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Good Tidings of Great Joy

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Luke 2:10

The angels brought the message of great joy. This joy was not about fun and games. Nor about health and wealth. But it still was a message of great joy. In fact, it was and is the greatest joy.

Poor shepherds were the first to receive this good tidings. They received it by means of an angel of God. Later, when the Holy Spirit saw fit to put this message into the inspired Scriptures, this same wonderful message goes "to all people," that is, to all kinds of people.

May we also hear the good news of great joy that was proclaimed in Bethlehem. Remember that the message was so important that it required the appear-

ance of an angel from heaven on earth in order to convey it properly and adequately. Let us hear and see the Word that is come to pass. And let us know the great joy.



The setting was one of great fear. The joy was so great and bright just because it was on the background of the frightening and great darkness. The shepherds had gathered, as they did every night, mingling their flocks and taking advantage of the only opportunity their lonely occupations gave them for fellowship with other humans. This was not a desired job. Usually only the very young and the uneducated had this position.

These shepherds were also believers. They had been given the gift of faith, whereby they held for truth the promises of God's Word, especially concerning the Messiah, who had been promised as the expectation of Israel. That they were believers is evident from the fact that they were the ones God selected to hear the angelic message of great joy. But they later evidenced their faith

when they made haste to see (not whether) that which was made known to them. Further, they excitedly told others what they had seen—they made known the Word that was told them concerning this child.

An angel, in all the brilliant splendor of the glory of God Himself, suddenly burst into the dark night. It was the angel, but more, it was "the glory of the Lord," that shone around them. This dazzling splendor, which pierced the night's darkness, was a reflection of the inexpressible, blinding glory of God.

The result for the shepherds was that they were filled with mega-fear. The poor shepherds were caught in the grip of a sudden, paralyzing fear. Yes, it was the fear of the unknown—the fear of such blinding brilliance. But more than that, it was the fear of being destroyed. This happened every time the glory of the thrice holy Creator came upon those who are mere creatures, and then horrible sinners on top of that. The glory of the Most High Majesty makes every member of the fallen human race conscious of his spiritual nakedness—just as

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it did with Adam after he sinned. God's glory exposes the deep and dark recesses of our sinfulness, where millions of sins hide. Thus the fear of the shepherds is the fear of facing the judgment, convinced of condemnation.



The message of the angel has the intent of removing the fear of the shepherds.

The first purpose of this heavenly visitor was to interpret what had just happened in a nearby stable. It was something that had never happened before and would never happen again. God revealed the tremendous greatness of His love as He had never done before. A virgin had given birth to God's Son. This virgin's conceiving and giving birth to God's Son must be seen as the fulfilling of a love promise of God—a promise that God had given throughout 4,000 years of history. The infant born in Bethlehem had created the world and had been upholding it in His hands. He had parted the Red Sea and led His people Israel through the midst of the sea. He who was wrapped in rags and laid in a manger was Almighty God united with human flesh.

Further, the message of the angel was intended to remove fear because it reported the birth of a most unique Person: "a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord." He is "Christ," that is, God's anointed servant, sent to do His will. He is born personally sinless and would remain sinless the whole of His life on earth. And He is the Lord, the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

Also it was important for the shepherds to know that this unique child was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, for this is the exact place God had designated in His promises of old. Finally, the angel identified the task of the child to be that of the "Saviour." He came to save from

sin. He was not "born this day in the city of David a Saviour" in order to teach an alternate pattern of behavior, nor was His purpose to get us in touch with our inner self and enable us to be all we can be. Rather, Jesus is *the* "Saviour," that is, He came to rescue sinners from the danger of the divine judgment and to secure for them the highest good and eternal life.

"Fear not." The very first thing out of the angel's mouth met the great and obvious need of the shepherds. They were "sore afraid." And remember, their fear was for divine judgment on them because of their sins and sinfulness. To them the angel says, "Fear not." The "good tidings" that I came to bring to you are the source of "great joy." And the joy is greater than the fear, as unbelievable as it may seem. The cause of the joy is greater than the cause of the fear! The Savior is greater than all our sin! The angel brought good news, news designed to remove all dread of God, and it was intended to dispel all fears. And the reason for the greater joy? Because unto you is born this day a Savior! The answer to all our fears is found in the incarnate Christ, who came to redeem us from all of our sins.

Such is the joy of forgiveness. Christ the Lord is Savior because He bore the punishment due to us for all of our sins and sinfulness. The "Savior" does not save us out of dire circumstances (being poor, being a shepherd, losing a loved one in death), but He does save us from our sins, and He declares to us the everlasting love of the heavenly Father Himself. He paid the punishment to the uttermost. He paid with His own life and death. The joy of being so completely forgiven removed the fear of God's judgment. This is the joy of having God, not as our enemy, but as our Friend.

Do you know this joy? This joy does not depend on what you do or do not do. Nor does

it depend on the circumstances in which you find yourself. It is the joy of repentant sinners who know that they are forgiven.



This is the real "spirit of Christmas." It is personal: "unto you." And it is universal: "to all people."

While the gift of the Savior is so very real, it is not for every human being, for to some He is "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pet. 2:8). Nevertheless, God gives this greatest joy to all kinds of people, to His elect children out of every nation, tribe, and tongue. This includes Jews and Canaanites, harlots and Moabites. It also is given to these lowly and insignificant shepherds, who were considered to be worthy of nothing.

This joy is personal. We may not have an angel announcing these good tidings of great joy to us, but it is still very real for us. Instead of angels proclaiming this good news, we have it revealed to us in God's holy Word. It is not that we have to hear an angelic voice, but rather that we hold for truth what God has revealed to us in His Word concerning the squalor and shame of our sins and sinfulness, and also what He has revealed concerning His love in giving His only begotten Son unto us in the squalor and shame of the manger and then of the cross.

This Savior and the joy He brings are for the frightened and humbled shepherds. And He and His joy are for all who are characterized by a spiritually broken heart and contrite spirit, that is, a repentant heart and a spirit characterized by godly sorrow. For "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy" declares that He dwells "in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the

heart of the contrite ones" (Is. 57:15).

The shepherds responded with joy. Let us respond in joy as

well. And may we sing: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood"

be praise in the church, world without end (Rev. 1:5). Rejoice!



Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

The Road to Rome Is Paved... (5)

In this concluding article we turn to the doctrine of justification and the fatal concession that the new evangelicals (as members of the ECT group) have made concerning it, a modification of definition that is both crafty and un-apostolic, which is to say, Romish to the core.

But before we do that we want to say something yet about baptismal regeneration. It is worth noting that the concessions that the evangelicals have made to Rome concerning baptismal regeneration and automatic sacramental grace have also brought them into full accord with the Federal Vision men on this doctrine.

The Federal Vision movement has also adopted what amounts to the heresy of baptismal regeneration.

Steve Wilkins is representative of this group and its neo-Reformed (which is to say, anti-Reformers) views.

Following the controversial Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference of 2002, questions were put to various participants about their new teachings. One question put to Wilkins was:

Question: Can we be in the church but not united to Christ?

Steve Wilkins: That's a distinction the Bible doesn't make. [!] I see what they're trying to preserve, but the distinction is not biblical. The visible, historic church is the body of Christ and thus to be joined to it by baptism is to be united to Christ. By baptism God offers and gives Christ to us. But this good gift must be received by faith or our baptismal union with Christ will bring judgment not salvation. (quoted by John H. Otis in his book *Danger In the Camp*, p. 204 - an excellent treatment of the Federal Vision error with extensive quotes from its promoters themselves.)

Just prior to this statement Wilkins had stated:

Obviously, by baptism we become members of the church, but to be a member of the church is to be a member of the body of Christ and biblically speaking that means that *the baptized are united to Christ* (emphasis ours - kk) (Ibid., pp. 203-4).

Keep in mind, Wilkins is speaking of *all* who are baptized in the name of the triune God. They are all (everyone of them) united to Christ by that sacramental act! And that means the Holy Spirit has been imparted to them *by water baptism*. I do not care what 'nuances' these learned fools try to hide behind (self-justifying, evasive Adam hid behind a nuance too. It was called a 'fig leaf' and didn't cover too very much for all its nuance!),

it takes the Holy Spirit to unite one to Christ, and that means that according to their 'new' covenantal doctrine the Holy Spirit is automatically imparted by the act of baptism. That's baptismal regeneration. And that's Rome!

Wilkins admits as much when later he states:

The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us to Christ and...to his body by the power of the Spirit. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we've all been made to drink of one Spirit.

Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.... Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings (Ibid., p. 204).

Wilkins does not stand alone in this Romish view. His compatriots do as well. John Barach, also a speaker at the Auburn Avenue Conference, expresses it this way:

Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union then with Christ and with the triune God.

The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant... and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. [!] The Bible speaks about reality, the efficacy

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of baptism.... [E]very baptized person is in Christ and therefore shares in his new life, shares in the new summons to life and still receives, not only the covenant promises, but also the covenant demands and covenant warning (Emphasis J. Otis, *Ibid.*, pp. 225-6).

So, baptism is always efficacious, and "every baptized person is *in Christ*," sharing his new life.

Baptismal regeneration! I don't care how you 'nuance' it.

It becomes plain that all the apostatizing Protestant tributaries are flowing back towards Rome.



Now to return to the ECT and its betrayal of justification by faith *alone*, the very heart of the gospel and the doctrinal hinge upon which the whole Reformation swung.

Rather than simply quoting the pertinent statements from the ECT I and ECT II documents and offering our own criticism, we will quote the former priest Richard Bennett and offer his commentary on the pertinent statements. To hear a former RC priest expose with great insight the craftily worded statements for what they are—thoroughly Romish and "another gospel"—carries its own special weight.

Those who drew up the ECT I and ECT II documents began the second document by informing the reader that even after all their work there were still "differences that cannot be resolved here." Evidently this was to reassure their respective constituencies that neither side had completely 'given away the store,' so to speak. From the Protestant side, however, such a reassurance rings hollow in light of what the Protestant contingent was willing to 'give away.'

Bennett is to the point.

The primary fallacy of the

lengthy [ECT I] document is its declaration on the Gospel. The signers state what they believe comes closest to the Gospel of Christ when they declare, "We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ..." (p. 5).

To be Biblical, this statement should read, "We affirm together that we are justified by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in Christ *alone*." The word "alone" signifies that the perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus—and that alone—is sufficient before the Holy God to justify unholy sinners. To so define justification, however, would exclude the Catholic sacraments and the Priests who control them, both of which are necessary for the Catholic people. Thus a *subtraction* had to be made from the Gospel of Christ in excluding what is signified by the word 'alone'. In a similar manner an *addition* had to be made to the Gospel. The ECT addition that redefines faith is, "*living faith active in love*." "Living faith" implies works and Baptism in particular. This is documented in present day official teaching of the Church of Rome where Rome teaches, "the very root of the Church's living faith [is] principally by means of Baptism" (www.bereanbeacon.org, *The Alignment of New Evangelicals with Apostasy*).

We love Bennett for that word "alone." Here is a man who was in bondage in the darkness and emptiness of Catholicism until the gospel significance of the Sola's dawned on him and set him free. Would to God that the signers of the ECT (and the Federal Vision men as well!—who disparage the Sola's) had the same unfettered insight and that the scales would fall from their eyes. They, however, appear more and more to be related to Bar-Jesus, upon whom a great mist of blindness fell, than to that great Apostle who first began to sing "...but now I see" on the street called Straight.

The ECT II document of 1997 (called *The Gift of Salvation*) was more explicit in setting forth a definition of justification. It is worded with subtle carefulness. See if you can detect the error.

Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God's gift, conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness, out of love that He bears us in His Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so. (ECT II)

Sounds orthodox? Justification is not "earned" or of "merits"; the phrase "Christ's righteousness alone" is used, and the statement even speaks of justification in terms of God's "declaration it is so."

Bennett cuts through the verbiage and gets hold of the statement by its (poisoned) roots.

The subject under review is stated clearly in the first sentence, "We agree that justification...is conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness." Then by careful reading one comes to see what the two pivotal sentences state grammatically, "It [justification] is entirely God's gift, conferred [rather than imputed]... and by virtue of his [God's] declaration it [justification conferred] is so."

This is traditional Roman Catholic doctrine. To employ the Roman Catholic word "conferred" instead of the Biblical word "imputed" is tantamount to putting aside Scriptural authority on the issue of justification.

Since medieval times, the Roman Catholic Church has clearly distinguished between the concept of imputation and the Thomist concept of God's grace conferred as a quality of the soul. Since the Council of Trent she has condemned the Biblical doctrine of Justification by faith alone.... Trent proclaims the following curse: "If anyone shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not conferred [emphasis Bennett's] from the work which has been worked [*ex opera operato*] but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace: let him be anathema" [emphasis Bennett's] (Bennett, op. cit.).

As Bennett notes in a companion article:

Anyone with theological or historical training is quite versed in the crucial distinction and would be aware of the history of the distinction. The exact reading of the RCC term, "conferred", in the classic and historic context of the issue of justification, in the ECT II is a lie documented. That...four educated [Reformed] men should agree to use it in a document concerning acceptance of the Roman Catholics as "brothers and sisters in Christ" is unfathomable, almost. (*Attempts to Reverse the Reformation*)

It couldn't be said better. And coming from Richard Bennett, who writes what he does on behalf of a group who call themselves *Ex-Catholics For Christ* (who, by the way, had a conference a few years back calling J. I. Packer *et al.* to repentance), simply adds to its weight. It is as if the 'ghost' of a certain German ex-monk of the early 1500s still speaks. And what he might say to J. I. Packer *et al.* about their mutilation of the gospel of justification so precious to his own eye-opening conversion we might well hesitate to publish unedited in the *SB*!

Let no one think that the

ecumenical efforts of the ECT (which received its impetus back in the Billy Graham crusades, remember) is merely a 'theological' quarrel and of little practical significance. The implications are far reaching, in particular into the realm of missions as it affects bringing the Apostolic gospel to those lost in Catholicism. And this is what the ECT signers have agreed to, a moratorium on evangelism amongst the Roman Catholics, acquiescing to a complaint by Romish leaders that evangelicals were engaged in missions in countries and communities heavily Roman Catholic. And this was brotherly, how?

Once again, Richard Bennett brings it home.

The devastating effect of the New Evangelical compromise with the Gospel is to put a stop to the evangelization of Roman Catholics across the world. If this compromise of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is accepted, then Bible believing Churches will refrain from evangelizing Catholics. The impact on the true Church in third world Catholic countries in Central and South America, in Africa, as well as in Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines, is already apparent. If this anti-evangelical trend continues unchecked it will become ruinous to the spiritual welfare of millions of souls. *But this is exactly the policy the ECT signers promote when they state* [emphasis ours—kk]: "...it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community [church] to proselytize [evangelize] among active adherents of another Christian community" (*ECT I, Introduction* p. 1).

As Bennett points out:

Since when has it been theologically illegitimate to expose error and heresy? Because these intelligent and educated men have contradicted the very Gospel of Christ, it is time to state that the

biblical mandate of separation from such men must be observed! (*Alignment of New Evangelicals with Apostasy*).

We thank God that there are still men like Richard Bennett who mince no words when it comes to a betrayal of the gospel of justification by faith alone. Would to God there were more like him and his.

Men such as J. I. Packer, Chuck Colson, *et al.* may argue their good intentions as they will—"To save the Christian West from being overrun by the secular forces of immorality within our post-Christian society, we need an institution having the clout of Rome!"—but the reality is that behind this seeking to renew ecumenical relations with Rome is the Prince of Darkness himself. With this the evangelicals of the ECT must come to grips.

This is not a wild accusation.

Let those of the ECT ask themselves what the Dragon's great purpose in the New Testament Age has been. Has it not been to prevent the spread of the gospel and the gathering of Christ's church? And who over the past millennium has been more instrumental in thwarting this spread with greater cruelty and fury, all the while holding her own members in chains of biblical ignorance and spiritual bondage, than Rome, the Dragon's mistress?

And now Protestantism should cease evangelism amongst the multitude of Rome's members lost in the maze of their quasi-pagan superstitions and biblical ignorance? And this attempt to silence the gospel and hinder its spread is of the Spirit of the ascended Lord Christ, having His approval, rather than of the Great Deceiver?

To ask the question is to answer it.

So the outcome is—an ecumenical gesture (of compromise)

by Billy Graham and the evangelicals towards modernistic, liberal Protestants in the interests of more successful missions culminates in a moratorium of missions. Talk about irony. But such is the price of compromising biblical principles and sacrificing truth for size.

We conclude this brief series with some ringing words of Ben-

nett, words liberally sprinkled with quotes from God's Word.

In this day of Apostasy, and of alignment of famous names with Apostasy, it is imperative that in the Lord's grace we remain faithful to *"the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* Together we commit ourselves to the Lord in His Sovereignty and His Gospel of grace alone

through faith alone, and to His Word, proclaimed as it is written, *"my sheep hear my voice."* The distortion and perversion of true doctrine leads to false Christianity and deceitful ecumenism. *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"* (Ibid.).



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko

An Introduction to Proverbs (2)

Wisdom and Solomon

Wisdom is the most important word in Proverbs and is used 119 times in the book, almost as many times as in the rest of the Old Testament. There are a number of synonyms used for wisdom as well, including discretion, prudence, subtlety, and understanding. All these words tell us something about wisdom as a necessary spiritual virtue. The outstanding thing in the book of Proverbs, however, is that wisdom appears in the book not only as a spiritual virtue but also as a person.

We meet Wisdom, as a person, especially in the speeches Wisdom makes in chapters 1:20-33; 8:1-36, and 9:1-18. In these speeches it is first of all Solomon who is speaking as Wisdom personified. Wisdom says many things about himself that point to Solomon, whom we already know

to be the author of the book and would expect to be the one speaking in the first person. In fact, Proverbs 1:1 tells us that these are the proverbs of Solomon, some at least of the three thousand proverbs he spoke (I Kings 4:32).

In Proverbs 8:15 and 16 the speaker says that he is a great ruler, in verse 18 he tells us about his riches and honor, and in verses 32 and 33 he speaks of his wisdom, all things we know to be true of Solomon (I Kings 3:12, 13; 4:21-34). He also identifies himself as the son of God, and though we might not think of Solomon in those terms, God does speak of Solomon as His son in Psalm 89:27-28 and in II Samuel 7:12-14. The second of these passages reads:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

Nevertheless, if Solomon is the only person we hear in Proverbs, there is no profit in reading the book, for Solomon with all his wisdom failed miserably and fell into horrible sins. Solomon speaks as a figure or type of Christ. Nor is that difficult to see, for though many things in Proverbs point to Solomon, they also point to one greater and better than Solomon and are true of Solomon only in a limited way. Lawson says:

There are some things spoken of men in the prophetic passages of Scripture, too great to be understood in their full meaning of any of the sons of men, except the man Christ.¹

The speaker in Proverbs is without sin. In Chapter 8:8 he says: "All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them." He, the speaker, is not only a great king as Solomon was, but the King of kings. In 8:15 and 16 he says: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By

¹ George Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), p. 96

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me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." He is from everlasting: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was" (8:22, 23).

Indeed, it can be said that Solomon can describe himself as wise and as the son of God and as a great king only in Christ. Christ, not Solomon, is the first speaker in the book of Proverbs, and Solomon speaks only as an echo of Christ. That accords with I Peter 1:11, where we learn that it was the spirit of Christ who spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament.

Wisdom and Christ

That wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not *something* but *someone*, not just a virtue but a real person, and that the person is God's only begotten Son, is not difficult to demonstrate. There are hints of this already in the first nine chapters, which are addressed to "my son" (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15, 19, 26, 27; 24:13, 21; 27:11). If Proverbs is the inspired word of God, then it is God who says "my son" when He speaks in the book. That son of God is always Christ first.

There are further hints of Christ in Wisdom's discourses in chapter 1:20-33; chapter 8 and chapter 9. In chapter 1, Wisdom speaks of pouring out the Spirit and of visiting judgment on those who do not heed his call. Especially in the threats of verses 24-28 it is evident that Wisdom is God's Son:

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.

The same is true of the promise of verse 33, "But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." That can only be Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of His people, speaking.

That Wisdom is to be identified with Christ has long been recognized. The commentator George Lawson says at the beginning of his exposition of chapter 8:

The grand question in this chapter is, What are we to understand by that wisdom which is here introduced, recommending her instructions to us? The fear of the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom (cf. 9:10). But the wisdom that speaks in this passage appears to be a person; and it is disputed whether we are to understand it of Christ, the great Fountain of wisdom, or of the noble quality of wisdom, represented by a strong eastern figure under a personal character.

This wisdom has been generally understood in the Christian church to mean the Lord Jesus Christ—the Word (Logos) spoken of by John, who ascribes to him under that name several of those glories which are here ascribed to wisdom.¹

If there were any doubts of Wisdom's identity after chapter 1, chapter 8 would lay them to rest, for chapter 8 speaks in unmistakable terms of Christ as the eternal Son and Wisdom of God. Especially verses 22-31 show that wisdom is the eternal Son of God:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills I was brought forth:

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;

Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.

The whole passage parallels John 1, which not only tells us that Christ is the eternal Word of God, Himself God, but the one through whom and by whom God created the heavens and the earth and all things in them. The Son was "by him" in all His work of creation and along with the Father rejoiced in all that they had made. Chapter 3:19 and 20 are even more direct than chapter 8 on that truth: "The LORD *by wisdom* hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew."

The whole passage speaks of Christ as one who was with God from before the foundations of the world, and verse 23 states

¹ Lawson, *Commentary on Proverbs*, p. 96.

that He is “from eternity,” a phrase that is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe the eternity of God Himself (Ps. 90:2). Verses 25 and 30 even give a glimpse into the eternal relationship between the persons of the Trinity, especially between the Father and the Son, and hint at the eternal generation of the Son: “I was brought forth” and “I was by him as one brought up with him.”

This has to do in theology with what are called the personal properties of the three persons of the Trinity, that is, what uniquely identifies each person in the Trinity as a real and distinct person and personality. In the case of the Father and the Son, these personal properties have to do with the fact that the Father really is “father” in the Trinity, eternally bringing forth the Son, and with the fact that the Son really is “son,” being eternally and forever begotten by the Father.

There are few clearer references to the Trinity in the Old Testament and few passages anywhere in Scripture that give such insight into the Father-Son relationship of the first two persons of the Trinity. There can be no question, therefore, that wisdom who is speaking in Proverbs 8

is part of the Trinity and no one other than Christ Himself.


It is in this capacity that He is also addressed throughout the book of Proverbs as “my son.” With those words God is not speaking first of all to us, but to Christ, and to us only as we are in Christ and identified with Him through faith. Without Him there is no possibility of hearing or heeding what God says to His children.

Christ in the person of wisdom does not just identify Himself, however, but tells all about Himself, often in language that resembles the language of the New Testament. In describing Himself in chapter 8, Wisdom speaks of the following: His value (vv. 10-11), His dwelling (v. 12), His attributes (v. 14), His sovereignty (vv. 15-16), His love (v. 17), His reward (vv. 18-19), His righteousness (v. 20), His eternal generation (vv. 22-31), His place in God's covenant (v. 30), and His blessings (vv. 32-35)—all in language that forces us to think of Christ.

Some of these descriptions are especially noteworthy. When Christ, as the wisdom of God, says in verse 12, “I wisdom dwell

with prudence,” there is at least a hint of the doctrine of the Trinity and a veiled reference to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom given by God in answer to our prayers (Eph. 1:17).

When Christ, speaking as wisdom, says in 8:20, “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment,” He is speaking of His work as the justifier of God's people. He leads in the way of righteousness by offering Himself for our sins, by earning a perfect righteousness that God imputes to us through faith, so that we are without condemnation. He further leads in the way of righteousness by teaching us God's righteous laws, so that we live and speak righteously—so that our works become the proof of our justification, as James teaches (James 2:14-26).

He is the one, therefore, who can say in truth: “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.” 

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

■ Morgentaler Named to Order of Canada

Such was the headline in the *Waterloo Region Record*, on July 2, 2008. Exactly three years ago I reported that notorious Canadian abortion activist and law-breaker Henry Morgentaler had received an honorary doctorate of

laws degree from the University of Western Ontario. That pales in comparison to the award he is now to receive. The “Order of Canada” is the country's highest civilian honor to recognize a lifetime of achievement and dedication to community. Terry Pedwell reports in the above-mentioned article:

The naming of abortion-rights activist Dr. Henry Morgentaler to the Order of Canada is being met with both applause and outrage.

The Harper government was quick to distance itself from the decision.

Morgentaler, best known for taking the issue of abortion rights all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, is among 75 people who will receive the prestigious national honour....

...Morgentaler was instrumental in having the high court strike down Criminal Code restrictions on abortion on Jan. 28, 1988, making Canada the only western democracy with no criminal sanctions of any kind against abortion.

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

He is to be named at a later date as a member of the Order of Canada for both his health care and humanitarian work, said a statement posted on the governor general's website yesterday.

"For his commitment to increased health care options for women, his determined efforts to influence Canadian public policy and his leadership in humanist and civil liberties organizations," the statement reads.

Author and feminist Judy Rebick said "it's about time" Morgentaler was recognized for his work.

"Certainly most women believe this is a huge victory, and he put his liberty and his life on the line to win it, and I think that should be recognized," she said. "The abortion debate is over in this country, the pro-choice side won, and Dr. Morgentaler was a big part of that victory."

But opponents of abortion say the Order of Canada is meant to unify Canadians, not divide them. "We think the Order of Canada should focus on things that unite us, positive values," said Joanne McGarry, executive director of the Catholic Civil Rights League. "I think it should go to people who all Canadians can look up to and admire and whose undertakings are inspiring for us."

McGarry added that honouring Morgentaler implicitly endorses abortion, and many Canadians will be offended by the decision....

That many Canadians will be offended by this decision is truly an understatement. Giving Henry Morgentaler the Order of Canada is the equivalent of presenting Jack Kervorkian, "Dr. Death," with the Congressional Medal of Honor in the United States. In the 1970s Morgentaler was charged with committing illegal abortions in Montreal. In 1974 he was sent to prison for ten months. His case ultimately made it to the Supreme Court of Canada, resulting in Canada's extremely liberal abortion laws.

Morgentaler held an unprecedented press conference to praise himself as an Order of Canada recipient. He said, "The work I've done over the years and the sacrifices and sentences of imprisonment I have suffered, I think that finally now the government has recognized my contribution to Canadian women and I am very proud of it."

Jim Hughes, national president of Campaign Life Coalition, asserts that while the advisory council of the Order of Canada no doubt sought to provide an official seal of approval on the cause Morgentaler espoused, it ended up setting off a storm of controversy and re-igniting the pro-life movement.

Protests have been held, and several on-line petitions have been launched. According to reports, the Prime Minister's office has received thousands of letters of opposition to the decision. On August 20, Campaign Life Coalition presented the signatures of 30,000 Canadians opposed to the awarding of the Order of Canada to Morgentaler at Rideau Hall, official residence of the governor-general. A large, random telephone poll of more than 13,000 households found that 56 per cent of Canadians are opposed to the awarding of the Order of Canada to this abortionist.

Jim Hughes said, "It is dreadful that this honour should even be considered for a man whose only claim to fame is that he is a professional killer of defenseless babies in their mothers' wombs."

Dr. Charles McVety, president of the Canadian Family Action Coalition, said that "Morgentaler's conduct is unbecoming a member of the Order of Canada," citing his repeated violations of Canadian law from 1968-1988 and his suspended medical license in 1976 as violations of the Constitution of the Order of Canada.

At least eight Order of Canada recipients—or their families or

inheritors of their legacies—have returned their awards to protest the governor-general giving abortionist Henry Morgentaler Canada's highest civilian honor. New names have been suggested for this award. It has been suggested that it be called the "Disorder of Canada." The one I prefer was provided by Garnet A. Parr of Duncan, British Columbia: "It is now better named the 'Odour' of Canada."

STOP THE PRESSES—As I finish this article, it has just been reported that Henry Morgentaler, along with a few other honorees, received his Order of Canada on October 10, 2008 at a small ceremony in Quebec City, within the walled Citadel. This ceremony received little advance publicity (one day) undoubtedly to prevent a large-scale protest at the scene. How shameful it is when a nation goes beyond tolerating the shedding of innocent blood to actually celebrating it. "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted" (Ps. 12:8).

■ We're Sorry, Charles??

We seem to be living in an age of apology—not apology for a wrong recently committed, but for a perceived wrong or injustice that may go back many, many, perhaps hundreds, of years. Apparently it is the politically correct thing to do, both for governments and churches. For example, there have been apologies for slavery, and apologies for attempting to integrate the native population into society. Certainly there may be apologies, confessions of sin, going back many years, that are not only proper but necessary. But some of these "apologies" are not only unnecessary, but utterly absurd. One such alleged apology deemed necessary was reported in the *Waterloo Region Record* on September 16, 2008 by Jill Lawless, under the headline: "Anglicans owe Darwin apology, reverend says":

It seems the Church of England owes Charles Darwin an apology.

At least that's the opinion of Rev. Malcolm Brown, head of the church's public affairs department.

In a statement yesterday, Brown faulted the church for initially misunderstanding Darwin's theory of evolution.

He says that initial failing has caused some people to continue to misunderstand Darwin to this day.

Brown issued his statement on an Anglican website launched to mark Darwin's bicentenary and the 150th anniversary of the seminal work *On the Origin of Species*, both of which fall next year.

The Church of England said Brown's statement reflects its position on Darwin but does not constitute an official apology.

Brown says the Church of England should say it is sorry for misunderstanding him and, "by getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand (Darwin) still."

The church's stance sets it apart from fundamentalist Christians, who believe evolutionary theory is incompatible with the biblical story of the Earth's creation.

Still, a descendant of Darwin's said the Anglicans' latest bout of soul-searching served little purpose.

"Why bother?" the scientist's great-great-grandson Andrew Darwin was quoted as saying by the Daily Mail. "When an apology is made after 200 years, it's not so much to right a wrong, but to make the person or organization making the apology feel better."

Darwin was born into the Church of England, educated at a church boarding school and trained to become an Anglican priest.

However, his theory that species evolve over generations through a process of natural selection brought him into conflict with the church. Religious leaders of the time were largely hostile to Darwin's ideas and

argued against them at public debates.

At an Oxford University debate in 1860, the bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, famously asked scientist Thomas Huxley whether it was through his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed to be descended from a monkey.

Brown said that from a modern perspective, it was hard to avoid the thought that the reaction against Darwin was based on what would now be called the "yuck factor" (an emotional, not an intellectual response) "when he proposed a lineage from apes to humans."

Brown called for a "rapprochement" between Christianity and Darwinism....

Sad to say, "rapprochement" (a renewal of cordial relations) between Christianity and Darwinism has already taken place to a considerable extent, for many years, even within many Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Many seminary professors, Christian college instructors, and Christian school teachers have long abandoned the clear teaching of Scripture regarding creation. Increasingly these "scholars" have sought to harmonize Scripture with evolutionary processes.

Especially over the last half century, one theory after another has been introduced and gained popularity. The so-called "period theory," the gap theory, the mythical theory, the allegorical theory, the poetical theory, the saga theory, and other variations that explain Genesis 1 as a doxology or as a teaching model have all been put forth. In recent years it is the so-called "framework hypothesis" that seems to have become the popular and influential view. All these views have one thing in common: they deny the literal meaning of the creation record in Scripture. And whether it is always deliberate or not, they are an attack

upon the Word of God and the very foundations of the Christian faith!

What happens to the truth of the perspicuity, the clarity of Scripture, when you adopt a theory such as the Framework Hypothesis? It's gone! But Scripture is not addressed only to theologians and scholars. All God's people, also our children, are given the Spirit and are able to understand the Scriptures. If the events recorded in the first chapters of Genesis never really happened, Christianity is just another mythical religion. There is no room here for compromises or accommodations with Darwinism. For, ultimately, the spirit that would rob God of His glory in creating will also seek to rob God of His glory in redeeming!

Our young children have no trouble understanding the biblical truth of creation. In Lesson 1 in the book *Old Testament Bible Stories for Beginners*, our children between the ages of 5 and 8 are asked the questions: "What does the first verse of the Bible teach us?" Answer: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." "In how many days did God create all things?" Answer: "God created all things in six days." And this one: "How do we know about this creation?" Answer: "God tells us about it in His Word, the Bible." The children understand and readily embrace this clear, simple teaching of God's Word!

May God grant us that child-like faith! That is what it comes down to: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). Then there will be no apologies made to Charles Darwin. And to those who do, we say: "Shame, shame!"



Chapter Two

The Intermediate State (6)

The “Immortality of the Soul”

The biblical and Reformed hope of the life of the elect believer with Christ in heaven in his soul immediately upon death—the intermediate state—must not be confused with the philosophical notion of the “immortality of the soul.” Greek philosophy taught that the soul of every human is inherently immortal. Physical death, therefore, only destroys the body. The soul naturally continues to live in a more-or-less happy, if vague, existence as part of a universal “world-soul.”

The philosophers had their reasons for this optimistic prospect of the soul of every human. The reasons were the Greek philosophers’ theories about the origin and the nature of the human soul. Every human soul was originally part of an eternal “world-soul.” Somehow, every human gets his own individual part of this “world-soul” at conception. As part of the eternal “world-soul,” the soul of every human is inherently good and noble. The soul thinks about grand realities such as the gods, truth, beauty, and justice, which are eternal ideas. Deriving from an eternal source and contemplat-

ing eternal realities, the soul cannot die.

According to the Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle, man is a dualism of body and soul. Because the body is material, it is vile and worthless. But the soul, as “spiritual” and “immaterial,” is good and noble. As long as a man lives, his noble soul is hampered and corrupted by his vile body. The soul cannot think the excellent thoughts about truth, beauty, and justice that otherwise it would. The body is the prison of the soul. At death, the soul is finally freed from its prison in the body and soars away on high to return to the universal “world-soul” whence it came. Presumably, there it shares in thinking grand thoughts forever.

In Plato’s *Phaedo*, as he is about to drink the poison, Socrates expresses to his disciples that he is “of good cheer.” In death, he will “go to the joys of the blessed.” The reason is that “the soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls will truly exist in another world.” For “the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable.” The soul, according to Socrates (and Plato), is “pure and noble,” at least the soul of the philosopher (Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Works of Plato*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, Modern Library, 1928, 107-189).

Greek philosophy knew nothing of the resurrection of the body. Indeed, it was opposed to

any teaching of the resurrection of the body. Apart from the utter impossibility of the resurrection to the unbelieving Greek mind, as inherently vile and worthless the body *ought not* be raised. It ought only to be disposed of permanently as so much material refuse.

Socrates assured his disciples that all his lifelong he was “entirely concerned with the soul, and not with the body.” As much as possible, he tried to “get away from the body and to turn to the soul.” “True philosophers” are “enemies of the body.” Death held no fear for Socrates (he said), because “having got rid of the foolishness of the body [I] shall be pure...and know of [myself] the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth.” “Purification” for a man is “the separation of the soul from the body...the release of the soul from the chains of the body” (*Phaedo*, 118, 121, 122).

This is why Paul’s preaching in Athens of the resurrection of the body was roundly ridiculed. “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked” (Acts 17:32). It is a testimony to the apostle’s faithfulness and courage as a missionary that he preached the resurrection of the body to his audience of Greek philosophers and their disciples on the Areopagus. He knew full well their contempt for the body and expected their mockery and rejection of his message.

What slight hope the Greek philosophers and their followers

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had for themselves in the face of death was the immortality of the soul. The soul is not mortal. The soul cannot die.

The hope of the pagan theory of reincarnation, of the older liberal Protestantism and of the average decent worldling in Western society, is essentially the same as that of Greek philosophy. Pagan religions teach a reincarnation of souls after death in a succession of beings until the soul is finally purified of all earthly desires and becomes worthy of union with the divine or of absorption into the nothingness that is nirvana. The older Protestant liberalism reduced the doctrines of the Christian religion to three truths: the fatherhood of God (of all men without exception), the brotherhood of man, and the immortality of the soul. The last, for liberalism, was no different from the vague hope of Plato and Aristotle. And the typical, decent, but thoroughly unbelieving and worldly American citizen, when he thinks of death at all, supposes that his soul will enjoy an everlasting, peaceful existence somewhere. At least, this is what he expresses in his obituary: "Joe Unbeliever has passed on to his everlasting rest"; or, "Jane Ungodly has now found peace"; or even, "Mickey the Drunken, Fornicating Ball-Player is now looking down with delight on the antics of his team in the World Series."

It is not impossible that the increasingly frequent cremation of the body indicates something of the old Greek contempt for the body, as well.

If the Greek philosophers grounded their doctrine of the immortality of the soul in reason, contemporary advocates of the immortality of the soul find some basis in experience for their hope of pleasant life after death in the soul. They appeal to accounts of an "after-death" experience by some who are supposed to have

died for a little while and then mysteriously returned to earthly life. These persons invariably tell of their enjoyment of a white light and of great peace.

The Mortality of the Soul

The philosophical, pagan, liberal, and unbelieving notion of the immortality of the soul is erroneous. The biblical truth of the intermediate state has nothing in common with this false hope in the face of death.

The soul of the natural man, that is, the unregenerated sinner, is subject to death, as much as is his body. Indeed, his soul is dead. The soul of sinful man is *mortal*.

The soul of the unregenerated sinner is sinful, indeed, totally depraved. This is the spiritual death of the soul. The verdict of the apostle upon natural men and women, that they are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), does not apply only to the body. It applies to the entire human nature. That the soul is included the apostle makes plain when he adds that this death expresses itself in the wicked "desires...of the mind" (v. 3).

Throughout earthly life, apart from the grace of God in the gospel of forgiveness, the soul of the ungodly is under the sentence of death in the wrath of God. The soul of the ungodly *knows* this verdict, which will be executed fully after the physical death of the ungodly. "Through fear of death" in the judgment of a just God, he is "all [his] lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15). In their imagining an immortal soul, the Greek philosopher, the pagan, the liberal Protestant, and the decent unbeliever vainly resist the testimony of God to them that they will die, soul as well as body. For all Socrates' (and his) bravado in the face of imminent death, Plato let slip that death was the "king of terrors" to Greek philosophers as much as to ordi-

nary mortals. Plato has one of Socrates' disciples respond to the apparently unafraid philosopher, "Socrates, you must argue us out of our fears.... There is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin: him too we must persuade not to be afraid when he is alone in the dark" (*Phaedo*, 137).

At the moment of physical death, the soul of the covetous and cruel man begins to suffer the torments of hell, which is continued existence to be sure, but not life (Luke 16:22, 23). Rather, this state of the soul is the beginning of eternal death.

The outcome of the final judgment will be that those whose names are not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, body and soul. This will be the "second death" (Rev. 20:14, 15). Whereas man is unable to kill the soul, God can "destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

Herman Hoeksema was right, therefore, to complain of a "loose" and "thoughtless" use of the "philosophical" phrase "the immortality of the soul."

It is to be regretted that this philosophical usage of the term is frequently adopted, not only by believers who very loosely and often thoughtlessly speak of the immortality of the soul, but even by the church as such (*Reformed Dogmatics*, RFP, 1966, 747).

The Indestructibility of the Soul

When the Reformed creeds speak of the immortality of the soul, or of the immortality of reprobate unbelievers, they mean, in fact, only that the soul continues to exist after death, or that the soul is indestructible. The soul cannot be annihilated. It does not drop into nothingness at the moment of physical death.

The Belgic Confession speaks thus, "loosely," of the immortality of the reprobate wicked in its

explanation of the punishment of everlasting hell: "The wicked... being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Art. 37, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, Baker repr. 1983, 435; see also the Westminster Confession of Faith, 32.1: "souls...having an immortal subsistence"). The Confession certainly does not teach that the reprobate wicked live after the final judgment, that they cannot die (which is the meaning of the word, "immortal"), for the Confession is exactly asserting the eternal death of the wicked in hell. By "immortal," the Confession means only that the wicked are not annihilated, and *cannot* be annihilated.

Evangelical and Reformed theologians who teach the evolutionary descent of man from animals have a great deal of difficulty with the teaching of the creeds that the soul is "immortal," that is, indestructible. As descended from animals, man either has no soul at all, or has a soul like that of the animals. In either case, man is completely destroyed at death until the resurrection of the body. This doctrine pits these theologians squarely against the confessions of the Christian church, which certainly do teach that the distinctively human soul cannot pass out of existence.

The evangelical Hans Schwarz indicates the problem that theologians committed to (theistic) evolutionary theory have with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul: "The idea of immortality of the soul is 'one of the greatest misunderstandings of Christianity'...Death is the end of this life in its totality; nothing and nobody will survive" (*Eschatology*, Eerdmans 2000, 276).

It is worth noting that the Confession affirms that the reprobate wicked are "immortal," or indestructible, not only with regard to their soul, but ultimately

with regard to the whole of their nature. By virtue of his creation in relation to God, as originally God's image, soul and body, as taught in Genesis 1:26, 27 and Genesis 2:7, man cannot be annihilated in the entirety of his nature. Not only his soul, but also his body must continue to exist everlastingly, either in the bliss of heaven or in the agony of hell.

The Immortal Christian

There is true immortality, in the exact meaning of the word—'not subject to death,' or, 'incapable of dying'—whether of the soul or of the body, only in the risen Jesus Christ.

Only when Christ died and rose again did imperishable life come to light. Christ did not gain or disclose immortality in the philosophical sense, the sense of the continued existence of souls after death (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4: *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, Baker, 2008, 616).

Reason cannot disclose immortality, nor can experience. Only the revelation of the gospel of Holy Scripture can make known the immortality of the soul, as of the body. "Jesus Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10).

Immortality is not an inherent quality and hope of all humans without exception, but the gift of grace to those who are in Jesus Christ by a true faith, according to God's election.

Jesus Christ first accomplished and entered into immortal life for man by His resurrection from the dead. "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). The life into which God raised Jesus Christ was a new kind of life for man, a life never lived before, a life never attainable by

anyone else, the highest and best form of life, life that is spiritual, heavenly, incorruptible, immortal (I Cor. 15:45-58). Adam did not have this life; he could, and did, die. Jesus Himself did not have this life before His resurrection; He was "die-able," and died.

In Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ's sake, elect men and women share the immortal life of their head and savior in the grace of God.

The elect becomes immortal at the moment of his or her union with Christ by the bond of faith. The resurrection life of Christ is put into his or her heart in the Spirit's work of regeneration. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26). The elect child of God knows and experiences his or her immortality by believing the gospel. "Jesus Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10).

The soul of the elect believer receives and enjoys this immortality perfectly at the moment of death. In the soul that is immortal by fully sharing the immortal life of Christ the believer lives and reigns with Christ (Rev. 20:4, 6). This is the intermediate state of the elect believer.

Elect believers will receive and enjoy immortality perfectly also in their body at the coming of Christ, when their body will be raised from the grave and made like to the immortal, glorious body of Christ. This is our hope: "By patient continuance in well doing [we] seek for glory, honor and immortality" (Rom. 2:7; see also I Cor. 15:53 and Phil. 3:21).

Only in Jesus Christ, on the basis alone of the promise of the gospel, is there hope for the sinner in the face of death. In Him, on the basis of the gospel, there is hope—hope regarding the intermediate state and hope for the everlasting future.

And what a hope!

Immortality!



The Place of Laity in Missions (1)

The Witnessing Church

God is pleased to gather His church and to save a people unto Himself by means of the mission work of the church. The church institute officially calls a missionary to go out and preach the gospel. He performs the work of missions. God by His grace and Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to save those lost in their sin. But does this mean that mission work belongs to the church only through her offices? Does this preclude the members of the church from being active themselves in missions? Is the support they lend to missions only by means of prayer and money? How can we expect the laity of the church to become zealous in missions if mission work is confined only to the consistory rooms and the committees formed by the church to oversee the work of missions? May members of the church become actively involved in missions?

There are members of the church who confront those who ask such questions with a frown. In their minds these questions indicate a spirit of rebellion against the calling of the instituted church to do mission work. Lay people, it is thought, ought to keep their hands off. They have nothing to do with the work of missions other than praying for the labor and supporting it financially. To ask the ques-

tion, "What can members of the church do in missions?" implies, they reason, a desire to be like the parachurch organizations who ignore the church institute by carrying on a work that Christ has entrusted only to offices in the instituted church. But this type of reasoning is wrong. The members of the church ought to be actively involved in the mission work of the churches. There are good and proper ways that they can serve in missions. These we intend to examine in the next several articles.

Before speaking of these ways, however, we must lay the proper biblical foundation for lay assistance in missions.

The church as a witnessing church

According to Scripture the church of Jesus Christ in this world *is* a witnessing church. We are not stating here that the church *must be* a witnessing church, or, that the church is *commanded* to be a witnessing church, but that the church *is* a witnessing church. In other words, the witness of the church and of her members belongs to the essential character of the church. There cannot be church where there is no witness. The church's witness belongs to the very fabric of her existence. This does not imply that the church has failed in her confession concerning the church when she states: I believe a holy, catholic, apostolic church. We are not contending here that another attribute ought to be added to our confession of the church. What we

would contend is that witnessing belongs to the church's catholicity. When we confess that we believe that there is a catholic church, then we express our faith in a fundamental truth of the Scriptures: God gathers His church from the various nations, races, and languages of the world.

The question needs to be asked, however, *how* does God gather His church from the nations? How does that church become universal in nature? The hyper-Calvinist would answer that God does this simply by the power of His providence and grace without the aid or the assistance of anyone. The church simply has to preach to its own and God will bring into the church those whom He chooses to save. The church's witness is given only by means of preaching within the sphere of the church institute. The only other witness the church gives is by the life of God's people in this world—not by their testimony to others, but just by the way they live. There is need for nothing else.

This answer of the hyper-Calvinist does not meet the test of Scripture. When speaking of one of the signs of His second coming, Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The church is called to preach the gospel not simply within the confines of the church itself. It is called to preach the gospel as a witness to all nations. Notice the emphasis here in this

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verse. The gospel *shall be preached*. Christ is not commanding His church here to preach to the nations, but it is assumed that the church will preach the gospel as a witness to the nations. Even when Jesus commands His disciples in the Great Commission, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), He does so on the basis of the fundamental character of the church as a witnessing church. After His resurrection, and just prior to His ascension, Jesus informs His disciples in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Here Jesus teaches us that He will empower His church by the Holy Spirit to witness of Him to the uttermost, that is, the farthest, points of the earth. Jesus did not say, I command you to be witnesses of me. He says to His church, you *shall be* witnesses of me.

With the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the church she actually became a witnessing church. The third sign of the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost attests to this power given the church by the Holy Spirit. Those who received the Holy Spirit on that day “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The Spirit gave to these saints “utterance.” This means they were given the ability to speak forth. What they spoke forth was “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). But the point is that they were given the ability to speak forth; they were given the ability to witness. Plus, they were given the ability to do this in the different languages of those people who were present to hear them. At the time of Pentecost, therefore, the church was given the ability to witness, to utter, to speak forth the good news of

salvation. And it was given also the sign that this witness must be sent forth to peoples of all nations and languages of the earth. Pentecost was the birth of the church as a witnessing church.

The idea of witnessing

But what does it mean to be a church that witnesses? What is this witness spoken of in Scripture. That is an important question, since most people define this term in a modern context. Today witnessing has become synonymous with canvassing a neighborhood in an attempt to engage someone in a conversation about Christianity. Or with sitting in a coffee shop sipping on a cup of coffee until someone sits down at a table near you, and you start talking pleasantly with him or her, slowly edging the conversation toward a discussion of sin and salvation in Christ alone. We will evaluate this form of witnessing in a future article. At present I only bring up these examples because of the modern context in which the term “witnessing” is used. This is not the idea of witnessing in Scripture.

The word “witness” is used both in the Old and New Testaments. In general, “to witness” means “to give testimony.” In most cases it is used in a legal sense. For example, when one enters into a courtroom to give testimony on behalf of or against another, he is considered a witness. This is true because, first of all, he has witnessed what has happened. This idea of witness is used in the Bible. John the Baptist said to his disciples when they became jealous for John because of Jesus, “Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him” John 3:28. His disciples heard John say that he was not the Messiah. They witnessed these words.

A witness in a courtroom is also called such because he must bear testimony either for

or against another. Pilate asked Jesus the question concerning the witnesses the Jews brought against Him at His trial, “Heardest thou not how many things they witness against thee?” (Matt. 27:13). Here too, the term witness is used strictly in a legal sense as one who testifies before another concerning someone else.

In other places in Scripture, however, this term simply refers to the testimony that a person or people in general give concerning another—in the case of God’s people, the testimony they give concerning Christ and salvation. It is inherent in the very nature of the church to witness. The church gives testimony to sin, to the need for repentance of sin, and the need to flee to the cross of Christ alone where pardon from sin is found. The church speaks out to others, not just to herself (though this is necessary too), of the good news of salvation. When this happens, the church is truly a catholic church. In other words, the church becomes worldwide because it is a witnessing church.¹

This witness of the church must be distinguished. The Scripture, first of all, clearly teaches that the church is called to be a witness by means of the official preaching of the Word. We have already concluded this. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus teaches that the gospel will be *preached* as

¹ To the reader who is interested in studying more about this whole idea of witnessing, I refer him to a book written by Rev. Jason Kortering entitled, *Evangelism in the Established Church*. This book is published by the Evangelism Committee of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Also, the interested reader may want to acquire a series of radio sermons on witnessing preached on the Reformed Witness Hour by Rev. Carl Haak (www.prca.org/refwitness).

a witness. In Acts 4:33 we read, "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." This was done through their preaching. The witness of the church through her preaching, therefore, is a given. If the church fails to preach, she has silenced her witness to Christ. If she becomes involved in all manner of activities other than the preaching of the gospel, she is no longer doing mission work.

The witness of the members of the church

But our concern in this article is whether the members of the church, that is, the laity, are also called to be witnesses. And if they are, may they take an active part in mission work? The Bible also addresses this concern. Scripture overwhelmingly supports the witness of the individual child of God. The church is a witnessing church, not merely in the preaching, but in the life and confession of every individual child of God. Again, it is not simply a matter of whether believers are *called to be* witnesses. Believers *are* witnesses. One cannot be a believer without being a witness. Witnessing is the life of the child of God.

This is true because of salvation itself. The child of God is saved in order to be a witness to God's glory. We learn in I Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous life." In this verse the purpose of God in our salvation is revealed. God has chosen us as His people, He has made us His own peculiar or special people, He has called us out of the darkness of unbelief and into the light of salvation, why? In order that we might show forth His praises! He has chosen us and saved us as His

people, a holy people, a special people to show forth His praises in this world. That is the witness of the believer. He testifies of God and His glory.

It is on this basis that Jesus teaches us in His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14-16,

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Those who are saved in the blood of Christ are the light. A light shines in the world. People *see* in the believer his Christianity. What he believes becomes his life—a life that reveals itself to others in his whole demeanor. Such a testimony is inherent in the very salvation we receive. It is not some mechanical method of mission work. It is the law of the very life of the child of God. It is the life that flows out of his salvation. We are not simply commanded to show forth God's praises. The believer *does* show forth God's praises. It is his life. The very life of Christ in Him shines forth for others to see.

Witnessing is the life of the child of God, in the second place, because through the anointing of the Holy Spirit believers have become prophets. This truth was boldly proclaimed by the men of the Reformation. God's people belong to the office of all believers. The members of Christ, and not just the clergy, have received the anointing of the Spirit. Believers are made prophets, priests, and kings in Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 12, Q & A 32, defines the believer's office of prophet as the ability to confess Christ's name in this world. The term prophet itself means "one

who bubbles over." This is true of believers. We are those who bubble over with the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ. We, to use the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:20, "cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." As a result of the work of the Spirit in his heart, every believer is a witness. He is not merely called to be a witness. Witnessing is a part of his spiritual makeup.

In the third place, witnessing is the fruit of faith. Those who believe are also those who make confession of what they believe with their mouths.

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.... For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:8-10).

This confession of God's people is not a one-time confession that we make when we stand up before the church and make confession of faith. Our confession is something that we carry with us into our lives in this world—where we work, where we live, in our recreation, in our friendships. Believers confess what they believe. In fact, Jesus says in Luke 12:8, 9, "Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." Confessing what we believe before men is an earmark of the believer.

This is where mission work begins. If the members of the church institute that preaches the gospel to others do not take seriously their own personal witness in this world, then mission work becomes worthless! This being established, we will now consider in what ways the laity can become actively involved in missions.



Rome and Politics (4):

Rome's Political Power Today

The Vatican

The logical place to begin a discussion of the political power of the Roman Catholic Church today is, of course, the Vatican, a sovereign city-state within the city of Rome. Established in 1929, the Vatican City is the world's smallest state, both by area (108.7 acres) and population (c. 800). Its citizenry is 100% Roman Catholic, its highest functionaries are Roman clergy, and its non-hereditary, elected monarch is the pope. Jesuit Thomas J. Reese mentions several other remarkable features of this unique state.

The...Vatican City is a sovereign state recognized under international law.... As ruler of Vatican City the pope is the last absolute monarch in Europe, with supreme legislative, judicial, and executive authority. He also controls all the assets of the Vatican, since this is a state economy without private property other than personal possessions of the employees and residents...its purpose is to provide an internationally recognized territory where the Holy See can operate in total freedom, without political interference.¹

¹ Thomas J. Reese, *Inside the Vatican* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 16.

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Previous article in this series: December 1, 2008, p. 112.

The Holy See claims the oldest continuous diplomatic service in the world, going back at least as far as the Council of Nicea (325). It also possesses one of the world's most capable diplomatic corps.

Nuncios [i.e., papal ambassadors]...speak for the pope to local governments and local churches. As professional diplomats who know their business, they are given high grades by their secular counterparts because of their training, experience, and extensive contacts in the country. While most embassies have few contacts outside government circles, nunciatures through contacts with the local church have sources of information unavailable to most embassies many times their size. The newsgathering potential of these contacts would be the envy of CNN or the CIA. This is one reason governments find it valuable to have embassies to the Holy See. "If you want to know what's going on in Mozambique" or other countries, Ambassador Flynn [America's official representative to the Holy See, 1993-1997] reports, "there's any one of a thousand Catholic workers that are in there administering to the poor, out in the villages, out in the boondocks, out in the grassroots, and they report back to the Vatican. I can have conversations with the Vatican, and the Vatican can tell me what's going on there or in Libya."²

Rome's political power rests upon her nominal membership of about one billion, some one-sixth

² Reese, *Inside the Vatican*, pp. 266-267.

of the earth's population, making it the largest multinational organization in the world. Many voters and powerful people around the world are Roman Catholics. All of them are under the authority of the "Holy Father" and "Vicar of Christ," owing (but not always giving) the pope complete obedience.

... the "subjects" of the state of Vatican City...live in every part of the world. Every person who has been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, and who has not left the Church or been excommunicated by the Church, is a subject of the state of Vatican City. These subjects owe to the sovereign of the state of Vatican City absolute, complete and unquestioning spiritual and political allegiance no matter where they may be living and no matter what the laws of the nation within which they are living may be.³

United States

Although many are not aware of it, Rome has significant political influence in the United States. For example, Roman Catholic social teaching, enshrined in Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), as well as liberal Protestantism's social gospel, facilitated the election and subsequent re-elections of the longest-serving U.S. President, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945), and the implementation of the

³ Albert Lévy, *Vaticanism: The Political Principles of the Roman Catholic Church* (Vantage Press: New York, 1960), p. 23.

New Deal, which promoted government interventionism, state redistribution of wealth, and trade unionism.¹

Although formal diplomatic relations between America and the Holy See began only in 1984, since then the U.S. has called upon Vatican ambassadors for help on various occasions.

The Vatican has...been secretly used to convey messages to governments that the United States has poor relations with, such as Iraq, Iran, and Libya. The nuncio in Iran visited the American captives at the U.S. embassy, and the nuncio in Iraq helped in getting two American prisoners released in 1995.²

Today, Roman Catholicism accounts for a higher percentage of the population of the United States than ever before and is, in fact, the largest church in the world's most powerful nation.³ This would have gratified John Ireland (1838-1918), Archbishop of Saint Paul, Minnesota, who famously declared,

Let me state, as I conceive it, the

¹ Cf. John W. Robbins, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church* (USA: The Trinity Foundation, 1999), pp. 46-47, 81-84, etc. Roman Catholic priest, socialist, and radio personality "Father" Charles Coughlin, of Oak Royal, Detroit, famously proclaimed, "The New Deal is Christ's deal!" When, however, Roosevelt "rehabilitated rather than expropriated the banks," Coughlin announced, "I am in favor of a New Deal," for even more radical left-wing policies (David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 231-232).

² Reese, *Inside the Vatican*, p. 267.

³ There is a Roman Catholic majority in the U.S. Supreme Court. The top governorship in America, that of California, is held by Roman Catholic Republican, bodybuilder, and movie star, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

work which, in God's providence, the Catholics of the United States are called to do *within the coming century*. It is twofold: to make America Catholic, and to solve for the Church universal the all-absorbing problems with which religion is confronted in the present age.... The work defines the measure of the responsibility.... The work is to make America Catholic.... The Church is triumphing in America, Catholic truth will travel on the wings of American influence, and encircle the universe.⁴

Republican George W. Bush is probably the most openly pro-Rome U.S. President in history. He repeatedly referred to John Paul II as a great spiritual and moral leader. The 43rd President even hosted the eighty-first birthday party of the 265th pope, Benedict XVI, in the White House (16 April, 2008).

As presidential hopeful, Democratic Senator Barack Obama significantly chose for his running mate Senator Joe Biden, an Irish-American Roman Catholic. The number 1 and the number 3 most liberal politicians in the 100-member Senate subsequently won the election and about half of the Roman Catholic vote. Some Roman Catholics voted against Obama on the basis of their church's right-wing bio-ethics; others—much to the disgust of their staunch pro-life co-religionists—voted for Obama because of the broad agreement between his left-wing socio-economic ideology and that of their church or because of the liberal media hype, etc. American Roman Catholics, always amongst the most "progressive" in global Romanism, are both increasingly left-wing and increasingly divided. This would not have been so gratifying to Archbishop John Ireland.

European Union

The name changes from the

⁴ Quoted in Lévit, *Vaticanism*, p. 12; italics mine.

European Economic Community (EEC, 1957) to the European Community (EC, 1979) and the European Union (EU, 1992) are significant, reflecting progressively greater integration towards a European superstate.⁵ Adrian Hilton points out,

The [EU, as it is now called] started under the inspiration of [Roman] Catholic politicians—such as [Konrad] Adenauer of Germany, Paul-Henri Spaak [of Belgium], Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman [both of France]. They were all Christian Democrats. They were all deeply influenced by Catholic social teaching.⁶

Robert Schuman, the "Father of Europe," was an especially devout Roman Catholic, strongly influenced by the writings of Pius XII, Thomas Aquinas, and Jacques Maritain. He, Adenauer, and Alcide de Gasperi (founder of the Italian Christian Democratic Party), three of the pioneers of European unification, are in the process of being made into "saints" by the Vatican as a reward for founding the new Europe "on Roman Catholic principles." The European Union's "single market," "social chapter," and "subsidiarity" are concepts of the Vatican's social teaching.

But Rome is not having everything its own way in the European Union. Despite John Paul II's placing Europe in Mary's hands and urging that the final draft of the European Constitution (2004) should explicitly recognize the Christian roots of the continent, the Vatican's representatives

⁵ The Treaty of Rome (1957), the founding treaty of the EEC (now the EU), focused on economic co-operation, but it also called for "an ever closer union" to "eliminate the barriers which divide Europe."

⁶ Adrian Hilton, *The Principality and Power of Europe* (England: Dorchester House Publications, 1997), p. 18.

failed to secure any mention of Europe's "Christian [i.e., Roman Catholic] heritage"—one of the papacy's cherished goals.

Rome claims that John Paul II, the Polish pope, was instrumental in bringing down communism in eastern Europe, by being the spiritual inspiration behind its downfall. But whether this is so or not, he was disappointed in his hope that Poles and other Roman Catholics would emerge from behind the Iron Curtain to revitalize Romanism in western Europe. Secularization proceeds from the Atlantic to the Urals. In part through the scandal of paedophile (i.e., homosexual) priests, Roman Catholic vocations are well down in Europe.¹ Even in the Republic of Ireland, a very Roman Catholic country, and despite much pressure from the hierarchy, in a national referendum (24 November, 1995) a (narrow) majority voted to repeal the constitutional prohibition of divorce.

United Nations

The League of Nations (1919) was formed after, and in response to, World War I (1914-1918), as an international governing body

¹ Over 90% of the sexual abuse victims are teenage boys rather than girls or prepubescent.

designed to prevent war through disarmament, collective security, negotiation, and diplomacy. The United Nations (1945) was founded as its more powerful successor after World War II (1939-1945), which the League of Nations had been unable to stop.

"From the very beginning," writes Thomas Reese, "the papacy has...been a strong supporter of the United Nations, despite its problems, as the best hope for peace."² Rome repeatedly calls for the strengthening of its powers and even appeals for one world government as the most effective way of ending all war. Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965) issues this impassioned plea, for what will be, in effect, the global kingdom of Antichrist in whose day war (Matt. 24:6-7) will come to an end (cf. I Thess. 5:3; Rev. 13:3-4, 8, 12, 14-17):

It is our clear duty, then, to strain every muscle as we work for the time when all war can be completely outlawed by international consent. This goal undoubtedly requires the establishment of some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all, and endowed with effective power to safeguard on the behalf

² Reese, *Inside the Vatican*, p. 272.

of all, security, regard for justice, and respect for rights. But before this hoped-for authority can be set up, the highest existing international centers must devote themselves vigorously to the pursuit of better means for obtaining common security. Peace must be born of mutual trust between nations rather than imposed on them through fear of one another's weapons.³

Rome's Way Forward

The Church of Rome is numerically stronger than it has ever been but more doctrinally divided than at any time. Beyond the biblical framework of predictive prophecy, no one knows what the future holds except the sovereign God. But we can consider where the Vatican wants to go from its current labors and policy statements. As it casts about for a "winning combination" to restore its fortunes in an aggressively secular and pluralist world, the major factors in Rome's push for greater religious and political power are false ecumenism and syncretism. The Holy See desires one world religion, with the pope at the summit of the earthly kingdom of god/man.

... to be continued. 

³ Walter M. Abbot (gen. ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (USA: The America Press, 1966), pp. 295-296.

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Margaret Laning

Seeking the Honor That Comes from God Only

Have you ever received something like this?

Dear Family and Friends,

This has been a wonderful year. We finally bought our luxury dream

Mrs. Laning is a wife and mother in Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan.

home in our favorite gated community. God is so good. Susie and Trent fit right in. For Trent's birthday, we flew to Disney World—his annual request! For Susie's, another Princess Cruise! Despite our busy year, we were able to find time serving others. As I look on my calendar I can count 108 overnight guests who stayed at our house, and I cooked 70 meals

for the sick (up ten from last year.) Martin volunteered his time building a couple of homes for the poor, and we continue to sponsor a needy child from overseas. We are so glad God has given us a heart for serving others....

Ah, yes, the holiday brag letter—abhorrent festive fodder.

Thankfully, we receive very few missives like this fictional one. The majority that come our way are humble, lovely ways to keep in touch. Yet, with the boastful ones we roll our eyes and wonder. Did they forget "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. 6:3)? Or, "let another man praise thee and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips" (Prov. 27:2)? Maybe they should write this in their message, "...few and evil have the days of the years of my life been..." (Gen. 47:9).

Even so, it is easy to point out faults in others and to forget about our own proud nature. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their showiness, but our old man is just as guilty. So foolish is our sinful nature, that we clamor for attention while knowing better. We become skilled at camouflaging it.

From the time our children are very young, we teach them that we are to seek the honor that comes from God and not man. John 5:44 comes straight to us, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" What a strong rebuke! "How can ye believe"? hits right between the eyes. We know a child of God cannot lose his faith entirely, but seeking the praise of man will put our faith in grievous danger. Eventually, our pride can lead us to the point that we no longer consciously experience faith. This is a dreadful thing, for faith, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, is how we receive Christ and all His benefits.

Seeking the praise of man means exalting ourselves above others. Our lust to glory in ourselves covets flattery. "She is the perfect mother." "Her house is the best kept house around." "She is the most organized person." "If you want a job done right, always ask for him." "He is the best all-around student."

Seeking the honor that comes from God alone requires constant soul searching. I find this difficult to do. Is my goal to glorify God and build up His people? I want to obey God perfectly from my heart with pure motives, but I fail every time. When can I ever write a family update without any pride mingled in it? When can I labor to clean my home without worrying what visitors will think about how I rate? When my children or I sin, how often is my concern primarily that I look bad?

Even when I am serving others, is my goal always what it should be? Undoubtedly, there is a difference between seeking the good of others, and seeking to be exalted by them. By seeking their good, we are not looking for what we may get out of it. In fact, we should be content to have our good works go unnoticed. The principle "That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:4) certainly applies to our good works. In our giving and serving may we take this to heart, and thus learn to forget ourselves. The more we do so, the more we free ourselves of pride and vainglory.

Furthermore, there clearly are proper times to praise one another. This is not necessarily flattery. When our goal is to glorify God and build up His people, expressing encouraging words, especially from Scripture, is a good thing. In fact, sometimes our lack of praising our children can lead them to become discouraged. It is very easy to fall into the sin of criticizing them too much at the expense of overlooking the good.

We can be quick to admonish when we see our child earns a low grade, but how quick are we at encouraging them? Our children may work hard to do well on a catechism test or in their school work, and we might not say anything. Our child may show patience and

meekness when being provoked by a brother or sister, and we might not think to commend him for that. Our child may help us by playing with and watching a younger sibling, and we might take this thoughtfulness for granted. Sometimes we can find ourselves bringing up one shortcoming and unsatisfactory performance after another, and forgetting about God's mercy. How much do we as parents fall far short in our heavenly Father's eyes?

There are times for criticism, discipline, and patient admonishments from God's law, to be sure. Yet, in all of this, may we remember to tell our covenant children the remedy for sin. Encouragement means pointing to Christ as the way of escape, not only from the guilt of their sin, but from the power of sin as well.

What do we praise our children for? Do we take them privately aside and commend them for their spiritual strengths? Or do we say very little about these, and yet jump and cheer when they make a slam dunk? When we see self-denial, thoughtfulness, patience, mercy, humility, and faithfulness in the work God has called them to do, it is good to let them know that we have noticed. This kind of praise encourages His people and glorifies God.

Our goal must be to imitate God in our parenting. Just as our heavenly Father said of His Son, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," so we must encourage and express love to our children. Our covenant children desire our approval, and this can be a means by which they hear the praise of God. We must pray that God will open our eyes more to see His work of grace in our believing children, for this is one way in which our children hear and receive the honor that comes from God.

We are also to be examples for our children. In fact, the more we imitate God in our parenting,

the more we will be blessed and see positive fruit in our children. During Jesus' ministry, He sought only God's honor. "Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me..." (John 8:54). Do we show our children that we, too, are seeking honor that comes only from God?

We are good examples when we show that we are on guard against the sin of judging the motives of others. We should be so busy examining whether we are truly seeking God's honor that we will not have time to analyze someone else's motives. When our brothers and sisters do good works, our sinful nature can become jealous. If we covet the attention they receive, we can look down on them and wrongly judge their motives. "Well, they are just showing off..." Our children are inclined to respond this way. When one child tries to stop another from sinning, then accusations of "holier than thou" or "you're so proud" can be hurled at the faithful child.

One of the greatest acts of faith was also wrongly judged. When David came down to fight Goliath, David's older brother Eliab accused David of seeking man's praise. "I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thine heart," said Eliab (I Sam. 17:28). We can point out to our children that Eliab was jealous of


David and wanted the attention and honor his younger brother was receiving. May we remember "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1).

How hard it is to esteem others better than ourselves. This is very much unlike the way in which the world runs a race. The athlete of the world runs to beat the competitors and to receive praise and honor from man. He esteems himself better than the others. In contrast, God calls us out of selfishness and into the body of Christ. When we run the race together as is spoken of in I Corinthians 9, we esteem others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). In this kind of a race, we are not competing against the brethren. In fact, such a race involves helping up a brother or sister who stumbles and falls. We run while encouraging and praying for others not to faint. Jesus Christ is the shining victor in the race. It is He whom we desire to be glorified as we run, and when we one day put on His incorruptible crown.

If we are seeking God's honor, and only His honor, we will fervently pray for much grace. Left to our own pride, how will we ever believe? Such a beam in our own eye will certainly interrupt the exercise of faith (Canons of Dordt, Fifth Head, Article 5). Thanks be to God for His grace, which works in us repentance from such idolatrous selfishness.

During Christ's ministry, it was rare that those of lofty status were the ones listening to Him. Rather, it was the common ordinary folk that followed Him. Mark 12:37 says, "And the common people heard him gladly." It is only when we view ourselves to be the undeserving, needy sinners that we are, that we find ourselves really listening to God's word, and experiencing the comfort that only His word brings.

How humbling is the thought that God actually honors us. How is it that He honors us? We grow to see this more as we consider again what Scripture says about how God gave glory and honor to His Son. II Peter 1:17 says, "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Similarly, our heavenly Father honors us by making known we are His children and that He is pleased with us. This, and this alone, is the honor we seek.

What a privilege it is for us to confess, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:29). May our boast be in the Lord, and from the One who Himself said, "I receive not honour from men" (John 5:41). 

Report of Classis East

Special Session

October 21, 2008


Classis East met in special session on Tuesday, October 21, 2008 for the purpose of examining Heath Bleyenbergh, Pastor-Elect of the Providence PRC. Pastor-Elect Bleyenbergh sustained his examination; and, with the concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* from

Classis West, his consistory was authorized to ordain and install him as a minister of the Word and sacraments in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Classis also approved the request from Kalamazoo PRC for the reduction of synodical assessments for 2008 because of their recent loss of three families. This request for reduction of synodical

assessments (retroactive to August 1, 2008) was approved and forwarded to the Finance Committee of Synod for its action.

Expenses of classis amounted to \$1,935.04. Classis will meet next in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 at the Grandville PRC.

Respectfully submitted
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk 

Young People's Activities

The young people from our churches in west Michigan were invited to this year's annual Young People's Thanksgiving Mass Meeting held Sunday afternoon, November 9, at the Byron Center, MI PRC. Rev. Ron Van Overloop spoke on the last part of Psalm 69:30, with the theme: "Magnify the Lord with Thanksgiving." Rev. Van Overloop reminded the young people that we can never magnify God more than what He is, and that we *must* magnify Him, seeing Him as big, and ourselves and our troubles as small. Rev. Van Overloop also encouraged the young people to keep in mind all the spiritual and material gifts and benefits God has given them and that our seeing God as a gracious Giver of these things magnifies Him. The Young People's Society of Byron Center sang as the special number for the meeting.

The Young People's Society of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI held their annual Christian Service Day on Saturday, November 22. Plans called for the young people to gather at Grace mid-morning and from there travel to various homes of church members to rake leaves, clean, or do minor yard work, etc.

On a cold late fall evening, what could be better than a bowl of hot-potato, or chicken-noodle, or pea, or tomato, or broccoli-cheese soup to warm one up? Well, that might have been the thinking of the young people of the Randolph, WI PRC when they sponsored a soup supper on November 11. They offered not one or two varieties of soup, but five different soups, in addition to BBQ'd beef and creamed-chicken sandwiches.

If that wasn't enough, and if you still had room left, you could finish up with dessert.

Congregation Activities

The Immanuel Ladies Guild of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada sponsored a ladies lecture and luncheon on November 5. Their pastor, Rev. Richard Smit, spoke on James 1:27. Coffee was ready by 10:00, with the lecture starting at 10:30 and lunch following.

The Covenant Ladies Circle of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada sponsored their annual Car Rally and Soup Supper on Remembrance Day, November 11. The rally began at noon, with the soup supper beginning after the rally at about 3-4 P.M.

Members of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC were invited to a combination potluck dinner and hayride on November 7 at the home of one of Kalamazoo's members.

The Men's Bible Society of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited their fellow church members to a special meeting on November 5 to hear Prof. Barry Gritters speak on and answer questions about "The History of PRC Missions: An Evaluation and Critique."

Rev. Ron Van Overloop preached his farewell sermon in the Byron Center, MI PRC on Sunday evening, November 16. Rev. Van Overloop chose to preach from Romans 16:24 under the theme, "Grace Be with You." Immediately after that service, Byron Center had a brief farewell program for the Van Overloops, after which there was a time of fellowship and opportunity to express thanks and bid farewell to the Van Overloop family for their faithful ministry over the past 4 1/2 years. Rev. VanOverloop was installed as pastor of Grace PRC in Standale, MI,

on Sunday morning, November 23. The Van Overloops will probably remain in Byron Center's parsonage through the end of 2008, as the parsonage at Grace is made ready for them to move into.

Members of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together on November 18 for their annual congregational meeting. After that meeting adjourned, the members were encouraged to stay for a while and informally discuss with their Building Committee what direction they, as a church, should go with regard to (especially) a parsonage and church location.

The retired members of the Byron Center, MI PRC were invited to the annual Thanksgiving Dinner on November 5, hosted by the children of Byron's Children Activity Night group.

Mission Activities

Our churches' Domestic Mission Committee sent a delegation to the Sioux Falls Mission in South Dakota for their annual visit. This committee consisted of Rev. Carl Haak and Elders Vern Haveman and Dave Rau. The men met with Edgerton's consistory on November 7, the Fellowship's steering committee on November 8, and the entire group Sunday, November 9. Rev. Haak also filled their pulpit in the absence of missionary Rev. Allen Brummel.

The Doon, IA PRC arranged to have Rev. Allen Brummel provide pulpit supply for the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, for November 9 and 16. Rev. Brummel traveled with a representative of our churches' Foreign Mission Committee, Elder Ike Uittenbogaard, and his wife, Phyllis. Sunday, November 16, the Berean PRC commemorated their second anniversary as an instituted church. They were officially instituted on November 19, 2006.

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Rev. Rodney Miersma and Elder M. Schwarz traveled to the Spokane, WA mission field November 14 as part of the regular supervisory work of the Loveland, CO PRC. Rev. Miersma was also able to preach for the Fellowship on Sunday evening.

Prof. Herman Hanko left for the CERC of Singapore on November 11. Prof. Hanko planned to deliver the annual Reformation Day speech and stay for several

weeks. Mrs. Hanko intended to join him there December 2 and they plan to return December 22. Prof. Hanko has gone to Singapore under the auspices of the Contact Committee. The time there will be busy, since he is scheduled to give at least seven speeches and seven sermons.

Evangelism Activities

The Hope PRC congregation in Redlands, CA gathered

together on October 31 for their annual Reformation Day lecture. Their pastor, Rev. Martin Vander Wal, spoke on "John Calvin and Calvin's Calvinism."

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada arranged for their pastor, Rev. John Marcus, to speak at their Reformation Day lecture on October 31. Rev. Marcus spoke on "Scripture in the Hands of the People."



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Doon PRC express heartfelt sympathy to Mrs. Marlene VanDenTop and her family in the sudden death of her husband and their father,

MR. HENRY VAN DEN TOP.

May Marlene and her family find comfort in God's Word as found in John 14:2-4: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Rev. David Overway, President
Jim Hoogendoorn, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Grandville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to John and Judy Bouma regarding the death of Judy's sister,

BEVERLY NETTEN.

May they find hope and comfort in the promise of the Lord given in Isaiah 51:11: "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Herm DeVries, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mr. and Mrs. Society of Southwest PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Steve and Deb Kuiper in the passing into glory of Deb's father,

MR. KENNETH SCHIPPER.

It is our prayer that they may find comfort in God's words of Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Tom VanderWoude, President
Nancy Buiter, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Hudsonville Ladies Society expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Florence Key in the death of her father,

MR. FRED DYK.

May she and her family find comfort in the words of I Corinthians 15:55-57: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Martyn McGeown, President
Donna Boven, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

RON and DEE MIEDEMA,

on October 2, 2008. It is our prayer for God's richest blessings on them for all of the days that God gives them to share together. Lamentations 3:22, 23: "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not, They are new every morning: GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS."

* Sandy and Craig Glashower

Derel and fiancé

Cory VanKovering

Quinton, Cody, Parker, Seth,

Kayla

* Todd and Cindy Miedema

Melissa & Jake Baxter

Leanne, Danae, Travis, Colten

* Bruce and Anne Miedema

Joel, Audra, Abigail, Olivia

* Tami and Steve Szost

Brittney, Brielle, Kristen

Byron Center, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 2009, at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk