sufferings of Christ.
 - 1. Man’s portrayal will only minimize the great work of this “once for all” sacrifice.

- a. The suffering of Christ was unique. To re-enact this event is to spoil the work of God. It is impossible to reproduce the “suffering” of our Savior.

- b. Christ suffered and died once. He said, “It is finished.” It can not and should not be repeated.

II. To attend this movie is disobedience to God’s will (2nd commandment) that we learn of God and our salvation only from His Word and the preaching of His Word. This movie is not being promoted as “entertainment.” It is being promoted as a “religious experience,” “religious education,” or an “evangelism tool.”

- A. The Bible teaches that it is God’s pleasure to teach of Himself by the Word and the preaching of the Word. (Gal. 3:1)
 - 1. The second commandment (Heidelberg Catechism QA 96 & 98) teaches that God may not be represented with images and that God will not teach us by “dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word.”
- B. The movie falsely teaches about Christ and His sufferings.
 - 1. The director uses extra-biblical writings and teachings based on the visions of the mystic nun, Anne Catherine Emmerich as a basis for some of the movie.
 - 2. The movie leaves the impression that Christ’s sufferings were mainly physical. The Bible does not emphasize the physical suffering because it does not compare to the spiritual suffering that occurred (this could never be re-enacted or captured on film).
 - 3. The movie doesn’t even address the fact that the curse meant that Christ was abandoned by God. Christ took on our sins, our curse, and, therefore deserved to be abandoned by God. Instead of the

words, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” the mere expression, “My God!” is used.

III. To attend this movie is to expose one’s self to Roman Catholic teachings about Christ, the cross, and salvation. Roman Catholic doctrine is false doctrine. The movie is Roman Catholic propaganda, even being released on the Roman Catholic Holy Day, Ash Wednesday.

- A. The movie dwells on “Maryology”. Mary plays a prominent role in the film and it emphasizes her part as mediator alongside Jesus.
- B. The teachings of the Roman Catholic Mass are subtly taught.
 - 1. A goblet is shown catching the blood of Jesus showing that they indeed drink the blood of Christ.
 - 2. Mary kisses the bloody body of Jesus and comes away with blood on her lips again emphasizing the drinking of blood.
- C. The movie teaches the Roman Catholic doctrine that Christ’s suffering is never finished. Jesus must be crucified again—in Mass, again—in the movie, and again through the Crucifix (Roman Catholic image of Jesus on the cross).
- D. This is all in opposition to the Bible and the Reformed confessions that refer to the mass as an “accursed idolatry” (Heidelberg Catechism, QA 80) because it denies the one sacrifice of Christ.

IV. Positively, we must go to the Word and to the preaching of the Word to know Christ and the work of the cross and to spiritually share in His suffering. The truth of Jesus is taught powerfully in His Word. Attendance of the movie will ruin and spoil our correct knowledge of Jesus and His suffering.

- A. The images of the movie will forever be in your mind. When we reflect on God’s Word or pray we will see the actor, the image, and not the Christ.
- B. Many who attend the movie state that they were moved to tears—a cry for Jesus and His pain. Jesus taught the women that they were not to weep for Him but for themselves and for their children. (Luke 23:27-31)
- C. We are told to glory in the cross and the redemptive work that Christ performed there. (Gal. 6:14) Jesus death was just and deserved because of our sins.

V. Conclusions

- A. The movie is evil. This subject in its dramatic form is a powerful tool of Satan that he is using to try to corrupt the church and lead people astray.
- B. We are called to be separate from the world and apostate churches and to have no part with these evil works.
- C. We are called to be good witnesses of the truth by not attending the movie, by letting people know why they should not attend the movie, and by inviting those with whom we speak to attend church to learn of Jesus true sufferings through the preaching of the gospel. ❖

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This article is the result of notes taken from various staff members of a speech given by Prof. David Engelsma to students and staff of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan on February 25, 2004.

Church Family

Imperfect Mothers—Perfect Children

by Mrs. Harold Brands

When I was a child, I had the opinion that my mother had to be the mother with the most faults of any mother in the world. I could have made a long list of grievances against her:

- She didn’t allow me to do this thing and that thing and twenty-four other things that my friends were all allowed to do. Was ever a mother so bigoted?

- She made me do these other two dozen and some things that I felt were not my responsibility. No more demanding mother could possibly exist!
- She had at least three dozen personal defects, all of them glaring and obnoxious, all of them declaring her an obviously unfit mother. Foremost of these was that she definitely did not love me, her child, in the least.

And I think I could have gone on for quite some time, enumerating all her defects.

The worst part was that we as brothers and sisters often had grievance gabs during which we sat and aired our annoyances about our mother. In our self-righteous estimate, *we* made no mistakes...and never deserved discipline...and worked harder...and generally in every way were superior to our mother. We broke the Fourth Commandment repeatedly while claiming to be little virtuosos. If we ever became parents, we would announce, we would not have this flaw nor that one. We would be perfect parents!

Now I am myself a mother. My children—ages 3½, 2½, and 1 years old—are too small to have anti-Mama gab sessions...but already are old enough to watch for Mama’s weaknesses and are quick to label Mama “naughty”. How quickly I see in them this same sin that characterized my childhood!

As for my expectation of perfection in motherhood, what has happened there? Well, if I now already tried to make a list of my weaknesses as a mother, it would have to be a list far longer than I as a child would ever have made for my mother. And if I now had to make a list for my mother, its size would be dwindled to microscopic proportions. Even those weaknesses I still see in her I would not dare to list because I have every one of them also myself.

I used to wonder how it could be that motherhood is a means to salvation for the woman. I now think that what I have been discussing is at least a part of the explanation. Through motherhood, God leads us as His children to see our own sins and weaknesses in a way we would never otherwise experience. And such sensitivity to our sin is the first requirement for salvation and comfort.

But motherhood, it seems to me, also leads to the woman’s salvation in relation to the second point of the Catechism. As children teach the mother her own weakness and sinfulness, she sees this same sinfulness in them. As she sees the sin in them, she experiences how futile will be all her efforts to lead them to righteousness. She

begins to realize ever so keenly how she depends on the Holy Spirit through the Word to save them. And vicariously, in the very nature of motherhood, this makes her lean more and more on the Spirit also for her own spiritual needs.

Let me try to say this in another way. The fact is that no mother is able to produce perfect and holy and righteous children. If she could in her own strength produce anything at all, the children she would produce would only exhibit and magnify her own sinful characteristics. Unrighteousness can only produce unrighteousness. And the realization of this leads the sanctified mother to pray, earnestly pleading with God to overcome her sins and failures and to bless her children for His sake only, pleading on the basis of His promises and His faithfulness. Children make a mother realize how wholly dependent she is on God, learning that her best efforts are not only weak and sinful but also completely useless apart from God’s work of grace in the heart.

But as God leads the mother to lean on Him, He also leads her to find the blessedness in her calling. Although the struggle with sin in herself and her offspring will be continual, yet God’s work of grace will also become increasingly evident to bring thanksgiving and joy. Right in the midst of disciplining and training her children, there will be marks of godliness also, and here she will know she sees God’s blessing on her work. Is her work of training imperfect? Oh yes! so imperfect. But God’s work is always perfect, and what God begins He always finishes...and that gives joy and hope.

I thank God that He has allowed me to become a mother. I thank Him that through my children He is leading me to see more fully my sin, unpleasant though this learning may often be. I thank God that He shows me my need of Christ also through my children. And I thank Him with great rejoicing that the story does not end with imperfect mothers and imperfect children but that it ends in perfection. Where His grace operates, I know that the end result will be His perfection, present in father, mother, and children. And this perfection—of God and unto God and in God—will last for all eternity.

May God’s perfect work—in mother and in children—receive all the glory and praise. May He alone receive the praise also on this coming Mothers’ Day. ❖

Mrs. Brands is a member of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota. This article is reprinted from the May, 1981 issue of Beacon Lights.

What Churches Need More Than Anything (1)

By Rev. David Overway



Generally speaking, churches are in trouble today. Many congregations and most denominations are losing members. They are shrinking rather than growing. Especially tragic is the fact that they are losing their young people, so that there is a gradual graying of the pew. Many of these shrinking congregations are also not very attractive to those outside of the church, so that they are not gaining great numbers of members from the outside either.

In order to counteract this problem, churches today are trying many different things. They are trying to find what they need to continue thriving and growing. Some of the things that they believe will ensure that they thrive and grow include more youth programs; multi-million dollar additions to their church buildings for gymnasiums, rec. rooms, etc.; and becoming more involved in various community social programs. In addition to this they attempt to reinvent a proper worship of God on the Lord's Day, including all sorts of unbiblical and foolish activities in worship calling all of this "liturgical renewal." Many are even open to what is called by some "theological pluralism," meaning simply, that any theological idea or system of theology is permitted in the congregation as an equally valid interpretation of the truth of the Scriptures.

For the most part, these things are not working. Despite much energy expended, much money spent, these things are not achieving the desired result. Churches try one of these ideas after another only to find that each new change leaves them ultimately unsatisfied and leaves them without the desired result. Admittedly, in some cases, these attempts to counteract the problems of the church seem to be working. Some of the churches employing these tactics have developed into "mega churches," congregations numbering in the thousands, and continue to grow. But that which seems to be suc-

cess is not real success. And even these apparent successes are only temporary. This is the case, because all these things are not what churches *really* need.

On the other hand, there are churches that are growing without resorting to these previously mentioned tactics. By God's grace, among these churches are the Protestant Reformed Churches. For the most part, our church buildings are full for services on Sunday. In fact, they are full for services *twice* each Sunday. Our churches are retaining their youth; many strong young families can be found taking their places beside gray-haired saints in the pew. Our churches are also being joined by others from outside the denomination. The Protestant Reformed Churches are small in number as churches go, but nevertheless growing, young, strong and healthy.

We are not this way because we are simply great people, or because we are more brilliant than others, or because our ministers are so holy or so nice. Rather, we have what churches really need today. We have a knowledge of the truth in the pulpit and pew because that truth is included in and taught by faithful preaching of the Word of God. And this is what churches need more than anything else.

Note this well—we have this in our churches by God's grace alone. We do not mention that we have what churches need in order to brag or boast. But we do not clothe ourselves in a false humility either, pretending that we do not notice God's tremendous blessings on us as churches. Rather we rejoice in this gift of God to us. And in gratitude to Him we want to thank Him, to speak of it among ourselves, and to tell others, too, about this gracious gift. God has given us the truth! God has given us faithful preaching! And we see the blessed result of these gifts.

But how does one *know* that this is what churches need more than anything? How do I know what churches

need? The only way to know what churches need is to listen to what Scripture says. The Word of God—indeed, God Himself—tells us what His church needs. It is not up to any man to decide what churches need. It is not up to any theologian, pastor, youth group or worship leader, or anyone else to be imaginative or creative regarding what their church needs. This is where so many churches go wrong today. They see there is a problem and then

It is not up to any theologian,
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rely on their own ingenuity to find a solution. But the church is not a business or any other man-made organization. And therefore does not benefit from human ingenuity that does not submit itself to God's Word.

God tells us, and God alone tells us, what His church needs in order to thrive and grow. If you remember anything from this article, remember this: God decides what His church needs. No man may decide.

God in scripture tells us what His church needs. He tells us that she needs the truth. He tells us why she needs the truth. He tells us why it is so serious not to know the truth, and why the tendency toward ignorance of the truth exists in the church. He tells us what this truth is at its heart, and He tells us how a church can gain and keep this knowledge of the truth in her midst. These are the subjects we will explore in future articles. ❖

Rev. Overway is pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

Church History

George M. Ophoff (15)

by Prof. Herman Hanko

In the last article we were discussing the actions of Classis Grand Rapids West in their dealings with Rev. Ophoff and his opposition to the three points of common grace. We ended last time by quoting a letter which the Classis sent to the Consistory of Hope Christian Reformed Church requiring of them that they put their pastor before the questions: whether or not he agreed with the decisions of the Synod of 1924 in Kalamazoo and whether or not he intended to submit to these decisions.

The consistory returned an answer to the demand of Classis which was read on the floor of the Classis by Rev. Ophoff. The answer was submitted, along with various other documents, to a committee to advise Classis.

The committee to which these documents were submitted brought its report. We shall not quote the entire report, but there were several interesting features about

it. The committee characterized the answer from Hope in a very ungracious and even mean-spirited way. It was all too evident that the committee had no time or patience with anyone who opposed common grace, and that its only interest was to rid the church of anyone who disagreed with the doctrine.

The letter from the consistory of Hope is a very lengthy document. Your committee feels assured that the classis does not expect of it a detailed analysis to all the arguments presented, nor a careful search into all the nooks and corners and all the byways of its cogitations. Without fear of contradiction, we opine that much of the material presented has little or no direct connection with the contents and purpose of our letter of the 16th of January.

The report goes on to say,

However, before considering the final conclusions of the letter from the consistory of Hope and to give some measure of courteous consideration to its copious argumentation, your committee briefly remarks the following:

1. All discussion of the question whether the three points are really in agreement with Scripture and Confession is out of order in this connection. If the consistory of Hope has objections against the three points it must present them to the classis by way of gravamina and meanwhile submit to Synodical decisions and require this of its pastor.

2. The difference between the pastor and the consistory of Hope on the one hand, and of the classis on the other hand, is not one of interpretation of three points as if we are forcing our particular interpretation upon the aforesaid pastor and consistory. The classis merely insists on submission to the Synodical decision embodied in the three points as this decision lies before us without insisting on any particular interpretation. Rev. Ophoff, according to the *Standard Bearer*, disagrees with the three points.... And the consistory evidently supports him in his stand.

Obviously, Hope's consistory, seeing that the fundamental issue was the Biblical and Confessional soundness of common grace, wanted to argue the doctrine on the Classis. But the Classis was not of a mind to do this. It simply wanted to squelch all opposition to Synod's decision.

One might argue that the Classis was correct in insisting that Synod had spoken and that the decision of Synod was settled and binding; and, therefore, the time of discussion had past. But the fact is that the Classis was about to depose office bearers from their God-given offices. That is serious business. It would seem that the Classis would want to be very sure that the doctrine of Rev. Ophoff was indeed heretical before proceeding to that extreme remedy. But there was no time nor inclination to do anything of the sort.

The conclusion of Hope consistory's answer to the Classis was then quoted by the committee. (This conclusion is all of the answer of Hope that appears in the minutes.)

1. Be it resolved that consistory of Hope Christian Reformed Church do not request its pastor to answer questions of Classis Grand Rapids West.

2. To appeal to Synod for interpretation of its decisions.

3. To request Classis Grand Rapids West to defer any and all action said classis might contemplate against the consistory of said Hope Christian Reformed Church until such a time as Synod shall have acted upon said appeal of said consistory of Hope Christian Reformed Church and rendered final decision of the matter.

With respect to these decisions of Hope's consistory, the committee advised Classis:

1. The classis recognizes the right of appeal.

2. Classis cannot defer any and all action on this matter till the next Synod without itself becoming insubordinate to Synodical authority.

3. The classis will take note of the fact that the consistory of Hope unequivocally refuses to submit to classical authority on this matter. It has officially resolved not to require of its pastor what the classis has required of it.

In consideration of the refusal of the consistory of Hope to require of its pastor submission to the doctrinal decision of the Synod of 1924 in regard to the three points, your committee submits the following advice to the Classis.

We advise the classis to require of Rev. G. M. Ophoff (a) That he declare himself unequivocally whether he is in full agreement yes or no with the three points of the Synod of Kalamazoo.... (b) An unconditional promise that in the matter of the three points he will submit (with the right of appeal) to the Confessional Standards of the Church, as interpreted by the Synod of 1924, i.e., neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend either by preaching or writing any sentiment contrary to the Confessional Standards of the Church, as interpreted by the Synod of 1924 and in case of an appeal, that he in the interim will acquiesce in the judgment already passed by the Synod of 1924.

Your committee advises that these questions be put to the Rev. Ophoff by the president at once on the floor of classis.

All this advice was adopted. The questions the committee formulated were put to Rev. Ophoff. Would he or would he not submit to the decisions of the Synod on common grace? The moment had come. As unjust and ruthless as Classis had been, there was no escape from a definite and forthright answer. Nor would anyone who knew Rev. Ophoff expect anything different from him.

The classical minutes do not give the full answer of Rev. Ophoff. They record only that he answered in the

negative. But some references in its decision suggest that Ophoff spoke at some length and rather emphatically.

All this took place on Thursday morning. On Thursday afternoon the committee continued its advice in the light of Rev. Ophoff's answer.

In consideration of the absolute refusal of Rev. G. M. Ophoff to submit to the requirements of classis in resubmission to the doctrinal decisions of the Synod of Kalamazoo and secondly in consideration of his defiant stand and of the strong language used by the brother, and thirdly in consideration of his own statement that he needs no more time to consider and fourthly in consideration of the serious situation that has arisen in our church demanding positive and immediate action over against ceaselessly active propaganda, your committee herewith submits to your honorable body advice that shall lead, if accepted, to final action in the case of Rev. G. M. Ophoff.

There then appears in the committee's report a lengthy argument which supports the immediate deposition of Rev. Ophoff instead of the suspension of the brother which the Church Order demands. The rules of the Church Order were, in this case, brushed impatiently aside. The actual advice, formulated in a hypocritically pious way, reads,

Your committee hereby advises classis to take the following action after preceding prayers.

The Classis Grand Rapids West in session on the 22nd of January, 1925, hereby deposes Rev. G. M. Ophoff from the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church of America on the following grounds:

(a) Insubordination to ecclesiastical authority. See Formula of Subscription.

(b) Public Schism. Art. 80 of the Church Order.

Ophoff's participation in organized propaganda against the officially accepted doctrines of our Church, propaganda which is making inroads upon our denominational solidarity.

Article 95 of the minutes records the vote on this advice as 30 Yeas, 12 Nos and 2 blanks.

But Classis still had to deal with Hope's consistory. Classis had received a communication from two deacons of Hope's consistory that indicated that these deacons were in agreement with the Classis and disagreed with their pastor. But the elders had supported their pastor throughout, and the time had come for them to be

dealt with. Friday afternoon the committee was prepared with its advice. After a long discussion in which the committee argued in favor of the right of Classis to depose (something forbidden by the Church Order), the committee advised the following for adoption.

Classis Grand Rapids West, in session the 24th of January, 1925, hereby deposes the Consistory of the Christian Reformed Church of Hope, except the two deacons who have declared their loyalty to our denomination.

Classis Grand Rapids West, hereby deprives the aforesaid consistory of all the rights and privileges of a legal consistory in the Christian Reformed Church of America.

Classis Grand Rapids West deposes the aforesaid Consistory by virtue of its jurisdiction over this Consistory as expressed in Art. 36 of our Church Order.

This also was advised on the two grounds of insubordination to Synodical and Classical authority and the sin of public schism.

Before action was taken on this advice, Classis decided that a committee would meet that evening with the elders of Hope "in an effort to dissuade them from their intended course."

This meeting was held. The minutes of Saturday morning reveal the outcome.

Art. 107. Elder Richard Newhouse announces in the name of the three elders of Hope Consistory that they abide by their former decision even after the conference held with the committee of overtures.

Art. 108. The recommendation of the committee in re the deposition of the consistory of Hope Christian Reformed Church is adopted by a vote of 33 yeas and 6 nos after preceding prayer by Rev. _____.

And so the matter was done. Classis had attained its goal. All opposition to the three points was effectively squelched. ❖

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This article is reprinted from the March, 1977 issue of Beacon Lights.

The “Dom-kerk” of Utrecht

by J. P. de Klerk

This is the highest church tower in The Netherlands. Today it is a State Reformed Church. It was built already in 1321-1382 and is 112 meters high, with a cloister to the chapter hall (minster) which is now in use as an auditorium of the State University. This church was built on the ruins of a Roman castle.

Christianity was brought to Utrecht by the English preacher Willibrord in the year 696. In the ninth century Utrecht was terrorized by groups of bandits all the way from Norway, but it survived and in the twelfth century became a busy commercial center, right in the middle of The Netherlands. This was important for an early arrival of the Reformation (much traffic from abroad).

The Synodal Reformed Churches held five Synods in Utrecht, in the years 1837, 1905, 1944-1945 (birth of the Liberated Reformed Churches), 1946, 1959-1960 (link with the World Council of Churches). ❖

J. P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.



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Website: www.prccconvention.com

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

Just Like Mother

... *let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

Anna put on an apron—just like mother—and helped to set out the ingredients: flour, sugar, shortening, salt and milk. Anna knew where to find them all. Mother began to measure them out into a large bowl.

“Anna, did you wash your hands?”

She nodded.

“Then let’s mix it all together.”

With a sturdy wooden spoon, Anna began to stir all the things in the bowl. She watched the ingredients disappear into one another and become one big lump of dough. It was hard to imagine that such a heavy mixture would ever become bread. It was hard work to stir as well!

“Now we must add a small—but very important—ingredient. Here is some warm water. And here—is some yeast. The yeast needs to be mixed into the water.”

Anna stirred in the yeast. She could smell its distinctive fragrance.

“Did you know the Bible talks about yeast? It’s called ‘leaven’ in the Bible. ‘A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.’ Jesus said the doctrine of the Pharisees was like leaven.”

Mother showed Anna how to knead the dough and the warm yeast mixture together. But it still didn’t seem anything like light, fluffy bread.

“Now let’s leave the dough in the bowl and cover it with a towel. We’ll see what kind of work the yeast will do.”

Anna helped her mother wash the measuring cups and spoons. Then they waited.

And waited.

“Anna, I think you can peek in the bowl now. What do you see?”

Anna carefully lifted the cloth. The dough was twice as big as it was before! She could hardly believe it was the same lump.

“It’s amazing what yeast will do, isn’t it? It affected the whole lump. False doctrine is like that, too. The truth we believe all fits together, so when a little lie is allowed to come in, it doesn’t change one part here or one part there—it changes the whole lump. It can change everything we believe. No wonder we must beware.”

Mother punched down the dough and folded it into a small ball again.

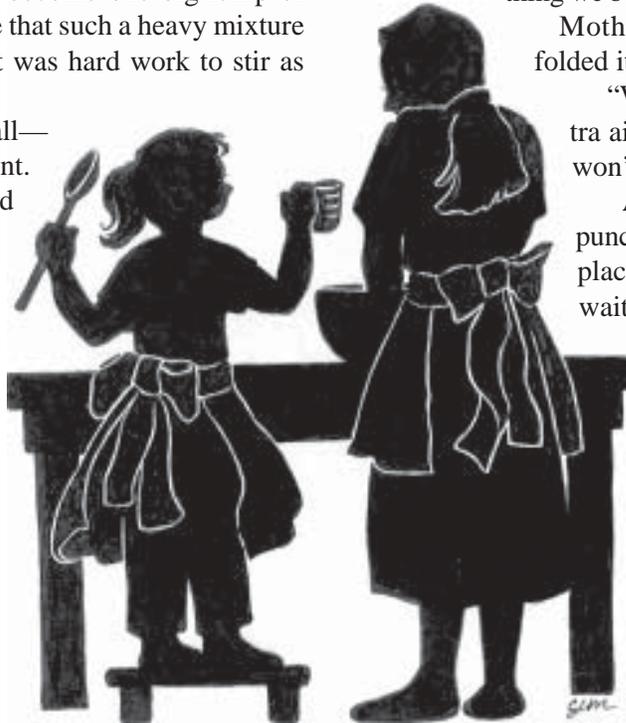
“We need to punch it down so that extra air bubbles can get out and the bread won’t be full of big hollow holes.”

Anna helped roll and shape the punched-down dough into two loaves and placed them into bread pans. Then they waited again. And the yeast did its work again. The risen loaves were finally ready to bake.

Anna watched the loaves turn golden brown in the oven. Soon the bread was able to be sliced and buttered and eaten. It was delicious.

“You did a good job, Anna. This is a good batch of bread.”

Anna smiled. She had learned to make bread just like mother.



“Then Jesus said to them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived; he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves...? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6-12). ❖

Connie is the mother of 5 children and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Church News

BAPTISMS

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:
Caleb James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Doezema—Byron Center, MI

Lydia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Baker—Doon, IA
Sharon, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brain VanFarowe—First (GR), MI

Caleb Raymond, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chuck Wiese—First (GR), MI

Evan Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Koole—Faith, MI
Ethan Jason, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Scholten—Faith, MI

Connor, son of Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Courtney—Holland, MI

Jenna Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Kuiper—Hope, MI

Julianne Rose, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. James Laning—Hope, MI

Kyle Dean, son of Mr. & Mrs. Loren Gritters—Hull, IA
Belle Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Schiermeyer—Hull, IA

Ethan Terril, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Kooima—Hull, IA
Herman Richard Andrew, son of Mr. & Mrs. James Molenkamp—Lynden, WA

Avery Hope, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Moore—Lynden, WA

Thomas Caleb, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Heystek—Lynden, WA

Peter Charles, son of Mr. & Mrs. William Smit—Lynden, WA

Taya Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Dykstra—Lynden, WA

Channice, Perez, Jahmai, Terrance, Rebekah, Juanita, Audrey and Azariah, children of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Suber—Pittsburgh, PA

Jaeden Jesse, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon Regnerus—Randolph, WI

Michael Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Mancusi—South Holland, IL

Joshua Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Ophoff—Southwest, MI

Amanda Kelly, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark DeKraker—Southwest, MI

Nicole Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad VanOverloop—Trinity, MI

Audra Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Randy Dykstra—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Romans 10:10

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Jenny Taylor—Byron Center, MI

Bethany Scott—Byron Center, MI

Jacob Peterson—Hope, MI

Peter Braaksma—Georgetown, MI

Ben Peterson—Georgetown, MI

Kris Koontz—South Holland, IL

MARRIAGES

"...and they twain shall be one flesh."

Matthew 19:5

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Andy Bylsma and Miss Shannon Huizinga—Faith, MI

Mr. Ross VanBaren and Miss Jill VanBemmel—Randolph, WI