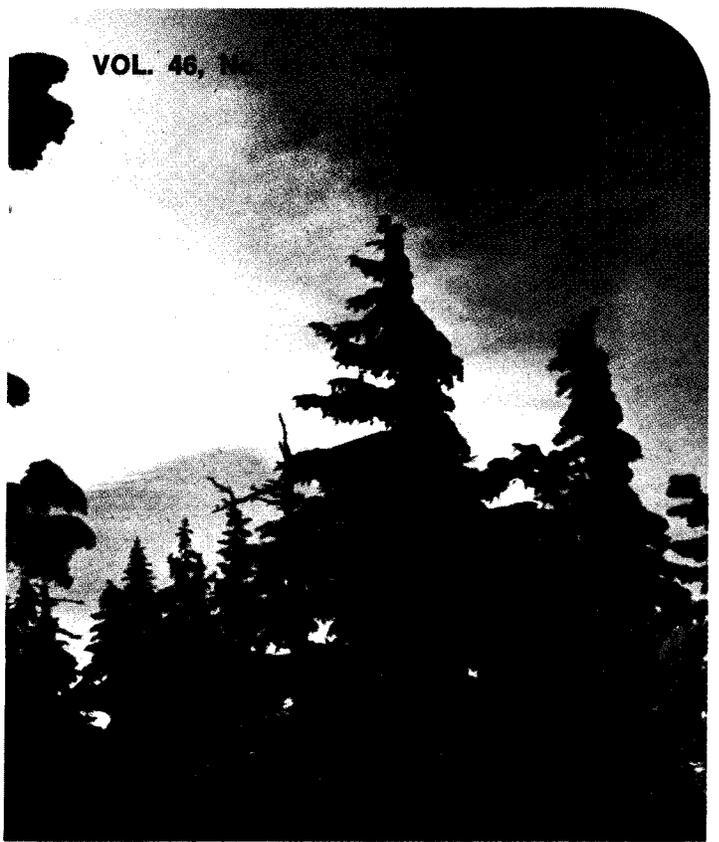


The Presbyterian Guardian

VOL. 46, No. 1



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Letters

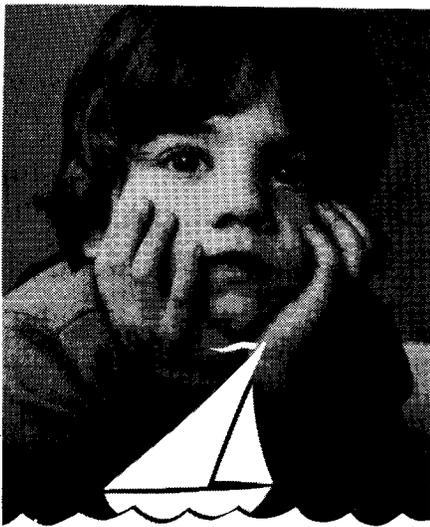


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Letters

The RPCES/OPC Merger

In the interest of Christ's church I find myself writing this letter. I would like to see some positive exchange (pro and con) concerning the proposed merger between the RPCES and the OPC.

My recent experiences have shown a high degree of interest among Reformed Christians concerning the future of these two denominations. Here and now is an excellent time to share openly the wisdom God has given us. Collectively, as God's people, we may be able to see more clearly the "forest" of which our individual "tree house" is but a small part.

1979 is not all that far off.

Daniel C. Broadwater
Westminster Theological Seminar
Philadelphia, Pa.

Radical/progressive new blood

My compliments to you on the summary of the 44th General Assembly in the July-August issue of the *Guardian*. I would like to make a couple of observations related to that summary.

As one of the relatively new ruling-elder commissioners at the General Assembly I was mildly surprised to be called a "radical"! As I read further in your summary it became clear that the label was not a "bad" one. Although I still have strong feelings that we should move in the direction of a partially decentralized foreign mission effort and though I am still wary of the dangers of a "hierarchy" in our church, my ideas were modified toward a less "radical" position during the Assembly following individual conversations with several of the "old guard."

For example, I don't believe everything that could be said in favor of having a general secretary for stewardship was said before the first vote. Although the open dismay expressed by the people most closely involved with the Stewardship Committee raised questions in my mind, it was only the new information I sub-

sequently gleaned from the "old guard" that caused me to modify my position with regard to the new general secretary.

You wrote, "It is only hoped that the 'new blood' will search carefully for the wisdom of Spirit-led men who have laid the foundation of the church. . ." I did have to "search carefully" for that wisdom in the above example. I do not believe the responsibility of that transfer of wisdom lies only on the shoulders of the younger presbyters; it also lies with the "old guard." Although, on Monday, I had made public statements in opposition to the new general secretary, no one approached me to give me their historical perspectives or to share their wisdom with me; I had to seek it out.

I suggest that in General Assemblies and presbyteries the "old guard" make their arguments and speeches on the basis not only of principles but also of their historical perspective. I believe that it is only in this way that we younger men will come to share that understanding. When younger men propose administrative changes in their zeal for the growth of God's kingdom they are labeled "radical," although I prefer "progressive." Let the older men make a "radical" departure from tradition and more aggressively teach us the basis for their historical perspectives. I for one would welcome that transfer of information.

In this way the church could better press forward with the younger men seeking the wisdom of the older and the older actively sharing their wisdom and seeking the suggestions of the younger. We all seek the same goals: the glory of God and the growth of his church.

Allan W. Bjerkaas, Elder
Covenant Orthodox Presby. Church
Burtonsville, Maryland

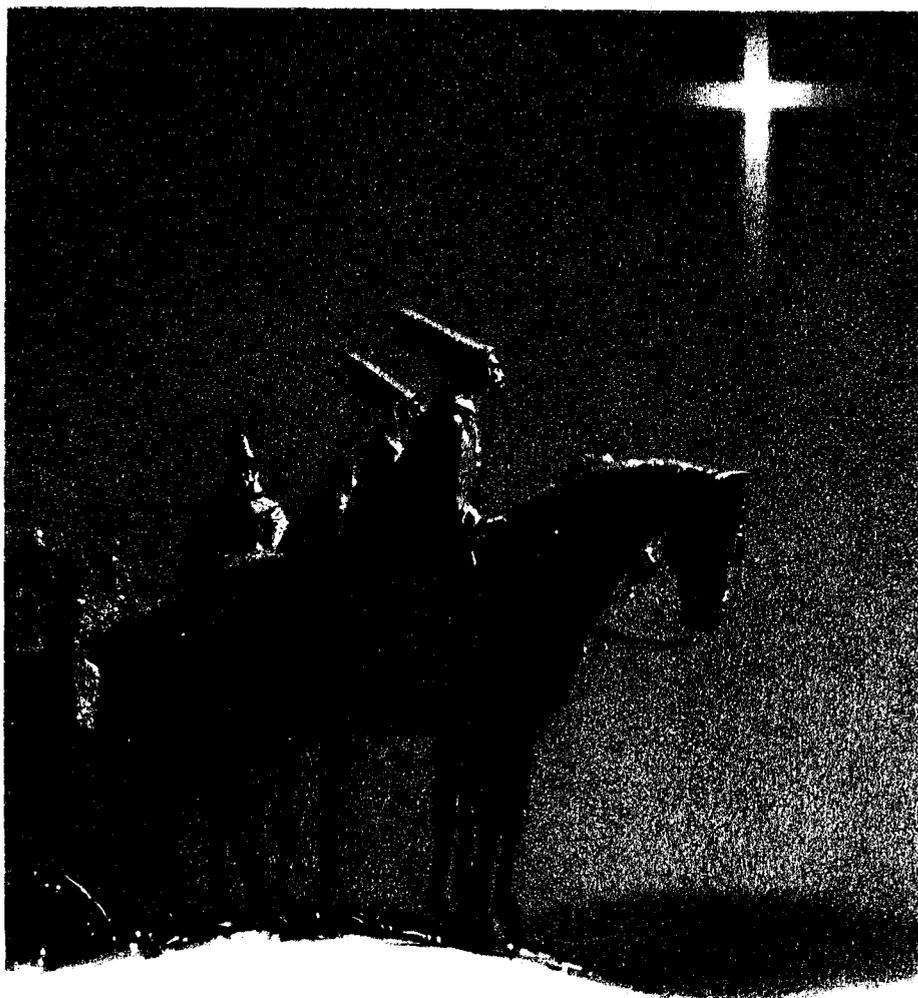
On being kind to pastors

The letter in the October issue of the *Guardian* from Florence Partington, Gloucester, Mass., is a priceless example to all lay persons on how to think well of and be kind to the pastor.

I could have predicted every line of the letter because this Elect Lady was one of nine people who along with my wife and myself started Grace OPC, Westfield, N.J., 41 years ago. Mr. and Mrs. Partington and others of that choice

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Wise Men Still Seek Him

Joel Nederhood

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem. . . . Matthew 2:1

On Christmas Eve, 1951, the NBC tele-

vision theater presented the first performance of the winsome and musically exciting one act opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. The words and the music of this marvelous work are by Gian Carlo Menotti, and with it another legendary addition to the biblical record of the Magi's visit to the Christ child was assured its place amid all the fascinating elements of Christmas.

I hope that you live in a community that is fortunate enough to have the story of Amahl presented during this

special season, and I hope that, if you are a parent of young children, you will favor them with a visit to this heart-warming opera. The story of Amahl is the simple tale of a crippled boy and his mother who live in poverty among shepherds. And one night, the Magi, whom we often call the Wise Men or the three kings, stop at their humble hut on their way to pay homage to the Christ child. In the opera, the kings Kaspar, Melchoir, and Balthazar, describe the child they are going to worship this way:

"The Child we seek has the moon
and the stars at his feet.
Before him the eagle is gentle,
and the lion is meek.
Choirs of angels hover over his roof
and sing him to sleep.
He's warmed by breath,
He's fed by a Mother
who is both Virgin and Queen.
Incense, myrrh and gold
we bring to his side,
and the Eastern Star is our guide."

The story of Amahl and the night visitors is a legend. It's not true. It's beautiful, but it's not true. Gian Carlo Menotti tells how the idea for this opera fell upon him as he walked through the rooms of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City and saw Hieronymous Bosch's painting the "Adoration of the Kings," and he remembered his childhood in Italy. There, in Menotti's youth, the children knew nothing about Santa Claus. Their Christmas gifts were brought by the three kings, Kaspar, Melchoir, and Balthazar, who appear in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.

It is no wonder that the three kings have excited men's imagination and that many stories and legends have grown up about them. But as we celebrate Christmas, one of the important elements in a proper celebration of this great festival is that we remind ourselves that there were actually men from an Eastern

(continued on page 10)

This sermon was first delivered by Joel A. Nederhood, Radio Preacher for The Back To God Hour of the Christian Reformed Church and it appeared in that program's publication, *The Radio Pulpit*, in December 1975. It is reprinted here by permission.

Who Can Stand Christmas?

Robley J. Johnston

This sermon was first preached in December 1953 in Calvary OPC, Middletown, Pa. It was printed in *Christianity Today* in 1961 in that publication's Select Sermon Series. It is reprinted here at the request of some who have known of it from the comments of those who heard or read it many years ago.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

One of Norman Rockwell's delightful *Post* illustrations pictures a salesgirl in the toy department of one of our great stores. The date on the calendar is December 24; the hands on the clock point to five minutes past five. The poor clerk has slumped upon a pile of toys behind the counter — dress askew, hair disheveled, and arms limp at her sides. She has slipped off her shoes, and her eyes are rolled back as if she were to breathe her last. She has just made it through another great American Christmas!

We all know just how she feels. There are moments when we glimpse that marvelous childhood Christmas again, to which the toys are tribute, but the mad crush catches up with us and we ask, "Can I stand another year of it?"

There is, however, a far deeper sense to the question, "Who can stand Christmas?" Quite apart from the customs that have grown up around the celebration of Christ's birth, the question must be asked about that event itself: "Who can stand before the birth of Jesus Christ?"

This is the question, asked in the last book of the Old Testament which looks forward to the coming Messiah. Malachi puts it to warn a people who thought themselves quite ready for Christmas. Indeed, they were impatient for God's great intervention to begin.

They were exiles returned from Babylon — the remnant of God's chosen people, restored by God's promise to the city where he had put his name. But they found the walls and the temple in ruins, the land desolate and filled with enemies. They must rebuild with trowel in one hand and spear in the other. When the wall was repaired and the temple foundation restored, their shouts of joy mingled with weeping. Compared with the former city and temple, the restoration was weak, mean, feeble. "How does all this fit with the promises of God's deliverance, and of Messiah's just and glorious reign?" they asked.

Malachi heard their murmurings. They cried to God, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" (1:2). "Where is the God of judgments?" (2:17). If God has really chosen us, when will he judge our enemies and deliver us? Will Messiah never come?

Malachi answers with the Word of God: "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap."

The answer to their prayer was dreadfully more than they had asked. They sought the Lord as an end to troubles; they wanted a Messianic panacea for peace and prosperity. But the coming One was the Lord indeed, and as Lord they must meet him. He comes not to play favorites on their terms, serve their dreams, and establish their kingdom. He comes to bring peace through judgment, to deal not only with the sins of their enemies, but with their sins. Could *they*

abide *his* coming?

If Israel was guilty of a superficial view of the significance of Christ's coming, so are we. We talk and sing of the coming of the Prince of Peace to earth. We are choked with emotion as we listen to the story of how he came and there was no room for him, save in a stable. We play the Christmas carols and fondly hope that the Christmas spirit may make the world a better place. But, I wonder, can we really stand Christmas? Are we really prepared to embrace all that the coming of Christ means? Our text suggests three reasons for posing such a question.

The Coming of Almighty God

The first reason why the inspired Word asks us "Can you stand Christmas?" is that the coming of Christ is the coming of the Almighty God. The One who speaks in this prophecy is none other than the one for whose coming Israel was crying. This is essentially the same prophecy as that found in Isaiah 40:3, where that prophet speaks of "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isaiah here speaks of Jehovah, Israel's almighty Sovereign. In ancient times when the king made a journey there were sent before him runners and riders to make sure that no danger lurked in the way, and to arouse all the people to greet their sovereign. This is the picture of the One who is coming, the Sovereign of God's people, and he is the Lord Jehovah.

But even apart from Isaiah's prophecy, it is crystal clear whose coming Malachi foretells, for he says, "The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." The prophet has just spoken of Israel's complaint, "Where is the God of judgment?" And in answer to that cry this word is given: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." The God whom Israel worshipped as the only God — the God whose temple stood in their midst as a continual reminder of his glory and power — *this* is the One who comes, sending his messenger before him. Is it any wonder that the prophet asks, "Who may abide the day of his coming?"

The One whose coming is the subject

of prophecy — the One whose coming is the object of our attention at this season — is none other than the mighty God. The Word who was in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, and who is very God — the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us. Only because he veiled his majestic glory behind the curtain of his flesh could men even look upon him. Even so, there were occasions when his majesty and might flashed forth in overpowering manifestations. Think of how the money changers fell back under the lash of his scourge as he cleansed his temple. Think of the moment of his arrest in the garden: he said, "I am he," and those who would seize him fell to the ground. Or think of the centurion who stood beneath his cross as the earth quaked and the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled in tribute to his deity — think of that hardened soldier crying out, "Truly this man was the Son of God." Yes, Christmas declares to us the unveiling of the invisible God, the coming of Almighty God among men, and who shall stand when *he* appeareth?

The Coming of the Kingdom

The second reason for the inspired question on Malachi's lips is that the coming of Christ is the coming of the promised kingdom of God. He whose coming is foretold is not only called the Lord, but he is spoken of as "the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." The mention of the covenant associates this event with all of God's promises to establish his rule among men. The messenger of the covenant in whom Israel took delight calls to mind that kingdom which was the fondest hope of God's Old Testament people. Of that everlasting kingdom of peace spoke all the prophets from Balaam to the Baptist. For God had made his covenant with his people; he had promised that he would set his king on his holy hill of Zion. God's covenant was his promise to send deliverance and salvation to his people and to establish his own eternal kingdom on earth. And this "messenger of the covenant" is God himself fulfilling his covenant. Again Isaiah and Malachi speak with one voice. In Isaiah 42:6, God says of his coming King, "I will give thee for a covenant of the

people, for a light of the Gentiles." The coming of this One is the realization of God's covenant; it is the coming of him who is Christ, God's anointed King.

This prophecy, therefore, agrees with all the other prophetic notices that speak of the coming of Christ. It makes plain that he whose birth we celebrate at this season is the One whom God hath made both Lord and Christ, King Immanuel. As such, his appearance is not merely a momentary manifestation of the great God; it is not one brief revelation of Jehovah upon earth. Rather, in terms of his covenant, it is God come to dwell among men as their King. Christ's coming was for the purpose of establishing the rule of God as the abiding Lord of the lives of men. What a staggering thought is this! Christ came not that we might glimpse the glory of God for a few brief years, but he came that God might dwell forever among men and that, dwelling among us, his righteous law might exercise its sway over our lives. The coming of Christ is in the most vital sense the coming of God's kingdom.

The kingdom of God does not await the second coming of Christ and the final, full manifestation of his sovereignty, for the prophet is here speaking of his first advent when he came announced by his messenger John. No, the birth of Christ ushered in the beginning of that glorious day spoken of by all the prophets — the day in which the mighty God dwells among his people as their sovereign Lord. Christ's birth began that kingdom in which men of every tongue bow and confess that he is Lord. And if we cannot bear his coming, how can we bear the coming of his kingdom? How shall we abide the day of his coming by whose appearance the sovereign rule of God is brought to bear upon our lives day by day, under which our selfishness and willfulness must be subjected to his perfect will?

The Coming of the King

Thus there is a third reason why it must be asked, "Who shall stand when he appeareth?" The reason is that the coming of Christ is the coming of the King of Righteousness. His coming is not some abstract, faraway concept. Rather, it takes hold upon our life and thought and

speech in a most concrete way, for the prophet says of this coming King, "He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." Malachi had just reminded the people of their transgression against the law of God — of their blindness to their sins of selfishness and ingratitude, and when he hears them express a desire for Messiah's coming he cannot but remind them that the One in whom they profess delight will, when he comes, deal harshly with their sin. The refiner puts his metals into the fire to burn out the impurities; the fuller soaks his soiled cloth in soap and water and then tramples it up and down to remove the dirt from the very fibres. It is the essence of the kingdom of Christ to deal severely with sin. Christ came not only as the Prince of Peace; he came also as the King of Righteousness. And he must perform his work of righteousness in order that his work of peace may appear.

In his first coming Christ was himself consumed by that refiner's fire. The Judge bore the wrath of judgment, for only so could he save his people from their sins. But Christ the Sin-Bearer can never be indifferent to sin; by both word and deed he raised the scourge of judgment. In his second, final coming to earth, that work of judgment will be completed. Then the dread that is expressed in these words of Malachi will be upon the lips of all those who have turned from his righteousness. Then will they cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. Yes, it is the *Lamb* who came to apply the righteous law of God to the lives of sinful men. And therefore he poured scathing condemnation upon men who make a show of religion, but whose hearts are void of mercy and filled with spiritual pride. He exposed the hypocrisy of those who made much of the law and the prophets, but who rejected the message they proclaimed for their own devious and foolish traditions.

The coming of Christ is the coming of the King of Righteousness who will by no means clear the guilty; and how shall we stand before him with hearts corroded by coveting the comforts of this

(continued on page 9)

Christians on the Move

Charles H. Ellis

A bright young woman after a worship service signed the church guest book. In the column marked "Home Church" she wrote "Heaven." When the pastor saw it, he was amused. That, of course, is the most important thing. But perhaps this incident isn't really something to be amused about. The young woman was dead serious. Many others feel the same way.

Now it is true that for every true believer in Jesus heaven is his home. We are strangers and pilgrims here. It is a glorious truth that in Christ we are seated in the heavenlies. We have indeed come "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22). We don't have to be enrolled in any church in this world to be saved. All that is required for salvation is faith in Jesus. Concerning that faith the Shorter Catechism says, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel."

In the world but not of it

But for now we are *in* this world, though not *of* it. And it is in this world that Jesus Christ is about the business of building his church. For that church Jesus died and rose again. For the good ordering of that body Christ has provided a visible, organized form. Acts 14:23 reflects the concern of the apostle Paul that elders be appointed in every new assembly of believers. His letters to Timothy and Titus deal at length with the way the life of the local church is to be ordered. Qualifications for the office of the elder and the deacon are given in considerable detail. The relationship between flock and under-

shepherds is in view in a passage like Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Surely no one doubts that these prescriptions are for the church in our day. Yet a very common element of life in modern society seems to blind many Christians to the need for taking seriously their relationship to the visible church.

In some parts of our land families continue to live in the same community from generation to generation. That, however, is the exception in our mobile society. "For Sale" signs and moving vans are constantly in evidence. And this presents problems.

Personal roots are often very shallow. In such a society as ours even Christians are inevitably caught up in all this mobility. We are very much in the world. Jobs, or job promotion, often dictate the move of a family from one place to another. Retirement is another big impetus to change of address. A Christian, however, may never disregard the significance of the fact that his ultimate citizenship is in heaven or that every act must be performed with a view to God's glory (Phil. 3:20 and I Cor. 10:31).

The church in a mobile society

Where does the church fit into this picture of Christians on the move? Too often this question is not asked — at least not too seriously. Sometimes the question is asked — but too late. An unwise move has already been made. Satisfactory church relationships are not to be found.

When we speak of the church, of course, we mean the church in its organized, visible form. The Lord who bought the church with his own blood is concerned about his body in its visible expression. Although many professing Christians take this very lightly, the Bible doesn't.

How should all this affect Christians on the move? Many factors are involved; there is no simple answer. Nevertheless, a few things may be said. A Christian ought generally to be identified

with a body of believers where he lives. He needs to be committed to that body; that body, through its properly constituted officers, ought to be exercising caring oversight with respect to him. Church membership is not unimportant. While salvation itself is not at issue here, spiritual health surely is. Else why does the Holy Spirit in the New Testament pay so much attention to the church in its organized form in this world? "And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11, 12).

There is another serious practical problem here. Not every group that calls itself a church is faithfully committed to the Bible as the ultimate standard of faith and practice. But the problem becomes even more thorny. Often a local church may teach the word of God faithfully but it is joined to a denomination that in many significant respects denies the gospel. In such cases the individual member in a local congregation cannot escape responsibility for what his church as a denomination teaches or fails to teach.

Some practical advice

What then should Christians on the move do? Is it sufficient to follow the patterns of this world? Just pick up and go? Simply take the job that offers the most pay? Seek the most comfortable climate? I offer two suggestions that stem from convictions formed as a result of seeing many church members leave one area to go to other parts of the country — some with happy results, and some very sad. First, make sure *beforehand* that there is a good, faithful Christian church in the new community. But what if, so far as can be determined, there seems to be no such church in the new place? In that event, the Christian should be prepared to give of his time,

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Charles H. Ellis is the pastor of Knox OPC, Silver Spring, Md.

The Robins

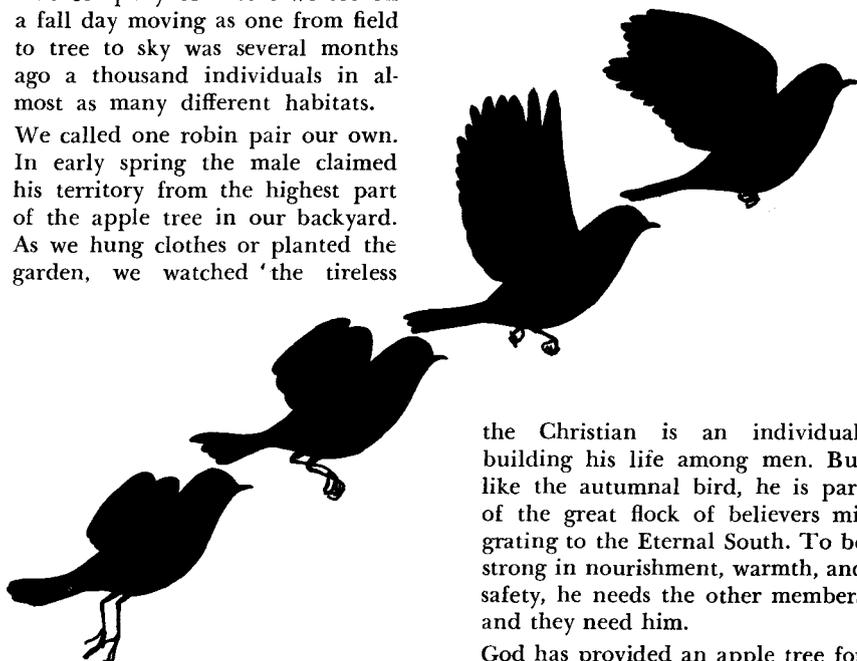
by Ellen Bryan Obed

"So, we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another." — Romans 12:5

The robins —
a thousand making one,
flying,
dying in the sun,
their autumn journey
now begun —
this morning
filled our trees
and lawn
until in sudden gust
were gone.

The company of robins we see on a fall day moving as one from field to tree to sky was several months ago a thousand individuals in almost as many different habitats.

We called one robin pair our own. In early spring the male claimed his territory from the highest part of the apple tree in our backyard. As we hung clothes or planted the garden, we watched 'the tireless



nest-building activity. We liked to see how close we could get to their nest in the fork of the tree. Soon someone would announce his discovery of a bit of blue shell. Then we would listen for the comical screech of the babies for approaching food. The robin family had become our family.

When we first saw the clumsy fledglings on the tree limbs, we felt a warm mixture of pride and excitement. Their feelings had become our feelings. We distrusted the neighbor's cat who eyed them from the hedgerow. Night sounds by the garden made us uneasy. Their enemies had become our enemies. We had grown to love our robins. They were an intimate part of our spring and of our summer.

The robins are also part of our fall. But we see them in a new way. They are not one pair but part of a thousand redbreasts — a huge body — compelled by internal and environmental rhythms to move south. Migrating together means life — food, warmth, and safety. Like the spring and summer robin,

the Christian is an individual, building his life among men. But like the autumnal bird, he is part of the great flock of believers migrating to the Eternal South. To be strong in nourishment, warmth, and safety, he needs the other members and they need him.

God has provided an apple tree for every Christian; he has also provided a flock. Praise God for both!

Fellowship among Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Carl E. Erickson

This last year Brentwood OPC started a new "tradition" of quarterly *Agape* socials. Members and friends gather together at someone's home for a "potluck" dinner, short biblical exhortation and the Lord's Supper.

Agape feasts are no innovation; they originated in the apostolic assemblies (cf. I Cor. 11:17-34; Jude 12). But, like many good practices, this one was abused and an early council banned the feasts. Yet, if properly carried out, such gatherings can be a great inducement for the development of holy fellowship in the church of Jesus Christ.

There is a definite need for fellowship among Christians both in and outside of worship services. God said it was not good for man to be alone and gave him woman. This reflects the fact that man was made a "social" being, made to interact with others — both with his Creator and also with his fellowmen. A body of Christians can grow only if there is mutual interaction in fellowship, sharing and caring for one another. As the author to the Hebrews says, "Let us consider how we may *spur one another* on toward love and good deeds" (10:24 NIV).

It is every Christian's responsibility to do this. No one is exempt; nor is there a special class of individuals with-

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This article by the pastor of Brentwood OPC appeared earlier in *The Genevan Times*, a monthly publication of that congregation.

AN APPRECIATION and a Look to the Future

Another chapter in the history of *The Presbyterian Guardian* has been completed with the resignation of John J. Mitchell as editor, and John has written his final "last word"—as editor (see page 3 of the October 1977 issue). As we look back over the seven years he served, it is with gratitude to God that we recall

John Mitchell's labor of love, his work of faith, and his patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ as he gave of himself to fulfill this calling. We appreciate his theological insight, his awareness of current issues in the church, his gifts for writing and journalism, his knowledge and appreciation of the principles of Presbyterian church government and reformed doctrine, and his staunch commitment to the infallible Word of God, the inerrant Scriptures. He will not be easily replaced.

The Presbyterian Guardian, although independent, has long been thought of as the church paper of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Under John Mitchell's editorship, no doubt, much has been done to enhance that image of the *Guardian*. And this is good. We earnestly desire to continue to serve the OPC, even more fully than in the past. But neither the board of trustees of the Presbyterian

Guardian Corporation nor the editor have felt it was inconsistent to serve other likeminded Presbyterian bodies as well, and if you search through back issues of the *Guardian* you will find many timely articles and editorials which are of value to all true Presbyterians. (As evidence of our sincerity in seeking a broader Presbyterian ministry for the *Guardian*, you may note that the list of board members given on page 6 of the November 1977 issue includes at least one member from each of the five NAPARC churches.)

Pray with us, then, for John Mitchell, as he enters his new calling as General Secretary for the Committee on Stewardship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Pray with us for *The Presbyterian Guardian*, as we seek a new editor to carry on its ministry. And pray with us that the *Guardian's* ministry may reach and serve more fully not only its loyal constituents in the OPC but also increas-

IN MEMORIAM

Lois Margaret Mitchell
1933 — 1977

I had a friend with ten talents. She faithfully invested these talents during her forty-four years and they have yielded an hundred fold.

As we celebrated the victory of Lois Margaret Mitchell over death through her union to Jesus Christ and rejoiced in her presence before the Savior whom she loved, we were witnesses to the fruit of her labor. There were people at the funeral from the hospitals where she worked, many of these Roman Catholic. There were women from her Bible study classes. There were neighbors from her block, and sisters and brothers in the Lord from miles away. Her life had touched so many. Her talents had been invested wisely.

Each of us who knew her recalls her gifts in different ways. Romans 12 speaks of gifts differing according to grace. It would appear that God in his grace gave to Margie Mitchell an abundance of the gifts mentioned there and, I dare say, many more.

She was a teacher. As one woman put it, "I loved her mind." Her thoughts were continually fed by her love of the Word. Oh, how enriching were her thoughts. How delightful to watch her take hold of deeper and deeper truths and bring them to bear on her own life and then to share them with others. Those in her Bible studies, including many Catholics, were richly blessed by this gift.

She was an exhorter. One could not be with Margie

long without a gentle exhortation being given. She was a prick to our consciences—if not by word, then by her own faithful life. We could not be at ease in Zion after spending time with Margie. Her example spoke too loudly.

She was a giver. Not just in dollars, but in all that she was. What she had belonged to God and to her fellow Christians. She did not hold back.

She showed mercy with cheerfulness. In her profession as a nurse and simply as a sister in the Lord she helped alleviate emotional and physical pain and suffering for so many. She was especially concerned for the lonely. Hundreds have received her hospitality.

One could go on and on.

Her life was a testimony to the grace of our Lord in such a beautiful way. She had a quiet, diligent spirit, ready and alert to do God's will. Her faith was in the Lord and not herself. That was her secret. That is why she bore so much fruit.

And what of us? What have we learned? Her death has reminded us once again of life's true perspective—Margie's perspective—to live is Christ, to die is gain. We who remain still have work to do. When we are weary, our remembrance of Margie's life will be a sweet reminder of our living hope. "I thank God for the grace he gave to Margie Mitchell.

In gratitude to God,
Jean Gaffin

ing numbers of concerned Christians in other biblically committed Presbyterian churches who are seeking to view all aspects of life in a biblical perspective.

—F. Kingsley Elder, President
Presbyterian Guardian Publishing
Corporation

Who Can Stand Christmas?

(continued from page 5)

life? How shall we endure the searching eye of him who says, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice?" How shall we escape his judgment who says, "Ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity?"

Who is sufficient for these things? Who can stand such an appearance as this — the coming of God himself to establish his rule of perfect righteousness over the life and thought of men? We say we want — we need — the celebration of Christ's birth. The Christmas spirit, we say, will warm the earth with kindness and love to one another, and so let us have Christmas. But can we really stand it when it confronts us in the fullness of its meaning? Do we recognize the implications of our desire for Christmas?

Ah yes, let us have Christmas! God forbid that we should ever be indifferent to the coming of his Son. But welcome his coming for what it is. Worship him who was born — that child whose name is Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. One day he will come again in power. But our King has already come, and summons us by his grace to enter into the Kingdom where he is sovereign of all our lives. Hear and believe his word: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Know that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Submit to his refining, cleansing work. Find cleansing for sin in "that fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins." Know that all your righteousnesses are as filthy rags and claim by faith the perfect righteousness of him who did always the things that pleased the Father. Fill your minds and hearts with his Word that in you may appear the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. So may we welcome the word of his coming and sing with new meaning: "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!" END

Letters

(continued from page 2)

group provided endless encouragement in a tough situation which we never counted tough but all blessing and prosperity. The Partingtons were of that fine breed of members who knew how to encourage, to love, and to help. I guess they had suggestions, maybe criticisms, but I only remember that they were builders of the church and lovers of people.

I suggest that God is looking for more Partingtons to grace the doctrines of grace and to deal graciously with too-often faint-hearted pastors who need the Partington kind of love and understanding. Four pastorates after Westfield, I praise the Partingtons of all my churches with heartfelt delight. Love, patience, and understanding comprise divinely-ordered ingredients to mold as one mighty instrument in the hand of God pastors and church members.

Heartily,
Donald C. Graham
Panama City, Fla.

On baptising females

In the September *Guardian* you wrote, "We baptize females, not by any express statement in Scripture, but by good and necessary consequence."

I do not think the statement is quite accurate in the light of Acts 8:12: "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both *men* and *women*."

I would like to see *some* comment and correction of your statement in a future issue of the magazine.

Richard L. Horner
Valley OPC
Roanoke, Va.

Fellowship among Brothers and Sisters in Christ

(continued from page 7)

in the church who fulfill this task. On the other hand, even though all are involved, there are some people who have a greater ability in these areas than others. Paul acknowledges this when he says, "we have different gifts, *according to the grace given us* . . . If it is serving, let him serve . . . if it is encouraging, let him encourage . . . if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give

generously, etc." Therefore, those who are more able than others should not be critical of those who are not as able.

Another problem that can arise is an unhealthy competition — one trying to outdo the other by being more elaborate in expressing care to the shame of others. Let us show courtesy, consideration, moderation and patience toward one another in these matters which are the very ingredients of fellowship.

Another difficulty in this matter of fellowship is reflected in these complaints: "No one speaks to me after church"; or, "No one ever invites me to his home"; and, "No one is friendly to me," etc. That does happen, of course, but how should one react to such *intentional or un-intentional forgetfulness of others*? Forgive and forget their forgetfulness; go up to them and say "Hello" or invite them to *your* home! Make friends with the so-called unfriendly. Do not wait for them; initiate love yourself. When no one volunteered to wash the feet in the upper room, Christ did not wait for the others. He, the Lord of Glory, went down on his hands and knees and washed his disciples feet without a murmur! Our pride says, "It's up to him to take the initiative." Instead, we should follow the example of our Lord. We win others to ourselves only when we have the patience and love of our Savior.

Fellowship means communion or oneness with one another in Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and

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by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace . . . ; and, being united to one another in love, they have *communion in each other's gifts and graces*, and are *obliged to the performance* of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both the *inward and outward man*" (XXVI:1). To ignore this type of fellowship and communion is to withhold from others what you have to offer them by God's grace. Not to attend the house of prayer with *good regularity* or to stay away *needlessly* from social fellowships within the congregation robs others of the opportunity to share with you. May the Lord teach us selflessness that we may act in love toward each other.

It has been said that growth is the only evidence of life. If we are living in Christ then we will grow first in him, then with one another. Real fellowship with one another can stem only from our fellowship with Christ.

Christians on the Move (continued from page 6)

energy, and money to seek to establish the kind of church that is faithfully and honestly committed to the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This he owes to the Lord, to his family, and to himself.

Church membership matters. And Christians on the move cannot afford to forget it.

Wise Men Still Seek Him (continued from page 3)

region who came to worship the Christ child, Magi, wise men, kings, whatever you wish to call them. Just how many there were, we do not know. But we do know that they were men of education, prestige, and wealth.

We associate their coming to Bethlehem to worship Jesus with the Christmas celebration even though the biblical record implies that they came with their unexpected adoration several months after Jesus' birth — most likely as much as a year afterwards. But come they did, and in their worship of Jesus we are able to see the full significance of the meaning of Jesus and of his coming to this world.

To refresh our memories, it is important that we review the record of their coming to Bethlehem as we find it in the Gospel according to Matthew. The story is simply told, without the embellishment of legendary elements. It is straightforward history through and through.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet:

"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'"

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and

frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2: 1-11).

That then is the factual account behind all the legends that have arisen about the three kings, or the Magi, and when we examine what actually happened when these men came and worshipped Jesus the Christ child, we discover that something so grand and so astonishing took place, we can barely comprehend it. That these men came to Christ is the Bible's way of telling us that the faith which has Jesus Christ at its center is *the* religion for all the world. All other religions pale into insignificance when compared to the religion of Jesus Christ. As the Bible faithfully records the coming of the Magi first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem it is actually establishing a very audacious, and even unwelcome point. It is this: all religion must finally give way to the religion of Jesus. It is this, in addition: if you are trying to find religious fulfillment anywhere outside of Jesus, you should abandon your futile efforts and surrender to him.

Many people would disagree with this. But if you examine the Bible, I think that you will agree with me that this is exactly what the Bible is saying.

Begin by remembering that the Magi came from the East. Remember also that they were Magi, that is, they were men who were steeped in the lore of the East, fully familiar with its learning and its religion. They were in fact religious functionaries.

Now, when you read the many, many pages of the Bible that go before the New Testament, you will discover that the writers of the Bible were thoroughly familiar with the religion the Magi represented. Take Moses, for example. Moses had grown up in the court of an Egyptian ruler, and he knew all about Egyptian religion. And before Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, all extremely important men in the Bible, as you know, had been well acquainted with this religion as well.

The religion of the Egyptians was part of a fascinating complex of religion that flourished for centuries in the part of the world which we now call the Middle East. If you have ever studied a course in comparative religion in college or high school, you are familiar with the elaborate myths that existed among the people in that area. For example, there were creation myths that spoke of deities with names like Marduk and Tiamat. The gods of the Canaanites, who lived in the land of Israel before the Israelites themselves possessed it, had such names

as Baal, Ashtoreth, and Molech. In any case, the Middle East, throughout the centuries before Jesus was born, was literally throbbing with religious myth and mystery, and all the people who lived in that region were entirely aware of the religious heritage of that part of the world.

In contrast to the religion that was found in the area we have just talked about, the religion of the people of Israel exhibited unique characteristics. At its center was the revelation of the one true God who spoke to his chosen people, delivered them from the land of slavery, gave them his law, and established his covenant with them. The God of the Hebrews was different from the many gods of the people who surrounded them. He hated idolatry and inspired the prophets to make clear to his chosen people that the gods of the heathen (the *goyim*) were worthless.

Psalm 96 expresses the unique nature of the religion of the Israelites and its

bold rejection of all other gods: "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols; but the Lord made the heavens" (vv. 1-5).

Indeed, the God of Israel looked with disdain on the false religion that surrounded his special people, and the book which that special people produced under his guidance became a powerful attack upon what was considered false religion. The history contained in the opening chapters of the Bible, which reveal God's work of creation, was arranged by Moses so that it was a powerful tract written against the bizarre creation myths the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians had fabricated.

Now, the wise men who came to Jesus and worshipped him were the representatives of the religion that surrounded the Hebrew people. Isn't it astonishing that they, of all people, would traverse miles to bring their adoration to the Christ child? How did it happen? What divine power broke into their lives and compelled them to deny the power of their own religion and come to the capital of the Jewish nation and find their way to the little town of Bethlehem to worship Jesus? In the answer to that question, we will be able to see how great the Christ of Christmas really is.

Remember how we noticed that the religion of the people of Israel and the religion of the people who lived in the Eastern region were opposed to each other? Well, the people of Israel were tempted again and again to participate in the religion of the people who surrounded them, and finally their unfaithfulness to the religion of the one true God brought the ultimate catastrophe upon their nation. They were carried into captivity, and they were brought to Babylon, the seat of false religion. And there they were purified.

Special prophets arose there in the place of captivity and called the people back to God. Daniel was one. Nehemiah was another. Ezekiel was another. The Jewish people were purged of their interest in the false religion of the East, and the people of the East were exposed to the true religion, the religion of the

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A Quiet Comment on Usury

Michael Bourgault

Shall a Christian charge interest on a loan made to a fellow Christian or group of Christians?

This issue can be broken down into two parts: the application of the Old Testament law and the application of the principle of Christian liberty. The clearest reference to each of these areas is in the standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, i.e., the Westminster Confession of Faith, XIX, 1-5; XX:1.

If we look to Old Testament ceremonial or civil law to do justice to the issue of usury we are looking in the wrong place. Chapter XIX of the Confession teaches that the ceremonial laws given to the church underage were abrogated, done away with by a powerful force. In like manner, the civil law was laid aside except for the general equity thereof when the nation of Israel ceased to exist as a body politic. In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul likens this law to a governor who keeps children in check until they grow to maturity.

It is only the Ten Commandments (the summary of the moral law) which span the two periods of redemptive history. As stated in the Confession, the moral law was first given to Adam, renewed at Sinai, and binds all men to obedience through all generations.

Since we are in the age of the fullness of times — where we have received status as sons no longer underage and where the Spirit and the gifts are ours — let us use our maturity to decide this issue. The matter of lending money to a brother or brothers can be left to Christian conscience guided by the moral law working out of a dynamic of love by the Spirit.

Wise Men Still Seek Him

(continued from page 11)

Jews, as they had never been exposed to it before. Even strong rulers who persecuted the Jews finally had to acknowledge that the God of the Hebrews was superior to their own. Thus, there was born among the religious leaders of the Eastern religions a great fascination for the Jewish religion and a deep interest in the God of the Jews. By the time Jesus was born, the leaders of the religions of the East were waiting with great expectation for something great to happen among the Jews.

When God spoke to them through the mysterious star, they were ready to respond. When he used a star to summon the Magi to Bethlehem, he used a language they could understand perfectly, for they were students of the stars, and they assumed that exceptional heavenly events heralded great works of God. When the star appeared, therefore, they did not connect it with something great in their own religion, but they connected it with the birth of the King of the Jewish people, the people who had been their captives several centuries before. When they saw it, they came to worship the God who had revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses and the prophets, the God of David.

So, when the wise men came to Jerusalem and finally found their way to Bethlehem what was really happening was that men who represented all the other religions of man recognized that Jesus was worthy of all praise and adoration.

This is the Bible's Christmas message, taken at its fullest: the religion of Jesus Christ is worthy of your attention, your study, and your faith. Jesus Christ is the one religious figure whose significance is not restricted to a special people or to a special part of the world. This is the religion that can bring fulfillment to all men everywhere.

Few today accept this message, because

most refuse to believe that we can find our deepest fulfillment through faith in Jesus Christ. They think instead that one religion is as good as another. The Bible contradicts this assumption. And I suspect that one of the reasons our world is corrupted by chronic chaos and our times are so uneasy and disjointed is that so many of us have refused to follow the example of the Magi. We often call them the wise men. They were indeed. They were, not only because they represented the flower of learning in that day, but they were also wise because they recognized the summons of God when they met it in the starry heavens. They expressed their towering perception when they abandoned restraints of their false faith and traveled with resolute earnestness to the place where they met the very Son of God.

Wise men still seek him. You should, too. According to the Bible, the child of Bethlehem was the magnificent person who became Jesus the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was worthy of the Magi's worship, for he was born to be King. But the road to kingship became for him the road of total sacrifice as he humbled himself in obedience before his Father in heaven and took the form of a servant and endured the torture of crucifixion and the crushing distress of hell itself so that all those who believe in him could be saved. Through his sacrifice, he paid for human sin, and now all those who confess their sin and ask him to cleanse them can participate in his salvation. Through the horror of rejection, execution, and death, Jesus Christ has been exalted to a kingship that is eternal.

If you are seeking for religious truth, for religious fulfillment, for the one religion that renders all others obsolete and unnecessary, seek no more. You have found it. Here it is: the religion of Jesus Christ. The Magi, heads full of religious lore, knew that they had finally come home when they found Jesus.

I invite you to be like them. Those who bow before Jesus Christ receive joy, liberation, and peace.