

The Standard Bearer

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Giving Alms in Secret

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:1-4

Alms are something we give to the poor in order to relieve them of their distress. The word “alms” derives from the Old English “almesse.” This word, in turn, originates from the Greek word *eleemosune*, meaning mercy or pity. Although mercy and pity start in the heart, they do not stop there. If someone has an *attitude* of mercy or pity in the heart, he will also manifest that mercy or pity in gracious giving to relieve the poor and needy.

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That is the reason Jesus talks about alms, not just as something one feels or thinks, but as something one does: “When thou *doest* alms...” In other words, faith doesn’t stay bound up in our hearts; faith shows itself in deeds of mercy and showing of pity to those in need.

Notice, too, that Jesus says, “*When* thou doest alms...” He assumes that every believer will show himself merciful. It is not a matter of *if*, but a matter of *when*. This duty is clear from the rest of Scripture: “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother” (Deut. 15:7). “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

Do we show pity to those in need? Does our faith manifest itself in doing outward works of mercy? Especially that ought to be evident in the church. But, even outside the church, if someone who is truly needy crosses our path, we ought to help him in Christ’s name.

Instead of giving an exhortation about doing alms, Jesus rather instructs His disciples about *how* alms

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ought to be given: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1). Jesus would have us avoid doing alms out in the open where men can see us. The last thing we ought to seek is to draw attention to ourselves: “Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Matt. 6:2). It is possible that some people in those days actually sounded trumpets and held great ceremonies when they showed mercy upon the poor and needy. Maybe the excuse was that sounding a trumpet would provide a way to alert the needy so they could come and receive a benefit from the giver. No matter, Jesus says, do not do alms that way; rather, make it so that your displays of mercy and pity are kept hidden.



Why does Jesus tell us to do alms in secret? Because He would have us consider our motives.

Frequently, the only thing that distinguishes a praiseworthy work from a horrible sin is the motive behind the act. For example, the motive might be the only thing that distinguishes a prayer that is pleasing to God and one that He finds an abomination. A wicked unbeliever might pray a beautiful prayer with the motive of scoring political points; such a prayer is an abomination to God (cf. Prov. 28:9). On the other hand, a sincere believer seeking the glory of God might utter the exact same prayer; his prayer will be pleasing to God. Such is the case also with the showing of mercy and pity; our motives matter. Jesus would have us examine our motives for doing alms.

In the first place, Jesus points at the wrong motive of wanting to be seen by others: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them....” Don’t try to get the attention of others. That’s what hypocrites do; they plan their apparent good works in order to obtain the glory and applause of others.

The very fact that Jesus addresses His disciples regarding the doing of alms shows that every child of God struggles with the wrong motivation for his good works. We want others to praise us. Maybe that at-

titude shows up when we have the opportunity to help a needy person who doesn’t show much, if any, appreciation for the help we give. It is hard to help that kind of person. But if we examine our motives, we see that part of the reason it is so hard to help them is that we want some recognition from them that we have exerted ourselves on their behalf. In other words, we want some applause, be it ever so slight.

Maybe we contribute to the church in some way and then complain because nobody recognizes us for our efforts: “Not even one person said thank you.” Again, we are guilty of seeking the applause of others. If nobody is going to applaud us, then we are not going to waste our time doing those things.

That is exactly the kind of thing Jesus warns us against. “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them....” Whenever we see that sinful attitude rearing its ugly head, we need to repent and seek God’s forgiveness.

Examining our motives can be difficult. On the one hand, we might so focus on our sinful motives that we refuse to see any good motives in our deeds. As a result, we count the almsdeeds we have done as completely sinful, with no good in them whatsoever. Now, it may be that we have had utterly wicked and selfish motives for showing mercy and pity; we ought to repent of such motives. However, if we have shown mercy and pity from hearts that truly seek to honor God, we should not be ashamed to acknowledge it. If we say we have no good motives whatsoever, in effect we are denying God’s work of regeneration in our hearts.

On the other hand, we might so focus on our good motives that we fail to see any sinful motives polluting our almsdeeds. We imagine our good work is well nigh perfect. In effect, this attitude denies that we still have a sinful nature that pollutes even our best works. A proper examination of our motives will recognize both the evil fruit that arises from our old natures as well as the good fruit that arises from faith.

Not only must we avoid doing good works to be seen by others; Jesus goes one step further: “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matt. 6:3).

Normally, our right and left hands work together. We would expect, therefore, that one hand would be aware

of what the other hand is doing. But, Jesus says, Do not tell your left hand about the good works of your right hand. Why would we want to do that? Because we want our left hand to pat us on the back while our right hand does the alms. In other words, do not dwell on your acts of mercy, because the more you think about them, the more likely it is that spiritual pride will manifest itself. That's a real danger. For example, when we start taking note of how much we ourselves help out in the church and how little others do, we are feeding our spiritual pride. That's exactly what Jesus warns against. Guard yourselves against spiritual pride.

What should be our main concern when we do works of mercy? That we do them before our heavenly Father: "That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:4). Whatever we do should be kept hidden so that only the Father sees our deeds.

Our motivation for doing good works should go back to the fact that God is our heavenly Father for Christ's sake. God has done such great things for us. He showed mercy and pity to us when He sent His only begotten Son to suffer the Hell that we deserved. He showed mercy and pity to us when He sent His Holy Spirit to give us new life in Jesus Christ. God's mercies toward us are new every morning as He blesses us with all spiritual blessings. Are we thankful to Him for His mercy and pity? Is it our desire to glorify the God of our salvation? There are times when we don't feel like helping a brother or sister in need. When that happens, we need to remind ourselves of God's mercy to us and the thankfulness we owe to Him.

We ought to see in ourselves a sincere desire to glorify our heavenly Father in everything we do. To be sure, our desire to glorify God is weak. Sometimes we have to do everything in our power just to show a small mercy to someone in need. But the fact that we are torn between the desire to glorify God and the desire to live for ourselves shows that there is a battle going on between the old man and the new.




Depending on what motivates our deeds of mercy and pity, there will be a reward.

Of hypocrites, who do good works only to be seen of men, or to pat themselves on the back, Jesus says, "They have their reward" (Matt. 6:2). But the question is, How will they be rewarded? If they do merciful deeds and good works to receive the applause of men, they will receive the applause of men. If they do their almsdeeds so that they can pat themselves on the back, they will walk away and say to themselves, "What a great person I am compared to so many others." But that's all they will receive; they will not receive any good reward from the Father.

*...we want our left hand
to pat us on the back
while our right hand
does the alms.*

In contrast, when we do our alms in secret, with no desire for the applause of others and no desire to pat ourselves on the back, then the Father "which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:4).

To be clear, when Jesus speaks of a reward, He is not condoning a mercenary attitude in our hearts. We must never think to ourselves, "Surely, after all that I've done, God owes it to me to spare me from this or that trouble." Or, "He owes it to me to give me this or that." That is what mercenaries do; they work for some sort of payback according to their own desires. The minute we think to ourselves God owes us something, we have gone astray.

Even though we cannot merit anything from God, He will reward our works of mercy. He will reward us in the first place with His public approval. On the judgment day, before the whole world, He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." He will reward us, too, with the joy of seeing His work being accomplished in and through us. Lastly, when we examine ourselves and see His gracious work, we can know that God has been merciful and pitiful towards us in the past and therefore that He will continue to bless us openly with His care in the future. 

Herman Witsius, Baptism, and Covenant Seed (1)

Recently we have been reading through a number of theological journals published by Mid-America Seminary the past few years (entitled *Mid-American Journal of Theology*—*MAJT*). They make for stimulating reading. What struck us was the number of articles over the past few years devoted to the doctrine of the covenant and related issues such as baptism, election, covenant of works, and common grace, among others.

Common grace, you say? Yes, common grace.

It comes in handy if you have a conditional covenant view and all the children of believers, even the carnal seed, are considered to be in the covenant of grace. They are in it by virtue of God's common grace, however devoid they might be of God's electing grace.

It is what we know as the Heynsian view of the covenant.

Interestingly enough, in one issue (Vol. 15, 2004) there is an article devoted to Heyns' view of the covenant as critiqued and sharply criticized by Dr. S. Volbeda, a critique lifted from Volbeda's unpublished class notes on Catechetics (circa 1930).

Worth reading.

That the doctrine of the covenant should be on the foreground these days in a Reformed seminary's theological journal is not surprising—not when you consider the recent publication of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* in English and its availability to the English reading public. And that taken in connection with the Federal Vision heresy that has recently forced to the fore the doctrine of God's covenant of grace and, with it, the significance of baptizing infants. What does the highly esteemed Dr. Bavinck, covenantal theologian par excellence, have to say on this matter?

Accordingly, there are a number of articles in the *MAJT* of the past few years focusing on Bavinck and his views as well.

Of special interest to us would be the article "Covenant and Election in Bavinck" by Dr. C. Venema (*MAJT* 19, pp. 69-116, 2008).

We intend to make a few comments about that article in due course, D.V.

That said, the article that caught our eye was one written by Dr. J. Mark Beach, entitled "Calvin's Treatment of the Offer of the Gospel and Divine Grace" (*MAJT* 22, pp. 55-

76, 2011). This article is of interest to us, not only because reference is made in the article and its footnotes to H. Bavinck, H. Hoeksema, H. Hanko (apparently, amongst the Dutch, "Herman" was once a popular name), and D. J. Engelsma, but also because the subject matter itself, namely that of the Free (or Well-Meant) Offer, is of paramount importance these days.

In addition, it is of interest to us not only because of how many in Reformed, Presbyterian, and Reformed Baptist circles are committed to the Free Offer these days, enabling them to make common cause together in spite of significant differences in other areas, but also because the Free Offer, as is becoming clearer and clearer all the time, is what explains more than anything else the commitment of these churches to their conditional covenant view (and the theory of common grace along with it), their steadfast resistance to an unconditional covenant of grace, and their remarkable inability (refusal?) to read Bavinck aright when he lays out his unconditional covenant view, trying as best they can to modify his view.

Why?

Because such might mean having to take a second look at the Free (or Well-Meant) Offer, and that is the doctrine they will not part ways with today; no, not at any cost.

Seemingly, that has become “The Marrow of [Everyone’s] Divinity” these days.

The one doctrine above all others precious to them.

And article after article in the *MAJT* of recent years touching on the covenant and issues related to it simply serve to underscore that conclusion.

More on that later.

However, before we comment on Beach’s article on Calvin and the Free Offer, we want to say something about another article, one found in the Volume 17, 2006 issue of *MAJT* that is well worth reading, a treatise by Herman Witsius translated under the title: *On the Efficacy and Utility of Infant Baptism in the Case of Elect Infants Whose Parents Are Under the Covenant*.

The editors of the *MAJT* are to be commended for making this treatise available to a wider reading public. We could wish it were printed in pamphlet form and made available for general distribution.

Herman Witsius was a Dutch Reformed theologian of the second half of the seventeenth century (1636-1708) who, while not so well known in our circles, is well worth reading. Most of his published works are no longer buried in the Dutch. And the more one reads his works, the more one appreciates his integrity, clarity, and Reformed convictions. I have on my shelf

his two-volume work entitled *The Apostles’ Creed*, providing good material for anyone who preaches regularly through the Heidelberg Catechism and is trying to stay fresh (for those interested, it is distributed by Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.).

Witsius’ magnum opus was *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (two volumes in the English translation). While it is true that Witsius went in the direction of a conditional covenant like many (but not all) of his contemporaries, the value of this work is that Witsius ties God’s covenant in with election, convinced, as he demonstrates, that this is the clear teaching of Scripture.

As is clear from Witsius’ quotations of his contemporary Reformed theologians, he considered this the prevailing view of the orthodox of his day. It becomes clear that not the view that election governs God’s covenant with sinful men is the view that is novel to historic Reformed doctrine, but God’s covenant of grace severed from God’s eternal election is the novel teaching.

But our interest at this point is with Witsius’ treatise on *The Efficacy and Utility of Baptism*.

The reason for my interest as a minister of the PRC in this little treatise is that it makes clear what Witsius believed concerning how believers, in accordance with Scripture, should view their children, namely, as spiritual seed having spiritual life, and not as little heathens, as spiritually dead and waiting for regeneration in their later years.

And this, according to Witsius,

was the prevailing view amongst the Reformed of his day.

In this treatise (which runs for some 65 pages in the *MAJT*) Witsius deals with various questions that arose in connection with the baptism of infants, which doctrine within the ranks of Reformed and Presbyterian theologians already in the 1600s was a source of much controversy, though all practiced infant baptism.

It was exactly disagreement between early Reformed theologians on this most practical of issues, the spiritual status of infants of believers, with its resulting confusion amongst believing parents about how they should view their little ones, that prompted Witsius to write this treatise.

While Witsius’ treatise is certainly polemical (taking issue with errant views), and his purpose ecumenical (to bring about a consensus among the Reformed in this area of controversy if at all possible), a case could be made that Witsius’ primary reason for writing this little treatise was practical and pastoral.

How a believer views his children from little on, as regenerated or unregenerate, as having the Holy Spirit or devoid of the Holy Spirit, is a matter of no little importance when it comes to the approach one takes in instructing one’s children. Witsius and his Reformed contemporaries were as well aware of this as we are.

But what becomes plain in the course of reading Witsius’ treatise is that one of the main issues that forced upon Witsius and his contemporaries consideration of how

believers are to view their children (as having spiritual life from little on, even prior to their baptism, or devoid of such life) *was the issue of the death of little ones*.

For us, the death of infants may seem little more than a side issue for theological discussion, at most a secondary consideration.

In the days of Witsius it was not.

And for those with any pastoral heart, it could not be.

We of the twenty-first century seldom go to the cemetery with the body of an infant or little child. Modern medicine has made the death of little ones the exception, not the rule. In the days of Witsius, carrying bodies of little ones to the grave took place with sorrowful regularity. Records indicate that in those days nearly a third of those born died in infancy, and of those who lived into childhood another quarter never made it into their teens.

There is good reason why a doctrinal creed no less than the *Canons of Dordt* saw fit to devote one of its articles to this reality with its comforting, pastoral conclusion that “godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy” (Head I, Art. 17).

When the mothers of Israel with empty arms cry for their little ones, the Christ of the covenant, that same Shepherd who carries the lambs in his bosom, is compelled to respond, just as surely overpowered by their cries as when Jacob flung his arms about the knees of the

Angel of Jehovah and would not let him go “until thou bless me.”

The Spirit of the Christ of the covenant compelled the theologians and preachers to write the pastoral words of reassurance found in Art. 17, Head I, of the Canons of Dordt. And by the phrase “[they] have no reason to doubt” the salvation of their children whom God *calls out* [!] of this life in their infancy, the Fathers did not mean simply that we as pastors are to tell the mothers of Israel that they are not to think about whether or not that little one whose body they cannot hold any longer is elect or reprobate, is safely in the arms of Jesus or perishing with the carnal. Just leave that to God. No! They are to have the assurance that these little ones are in the arms of Jesus, Almighty Shepherd of His sheep.

We are well aware that not all in our own circles are of the same persuasion on this matter. But that is another matter.

In the course of his little tract, Witsius lays out his own convictions on this question, which he was convinced was also the consensus of the Reformed of his day.

Towards the conclusion of his treatise, in the interest of “establishing peace between brothers” in this in-house baptismal controversy, Witsius draws up six points which, he was persuaded, “all we who are called orthodox are by the grace of God agreed upon....” The fifth point reads:

(5) That the benefit of baptism is not only great as respects those who grow up to maturity but also in the case of those who die in infancy, to

whom, though they are ignorant of the fact, it is the surest pledge of present grace and future glory (*MAJT* 17, p. 187).


In our judgment, Witsius’ pastoral heart was nothing less than scriptural.

If you have an argument with Witsius’ conclusion, I say, “Take it up with the widow of Zarephath (taking special note of Elijah’s [that great type of Christ] compassionate response to her bewildered, brokenhearted plea), or with the Shunammite woman (and consider Elisha’s pastoral response, and he the great Old Testament pastoral type of Christ Himself, who also had mercy on grieving mothers of Israel again and again).”

And the New Testament mothers of Israel, arms empty, have less comfort and hope than they?

For an informative and insightful article on the whole issue of children dying in infancy, we could direct you to another article in the *MAJT* (Vol. 17, 2006) entitled “The Election and Salvation of the Children of Believers Who Die in Infancy: A Study of Article I/17 of the Canons of Dort,” by C. Venema.

A worthwhile historical overview.

Next time we will return to Witsius’ treatise on “The Efficacy and Utility of Infant Baptism” to demonstrate what Witsius was convinced was the scriptural teaching on how believers are to view their covenant seed, which view he was also convinced was the prevailing Reformed view of his day. 

Another Beast

“And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred, and all their brethren were at their commandment.”

I Chronicles 12:32

The near monopoly of power once enjoyed by sovereign entities is being eroded. ...states must be prepared to cede some sovereignty to world bodies.... Globalization thus implies that sovereignty is not only becoming weaker in reality, but that it needs to become weaker.... The goal should be to redefine sovereignty for the era of globalization, to find a balance between a world of fully sovereign states and an international system of either world government or anarchy.¹

With these comments Richard N. Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, whose ultimate aim is that national boundaries be obliterated and a one-world rule established, echoes the goal of the first beast of Revelation 13 to have power over “all kindreds, and tongues, and nations” (Rev. 13:7). Visionary John D. Rockefeller, whose family donated the property on which the United Nations headquarters was built, sets forth a role for the church in accomplishing this goal of the first beast:

Would that I had the power to bring to your minds the vision as it unfolds before me! I see all denominational

¹ Richard N. Haass, “Sovereignty and Globalization,” February 17, 2006, posted at: <http://www.cfr.org/sovereignty/sovereignty-globalization/p9903>.

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Previous article in this series: December 15, 2012, p. 139.

emphasis set aside.... I see the church molding the thought of the world as it has never done before, leading in all great movements as it should. I see it literally establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.²

“Molding the thought of the world...” would appear to be the task of “another beast” revealed in Revelation 13. It is our purpose in this article to look into the identity of this second beast and some of his deceptive activity as we continue our quest to understand the times.

Herman Hoeksema’s Exposition of the Meaning of the Second Beast

The apostle John informs the church in Revelation 13:11-12: “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.” According to Herman Hoeksema, broadly speaking these “...two beasts together form the picture of the full and complete antichristian power. But the first beast pictures it in its political aspect; the second beast deals with its religious and moral and scientific forces. The first beast tells us that this kingdom has sway over all men and over all things; the second beast rather explains to us how this first beast exercises his authority.”³

Hoeksema continues by writing more specifically

² John D. Rockefeller, quoted in James W. Wardner, “Unholy Alliances: The Secret Plan and the Secret People Who are Working to Destroy America,” 1996 (privately published).

³ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 467.

concerning the meaning of the second beast. Paraphrasing Hoeksema: we are informed that this second beast is from the earth rather than the stormy sea, indicating that the second beast is “less formidable in appearance.” Not only that, the second beast has horns as a lamb, nevertheless he speaks like a dragon, which indicates that he serves the first beast and exercises his authority. In fact, it is the task of the second beast to cause the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast, and if they don’t, to see to it that they are easily distinguished from those who do in order that they may be killed. Hoeksema contends that this second beast does not exercise his power by commands but by persuasion: “He comes by speaking and doing great signs and wonders. He comes therefore with the persuasion of a prophet. He does not force, but convince. He does not command and issue laws, but he wins the hearts of men.”⁴

Further investigation into the book of Revelation reveals who this second beast represents. In chapter 19, writing about the judgment of the two beasts, the apostle John records: “And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20). Revelation 20:10 further confirms that the second beast is identified as the false prophet: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are....” Hoeksema concludes about this second beast that he “is indispensable to the first. The world-power has need of false science [for one, think Darwinism, ck] and philosophy [for two, think naturalism and postmodernism, ck] and religion [for three, think Arminianism, common grace, and postmillinianism, ck] to maintain his authority and the integrity and unity of his kingdom.”⁵

The Activity of the Second Beast

With all the power of science, philosophy, and religion at his disposal, the false prophet (second beast) utilizes agents in this world to promote his lies. At his disposal for this purpose is the false church. This be-

comes clear when we examine the similarity of what we read in Revelation 13 to what we read in Revelation 17. The second beast described in Revelation 13 is given the power to cause “the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast” (v. 12). Furthermore, he has the power to “...cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (v. 15). Interestingly, we find this same vile activity carried out by the whore Babylon (false church) revealed in Revelation 17. There we read, “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:4-6). Herman Hoeksema expounds this passage:

...we have a picture of the harlot church, the false church, the counterfeit church. For even as the devil aims at establishing a counterfeit kingdom, so he also establishes a counterfeit church. Naturally! We have told you before that he uses all the institutions which God has placed on the earth in this dispensation for the maintenance and establishment of his kingdom, that he employs them all for his own purpose and for the propagation of his own principle. The same is true of the church. Also the church as an institution in this dispensation, designed to be the army of the kingdom,—also that church the devil shrewdly employs in his service. And the result is that a counterfeit church, the harlot church, is established. The true church is the spiritual bride of Christ, ingrafted into Him by a true faith, and through Him stands in covenant relation with the Lord Jehovah. But that counterfeit church is the church which still bears the name of church, still appears as the church in the world, still claims or pretends to be the church, outwardly also looks like the church, has its ministers and sacraments, the preaching of the Word and teaching, and all kinds of institutions and societies besides, but employs all the blessings she has outwardly received in the service of Antichrist.... (A)ll her members she educates to work for the dragon and his kingdom.... The more she labors in the interest of

⁴ Hoeksema, 467-468.

⁵ Hoeksema, 471.

the antichristian kingdom, the more she will enjoy the favor of the dragon: for she is nothing but his harlot, and allows herself to be the instrument of Antichrist.⁶

Tracking the Second Beast

In a previous article (“The Beast Rising”—see December 15, 2012, p. 139) it was demonstrated that there is progression throughout history in the attempt of the devil to establish his antichristian world power. The same is true of the work of the second beast. This is understandable if one considers that “...he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast” (Rev. 13: 12).

In tracking some of the past activity of this second beast, one is naturally drawn to the obvious examples of the persecution of God’s people by that which has called itself the true church. After all, the apostle John records that the woman is “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the martyrs of Jesus.” Countless examples of this can be seen throughout the new dispensation. A few that immediately come to mind include the persecution of the infant church at Jerusalem by the Jewish leaders shortly after the death of Christ. Specific examples that are recorded in Scripture are the murder of James, the stoning of Stephen, and the zealous pursuit of the early Christians by Saul of Tarsus. And who can forget the countless heinous crimes of the Roman Catholic Church, especially as they were carried out by its Dominican Order, in the dreaded Inquisition throughout much of the Middle Ages?

But it should not be forgotten that the second beast also works throughout history through the counterfeit church to *deceive*. The apostle John takes note of this when he describes the power of the second beast to deceive “them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had the power to do in the sight of the beast” (Rev. 13: 14). She does this in part through false doctrine. In John’s day the counterfeit church revealed itself in the false teaching of the Judaizers. During the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, its counterfeit nature would be demonstrated in its teachings of Semi-Pelagianism, Mariolotry, papal infallibility, and salvation by faith and works.

⁶ Hoeksema, 561.

Furthermore, Rome has been quick to promote its cause by the use of miracles (whether real or contrived). A few specific examples will suffice to demonstrate this point: Many have been deceived by the supposed appearance of the Virgin Mary to three shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal on May 13, 1917 and the thirteenth day of each of the following six months. Even more fantastic is the “miracle” of the Virgin of Guadalupe that won the hearts of the Indians in Mexico:

The Spaniards, after they had conquered Mexico, had in mind the goal of converting the indigenous Indians into catholicism. But the Spaniards encountered many difficulties because the Mexican people had existing strong beliefs in their many gods. It wasn’t until the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Juan Diego that this started to change.

Juan Diego was a young indigenous Indian walking toward the Hill of Tepeyac on December 12, 1531 when he was stopped by the appearance of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary appearing to Juan Diego was a young woman with black hair and dark skin which looked more like an indigenous person. She ordered Juan Diego to go to the bishop and ask him to build a church at the Hill of Tepeyac. Juan Diego then ran to the Bishop to tell him what the Virgin Mary had told him. The Bishop did not believe what this young man was telling him and decided to ignore the petition.

The Virgin Mary appeared again in front of Juan Diego and told him to collect flowers from the top of the hill, but because it was December Juan Diego knew that there was not going to be any flowers at the rocky hill. Upon reaching the top of the hill, Juan Diego was surprised to see that it was covered with colorful and beautiful flowers. Juan Diego, as he was asked to, collected the flowers using his overcoat and ran again to see the Bishop.

Juan Diego gave the coat full of flowers to the bishop, and here the bishop discovered the image of Virgin Mary’s picture was miraculously traced on the coat. Seeing both the unseasonal flowers and the image of the Virgin, the Bishop realized Juan Diego had told him the truth and The Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe was built on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico City.⁷

That the Virgin of Guadalupe was like them (dark hair and dark complexion) won the hearts of the indig-

⁷ <http://www.mexonline.com/virginofguadalupe.htm>

enous Indians to the Roman Catholic Church and their bodies to the service of the Spanish government.

Of particular interest in this particular case is how the supposed miracle promoted by the Roman Catholic Church served the political cause of the Spanish government. It appears to demonstrate how the false church can be of service to the first beast in promoting

his political goals. Is it possible that similar forces are at work today to bring to fruition the kingdom of Antichrist?

As the return of the Lord nears, the tracks of this beast are becoming more numerous and distinct.

But following this trail must wait for a future hunt.



CONVOCATION ADDRESS

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the “Good Christian Schools” (1)

Reformed churches have always shown a keen interest in the cause of Christian education. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the Reformation itself was concerned for the education of the children of believers. The Reformers had harsh things to say about education in the existing schools, which education was largely under the control of the corrupt Roman Catholic Church and was shot through with the humanism of the Renaissance. The Reformers called for new schools in which children and young people would be taught in harmony with the truth of the Word of God.

Luther was outspoken in his call for the establishment of sound Christian schools. In 1524 he wrote a tract entitled “To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.” In 1530 he preached a sermon entitled, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School.” He criticized as “a master-piece of Satanic art” the delusion of

parents who supposed that the Christian education of their children was unnecessary. Addressing himself to pastors and preachers, he said:

My Very Dear Sirs and Friends: You see plainly how Satan is now attacking us on all sides, both with power and cunning, and brings about every misery, that he may destroy the holy Gospel and the kingdom of God, or, if he cannot destroy it, that he may at least hinder it in every way, and prevent its progress and success. Among the various crafty devices, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, is to delude the common people into withholding their children from school and instruction, while he suggests to them such hurtful thoughts as these: “Since there is no hope for the cloisters and priesthood as formerly, we do not need learned men and study, but must consider how we may obtain food and wealth.”¹

In “An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,” written already in 1520, Luther criticized the state of education in his day:

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Convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary were held on September 5, 2012 at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville. The text of Prof. Cammenga’s address on that occasion begins here.

¹ Frederick Eby, *Early Protestant Educators: The Educational Writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Other Leaders of Protestant Thought* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 105.

The universities also need a good, thorough reformation—I must say it no matter whom it vexes—for everything which the papacy has instituted and ordered is directed only towards the increasing of sin and error. What else are the universities, if their present condition remains unchanged, than...places for training youth in Greek glory, in which loose living prevails, the Holy Scriptures and the Christian faith are little taught, and the blind, heathen master Aristotle rules alone, even more than Christ.²

Luther somewhere says, “When the schools flourish, all flourishes.”

The Geneva Academy was a monument to John Calvin’s zeal for Christian education. Begun in 1558, it provided a Christian education from the primary grades through university and seminary level courses. The persecution of Protestants in different places, as in England during the reign of “Bloody Mary,” caused many to seek refuge in Geneva and to enroll in the Academy. The Geneva Academy sent its graduates all over Europe, convicted of the truths of the Reformation and prepared to apply the education they had received in Calvin’s school to a wide variety of vocations. By the time of Calvin’s death in 1564, there were more than 1,200 students in the college and more than 300 students in the seminary.

The concern for Christian education showed itself in the Presbyterian branch of the Reformation. John Knox, one who himself had studied in Geneva during the time of Calvin, in *The Book of Discipline* that he authored, called for the establishment of good Christian schools.

The Necessity of Schools. Seeing that God hath determined that His Church here on earth, shall be taught not by angels but by men; and seeing that men are born ignorant of all godliness; and seeing, also, how God ceaseth to illuminate men miraculously, suddenly changing them, as that he did His Apostles and others in the Primitive Church: of necessity it is that your Honors be most careful for the virtuous education, and godly upbringing of the youth of this Realm, if ye now thirst unfeignedly for the advancement of Christ’s glory, or yet desire the continuance of His benefits to the

² Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), 92.

generation following. For as the youth must succeed, so ought we to be careful that they have the knowledge and erudition, to profit and comfort that which ought to be most dear to us, to wit, the Church and Spouse of the Lord Jesus.³

The General Assembly of the Scottish Presbyterian Church already in 1560 directed the presbyteries to establish “a church school in every parish, and to see that the teacher employed in each was a pious, orthodox, well-qualified man...” (Samuel Miller, *Baptism and Christian Education*, p. 141). By an act of the General Assembly of 1642, it was decided that a grammar school should be established in every presbytery. The General Assembly of 1700 enjoined all presbyteries to “take special, particular, and exact notice” of all schoolmasters, governors, and instructors of youth within their jurisdiction and oblige them to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Further, it called for the dismissal of all those who showed negligence, error, or immorality.

The Reformed churches of the Netherlands shared this concern for Christian education. Early on, the government entrusted the church with the reform of the existing Roman Catholic schools. The Synod of Dordt, 1618-’19, ruled that: “All consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters who not only teach the children reading, writing, language, and the liberal arts, but also train them in godliness and in the catechism.” Every schoolteacher was required to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, and no one was to be hired as a teacher who was not a member in good standing in the Reformed church. To ensure that faithful instruction was being given, it was made the duty of the ministers and elders periodically to visit the schools.

The Protestant Reformed Churches share this interest in and concern for Christian education. This can be demonstrated. Our concern for Christian education comes out in our official creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 38. Lord’s Day 38 contains the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the Fourth Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” Question 103 asks: “What doth God require in the fourth commandment?” The answer begins: “First,

³ Eby, *Early Protestant Educators*, 277.

that the ministry of the gospel *and the schools* be maintained....” Clearly, these schools are the Christian day-schools, the schools established and maintained by the parents of the congregations. One of the prescribed questions put to each consistory at the annual church visitation is: “Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school?” Article 41 of the Church Order prescribes that one of the questions asked of the delegates from each church at the conclusion of the classis meetings shall be: “Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?”

Article 21 of the Church Order reads: “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.” Recently, our churches were involved in controversy, painful controversy, over the meaning and application of Article 21. We may hope that that controversy has sharpened our understanding of our calling, especially our calling as officebearers, and strengthened our resolve to carry it out.

Article 21 concerns the duty of consistories and officebearers in promoting the “good Christian schools.” Although Article 21 concerns the duty of the denomination’s consistories and officebearers, it has important implications for the denomination’s seminary. That ought to be obvious, if from nothing else, from the fact that the seminary is called to train future officebearers, ministers of the gospel, whose calling will be one day as members and presidents of consistories to promote the “good Christian schools.”

The “Good Christian Schools”

The “good Christian schools” of Church Order, Article 21 are, first of all, *schools*. Article 21 calls for the promotion of schools in the classic and historic sense of the word. This is simply the only kind of school that Article 21 could possibly have been referring to at the time at which it was written, no alternative to the traditional school being then available. This does justice to the language of Article 21, for these are schools in which parents *have* their children instructed, have them instructed by others, by the schoolmasters to whom reference was made in the earlier versions of the article. Besides, reference is made in the article

to schools in which “parents” have their children instructed, parents in the plural, parents who have banded together in order jointly to establish and maintain these schools.

That Article 21 refers to schools in the traditional sense of the word is confirmed by the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order: “Are the poor and Christian schools cared for?” And this is confirmed by the questions for church visitation: “Does the consistory see to it that the parents *send* their children to the Christian school?” The parents send their children away to attend these schools. Clearly, the “good Christian schools” of Article 21 are the schools established by the community of believers, inasmuch as the children of believing parents belong to the covenant and church of God.

In the second place, these schools are *parental* schools. Article 21 calls upon consistories to see to it “that there are good Christian schools in which *parents* have their children instructed....” The government does not have, neither ought it to assume, the duty of educating the children. The church as institute does not have the duty to educate the children. To catechize, yes, as part of its calling to preach the gospel. But not to educate more broadly with a view to preparation for earthly vocation. That calling belongs to the parents. Parents carry out this calling by hiring teachers who stand in their place, *in loco parentis*.

That it is the calling of parents to instruct their children is plain from Deuteronomy 6:6-9:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

And this parental calling comes out in Deuteronomy 6:20ff.: “And when thy son asketh thee in time to come...then thou shalt say unto thy son....”

... to be continued. 

Religion and Discrimination in Employment (3)

In two previous articles under this rubric, we examined some issues in employment law relating to discrimination claims as they protect individuals from religious discrimination and as our schools and churches can be affected by claims of discrimination. We also looked at some recent United States Supreme Court rulings that apply to religious organizations that act as employers. In this issue, we will look at the factors that impact such cases and the measures that can be taken to preserve religious freedom in this area.

We have looked at three ways the law protects our religious freedoms. First, individuals as employees have freedom from discrimination based on religious beliefs. Second, religious organizations have the freedom to hire employees of their own religion if the “purpose and character of the organization are primarily religious.” Finally, the ministerial exception allows religious organizations freedom from government interference in employment decisions for employees who instruct in religious doctrines. In order to use these legal protections, a person or organization needs to be able to provide evidence that they are entitled to such protection. We will look at each type of protection and the evidence that can be used.

First, an individual claiming protection against religious discrimination must be able to show that his claim is based on a “sincerely held” belief. Obviously, whether a person sincerely holds a belief is a somewhat subjective inquiry. However, a person’s beliefs

are easier to demonstrate if he is a member of a church that clearly holds a position. Let’s use the example of Sabbath Day observance. It is easier to demonstrate that an employee believes that Sunday is a day of rest if that is the clear position of the church where he has his membership. The church’s position may be evident from published writings, but will be even more firmly established by statements of official positions and decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies such as a classis or synod. If the employee’s church holds firmly to a position, the employee can use that as evidence of his sincerely held belief.

This does not mean we should start making declarations or decisions by our ecclesiastical assemblies just for the purpose of establishing our positions for use in legal matters. The rule with our ecclesiastical assemblies has generally been that they address issues only when there is a current case in controversy. This is a wise rule, and the appellate courts of our land generally follow the same rule. When there is a genuine case in controversy, all aspects of the issue are more fully presented, and it is less likely that a decision is rendered that is overbroad or that inadvertently affects other cases. However, we should be clear and unequivocal in addressing issues when given the opportunity. This is obviously true for doctrinal reasons, but it also affects individual members and our organizations as well.

To illustrate, let’s look at the example of a church that does not take a firm stand for the truth. Let’s say this church does not discipline members who violate the Sabbath Day. Maybe cases even go to ecclesiastical assemblies but no disciplinary action is taken. If an individual member of that church objects to working

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Previous article in this series: May 15, 2012, p. 376.

on the Sabbath Day, he may still be able to argue that it is his own personal sincerely held religious belief, but he certainly cannot point to the practice of his church and fellow members. Allowing one member of the church to work on Sunday could adversely impact another member's ability to refuse to work on Sunday, especially if "sincerely held beliefs" are scrutinized more closely in the future. As individuals, we bear in mind that what we do may affect our fellow members.

The legal difficulty is even more pronounced under other legal protections, such as the religious organization exception. Under this exception, a religious organization can discriminate and hire only those who have the same religious beliefs, or fire employees who do not.¹ However, this becomes difficult if religious beliefs are not clearly stated. For example, a small Christian school could have a local constituency that holds firmly to a six-day creation, but a teacher begins teaching evolution. If the school is affiliated with a denomination that refuses to condemn the teaching of evolution or discipline those that teach evolution, the school would have a difficult time terminating the teacher for his teaching under the religious organization exemption.

As stated previously, the religious organization exemption applies if the "purpose and character of the organization are primarily religious." Our schools can arguably come under this exemption because our primary purpose in creating them is to incorporate our religious beliefs into every aspect of teaching, and the teachers stand in place of the parents in this regard. To avail ourselves of this protection, we should make this purpose clear in the legal documents that govern our schools, such as the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws or Constitution. The courts have established a four-part test to determine whether an organization is a "religious organization": 1) Do the Articles of Incorporation state a religious purpose? 2) Is the day-to-day operation religious? 3) Is it a non-profit organization? and 4) Is it affiliated with a church or other religious organization?

The Articles of Incorporation, rather than simply stating a purpose to educate our children, can state our purpose to educate our children in our doctrines by

¹ See, e.g., *Spencer v. World Vision, Inc.*, 633 F.3d 723 (9th Cir. 2011).

incorporating our religious beliefs into every subject taught. Incorporating the denominational name in the Articles can also help to show the affiliation with the church. Often these Articles simply recite the language required by the Internal Revenue Service for recognition as a tax-exempt charitable entity, but care should be used to expand them to state fully the real purpose. If not in the Articles, this purpose should at least be stated in the Bylaws.

With regard to the issue of whether our schools are affiliated with our churches, we often shy away from the concept of affiliation because we want to stress that our schools are parental, rather than parochial schools controlled by the churches. While that may be true, they are still affiliated with our churches in the legal sense. The churches and schools have overlapping constituencies, the schools are supported by the churches, and the schools are established so that the instruction students receive is in agreement with, and a continuation of, the doctrine of those churches. The Bylaws or Constitution of the school can establish this legal affiliation by requiring that the same religious doctrines of the society-member parents be incorporated into the school and every subject taught in the school.

Finally, as discussed in the last article in this series, the United States Supreme Court recently extended the "ministerial exception" to a teacher in a Lutheran school.² This exception traditionally applied only to ministers and is based on the principle that courts will not interfere in the decisions of churches or religious organizations in employing individuals to give religious instruction. The majority opinion made much of the fact that the teacher in this case was considered a "minister" who was called by the church to teach. However, the concurring opinions suggested that the decision should not be limited to ministers in the traditional sense.

While we do not know whether the court would apply the same exception to a teacher in our covenant schools, it could be argued that the exception is even more applicable to our teachers. The court in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case discussed the fact that the teacher


² *Hosanna - Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 132 S.Ct. 694 (2012).

taught religious subjects in addition to what the school considered “secular” subjects. In our schools, we ask that our teachers incorporate our beliefs into every subject. Even a “secular” subject like math is taught from the perspective that God is an orderly God who created all things and incorporated that order into His creation.

The court in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case relied extensively on the documentation produced to determine the legal clarification of the teacher, including the school’s policy manuals and handbooks, and even the tax forms used by the teacher in filing her tax returns. We should also take care that our documentation confirms that our churches and schools are institutions where our religious doctrines are taught. The Bylaws of the school should incorporate the idea that the teacher is standing in the place of the parent in providing religious instruction to the children in all subject areas. The Bylaws or other policy documents should also clarify that we do not believe that any subject is untouched by our religious beliefs.

Incidentally, it does make a difference which document such ideas are incorporated into. In the law there is something of a hierarchy of documents, depending on which documents are most easily adopted and amended. Because of this, Articles of Incorporation

generally carry more weight than Bylaws, Bylaws carry more weight than Board policy manuals, and so forth.

Obviously, space is too limited in this article to give an exhaustive list of the topics that could be included in governing legal documents to increase the protection for religious liberty to our churches and other organizations. In this article we have examined the need to have clear, consistent practices as well as clear documentation of our beliefs and the role our schools have in teaching those doctrines. As the times change, the world around us seeks more and more to restrict our speech regarding our beliefs. Our condemnation of sin in the world around us is seen as intolerant and hateful. The focus of this article has been the context of employment discrimination, but in the future, just to use the Freedom of Religion embodied in the Constitution, we may need to show that what we teach is our “sincerely held” belief. This includes having clearly articulated statements of our beliefs, and having practices consistent with those statements. Article 28 of the Church Order requires that legal measures be taken so that the church can claim the protection of the authorities. As shown above, both our churches and schools benefit when our governing documents reference our beliefs and the methods we use to teach them. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

MRS. MARGARET LANING

Children Are Treasures

Living in NW Iowa is living upon the threshold of the Great Plains. The broad flatland stretches as far as the eye can see. The sky seems larger in all of its breadth and beauty. Thunderhead clouds look close enough to touch. On clear nights, God’s promise to Abraham resounds as a cascade of stars prove too numerous to count. “...tell the stars, if thou be able to number them:... so shall thy seed be” (Gen.

15:5). What an astounding picture we have of the spiritual children of Abraham, so numerous and lovely.

No matter where we live, which hemisphere or nation, we all have a front-row seat beneath this enormous banner of God’s promise to the church. Showing every night, twinkling gems ordered to perfection in harmonious heavenly constellations. Admission is free. Who needs TV?

When the sun goes down, the rhythm of crickets and outbursts of children fill the air: “There is Polaris the North Star.... Oh, I see Orion the Hunter.... I found

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the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, too!” What a delight to sit with family and friends under the stars and meditate upon the promise of God.

This promise was a comfort to Abraham, who was a stranger in a strange land. He worshiped with his household in solitude. How could he ever look upon the stars the same way again? What a thrill as he looked forward to the day of having many brothers and sisters in the Lord.

This is a comfort for us, too. Though a remnant on earth, when gathered into God’s kingdom we will stand amazed at the size of the body of Christ. For, “He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations” (Ps. 105:8).

We are numerous, yet each child of light is rare and precious. “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels...” (Mal. 3:17). God’s jewels are our jewels. By faithfully raising, training, and teaching His children in the ways of godliness, we are laying up treasures in heaven—a treasure trove of jewels! This makes all our labors, even the hardships, disappointments, and mundane chores, to have purpose. As we look at the stars and think upon God’s promise, all our work on earth takes on new meaning.

The covenant promise is for all His people—single adults and childless couples, too. The children of the congregation are rightly called the “children of the church.” Whether or not we are related by blood, Abraham is father of us all.

Jesus said, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50). The childless apostle Paul said to the saints in Corinth, “...for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (I Cor. 4:15). Similarly, the apostle John was speaking of his spiritual children when he wrote the oft-quoted statement, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (III John 1:4).

Together, we raise the children of the church and rejoice when God grants us more children. With the love of Christ, everyone watches out for one another, just as any member of a family would do. We rightly view one another as family members.

We know, of course, that we may have an unbeliev-

ing Esau as well as a believing Jacob. We bow before the sovereign, electing God. We rejoice to know that if it pleases Him to save even one of our children, then we have gained that child as co-heir of eternal life.

The world views children quite differently. To them, children are a nuisance, or a means to promote selfish ambition. This showed itself in the media quite a bit last year. When the world’s population reached the seven billion mark, some reproachful media coverage was prompted. For example, MSNBC news interviewed several “notable” figures on the topic of our current world population. Paul Ehrlich, professor of biology at Stanford University and author of *The Population Bomb*, said, “Governments should all adopt the slogan ‘patriotic citizens stop at two children’ and adjust tax and other policies to discourage over-reproducers and those unethical elements in society that are pronatalist.”

In another interview, actress and feminist Alexandra Paul outdoes Ehrlich’s “stop at two children” plan, a plan that would merely hold population constant. Rather, her contention is to pare down the masses to two billion. Just how she hopes to rid seven out of every ten people living today is not spelled out. Clearly, there is much disdain for large families.

The Devil would love to have us cave in on this. Hasn’t he often attempted to aim his darts at the children in the line of the covenant promise? What an effective way to snuff out the church. Back in the days when Pharaoh ordered the male Israelite babies to be thrown into the river, the Devil was there. He was behind Queen Athaliah’s mass murder of her grandchildren in the line of David. Satan struck again when Herod heard of the birth of Jesus and ordered all the young children of Bethlehem to be slain. He was licking his chops through all of these wicked attempts and many more. “...and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev. 12:4).

Today, the Devil is behind abortion, a wickedness growing in intensity. An article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (February 23, 2012) promotes the practice of killing newborns out of the womb. The authors contend that whether in the womb or out of the womb should not matter. Their evil thinking is reaching its logical conclusion.

Still more grievous it is to see abortion's influence in churches. For example, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) holds to abortion in certain instances. As stated on their website, "...we believe, in principle, that abortion ought not to be practiced at all. However, in this complex society, where many times one form of evil is pitted against another form of evil, there could be exceptions. It is our Christian conviction that abortion performed for personal reasons to insure individual convenience ought not to be permitted."

There are problems with this position. If abortion is allowed because of our "complex society," then the principle has been compromised. Did they mean only when the life of the mother is in danger, and when the death of the mother would mean the death of the child as well? If that is what they meant, then why would they not have expressed this? Their statement begs the question, "When is abortion the least of two evils?" Could it be pregnancies caused by rape or incest? If this is the case, how senseless to punish the child for what the father has done. It is the criminal who needs to be brought to justice. The RCA stands back from giving any examples, but their ambiguity leaves the door wide open. They give themselves the freedom to decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not abortion is the least of two evils.


The devil uses any means possible to prevent Jesus from gathering His lambs. He is behind the laws to limit children, as well as all the scare tactics and ridicule aimed at "unethical pronatalist" parents for having the children the Lord has been pleased to give them. The seed of the serpent will stop at nothing to attack

the seed of the woman. Of course, the devil will never overpower God to get at His jewels.

God's promises are yea and amen. When we are treated as dishonorable and indecent people, we should not be discouraged. We should not listen to this world! By faith, we stand with Moses, who esteemed the "reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:24-26). We believe that Scripture speaks the truth when it says, "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed..." (Ps. 127:5).

What an amazing picture we have above us—glorious stars that represent our family in the faith. As we see others added to the family of God, whether born to believing parents or coming from the outside, what a joy this is.

Christ will not return before the very last one is born. We will not know until the last day just how many elect there are. But He knows. Just as He knows with perfect understanding each star in the sky, so He knows with an infinite love each one of His children. Not a one of them is superfluous. Each child of God a treasure, bought with a great price by the precious blood of His only begotten Son. How we pray for God's grace to raise His covenant children to His glory.

"Our Lord is great, He calls by name and counts the stars of night; His wisdom is unsearchable, and wondrous is His might. The Lord upholds the poor and meek, He brings the wicked low; sing praise to Him and give Him thanks and all His goodness show" (Psalter 403). 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Thomas Becket: Warrior, Priest, Rebel, by John Guy (New York: Random House, 2012). Pp. 424. \$35.00 (cloth). Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.

Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

For the laymen, as well as the clergy, who enjoy riveting history told by a first-rate historian in superb prose, John Guy's new biography of Thomas Becket is a delight.

From the original sources and with critical judgment of later, usually hagiographic, accounts, biographer Guy relates the fascinating life and famed death of the twelfth century archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket.

Lifted from lowly origins to the secular and political heights of chancellor of England by King Henry II, near descendant of the renowned William I, Norman conqueror of England in AD 1066, Thomas was appointed archbishop of Canterbury, by the king, in 1162. Not all the lower English clergy applauded the appointment. A prominent bishop of the English church grumbled that the king “had wrought a miracle by transforming a warrior and a man of the world into an archbishop” (148).

Prior to the appointment as archbishop, Becket was a thoroughly worldly man—an avid hunter, a skilled horseman, active in physical warfare, and covetous of name and riches here below.

Henry’s motivation in the appointment was not his recognition of outstanding spirituality on the part of Thomas. Rather, writes Guy, by combining the position of head of the English church with the office of chancellor in his man—Becket—Henry “could more easily rule the whole of the English Church” (143). Thus, Henry would govern all the life of England, church as well as nation.

The king’s mistake was to suppose that Becket would be content to be Henry’s man, rather than his own.

Hardly had Becket assumed the office of archbishop, having resigned the office of chancellor, when he asserted himself and all the not inconsiderable powers of primateship in England. Subject only to the pope, Becket was virtually absolute lord of the entire church, all the other clergy, and the souls of all the inhabitants of England. And in those days, whatever else must be said of the spiritual condition of the members of the church, men and women valued their souls.

Becket’s power extended, as well, to much of the land and earthly riches of England, inasmuch as a corrupt church was deeply involved in the mundane matters of amassing property, acquiring wealth, asserting dominion, and basking in glory.

The rest of Becket’s short life—and of the story—was a titanic struggle for power between two towering figures and two oversized egos: political King Henry and ostensibly ecclesiastical Archbishop Thomas Becket.

The penultimate end was “murder in the cathedral,”

in the words of the title of T. S. Eliot’s gripping play, based on the event. On Tuesday, December 29, 1170, four of King Henry’s knights accosted the archbishop in his cathedral, and murdered him—“one of the most infamous events of the Middle Ages” (312). To the dramatic, bloody, gruesome event, John Guy does full, vivid justice.

The ultimate end was the swift canonization of the dead Becket by the pope, whose support for his loyal servant during the struggle with Henry left much to be desired and who used Becket as a pawn in the characteristic papal effort to defend and aggrandize himself and his office—yet another power-hungry player in the drama.

At once, the people, not only of England, but also of all the nations of “Christian” Europe worshiped the dead archbishop, flocking to the cathedral to stand at the exact spot where Becket was killed (the tourist at Canterbury can view the site, to this day) and to beg miracles from his relics, including his blood, which had been preserved. It was on such a pilgrimage to Canterbury that Geoffrey Chaucer’s motley crew told their stories in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*:

And specially, from every shire’s end
In England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

The popular and papal pressures forced King Henry himself to express repentance and do penance for his part in the murder of Becket. Although Guy has ascertained that the words commonly attributed to Henry in the presence of his knights as the cause of the murder, “Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?” are “apocryphal” (310), Henry did publicly and angrily make similar statements, which occasioned his knights’ murderous mission.

Becket died bravely. He refused the conditions, contrary to his conscience (or to his will), that might have spared his life. Despite the pleas of his servants, he declined to flee and hide, as was possible in the vast, dark cathedral, although he knew his life was threatened.

But Thomas Becket did not die a martyr, as Rome and popular opinion maintain. Guy does not commit himself. Rightly, as Guy quotes from Augustine and


Cyprian in the chapter, "Martyr," it was "the validity of the cause for which a victim died, not the violence or sacrifice he or she had suffered along the way that made a true martyr" (346).

The cause for which Becket gave his life was not the truth and holiness of the gospel. It was not Jesus Christ. Rather, Becket died for contending with an admittedly tyrannical monarch over church properties and income, as well as over the church's sole right to judge the clergy for civil offenses. Thomas Becket died for the carnal power of the apostate papal church and, not improbably, as Eliot suggests, for his own greater and lasting glory. With a view to his impending death, Becket is made by Eliot to say (although Eliot has Becket resisting the temptation):

The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason...
Servant of God has chance of greater sin

And sorrow, than the man who serves a king.
For those who serve the greater cause may make the
cause serve them.

As he lay dying, the archbishop called on Mary and the saints: "To God and St. Mary and the saints who protect and defend this cathedral, and to the blessed St. Denis and St. Alphege, I commend myself and the church's cause" (321). Trust in Mary and the saints is not the mark of a genuine martyr. How radically different were the dying words of the first, genuine New Testament martyr, Stephen: "calling upon, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59, 60).

Adding to the book's appeal, and worth, is its careful description of life in England in the twelfth century AD and its relating of an important slice of the tightly intertwined political and ecclesiastical histories of Europe at that time. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

The President's Polytheism

Prior to last year's presidential election I wrote an article about Mormonism, the religion of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney (see the Feb. 15, 2012 *Standard Bearer*). Mormonism is well-known as a polytheistic religion, that is, a religion that believes in the existence of many gods. As an adherent to the false religion of Mormonism, Mitt Romney wickedly believes there are many gods. But Mitt Romney was not the only polytheist in the race for the presidency last year. President Obama, despite

his public profession of Christianity, also promotes a form of polytheism.

There are different forms of polytheism, and President Obama's is not the same as the polytheism of Mitt Romney. Many religions, such as Mormonism and Hinduism, are openly polytheistic. These openly polytheistic religions candidly confess their belief in more than one god and candidly admit that they engage in the worship of more than one god.

President Obama does not hold to this form of open polytheism. If asked point blank whether he worshiped many gods, it is likely President Obama would say no. If asked whether he believes in the existence of more than one God, it is likely that again, as a professing Christian, his answer would be no.

Rev. Spronk is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

President Obama's polytheism is the more subtle form in which he does not personally believe in other gods, but he tolerates the religions of others who do believe in other gods. Not only does President Obama tolerate those who worship other gods, he even worships with them.

The most recent example of President Obama's toleration of other religions and willingness to worship with them came in the aftermath of the tragic Newtown, Connecticut shootings. It was reported in the news media that President Obama attended an *interfaith* prayer meeting. Most of the focus was on President Obama's speech, in which he expressed sympathy and support for those affected by the dreadful shootings. The fact that President Obama joined with other faiths for prayer is slightly noticed by the media. It is difficult to find much information about the religions represented at this prayer meeting. I have found evidence that the participants included Christians (from a congregational church and a Presbyterian church as well as the President), orthodox Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs.

In his remarks President Obama indicated he would have welcomed more people from more religions, indeed that he would gladly welcome people from all the world's religions (the president's speech is available on the White House's web site). Towards the end of his speech the President said, "All the world's religions—so many of them represented here today—start with a simple question: Why are we here? What gives our life meaning? What gives our acts purpose?" If I had opportunity to interview President Obama, I would like to ask him how he views all these religions of the world. Does he believe it is possible that there are many gods? Or does he believe that there is only one God, which all religions are actually worshiping under different names and in different ways? We do not know how the President would answer those questions, but we do know that he does not believe other world religions are to be condemned as false. We do know that he does not believe that Christians should condemn and separate themselves from the worship of other gods. We do know that he believes it is legitimate for Christians to participate in the same worship service as

those who worship other gods (a *prayer vigil* is a *worship service*).

Some Christians, including the President, would probably object to describing attendance at an interfaith prayer meeting as polytheism. Perhaps the President would argue that while at the meeting he did not worship the god(s) of the Jews, the Muslims, the Sikhs, or any other religion. He worshiped his God and they worshiped their gods. If the president worshiped only one God at the prayer meeting, then he must be a monotheist, a believer in one God—so the argument would probably go.

But President Obama's "monotheism" is not the monotheism demanded by and defined by Scripture. True monotheism is the belief in and worship of the one true God of Scripture, the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jews and Muslims are monotheists in the sense that they profess belief in only one god. But they are not *true* monotheists because they do not believe in the one true God revealed in Scripture as the triune God. President Obama and other Christians who willingly attend interfaith prayer meetings would claim they are true monotheists. "We believe in the one triune God," they would say.


But Scripture demands more than the personal belief in and worship of the one true God. The monotheism taught in Scripture also forbids the toleration of other gods and requires the rejection and condemnation of them. God demands of His people that they confess with Him in Isaiah 46:9: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me." God forbid Israel to participate in "interfaith" services that included the worship of other gods. In Exodus 34:13 God says, "But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves." Then God describes the worship of other gods as spiritual whoredom. "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods" (Ex. 34:14-16). There is an important progression described in this text. The

sons of Israel are not described immediately as whoring after the other gods. Instead they and their fathers (and probably other family members) first only attend the worship feast dedicated to the other gods. Probably at those initial feasts these Israelites claimed that they were not worshipping the other gods. But soon the son of the Israelite marries a woman who goes a whoring after other gods, and he joins her. The son may not have been spiritually whoring after other gods in the beginning by simply attending the worship feasts, but he was spiritually flirting with the other gods, and that flirting led to outright spiritual adultery.

At the interfaith prayer meeting President Obama and other Christians may not have gone a whoring after other gods, but they did play footsy with those gods. By spiritually flirting with the gods of other religions, these professing Christians did not practice true monotheism as it is defined by God in Scripture. They did not break down the altars of the other gods by condemning those other gods and testifying plainly there is only one God. When they spoke of Jesus (President Obama did speak of Him), they did not declare Him to be the only Savior and proclaim that there is no salvation outside

of Him. I am not arguing that the President needs to use his position as president to declare the gospel. But we do need to understand that his presence at the interfaith prayer meeting as a professing Christian was the horrible sin of spiritual unfaithfulness to the one true God.

Why do we need to know this? Because just as God warned Israel in Exodus 34:15 that the Canaanites would “call thee” to join them in the worship of their gods, so the church today needs to understand that she is called by the world’s religions to join them in their worship services. The pressure and temptation to participate in interfaith services only increases as now so-called Christians also call us to join in. Even the President, in his influential position, is setting an example that calls to all Christians, “This is good, you can and should join us too.” But we may not join in. We need to understand that tolerating other gods is a subtle but deadly form of polytheism.

In faithfulness to God our testimony must be that there is only one true God, whom we will worship, and there is one way of salvation through Jesus Christ (HC, LD 11). 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

Remembering the Word of God found in I Timothy 3:15, “...the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,” we call your attention to the anniversary of the Grandville, MI PRC, organized on February 9, 1984.

Rev. C. Haak, Elder Deane Wasink, and Prof. B. Gritters, on behalf of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, left January 2 for a two-week trip

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

to the Reformed Christian Church of Vellore, India (RCCV). In addition to preaching in both the English and Tamil congregations, the men also planned to give a conference on the Office of Elder and Deacon and the function and calling of the instituted church. The men hoped to spend time with Pastor Paulraj and his wife, Kasthuri, members of the RCCV, the Grace Foster Home, and possibly a few of the village outreaches of Pastor Paulraj. You may also be interested to know that the India Mission Outreach of Georgetown provides assistance to RCCV in two main areas,

with the focus always on the spread of the gospel. Financial assistance is given by Georgetown to RCCV as well as to Grace Foster Home through a sponsorship program. In addition, members of Georgetown’s outreach committee, as well as pastors from other churches, meet with Pastor Paulraj on a bi-weekly basis via Skype, studying the Bible in depth and increasing Pastor Paulraj’s understanding of the Reformed faith.

The members of the Choral Society of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL invited their congregation to their annual Christmas program/singspi-

ration on Sunday evening, December 23. A collection was taken for this summer's Young People's Convention.

Starting with the New Year's Day service, January 1, the congregation of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI began reciting the Votum in unison. Rev. W. Langerak, Southeast's pastor, will now pronounce the Salutation, "Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ," and the congregation will respond with the Votum, "Our help is in the name of Jehovah who hath made heaven and earth." If you are interested in the background for the change, search the *Standard Bearer* archives, specifically an article in the November 15, 2012 issue by Rev. C. Griess. We could add that our sister church in Singapore does this, as does also the Grace PRC in Standale, MI.

The members of the choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, presented their Christmas program on Sunday evening, December 16. In addition to the choir singing, there were also several special numbers, and the audience was given the opportunity to join in the singing of several Christmas carols.

The Loveland, CO PRC had the opportunity to say "farewell" to Seminarian Erik Guichelaar, his wife Cherith, and their daughter, Kennedy, after their morning worship service on January 1. Seminarian Guichelaar led that service, the last official duty of his six-month internship in Loveland, before returning to Grand Rapids, MI and the Seminary for his last semester of classes before graduation in June, DV. A short program followed the January 1 service, with refreshments and fellowship in the church basement afterwards.

Mission Activities

The combined consistories of the First Reformed Church in Bulacan and the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, met together on December 24 in Antipolo. Our missionary pastor Rev. D. Kleyn served as president, and Rev. R. Smit served as clerk for the meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss and seek to come to an agreement concerning Article 67 of the Church Order, the article calling for the observance of special worship services like Christmas, Ascension Day, etc., as well as concerning the acceptance of baptisms from other churches, such as the Roman Catholic church.

Denomination Activities

On Saturday, December 15, between the hours of 9 A.M. and 3 P.M., the Reformed Free Publishing Association, the publishers of this magazine, sponsored a warehouse sale at their headquarters in Jenison, MI. Customers could come and have the opportunity to fill a reusable book bag with as many books as they could fit in for only \$25. There were 40 titles available for the special. This sale was a way for the RFPA to say thank you for the continued support they receive from us, the readers, and it was also intended to help young people and families establish a solid Reformed library. We are happy to say that the average age of customers that day was estimated to be about 30. This is very encouraging for the RFPA. Younger members are interested and are reading RFPA material. That Saturday approximately 460 bags of books were sold to an estimated 325 or so customers. The RFPA cleared about 10,100 books from their warehouse. The most popular book was *Portraits of*

Faithful Saints, selling 402 copies; with the *Unfolding Covenant History* series close behind, at approximately 380 copies of each volume.

Sister-Church Activities

The week before Christmas was the annual Youth Camp for the Covenant Keepers and Covenant Keepers Seniors, basically all the young people of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. They do this every December, staying together at a place in Singapore from Monday through Friday morning. Rev. A. Lanning was this year's featured speaker. He was able to speak four times on the book of Judges, under the theme, "Deliverers from the Lord." Rev. Lanning spoke on Othniel, Deborah, Barak, and Jephthah, while Elder Chan gave a speech on Gideon, and Aaron Lim gave a speech on Samson. In addition to these speeches, there was a short one to close the camp and an introductory speech by Prof. H. Hanko, via DVD, to open it.

Minister Activities

Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, declined two calls he was considering. He declined the call from Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to serve as their next pastor, and he declined the call extended to him from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD, received the call to serve as pastor of the vacant Randolph, WI PRC. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ On January 18, 2013,
STEVE and JANICE HOLSTEGE
celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for the years they have shared together. We are thankful for their love and godly example. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care for the years to come. "For the LORD is good: his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Dave and Kim Holstege
Ross and Brittany Kooienga,
Jessica, Tiffany
- * Jim and Denise Brinks
Trevor, Heather, Miranda
- * Doug and Michelle Holstege
Rachel, Kristen, Joselyn, Darrin,
Trenton
- * Scott and Marcy Lubbers
Taylor, Zachary, Danielle, Alex,
Madison
Hudsonville, Michigan

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Lynden, WA on Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at 8:30 AM, the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 5.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express Christian sympathy to Ed and Mary Lotterman and their children in the passing away of their mother and grandmother,

GENEVIEVE ALPHENAAR.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17)

Rev. Ken Koole, Pres.
Tom Bodbyl, Asst. Clerk

Officebearers' Conference

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

The Heidelberg Catechism: 1563-2013

9:00 A.M.

The History and Significance of the Heidelberg Catechism

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Pastor, Covenant of Grace PRC, Spokane, WA

10:30 A.M.

Preaching the Heidelberg Catechism (I)

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Professor of Practical Theology and New Testament,
Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches

12:00 P.M. (Lunch)

During the lunch, a freewill offering will be taken to help cover the cost of the lunch, and other expenses of this and future conferences.

1:00 P.M.

Preaching the Heidelberg Catechism (II)

Prof. Barrett Gritters

2:45 P.M.

Preaching the Heidelberg Catechism (III)

Prof. Barrett Gritters

All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested individuals, are invited to attend this conference.

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (Phone: 669-1504). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 20, 2013, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour February 2013

Date	Topic	Text
February 3	"Joseph's Dysfunctional Family"	Genesis 37:1-11
February 10	"Joseph Is Sold into Slavery"	Genesis 37:12-36
February 17	"Joseph's Diligence in a Strange Place and Position"	Genesis 39:1-6
February 24	"Joseph Resists the Advances of a Seductive Woman"	Genesis 39:6b-20