

# THE *December 15, 2007* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 84 ◆ Number 6

# The Bright and Morning Star

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

Matthew 2:10



hristmas is a time of joy.

But what is it that gives us joy in this season? For some, it is a time to get together with family. For others, it is a time to renew friendships. Many look at Christmas as a time to give and to receive all sorts of gifts.

It is not that there is anything necessarily wrong with these things. Indeed, some of these things are legitimate reasons to be joyful. But if we seek for joy only in these things, then we will be sadly disappointed.

True and lasting joy comes only from God. In His presence is fullness of joy. Our joy comes as we fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. That is the joy of believers. That is the joy of Christmas. That was the joy of the wise men who sought Jesus Christ after His birth.

*Rev. Marcus is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.*

Nobody knows for sure how long it was after Jesus' birth that the wise men came to visit Him. What we do know is that the wise men found Jesus in a house. So it appears that they did not visit Jesus on the night He was born. If they had visited Him then, they would have found Him in a stable. The other thing we know is that when Herod tried to kill Jesus, he had all the babies in Bethlehem killed who were two years old and under. Herod was trying to make sure that the baby Jesus was among the children that were slaughtered. Based on this information, the wise men probably made their visit to the baby Jesus some time within the first two years of Jesus' life.

Not that the time of their visit is so important. Rather, the fact that the wise men made this visit is what makes this story significant. It is significant, too, that God brought the wise men to Jesus by means of a miraculous star. When they had finally arrived at their destination and saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. That is the joy that God gives to His people. That is the joy of Christmas that the wise

men expressed some two thousand years ago.

## The Wise Men

The wise men are mysterious figures. Scripture does not reveal much about them. For example, Scripture does not reveal anything about how many wise men there were. There might have been two or three or even three hundred. The reason that so many think there were three is that Scripture says they brought three different kinds of gifts, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is assumed that, if they brought three gifts, then there must have been three wise men. But, really, Scripture does not say anything about how many men brought the gifts. Neither does Scripture tell us that they were kings. We have all heard the song, "We three kings of orient are...." But the word used in Scripture to describe these men does not indicate they were kings.

Well, just who were these wise men, and where did they come from? Scripture gives us two clues. In the first place, Scripture indicates that they were from the East. When

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they arrived in Jerusalem, they reported to Herod, "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Secondly, Matthew calls them "wise men," or, literally, "magi." One ancient historian, Heroditus, records that the magi were a priestly caste of the Medes, who were active in Babylon during Old Testament times. Generally speaking, the religion of those who were magi was not the true worship of God. Rather, magi usually practiced some sort of demon worship.

### Seeking Jesus

What is so striking, then, is that such men would seek after Jesus Christ. How did those who were once in the camp of Satan come to seek after the Savior? Why would they seek after a child born King of the Jews? Furthermore, why were they looking for a star? And how did they know that this particular star had anything to do with the birth of the coming King? Somehow, God revealed it to them. Only a wonderwork of grace could take men who were steeped in demon worship and paganism and cause them to seek the Messiah.

Scripture does not say exactly how; but they must have had some knowledge of the Messiah, the promised Savior. The explanation may be that these men came from Babylon. Recall that the Jews had once been captives in Babylon. Recall, too, that many of them remained in Babylon even when their captivity ended about five hundred years before Christ.

We read about magi in the book of Daniel: "Then the king commanded to call the *magicians* (the Greek translation of this word in Daniel is the same word that is used in Matthew: *magos*) and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king" (Dan. 2:2). These men were called into Nebuchadnezzar's presence to try to interpret his dream. They could

not; but Daniel did. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over all the wise men of Babylon, including the magicians.

It may be that Daniel himself taught them about the true and living God and about the coming Messiah. Or they may have learned it from other believing Jews who remained in Babylon. That knowledge could have been passed down through the centuries, up until the time of Christ.

At bottom, the magi were Gentiles. But they were Gentiles to whom God revealed the truth concerning the coming Savior. Though we do not know exactly how, we do know that God revealed enough information so that they knew about the Savior who was to be born King of the Jews. Not only did God give them that information, He also put it in their hearts to seek after Him. They did not come to see Jesus merely out of scholarly interest in something novel. Rather, they were living out their faith, the faith that God had graciously given to them.

The wonder of the gospel and the joy of Christmas is that God does the very same thing for His people today. He brings us the glorious message of the Savior born in Bethlehem. Through the preaching of the gospel, we learn of our King born into the world so that He might die. And, having brought the gospel to us, He also convicts us so that we believe the truth about the King born in a stable. Because He gives us new life, we seek Him too.

### The Miraculous Star

How did God bring these particular magi to the Savior? The way that God brought them to Jesus was by means of a miraculous star.

There are many theories as to what this star really was. It is common to read these theories around Christmastime. Some say that the star was caused by a conjunction of planets in the sky. One theory

goes that Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn all lined up very closely in the sky so that their light together looked like a very bright star. Others say that the star was a comet that came very close to the earth. And still others claim that the star was a nova, an exploding star that would have been extremely bright for a number of months.

The problem with all of these theories is that they do not do justice to the uniqueness of the occasion. If the star of Bethlehem was any one of these natural occurrences, how would the wise men know that this particular star was the star that they were looking for? After all, these kinds of events happen somewhat frequently throughout history. Most of us have lived when one of the comets has come near enough to see from the earth.

The simplest and best explanation is that the star was truly miraculous. And, really, how fitting that the messenger that announced the miraculous birth of Jesus to the magi was itself a miraculous sign.

This fits Matthew's account of the magi. At first they saw the star in the East. But by the time they came to Jerusalem, they did not see the star anymore. No doubt that is why they went to Jerusalem for directions. When the chief priests and scribes informed Herod and the wise men that the anointed King would be born in Bethlehem, the magi went their way to find Him.

It was at this point that the star reappeared and went before them. "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matt. 2:9). It literally led the way right to the place where the baby Jesus lay. No ordinary star, or comet, or nova, or any alignment of planets could do that. The star must have been miraculous.

The way in which the star went before them and stood right over the house reminds us of the pillar of fire that went before Israel.

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"And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Ex. 13:21). Just as the light of the pillar floating in the sky went before the Israelites, so also this star went before the magi.

It is significant, too, that the light from the cloud that led the Israelites is called the "glory of the LORD." This cloud stood over the tabernacle when Moses had finished the tabernacle. "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the *glory of the LORD* filled the tabernacle" (Ex 40:34).

Recall, as well, the shepherds who watched their flocks by night. We read that, when God announced the birth of Jesus Christ to them, "the *glory of the Lord* shown round about them." Thus it would appear that the miraculous star was more along the lines of this glorious light of Jehovah.

The cloud, which is called "the glory of the LORD," also descended upon the tabernacle when Moses was speaking with God. "And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses" (Ex. 33:9). Of course, the tabernacle was a picture of God dwelling with His people. How fitting, then, that the birth of Immanuel should be marked with the glory of the Lord appearing to the shepherds as well as to the wise men.

### The Light Revealed

After all that has been said about the star, the important thing is that God showed the magi the truth to which the star pointed. God had revealed to them that the star pointed to a very special king who would be born king of the Jews.

We may wonder how the magi even knew that they should be looking for a star. Well, we do not really know that either. Perhaps

they had been taught the truth revealed in Numbers 24:17: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a *Star* out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." This prophecy may have been made available to Babylonians when the Jews were taken captive there. However they found out, somehow they knew that there would be a star that would come out of the nation of Israel, and that this star would be a scepter, that is, a king. God revealed the truth to these Gentile men, who otherwise would have been lost in paganism.

Then, having revealed the truth concerning the star that would arise out of Jacob, God also showed them the miraculous sign of the star in the heavens that led them to the baby, who is the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16).

By themselves, the wise men would never have been able to find Jesus. That is why they stopped in Jerusalem to look for Him that was born King of the Jews. They looked in the place where men would expect royalty to be found—they looked in Jerusalem. But, by means of His Word, God directed the wise men to Bethlehem. And that is when God revealed the star to them and led them right to the place where the baby Jesus lay. It led them to Immanuel.

### The Great Joy

That is why the wise men rejoiced with *exceeding great joy*. This was no ordinary joy. Their rejoicing was of a very high degree. Scripture does not say that they jumped up and down and let out loud ecstatic laughter; but their joy would certainly have warranted that.

The long-promised King had finally come! And the wise men had found Him! You understand, they were not just rejoicing over the fact that the Jews had a King. They

were rejoicing because they themselves had found their King.


And their joy was not only in their hearts and mouths. The wise men also showed their joy by what they did when they found the promised King. Matthew tells us that they "fell down and worshipped him." By their act of worship, they were expressing their complete submission to the baby Jesus, God the Son in the flesh.

After showing their complete submission to Him, they opened their treasures and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Perhaps these gifts have a symbolic meaning. What is most important, however, is that the wise men gave the most precious of gifts. Not second-rate gifts, but the very best would they give to their King.

The great joy of the wise men was reflected in their humble worship. What a contrast with the attitude of Herod, who sought to kill the baby Jesus. What a contrast with the Jews who proclaimed, "we have no king but Caesar," and promptly demanded that Jesus be crucified. The world will not worship and bow down before the King of all creation. Rather, they gather themselves against Him as His enemies.

Just as the Gentile wise men rejoiced over Him who was born king of the Jews, we also rejoice over Him. Not because by some great wisdom of our own we learned of Him and then found Him, but because, in His goodness, God has revealed Him to us.

Just as the wise men would never have found the Savior unless God had led them, so it is with us. We never would have sought and found Christ unless God had brought us to Him. And since God has revealed the bright and morning star to us, we also desire to express our joy by bringing gifts to the King. Not to make Him richer. But in thankfulness, to show our absolute submission to Him.

May Christ be the source of our joy in this Christmas season. 

# Seth: The Ordinary Birth of an Extraordinary Child—Harbinger of Things to Come

*"And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew."*

Genesis 4:25

**T**his is a text for all seasons, but, in a special way, it is a text for this time of the year, when the church reflects upon the coming and birth of the woman's great promised Seed—the coming of the Dragon-slayer.

It is a passage easily overlooked. It is dressed in such common garb—a man "knew" his wife "again," and a child results. Throughout the history of the fallen human race, what has been more ordinary and commonplace than that?

But to overlook either this passage or Seth due to their outwardly ordinary appearance would be a serious oversight indeed. The birth of Seth is a matter of extraordinary significance. Mother Eve certainly read it that way.

Genesis 4:25 is a jewel of a text, filled with gospel light and beauty. Jehovah God, God of covenant promise and faithfulness, is set forth as the gift-giving God.

You have here a love story—of Adam loving Eve his wife, and of God loving His church and quickening her womb once again, a love that provides the answer to death,

death just experienced, death in all its horrors.

Common and ordinary though the record of Seth's birth is, his birth is anything but ordinary. That becomes plain when you consider what Seth was, to whom he was born, and when.

Every birth is a wonder, that which displays the splendor of the mind of the Creator—the God who endows strands of DNA with life-giving power that brings forth a full-bodied child to be held in one's arms. Hold your little one, newly emerged from the womb, wrapped in a blanket, and exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

But more than that, this child Seth was a child spiritually alive. From fallen Adam and Eve should come forth one having spiritual life? Talk about a wonder of grace! These were two who had been guilty of base ingratitude. God had given them the whole earth, but still it was not enough. "Is this all we get? We want more!" Sound familiar? That these two should receive such a child, one having spiritual life, and that from the very One whom they have snubbed, is a wonderful and extraordinary thing indeed.

And this child, of course, foreshadows that One whom God would give to a fallen humanity and church, in whom would be

eternal life itself—eternal life for ourselves not only, but for our little ones as well.

Grace beyond telling. Fall on your knees.

But, as well, this Seth was born at an extraordinarily critical time. He is born when everything appeared to be lost, and that for the second time. The first time was when Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit and persuaded Adam to do likewise. Surely all was forfeit—humanity under the sentence of death, barred from the tree of life itself. But God had mercy and gave the "mother promise," which spoke of spiritual seed and of One who would bring victory. Hope revived.

Now this latest crisis, the death of Abel, murdered by his own brother. And Cain shows himself to be the serpent's seed. It seemed the crushing of all hope.

There is evidence that Eve had thought Cain himself, her first-born, might be the promised conquering champion. As chapter 4:1 states, "[A]nd she...bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD." Already God is making good His promise, she thinks. And if not Cain, then Abel. But that hope was cruelly dashed. Cain was not godly seed. He was reprobate and ungodly to the core. And Abel, the believer, powerless before him, was dead. Evil has

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triumphed. The Dragon has conquered after all.

This history of Cain and Abel, itself a harbinger of the whole of Old Testament history to follow: the Dragon seeking to slay the woman's seed (cf. Rev. 12:3, 4), and coming perilously close time and time again. But here already, at the dawn of history, the promise and coming of the woman's seed, the Dragon-slayer seemingly is cut off before it has scarcely begun. Evil has triumphed again. What hope in the face of such power?

But deep are the ways of God. In bleakest times, the God of promise is still at work. He works within the womb of Eve, and implants from Adam a seed of special significance. Seth is conceived and born. An ordinary baby boy from every human perspective, yet extraordinary in that he is of the promised seed. This one is to be the direct link to the great Seed. He and his birth ultimately spell the Dragon's doom.

And note you well, such is the wisdom of God with our children as well—ordinary, everyday children of believers, not necessarily extraordinarily gifted at all. In such not only does God still work salvation, but through such He works victory over Satan and evil as well. The world may count them as ever so ordinary. Be sure the Dragon does not. They are his bane.

Deeply woven into this passage is the golden strand of love, covenantal love. This is highlighted when you put the text into its historical context. Eve speaks of "another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew."

Consider Eve's grief.

You want to talk about grief of an almost bottomless sort, tending sometimes to despair, then you talk about the death of a child, be it daughter or son. Such is never forgotten by a mother. Be it fifty years after the death, mention to an 80-year-old widow that you see she

had five children, and she will respond, "No, pastor, I had six. One died of tuberculosis when only six months old." They never forget. The love of a mother goes deeper than life itself.

Now add to such a grief this, that one's son was murdered by his own brother! The loss of two sons, really, in one stroke. And add to that the certain knowledge that one of your children, the firstborn, is reprobate, carnal to the core. Talk about monumental grief! Mother Eve's.

But here, coupled to all that grief, is the knowledge of Eve that, in a very real sense, she was the cause. She was to blame. "I brought this into the world. This is due to my sin and folly. The Lord brings my sins to remembrance. He is punishing me. He has forgotten to be kind."

I do not know that I would have wanted to have been Eve's pastor at this point. Would you? What would you have said?

It is hard enough in some tragic circumstances, though you have the whole of the gospel in your hands, to know just what to say to answer to some griefs that overwhelm. But now Eve, at this point in time—not only no Jesus to comfort her, but without even Seth, the replacement, yet born. Just the body of Abel, and Cain unveiled as a complete stranger to them. What would you say?

Despair, that's all. An overpowering sense of guilt. "I am being punished for my folly and my sin." Surely, all hope is destroyed.

True, there was a gospel word prior to that—the mother promise, the promise of the Seed who was to crush the head of the Serpent—but right then, for all the world, it looked to our mother as if the Serpent had overwhelmed the promised one. Her seed was dead, the promise hung in tatters, shredded beyond repair. And she to blame!

It is into such circumstances of grief and guilt that Seth is given

and is born. Another seed! Eve clung to him and what he represented with all the power of her faith. She does so because she recognizes that this child is a word of God to her.

Notice, "God hath appointed unto me another seed." God! This Seth, whose name means "compensation"—given to replace and console for one's loss—represents a word from God, a word of remembrance and love.

The birth of this Seth tells her that the face of God towards her is not the face of implacable anger, of condemning wrath: "You turned your back on Me, Eve, and ruined it all. Now, you are going to pay." Rather, in the power and timing of this birth she sees the face of a gift-giving God, a face of faithfulness and forgiving love. Hope revives.

Indeed, it is because of Seth, and that *other seed* whom he represents, that we have a word to bring in times of desperate grief. This passage demonstrates in a most concrete and tangible way that God has not forgotten to be kind. As a Father He takes pity on His children, moved by their cries. He is the God who abundantly pardons. In return for our evil, He is good and kind.

If in this passage you cannot hear the echo of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "Comfort ye, Comfort ye, my people, saith your God," set to strains of the great Oratorio, *The Messiah*, you are tone deaf.

In this child Seth, another son, this new heir, Eve beholds the smile of her God. The line of the covenant and coming of the Dragon-slayer has been preserved.

In addition, we point out that this passage tells us *how* God chooses to defeat Satan and the power of sin and death, namely, through the common, yet anything but ordinary ordinance of Christian marriage and its love.

As the text states, "And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare

a son....” Seth was the fruit of love—marital love. By that word “knew,” the Scripture is telling us more than that Adam had a sexual relationship with Eve, resulting in a child. Rather, this is a knowledge that has to do with love and understanding. Eve clings to Adam in her grief and despair. Adam knows her grief, their loss, and her sense of guilt over what she introduced into the world. And in this knowledge he holds her and seeks to comfort her. He “knew her again,” that is, with a purpose.

Adam, full of grief himself, could have lashed out, pointed his finger at her, and declared, “See what you did when you acted on your own! It is all your fault. If it were not for you...! Get away from me. Because of you, our sons are gone.” But he did not. Instead, he loved her, embraced her, and assured her he did not blame her. He had sinned as well. And from that love, forgiving and self-giving,

comes life, comes the Christ and salvation of the world and of the chosen human race.


In this seemingly unequal battle between the church and the Dragon, never underestimate the importance of marriage and its fruits, where love and faith and repentance dwell. From such love comes the woman’s seed and Satan’s defeat.

And all of this a harbinger, a harbinger of another day, one even far more wonderful, and of that Other Seed, Mary’s firstborn, wrapped in swaddling clothes. Ever read of anything so commonplace and ordinary as that birth? In outward appearance, nothing to mark this One off from the most ordinary of children. But let not appearance deceive. He was and is anything but ordinary. In this Christ-child related to mother Eve dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily—He, too, the fruit of love, God’s great love for His own.

This Seth, who replaced Abel, was but a forerunner, an essential forerunner in keeping the line of the coming Seed of the woman unbroken and alive, but only a forerunner for all of that. Thanks be to God, another replacement was yet to come. Seth himself would die and could himself destroy neither the Dragon nor the power of sin and death. But Mary’s firstborn could and has. Worship Him!

Do you hear God’s word to you through Him? Not a word of implacable wrath and condemnation, but a word of remembrance, of kindness, of love—just as with Seth, so long ago held in mother Eve’s arms.

And also of the Dragon’s certain doom.

Deep is the wisdom of God, faithful in His surpassing love. With our little ones let us celebrate that revelation of His love this season of the year. 

## Letters

### Covenant Theology

**I**t was with true joy that I received the complimentary copy of the *Standard Bearer*. Its pages were my companion that very evening and provided a source of interest and edification. I certainly appreciated the articles concerning various aspects of our joint heritage, the *Afscheiding*....I am well aware of your conviction concerning the nature of the covenant of grace and its being unconditional. Furthermore, you are aware of the URC and CanRC courtship and their (CanRC) emphasis on the covenant being conditional. I am wondering what your reaction is to an attempt to hold to a carefully qualified distinction between the covenant being unconditional in a meritorious sense and conditional in an instrumental sense—the immediate qualification being that the

instrumental conditions are set upon and fulfilled by Christ on behalf of the elect....(I)n my own developing covenant theology (and the PRC has been helpful to that development) this distinction accompanies a legal/vital distinction in relationship to covenant participation....I deeply appreciate your magazine and labors.

Blessings in Christ,  
(Rev.) Greg Lubbers, Pastor,  
Covenant URC  
Byron Center (MI, USA)

### RESPONSE:

The issue you raise in the question concerning “a carefully qualified distinction between the covenant being unconditional in a meritorious sense and conditional in an instrumental sense” is fundamental to the gospel of (covenant) salvation by grace alone. It

is also timely in view of the theology of Norman Shepherd, as set forth in his *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (P&R, 2000), and the men of the “federal vision,” as propounded in their *The Federal Vision* (Athanasius Press, 2004).

Not one of the “Three Forms of Unity,” which are the creeds of the United Reformed Churches and of the Canadian Reformed Churches, teaches conditional salvation or a conditional covenant. The Canons of Dordt, which is a creed of the United Reformed Churches and of the Canadian Reformed Churches, expressly *denies* that faith is a condition either of election or of salvation.

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any

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other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended... (Canons, I/9).

The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which doth not consist herein that God, foreseeing all possible qualities of human actions, elected certain of these as a condition of salvation... (Canons, I/10).

The Synod *rejects* the errors of those...who teach that Christ, by His satisfaction, merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire... (Canons, II, Rejection of Errors/3).

The context of the Canons' rejection of "conditions" in the third article of the Rejection of Errors section of the second head is the covenant of grace (see Canons, II, Rejection of Errors/2, 4). Here, therefore, the Canons explicitly apply their denial that faith is a condition of salvation to the covenant of grace.

Herman Bavinck noted the reluctance of Reformed theologians to use the term "'the conditions' of the covenant."

In the beginning Reformed theologians spoke freely of "the conditions" of the covenant. But after the nature of the covenant of grace had been more carefully considered and had to be defended against [Roman] Catholics, Lutherans, and Remonstrants, many of them took exception to the term and avoided it (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, Baker, 2006, 229).

Nevertheless, orthodox Reformed theologians have spoken of faith as the "condition" in the covenant. By this, they meant that faith is the necessary "means and

instrument" of covenant communion with Christ and of covenant salvation. Francis Turretin carefully defined his reference to faith as the "condition" in the covenant: "Faith has the relation of a condition in this covenant...as it is the means and instrument of our union with Christ (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, P&R, 1994, 187, emphasis added).

Other Reformed theologians spoke of faith as a "condition" in the covenant intending nothing more, or other, than that faith is a demand of God upon His covenant friends in the covenant of grace, as their part in the covenant. Invariably, these theologians added that God Himself gives this faith. Turretin remarked that this was really an "improper" use of the term "condition" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, 189).

The Westminster Standards refer to faith as "the condition" in the covenant of grace in the sense of faith's being the instrument by which the elect sinner receives and is interested in the mediator of the covenant.

How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant? The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him... (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 32).

This orthodox use of the term "condition," with reference strictly to the *means* of covenant communion and salvation, always appeared in the context of the teaching that God establishes the covenant only with the elect, that the covenant promise is to the elect alone, and that God bestows the salvation of the covenant exclusively upon the elect. Turretin is representative:

By the latter [the "evangelical" covenant of grace in Christ—DJE], he [God] promises to the believer

safety in Christ and on account of Christ...[This covenant] was entered into with the elect in Christ after the fall (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, 174).

But the common and received opinion among the Reformed is different. They hold to a particularity of the covenant (no less than of saving grace) that although what is extended to many may be called general (especially under the New Testament, the distinction of nations being taken away), still it never was universal with each and all, but particular only with the true elect members of Christ (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, 207).

The particularity of the covenant, the covenant promise, and the covenant blessings of salvation, with, to, and upon the elect in Christ alone, is confessional with Presbyterians: "With whom was the covenant of grace made? The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed" (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 31). This perfectly lucid statement, with its biblical basis in Galatians 3:16 (to which the article appeals), is simply conclusive against that doctrine of the covenant that has God making the covenant, conditionally, with all baptized persons, elect and reprobate alike, altogether apart from Christ.

In the very answer in which it describes faith as a "condition" in the covenant, the Westminster Larger Catechism immediately adds that the elect in Christ are the exclusive object of the covenant promise and expressly states that faith is a gift of God in the elect.

God...promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation (Q. and A. 32).

Also the Westminster Confession of Faith explicitly limits the promise of the covenant of grace to the elect and expressly states that faith is a gift to the elect: “promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (7.3).

In a Reformed theology that freely, boldly, and joyfully confessed that election governs the covenant and that expressly stated that faith is a “condition” in the sense of “means,” or “instrument,” there was no danger of viewing faith as a work of the sinner *upon which the covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation depend*.

Radically different is the use of “condition” in the theology of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), the Canadian Reformed Churches, Norman Shepherd, and the men of the “federal vision.”

No matter that, when pressed by defenders of the creedal Reformed doctrine of salvation by particular, sovereign grace, they resort to crying up their “condition” of the covenant as “means”!

In their covenant theology, “condition,” that is, faith as they conceive it, does not function as the “means” of covenant communion and covenant salvation. That is, “condition” does not function in their theology *exclusively* as means, or even *primarily* as means. Rather, for them faith is the condition of the covenant in the sense that faith, as the act and work of the sinner (whether with or without the help of God—it makes no difference), is the explanation why some remain in the covenant, whereas others as truly in the covenant as those who remain fall out; is the cause why the covenant promise is effectual unto salvation in some, in distinction from others to whom God made the promise as really as He did to those who permit themselves to be saved by the promise; and ac-

counts for the fact that the covenant, which God (according to them) has made with all the baptized children of believers alike, continues with some, whereas it is annulled with respect to others.

In the covenant theology of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), the Canadian Reformed Churches, Norman Shepherd, and the men of the “federal vision,” faith functions as a “condition” in the sense that it makes effective unto everlasting salvation a covenant grace that God supposedly extends to and bestows upon many more than the elect—upon many more than are saved by this grace. Covenant grace in itself is powerless, and resistible; the child’s faith makes it effective.

In the covenant theology of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), the Canadian Reformed Churches, Norman Shepherd, and the men of the “federal vision,” the covenant, covenant grace, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation *depend* upon faith.

This is heresy.

This is the heresy that Scripture condemns and warns against throughout: salvation dependent upon the sinner! divine grace dependent upon the will and work of man!


It makes absolutely no difference that those who teach this covenant doctrine deny that the “condition” is meritorious. Between the meritorious conditions of Roman Catholic theology and the non-meritorious conditions of the covenant theology of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), the Canadian Reformed Churches, Norman Shepherd, and the men of the “federal vision,” there is no essential difference: both make the grace of God in Jesus Christ dependent upon the sinner. And both make the grace of God dependent upon the sinner *for the same reason*: they refuse to confess that grace has its source in, and is determined by, that is, de-

pends upon, God’s eternal decree of unconditional election.

Scripture never teaches that grace, union with Christ, justification, and salvation *depend upon* faith. It teaches that grace and salvation are *by means of* faith, or *out of* faith, inasmuch as faith unites the elect sinner with Christ. “Therefore it [covenant salvation] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed” (Rom. 4:16).

The conditional covenant doctrine of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) and the Canadian Reformed Churches is, in principle, a denial of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace, as defended by Dordt, with specific reference to salvation in the covenant. The men of the “federal [covenant] vision” are only developing the doctrine of a conditional covenant, as indeed they themselves openly acknowledge. This development is the open denial of justification by faith alone and, with this fundamental truth, all of the “five points of Calvinism” confessed by Dordt. I demonstrate this in my book, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (RFPA, 2005).

I urge you, all others who may be interested in this vitally important issue of the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant of grace, and the entire community of Presbyterian and Reformed churches (now being tested by the “federal vision” concerning their love of the gospel of grace) to read the Protestant Reformed Churches’ decision on the issue, already some fifty years ago: a “Declaration of Principles.” The “Declaration” is found in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).

—Prof. David J. Engelsma 

# Star


A Star shall come. Not from Hollywood or Wall St., Harvard or Princeton, the NBA or NFL, Republicans or Democrats, not the USA. A Star shall come out of Jacob (Num. 24:17). He does not come to boost ratings with song and dance routines, to sell tickets with RBIs or dunks, to create fortunes, lower taxes, bring social justice, institute affordable health care, or even put a chicken in every pot. He comes to save—from sin. He comes to save the world. Jesus is that bright and morning Star (Rev. 22:16). He has come, and as wise men from afar, we must worship (Matt. 2:2).

When we lift our eyes to observe the stars, God intends we worship. Not the stars themselves—always a temptation for fallen mankind (Deut. 4:19)—but, humbled by their beauty, majesty, and multitude, to worship the Creator. The appropriate response is not, “All Hail, Great Bang, Hubble, or Hawking,” but, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:3). God made the stars. Not simply massive spheres of fiery plasma, they are His creatures. Their home is the heavens (Gen. 1:16). He formed them, the sun to rule the day and stars like those of Pleiades and Orion for night; He set the sun in its course and gave ordinances for the stars (Amos 5:8; Jer. 31:35). They are divine artistry—with the fingers used to measure His canvas, He paints with glorious light (Ps. 8:4; Is. 40:12). How appropriate to remember our Creator in youth, while the stars be not darkened (Eccl. 12:2). God who dwells above the stars, before whom the stars are not pure, who even seals and makes them dark—this God we must worship (Job. 25:5, 9:7, 22:12).

The stars are among the Lord’s hosts, which He directs to serve His purpose with man. He ordained that they divide day from night, and be for seasons (Gen. 1:14). They mark the onset of evening, remind us day will dawn, and are beacons for travelers (Neh. 4:21; Job 3:9; Acts 27:20). He even enlists them at times to destroy the enemy (Judges 5:20). They remind us of His mercy (Ps. 136:9). They praise their Maker too (Ps. 148:3). Fitting, then, that stars are also signs representing other of the Lord’s hosts, the rational-moral min-

isters that do His good pleasure (Ps. 103:21). They represent angels, that excel in strength, hearken unto His Word, and from their heavenly home sing together and shout for joy (Ps. 103:21; Job 38:7). They represent ministers who preach the glorious gospel in Jesus’ church (Rev. 1:20). They represent the elect, who, believing on Jesus, radiate His perfection, obey Him, and in the resurrection will differ from one another in glory like stars (I Cor. 15:41). They are the innumerable host that sprang from Abraham, and him as good as dead (Heb. 11:12). Yet our Lord calls each by name and counts these stars above (Ps. 147:4).

The wicked stargaze (Is. 47:13). Rejecting the Creator, they scour the galaxies for the origin of the universe. Superstitious, they use the course of the stars to chart their fortunes. Ignorant of the Lord of glory, they scan TV, stage, university, and arenas for stars radiating the lust of flesh and pride of life—and worship (Amos 5:26). They are children of their father, Lucifer, who would be like God and exalt his throne above the stars (Is. 14:13). He is fallen, cast into the earth, and taking a third part of the stars with him. Black holes they are, who now toil to pull the world with them into the black abyss of darkness forever (Rev. 12:4; Jude 1:13).

How appropriate that the Lord of glory will punish this evil using of His obedient stars (Is. 13:10-11)! Even as the stars announced His birth, signs among the stars will mark His return (Matt. 2:2; Luke 21:25). One shall poison the waters; others shall not give their light (Rev. 8:10; Joel 2:10). And in that notable day, when these signs are no longer needed because the reality—the Angel, Minister, and Elect of God—has come, the Lord shall shake the powers of heaven so the stars fall, and then roll up His canvas as a scroll (Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12-14; Matt. 24:29). But the church shall not fall. When the new day dawns and that Daystar arise in our hearts, they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the stars forever (II Pet. 1:19; Dan. 12:3). Glorious in the image of God through Jesus Christ, she is clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev. 12:1). And she worships—that bright and morning Star (Rev. 22:16). Behold the Star out of Jacob! Though the world be troubled, rejoice with exceeding great joy. 

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# Working Towards an Indigenous Church (1)

## What is an indigenous church

**I**n the history of missions, there has been tension in the Reformed churches as to the proper perspective of what a mission church, established in a foreign land, ought to be.

Years ago, when the Dutch government was heavily involved in the colonization of the world, the Reformed churches of the Netherlands combined colonization with mission outreach. This took place through the Dutch East India Company. Let me use Malacca, Malaysia as an example. The French controlled Malacca and, with it, its wealth of palm oil, spices, and whatever resources were there for the taking. Then the Dutch moved in and, through armed conflict, gained a toehold in Malaysia in Malacca. During this time of occupation, the Dutch East India Company controlled the harvesting and shipping of the natural resources. Part of their activity was religious: they realized there was a need to meet the spiritual requirements of the Dutchmen who were involved in this work. The Dutch built Christ Church in Malacca, with strictly Dutch architecture and Dutch-style pews, for the purpose of holding Dutch worship services for the merchants and laborers involved in the work in Malacca. The church in the Netherlands called and installed a Dutch preacher in this church.

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We could not find a record of any effort to reach out to the Malaysian people of Malacca. In fact, you can see even today how they existed. They built a literal fortress to keep out any intruders, whether foreign or domestic. They lived in a secure compound. This kept them safe long enough to gain their money by merchandise—but only until the British came along and blew their fortress to pieces with their long-range guns.

When we researched this some years ago, it struck us that this is considered mission work in the history of the Dutch churches. In fairness to the Dutch, there were some countries where they did put forth effort to reach out to the locals, and in some instances they were successful. For the most part, however, the church they organized in the foreign land was a transplant from the home church. The locals had to learn the Dutch language if they were to worship there, they had to learn to sing Dutch Psalms, they had to conform to the Dutch ways. Later, things changed, and the mission work became more focused on making the church reflect the local society. An example of this is the influence of the Dutch in Indonesia.

This mission activity by the church of the past is called the “colonization of the church.” It generally was integrated into the efforts of their own government, through independent societies or companies such as the Dutch East India Company, to colonize other peoples and absorb them into the territory of their own government.

These governments would set up administrative councils to rule these people and return the benefit, especially financial, to themselves. It was quite natural for the church to take advantage of such an opportunity to gain entrance, enjoy security, and advance the gospel in these foreign countries. History shows, however, that precious little consideration was given to the local people as to the function and formation of the church. They usually formed clones of the mother church in these foreign lands. In the long run this caused all sorts of problems in the churches.

One thing in particular that caused serious problems in such a colonial setting was that the foreign church became completely dependent upon the sending church for everything. Foreign missionaries assumed all leadership roles. Little or no effort was expended to train local pastors. Eventually, when the need for local men became apparent, they learned that the local men could be better pastors and were better able to do mission outreach in their own country. A power struggle developed between the missionary and the locals. Eventually the local men were paid with foreign money just as the missionary. This tempted the village church planters to focus on money and the things it could buy. Dependency upon foreign funds developed, and the incentive for sacrificial-giving ended.

During the post-colonial period of history, the churches began to rethink mission work. Some of the

churches did not go along with this practice to begin with, and they offered criticism. The world was brought about national independence throughout Europe and Asia. For the most part, colonialism failed, its days were numbered, the world entered into a new era of international recognition of foreign powers and the legitimacy of national independence and individual rights. International trade, enhanced by economic prosperity, opened the door to developing countries.

This fresh "spirit of the age" generated in the church the idea of working for an indigenous church in mission outreach. By stating it this way, we do not intimate that it was some worldly influence on the church that caused her to change her objective in missions. Rather, the fresh spirit enabled the leaders of the church to study the Word of God without the prejudice of the cultural blinders of colonialism. Through this searching of Scripture they concluded that the goal of missions ought to be an indigenous church.

What is an indigenous church?

For the etymology of the word, we turn to the dictionary and learn that its roots are in Latin, *indigenus*, which means native, born in a country. In general, when we speak of an indigenous church we mean a church that takes on the character of its own people and country. To use another term, it is a church that is culturally sensitive: it reflects the local language and takes into consideration the thinking and manners of the local people. It allows these people to learn leadership roles and to assume those roles in both the teaching and government of the local church.

One of the pioneers in promoting an indigenous church was John L. Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary laboring in China during the latter part of the nineteenth century. During these years he saw the sad consequences of churches practicing

missions at the expense of the involvement of the local people. Especially he saw that when foreign money was used to pay the village church planters, it spoiled everything. It made the local workers discontented with what they had, and it made them lazy. In 1890 Nevius was invited to join seven young missionaries working in Korea. During the first two weeks of his labor there he lectured to them about his principles concerning how to labor for an indigenous church. These lectures set forth in seed-form the three self-help ideas of an indigenous church: self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The young missionaries in Korea, assisted by this experienced man of God, went to work, and, as they say, the rest is history. The strength of the Presbyterian Church in Korea today is a testimony of God's blessing on those long-ago labors.

One thing that is often overlooked in the pioneering work of Nevius is that he not only emphasized the wrongness of paying local workers, but he also insisted that, in place of money, the emphasis must fall upon the need spiritually to excite and enhance the duty and ability of every member of the mission to engage in outreach.

In the early history of the Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity spread chiefly through the voluntary zeal of ordinary church members and the work of the Apostles consisted mainly in superintending and organizing the companies of Christians thus gathered. Their zeal was so great that persecution could not repress, but only intensified it. If there is not that zeal and effort in the Church at home, it is much to be deplored. Perhaps the want of it is due in a great measure to a growing habit of leaving work for Christ to be done by those who are paid for it. Where such an idea prevails, whether at home or on missionary ground, it tends to paralyze the power of the Church for good

(*Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, p. 25).

Nevius wrote up a manual, which he placed in the hands of every inquirer. One of the chapters of that manual is entitled, "The Duty of Every Christian to make known the Gospel to Others."

About the same time, another missionary laboring in China developed similar principles. Roland Allen was there as an Anglican missionary from 1895-1903. After this experience, he wrote on missionary principles, a work that did not come to public attention until about 1927, when he published his first edition of *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* These principles were not seriously considered by the church until after his death in 1947. The second edition, in 1962, gained the attention it deserved. The strength of his book is the careful treatment of the New Testament as it relates to missions. He was still of the mindset that considered it mandatory that missionary methods be rooted in the Word of God. This can be done in two ways: by applying biblical principles, or by following the practices of Paul and others as recorded in Scripture. In his book, Allen connects the goal of an indigenous church with that of the work of the great missionary Paul. The work of Paul was under the direct guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is not man-generated, but divinely ordained.

There are many authors who address the subject of the indigenous church. We want to include one more man of God who wrote about missions from a Reformed perspective. He is J.H. Bavinck. He lived during this same period of time, 1895-1964. He served as missionary from the Dutch churches to Indonesia and later taught missions in a Reformed theological school in the Netherlands. His book, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, is a more detailed and more mature treatment of missions, includ-

ing the issues of self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. The burden of his writing is to expose the error of mission work being done by societies and independent organizations. Missions is the work of the exalted Christ through His church. This is important because the goal of missions must be set by Christ through His Word. It follows from this that those engaged in this work can then enjoy and be blessed by the Sending Christ.

In conclusion, we ought to consider a moment that it is important in our mission labors that we have a goal. What kind of church are we setting out to establish in a foreign country? Are we going to repeat the mistakes of history and focus on a colonial type of mission, or are we going to learn from the

past and concentrate on an indigenous church? Only with a clear perception of what the church ought to be can we include the steps that are necessary to achieve this goal. This is homework that the calling church and the foreign mission committee have to do.

This was brought home to me some years ago when we engaged in animated discussion with missionaries who were also teaching third-world pastors in Yangon, Myanmar. We were covering some aspects of the three self-help concepts of Nevius. They obviously had quite a bit more experience in field work than I did. A point that one brother made stuck with me. He said, "If I am asked to come to Myanmar to assist a church in

teaching their pastors, I address two questions to them. What is your goal, and what steps do you propose to attain it? If they have no clear idea of what they envision the church to be, or of what their ministry should work toward, I am wasting my time trying to help." That gave me pause.

The goal has to be the salvation of the lost according to God's sovereign purpose; the establishing of a local church that reflects the kind of church Christ describes in the Bible; and through this labor bringing glory to God and to Christ, the King of the church.

In this endeavor, an indigenous church plays a key role.

In future articles we hope to explore this in a bit more depth.



*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. Steven Key*

## The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (6)

**W**e have seen that the Lord's Supper is a blessed ordinance established by Christ for His church, by which our salvation is signified and sealed to us through faith as we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ our Savior.

By this means of grace we are brought into the fellowship of God's covenant life, to sit at feast with Him in Christ Jesus. In partaking of the bread and wine of the Lord's table, we partake of a spiritual feast, eating not the physical body and blood of Christ, but

nonetheless partaking of His body and blood *spiritually*, with the mouth of faith.

Having seen the error in Roman Catholic teaching concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist as they refer to it, we need yet to give attention to that which Rome connects inseparably to the sacrament, namely, the Mass.

### **Evaluation of the Roman Catholic Mass**

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 30, Q & A 80, gives a careful evaluation of the Mass. It reads this way:

Q. 80. What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the popish Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper testifies to

us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ, who according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven, at the right hand of God His Father, and will there be worshiped by us—but the Mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them; so that the Mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.

This eightieth question and an-

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swer was not in the first edition of the Heidelberg Catechism.

It was not until the third edition that it was inserted in the complete form as we have it. That was not a long time after the first edition—less than two years. But it was an addition to the original Catechism—the only addition, I might add.

The reason is easily explained from the developments of church history.

In the years following the break with Roman Catholicism by the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church held a Council meeting in Trent, a city in northern Italy. That Council of Trent began in December of 1545 and, with several interruptions, was not complete until December of 1563.

From a doctrinal point of view it remains the most important Council in the history of Roman Catholicism, and clearly fixed her distinctive doctrine and practice over against the Protestant churches. The doctrinal decisions of the Council were divided into *decrees*, which contain the positive statement of Romish doctrinal positions, and brief *canons*, which condemn the dissenting Protestant doctrines with a sharp *anathema*, i.e., let them be accursed.

The doctrines of Rome adopted by the Council of Trent have not changed at all. There have been many changes in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the centuries and especially in recent decades. But Rome's doctrinal positions have not changed at all, and there have been no concessions whatsoever to Protestant Christianity. The recent movement toward ecumenical talks and concessions has involved concession solely on the part of an apostatizing Protestantism.

The Council of Trent stated Romish doctrine with clarity and precision. There is no mistaking where she stands.

The Council was concluded in December 1563, a little more than

a year after the Heidelberg Catechism was first written. Upon seeing the decisions of Trent, Elector Frederick III of the German Palatinate, who had commissioned the writing of the Heidelberg Catechism by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, instructed that an article be written and inserted as a solemn protest against the idolatry of Rome as seen in their doctrine of the Mass. That is why Article 80 is included as it is, written by the same authors, Ursinus and Olevianus, and later adopted with the entire Catechism by most of the Reformed churches as their official confessional stand.

The Lord's Supper, contrary to the Roman Catholic Mass, lays hold of the one finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Reformed faith, true biblical Christianity, must object strenuously to the Mass of Roman Catholicism.

When you understand that "the Mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them," then you can see that the following language of the Catechism is none too severe, when it says, "that the Mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry." Strong language, to be sure; but true nonetheless. Let us consider it.

### A Repeated Sacrifice

In the first place, the Mass is a denial of the one *finished* sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

At the basis of this whole Romish conception of the Lord's Supper and the Mass lies their error of transubstantiation, which we considered earlier. According to their conception, at the word of the priest in consecrating the elements, the signs of bread and wine are

changed into the *physical* body and blood of Christ. Therefore *Christ* is there on the altar, again physically, to be offered as a sacrifice for sins.

That sacrifice, according to Rome, is essential unto salvation. So essential is it, that Rome has priests. That is why Rome speaks not of the communion *table*, as do we. They have no concept of the table of the Lord as the table of the *covenant*. But Rome speaks of the *altar*. Rome calls its people to the *altar*. And through the church, that is, through the priest, Christ is offered even continually as a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

That is necessary, according to Rome. One of the purposes for which the Mass is offered is "to satisfy the justice of God for the sins committed against Him."<sup>1</sup>

Now, do not be deceived by them.

If you were to ask a member of the Romish clergy, "Do you believe that Christ alone saves His people," he will say, "Sure; of course." If you were to ask him, "Do you believe that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is sufficient for the atonement of sins," he will answer, "We most certainly do."

That is why you have to listen to the complete explanation that they give. They say and teach emphatically, even in their official catechisms, that unless the sacrifice of Christ is repeatedly offered in the Mass, the atonement of Christ cannot be applied to the sinner. That which Christ merited on the cross is applied only through the Mass. "On the cross Christ gained merit and satisfied for us, while in the Mass He applies to us the merits and satisfaction of His death on the cross."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, for the people of God, even for the dead, to receive the forgiveness of sins, it is necessary that the priest repeatedly offer Christ in an unbloody sacrifice in the Mass. There only do you have the application of what Christ gained for His people on Calvary.

Only through the Mass can you have the forgiveness of sins.

The Mass is said for the living and for the dead, for those who come to the altar to receive the host, and for those that are in purgatory.

That is the repeated sacrifice of Christ offered in Roman Catholicism.

### **An Accursed Idolatry!**

In the second place, the Mass is called by our Heidelberg Catechism “an accursed idolatry.” That is strong language indeed.

The Roman Catholic Church will most ardently, even angrily, deny this.

They will not deny that they worship the host, the elements of the sacrament. That is surely a matter of their doctrine. They teach that “Christ gives us His own body and blood in the Holy Eucharist...to remain ever on our altars as the proof of His love for us, and to be worshiped by us.”<sup>3</sup>

But, remember, to them they are worshiping *Christ* in those things. They will insist that they are not idolaters. After all, they know that God’s law forbids all idolatry.

If you grant that in the words of consecration the elements are changed—not spiritually, but *physically* into the body and blood of Christ—if you grant that, then you have *Christ*, the physical Christ, before you on the altar. Then of course you may worship Him.

That is why, until Roman Catholics have seen the error of transubstantiation, they cannot possibly see their idolatry.

But idolatry is exactly what it is. For they worship not Christ, but the signs.

That is evident even from Old Testament history.

When Moses was in the Mount, receiving from the hand of God the two tables of the law, the people were at the base of the Mount worshipping the golden calf that Aaron had made. The people of Israel

and Aaron certainly did not mean to worship that golden calf as such. Of course not. They were not so foolish. They looked upon that golden calf as the very *embodiment of God*, the image or representation of Jehovah. That is evident. For they said, “Behold thy God, which has delivered you out of the land of Egypt.”

That is exactly what the priest does when he offers Christ on the altar. “Behold the Christ that delivered you from your sin.” That is the same thing. And that is an accursed idolatry.

We must understand these things, not that we might gloat over against those who are in the bondage of Roman Catholicism. We have nothing about which to boast. If anything, we ought to be deeply humbled by the place God has given us in His church, which is established not upon tradition but upon the teachings of His Holy Scriptures.

But we *must* understand the errors of Roman Catholicism. Their errors in many ways are very attractive. We must not imagine that we are through dealing with Rome. The Roman Catholic Church is still the biggest and most powerful church in what is called Christendom. When it comes to that which is called Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church is still by far the largest church in the world today. But its attraction is to be found exactly in its carnality.

It is so easy to make religion something merely outward. That is exactly what we want by nature, i.e., according to our sinful nature. It is so easy to eat bread and drink wine and to have the impression that by eating and drinking we are saved. That is easy. It is easy to think that just by coming to church occasionally and observing some outward elements of religion, all is well. That is easy. And so there are multitudes who want just such an easy religion. If only we can go to heaven someday by doing a few outwardly religious things now—

that is a good insurance policy for the everlasting state, is it not?

Rome presents an easy religion. It really is. It is a religion of outward observances. So long as one is baptized, so long as he does not commit any gross sins, mortal sins, so long as he attends the Mass occasionally and partakes of the bread and wine of the Eucharist, grace is received.

There is an appeal in such a religion—to us too. If we can set aside the call to repentance and faith, if we can cast off the truth of Scripture for a religion of mere outward observances—especially if our whole family is involved in the same religion—that is a nice insurance policy for heaven. The trouble is, it is idolatry. It is cursed by God.

### **Christ’s Finished Sacrifice**

Over against the error of Rome, the authoritative Scriptures teach that Christ’s sacrifice was once offered and completely accomplished its purpose. Faith in Christ makes us partakers of that one finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As the writer to the Hebrews explains very explicitly in Hebrews 9, Christ does not offer Himself often, “as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” He appeared to put away sin by offering Himself *once*. And as if the truth could stand emphasis, the inspired writer adds in verse 28: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for

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1. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition of the Baltimore Catechism* (Paterson, New Jersey, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1941 and 1949), Lesson 27, p. 285.


2. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

3. *Ibid.*, Lesson 26, pp. 280-281.

him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

In Hebrews 7 Christ is pointed to as the fulfillment of the priesthood. There is no priesthood any longer, except the priesthood of all

believers, all who are *in* Christ. Hebrews 7:26, 27: "For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the

heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." 

## News from Iowa

# Calvary Protestant Reformed Church

**I**t is with great joy and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father that we can report the birth of a daughter congregation. The organizational worship service of Calvary Protestant Reformed Church was held on Thursday evening, October 11, 2007, at the Hull PRC. Pastor Steven Key chose Ephesians 2:19-22 for his text that evening, and preached under the theme "God's Holy Temple." An offering was taken for the Calvary Protestant Reformed benevolent fund.

After the message the actual organization of the new congregation took place. The charter members of Calvary PRC consisted of 43 families and 7 individuals. Transferal of membership to Calvary PRC included 91 confessing members and 89 baptized members, with one infant who had yet to be baptized, for a total of 181 souls.

The meeting continued with the business part of the organization led by Pastor Key. Alvin Bylsma, Glenn Kooima, and Edwin Westra were elected as elders. Wayne DeJong and John Keizer were elected as deacons. These men were installed into their respective offices and signed the Formula of Subscription. The evening concluded with the closing doxology and benediction, followed by refreshments in the fellowship hall.

The formation of a daughter congregation started in January of

2005 when the council of the Hull PRC appointed a committee to look into the needs and desires for a daughter congregation in our area. The Hull PRC was becoming overcrowded, and the elders had been hearing concerns during family visitation about the need for a daughter church. Throughout the year of 2005 the Hull PRC continued to see a steady growth in their membership to 142 families and a total membership of 593 souls.

After a survey of the congregation was taken, it became apparent that there was sufficient interest to take the next steps in forming a daughter congregation. An informational meeting was planned during the March 2006 council meeting. The meeting was set for June 26, 2006, to confirm sincere interest in the project and to share the procedures in organizing a church. A sign-up sheet for potential members was made available to the congregation, and by October contained 39 signatures. Leon Uittenboogaard (chairman), Travis Groeneweg, George Hoekstra, Lyle VanRaven-swaay, Marv Van DenTop, and Edwin Westra were appointed to work

as a Steering Committee for the project. The Steering Committee met for the first time on November 21, 2006. They presented to the council a proposed timeline for the formation of the daughter church and budget information.

After receiving approval from the Hull council, the group that would later become Calvary PRC began meeting for a Bible Study on January 7, 2007. They began holding separate worship services on March 4, 2007, at the Boyden-Hull Community School Auditorium in Hull. On June 4, 2007, they received official approval from the council of the Hull PRC to form their own congregation. A formal request for organization, signed by 38 families and 9 individuals, was sent to Classis West, and permission to form Calvary Protestant Re-




*Newly-elected officebearers:  
l. to r.: John Keizer, Wayne DeJong,  
Edwin Westra, Glenn Kooima, Alvin Bylsma*

formed Church was given from Classis West on September 5, 2007.

We want to express our appreciation publicly to the ministers who have so willingly helped us out with pulpit supply during our first worship services as a daughter church and since our organization. We would also like to express

our appreciation to Pastor Key for his guidance and prayers offered on our behalf, and for his willingness to continue to give our youth catechism instruction until the Lord provides us with our own minister. We would also like to thank our mother church, the Hull PRC, for their help and encouragement

during our time of organization, for their financial support, and for their continued prayers on our behalf. Above all, we give thanks and praise to our covenant God for His faithfulness to us and for His providential care.

Calvary PRC Council  
Alvin Bylsma, Clerk 

*When Thou Sittest in Thine House*

*Mrs. Margaret Laning*

## Wifely Submission: Truly Liberating

**S**ome time ago, I attended a fiftieth wedding anniversary dinner celebration. There were many friends and family gathered in attendance to celebrate this occasion. Prayers, toasts, singing, and speeches all made for a memorable evening. One speech, in particular, recurs in my mind. This was during a lighthearted question-and-answer period, with the questions directed to the honored couple. Their son-in-law came with them to the microphone with written questions. Some were directed to the woman, and some to her husband. One question for the husband was, "What do you think has been the secret to your fifty years of marital success?" Without missing a beat, the husband responded, "Do what your wife tells you to do!" This, of course, brought uproarious laughter and even clapping. It was humorous to those who knew the couple, because they thought it somewhat accurately described their marriage. Maybe they were guiltily laughing at themselves, too. Like the old saying goes, there are three things the average young woman thinks about on her wedding day: the aisle (as in walking

down the aisle), the altar, and him (her beloved groom). But, actually, it is "I'll alter him!" When we hear these jokes we know they are not truly funny, for beneath their exterior is a story of untold misery wreaking havoc upon entire families.

Now, on the one hand, the Scriptures do not give license for husbands to be tyrants or to be abusive toward their wives. Rather, they are admonished to love them. There are many decisions the head of the household can trust his wife to make. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil" (Prov. 31:11).

That being said, many a wife rejects the notion of submitting to her husband and convinces herself she knows a better way for a happy marriage and family. She finds her joy dependent on how successful she is at changing her husband. Is it not the height of foolishness and pride to call God a liar? Is not that what happens when we justify ourselves as we walk in contradiction to His law? That is what happens when a wife refuses to submit to her husband. That is what happens when a husband gives away his headship in order to preserve peace. But God will not be mocked. When husbands and wives do not honor the Scriptures,

the very foundation of the home, church, and even civilization will surely crumble, leading to utter desolation.

God's infallible Word teaches us how to build a strong, loving home, and how to avoid tearing it down. May we be builders "like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:10). In God's inscrutably perfect plan for families, He commands wives to submit to their husbands in all things lawful. Ephesians 5:22 says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." The word "sub" in submission means "under." So the word means to put yourself under someone else's authority. This pleases the Lord, for it is a beautiful picture of the church submitting to her Bridegroom, Christ. Ephesians 5:23 goes on to say, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body."

The fact is, without the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, it is impossible to be submissive. Only by His Spirit do we have the ability and proper motivation to do this. A true love for God and our spouse is the motive behind our submission. Love is paramount! In fact, if a woman does not obey her husband out of love, she is not truly submitting to him. We must

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pray for a loving heart. We must pray for stronger faith to give ourselves up more to our husbands. The prayer in our Lord's Supper Form speaks beautifully of this truth. Although it is speaking of the marriage of Christ and His church, we can apply it to our marriages also. In this prayer, we ask the Lord "to work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, that we may daily more and more with true confidence give ourselves up unto Thy Son Jesus Christ." Just as a church on earth prays for grace to give herself up more to her heavenly Husband, so we as wives should pray for this regarding our husbands on earth.

A godly woman who is given wisdom will recognize the God-given office her husband holds. She will find that in the way of lovingly submitting to her husband, she receives many wonderful blessings from the Lord. Not that she submits in order to merit something with God. Rather, it is with a thankful heart that she does this by the grace of God. The following is a list of just three of many blessings a woman receives when she is truly submissive to her husband.

1. A submissive wife teaches her children the principle of submission. When children see her example, they will, in turn, recognize the importance of obeying the fifth commandment, by honoring those in positions of authority. Our daughters, by God's grace, will grow up to be God-fearing, submissive wives, like their mothers. There are many ways in which a wife and mother can show her children that she honors her husband: find opportunities with the children to talk about how godly their father is; spend time explaining the importance of his office as head of the home; pray together for him; bring up examples of how he denies himself for the sake of the family and church; talk about the biblical truths he holds dear; resist the temptation to put him down, especially in front of the children, since this will only undermine his author-


ity in their eyes. Even a wife with an unbelieving husband can speak positively of her spouse, pointing out his God-given position of authority in the home and how he diligently works to provide for the family. In this way the children will also see how God causes their father's love for their mother to grow when he sees his wife's submissiveness.

2. A submissive wife is beautiful to her husband. This is a rare beauty our children learn to appreciate by our example. I Peter 3:4 describes what is truly beautiful in a woman, "even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Sarah is given as one of the outstanding examples of such women. "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well..." (I Pet. 3:6). This is a New Testament commentary on an event recorded in the Old Testament. That event was God's telling Abraham that Sarah would have a son, and Sarah's response to that news when she heard it. In Genesis 18:12 we read, "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" This is a significant passage, for it shows Sarah esteeming her husband *inwardly*. She called him "lord" silently to herself. Her submission was inward, not a mere outward show. Although wives today are not required outwardly to call their husbands "lord," we are to esteem our spouse highly inwardly, mindful of his honored headship. The more a wife esteems her husband inwardly, the more her husband will be attracted to her, and love her. This leads to a beautiful upward spiral in marriage. The more the wife submits, the more the husband is attracted to her and loves her. And the more her husband loves her, the more she desires to submit to him.

The opposite happens when a wife does not submit inwardly. Her husband will sense she looks down upon him, and therefore he

will not feel as close to her. If this keeps up, the wife will become angry with her husband's withdrawn manner. Then the husband will become angry, because the wife does not show him honor as she ought. Downward plunges this bitter spiral in marriage, with worse sins committed as time goes on, consequently leading the children to stumble as well. Certainly we must never allow this to happen. In such a situation a godly wife will not insist that her spouse show love and forgiveness to her first. Love does not behave this way, for Christ loved us when we were not at all lovable, nor beautiful.

3. A submissive wife finds life. Matthew 10:35 says, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." This is happiness. When we stop living for ourselves and rather live for Christ by giving ourselves to our husbands, how truly liberating this is. It is selfishness that is bondage. Both Hannah and Mary sing an inspired song in the Scriptures that has a parallel idea to this. These women humbly praised God for exalting those who are of low degree (I Sam. 2:7, 8; Luke 1:52). This is a precious promise of the Lord to all believers who humble themselves in this life. As we think of the life of Jesus during His earthly sojourn, this promise was His own. We can sing with confidence in the Lord, that "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (I Sam. 2:8). If we exalt ourselves and insist on our own way, God will bring us down. If we humble ourselves and submit to our husbands, God will raise us up.

When we as wives submit to our husbands, and thus to God, our heavenly Husband will grant us joy. We are to teach this to our children, so that they, too, will believe and confess that wifely submission is honoring to the Lord and good for all His people. 

# Just So Stories

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

I Chronicles 12:31

**R**udyard Kipling was a great storyteller. Perusal of a few of the stories he wrote for his "Best Beloved" daughter Josephine in the collection *Just So Stories* will illustrate the point.

One of the classics in that collection of stories is "The Elephant's Child." The elephant's child was full of what Kipling calls "satiableness." As a consequence the elephant's child asks "a fine new question that he had never asked before. He asked, 'What does the Crocodile have for dinner?'" What response did he receive? No answer to his question was forthcoming, just spankings. He related his sad experience to the Kolokolo Bird, "My father has spanked me, and my mother has spanked me; all my aunts and uncles have spanked me for my 'satiableness'; and still I want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner!" The Kolokolo Bird, with a "mournful cry," had a suggestion for the elephant's child: "Go to the banks of the great gray-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, and find out." So that is exactly what the elephant's child

did. His expedition to the Limpopo River would have far-reaching (no pun intended) consequences for himself and all his elephant relatives, and all this with some timely help from the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, of course. (If this has piqued *your* "satiableness," by all means go to your local library or the Internet for "the rest of the story.")

Interestingly, what for Kipling in his day were "just so stories" would in today's world sometimes qualify as valid arguments in debate. Today's "argument/stories" may not be quite as fantastic as those of Kipling, but they are stories nonetheless. And often those who would question the legitimacy of using such stories as arguments are repeatedly chastised like the elephant's child. This we will try to demonstrate in this article. But first let's go to the root of the problem.

## Postmodern thought

That stories would qualify as arguments in today's world is a consequence of the postmodern thinking that has permeated our age. Postmodern ideas were greatly advanced during the counterculture movement of the 1960s. At that time many young people, especially those on the college campuses under the influence of their liberal professors, began to question the fruits of Western society and especially the authority that underpinned Western society. They sought instead a way of life free of moral and rational restraint. Thus it was that the peace symbol and the slogan "free love" were much bandied about as represen-

tative of the thinking behind the movement.

Though difficult to define, what postmodernism stands for has been expressed ably by Gene Edward Veith Jr., who explains that, according to postmodernism,

Truth is relative, dependent on the individual's experience and culture. Morality is also relative, a function of the individual's choices and prevailing cultural norms.

If truth is relative, one idea is as good as another. In the absence of any reliable means of arriving at truth—with both revelation and reason discredited—the only criterion for adopting a particular idea, if only provisionally, is desire. Reason is replaced by the pleasure-principle. Instead of people saying they agree or disagree with a proposition, we hear how much they "like" or "dislike" a particular idea. People pick and choose what they enjoy from a wide range of theories and religions, dependent solely on their personal preferences and choices. The intellect is replaced by the will. Moral issues are similarly relativized. "You have to decide what's right for you," we are told on the talk shows. "What's right for one person might not be right for someone else." "Who are we to judge?" Moral issues are not seen in terms of absolute transcendent standards as in the Bible, nor in terms of what is good for society as a whole, as in modernism. What makes an action moral or immoral is whether or not the person made a choice.

In a relativistic climate, the only remaining virtue is tolerance. The only philosophies that are wrong are those that believe in truth; the only sinners are those

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who still believe there is such a thing as sin.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly why postmodernism is such an ardent foe of Christianity. Not only does the postmodernist reject the truth-claims of the Christian, in the process of the discussion he elevates stories (which often are simply appeals to the emotions) to the status of serious arguments: stories which in his view carry as much or even more weight than well-reasoned arguments. Some examples will help to demonstrate this.

### How it works in the world

E.J. Dionne spans President Bush for his veto of Congress' \$35 billion expansion of the children's health care program known as SCHIP. In opposition to the veto of SCHIP, Dionne's "just so story" relates:

A car crash in December 2004 left two of Halsey and Bonnie Frost's children comatose, Graeme with a brain stem injury and Gemma, his sister, with a cranial fracture.

The kids were treated, thanks to SCHIP. The Frosts spoke out so the public would know that real people lie behind the acronym.

...The real issue here is whether uninsured families with earnings similar to the Frosts' need government help to buy health coverage. ...The answer is plainly yes.<sup>2</sup>

Long and hard as one may look in the article for *reasoned* arguments in support of expanding the SCHIP program—arguments concerning whether or not health care programs are the business of the federal government, how such a program can be financed, whether or not similar programs are working in other countries, etc.—none exist. Just stories...and spankings for being so uncaring of those in need!

It is the same story on the abortion issue. From day one it was stories and still is: stories about "back-alley abortions," stories

about the pregnant twelve year-old, stories about the woman who is pregnant as a result of rape, and stories about the deformed fetus that (not "who") will lead an impossibly difficult life if left to live. Ignored all the while is the elephant in the room. He is conveniently pushed into the closet, even though he is the most important character in the whole debate. The ignored elephant is the fetus itself and the answer to the question: "What is the unborn?" One would think there would be, at minimum, some "satiating curiosity" concerning an answer to this question, but alas...there appears to be none.

With the developments in science it is becoming easier and easier to answer that question correctly using well-reasoned—even scientific—arguments (see example in the *Standard Bearer*, Sept. 1, 2007 page 476). Yet what we continue to hear are "just so stories." And what we continue to feel with drumbeat consistency is the *swat...swat...swat...* of the stick because of a lack of compassion for all the victims...with the exception of the elephant, of course.

### How it works in the church

While many other examples could be cited of "just so stories" told by the world to support the "ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed" (Jude 15), what is more disconcerting is that the church has been infected with the same postmodern virus. It too has often resorted to stories—even when the Scriptures provide clear answers to the issues. A case in point is the women-in-special-offices-of-the-church issue. How very clear the Scriptures are on this issue (Acts 6:3-6, I Cor. 14:34-36, I Tim. 2:11-15). Yet the stories about the women in the churches that have all these gifts that are being wasted if they are not allowed to use them in the special offices often win the day. Ignored in the discussion are the many ways women can and do use their God-given gifts in

the churches to the edification of the body *without* violating the demands of Scripture. But to suggest the stories are not valid arguments will likely as not result in being spanked with the charge of being a "male chauvinist."

Similarly, the issue of divorce and remarriage has been decided by many denominations, in large part, on the basis of "just so stories" about the battered wife, the unfaithful husband, and a hundred other heart-wrenching scenarios of conflict within the marriage relationship. All of which may necessitate the direct involvement of the church, and even in some instances result in a biblical divorce (Matt. 19:9). However, the leap to approve *remarriage* in these cases, while the spouse is living, goes contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture (Matt. 19:4-9, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, Rom. 7:1-3, I Cor. 7:39) and is based primarily on stories that emit pity for the "innocent" party. Be prepared to bend over for your spanking if you dare be so uncaring and unsympathetic as to suggest that God does not approve of this. Story time is over, just the spankings remain.

Those issues (women in office and divorce and remarriage) have already been decided in most of the churches, but that of accepting homosexuals as members and/or officebearers in the churches is still up for discussion by some. Once again it is "just so stories" designed to elicit responses of pity that are presented to support it.

For a demonstration of this, look at the present battle being fought in the Christian Reformed Church over this issue. The one side identifies the problem:

...Homosexual lifestyles are being accepted and tolerated by some church people today out of their pity for gays and lesbians as people. Professing Christians are accepting the belief that homosexuality is of genetic origin when the Bible clearly states that a ho-

homosexual lifestyle is detestable to God (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13; Rom. 1:26-28, 32). Scripture teaches that God condemns the behavior and holds the person responsible for it. When we pity a sinner and thereby let him continue in his sin, it will become a snare to the church and to the Christian.<sup>3</sup>

The other side mostly tells stories, as illustrated by former *Banner* editor John Suk. He writes concerning a committee report on this issue to the 2002 CRC synod :

...The committee notes, however, that many gay people and even some Christian Reformed ministers, such as well-known author and retired Fuller theological seminary professor, Lewis Smedes, have a different point of view. Smedes argues that even though God intended for humans to be heterosexual, "God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Smedes here offers a story rather than an argument. He tells a story about what *he thinks* God prefers even though what God actually "prefers" (as clearly expressed in Scripture) is something quite different. That the committee of synod would use this story in its report is disappointing.

This issue is not yet finally decided in the CRC; however, the stories continue. And the stories are designed to condition the listener to be more accepting of the homosexual lifestyle. Consider the message of the play "Seven Passages," which was directed by Calvin College theatre professor Stephanie Sandberg. Concerning the storyline of the play the religion editor of *The Grand Rapids Press* writes,

The veteran actress gives a soliloquy about a mother who couldn't bear children, who is then blessed with a daughter, who turns out to be a lesbian.

Her sexuality rejected by her parents and prayed over by her church, the daughter leaves home and eventually kills herself. Soon after, her father dies of a heart attack.

Eventually, her mother realizes that she, too, is a lesbian. Her daughter's suicide note comes back to haunt her: "I feel like a body exposed in winter."<sup>5</sup>

In her comments about the play, the director remarked, "In compelling people to hear their stories (the stories of "gay Christians," ck), the play achieved exactly what it set out to do," which was to generate feelings of pity for the characters. In addition we are told, "The play pointedly questions traditional biblical interpretations commonly used to condemn gay relationships."<sup>6</sup>

Apparently the play promotes the idea that "just so stories" trump "traditional biblical interpretations." And if that is not bad enough, the play's cast intends to produce a DVD of the play, which local pastors desire to use to generate discussion in their churches. Thus their stories are intended to have a broader impact on the church's position with respect to this sinful activity.

#### Some considerations for modern-day Issachar

Considering how the present-day world and church use "just so stories" to promote their false ideas, modern-day Issachar will do well not only to recognize this postmodern method of debate for what it is, but also to *challenge* those using it to present real arguments—if they can—in defense of their positions.

Further, modern-day Issachar herself must exercise care not to resort to "just so stories." The fact of the matter is, God's people do experience sympathy and concern for those in these difficult circumstances. However, never may our sympathy for them give occasion to excuse or tolerate sin, difficult

as this may be at times. God's people do not need excuses for sin; they need to be shown the way of forgiveness.

In addition, it serves as a stern reminder of the importance of maintaining the truth of the infallibility of Scripture. More specifically, the Reformed truth concerning plenary inspiration needs to be reemphasized: the truth that the *entire* Bible is the inspired Word of God. Scripture alone—all of it—must serve as the foundation for debate on the issues of doctrine and life. If the Bible is merely a storybook (in whole, or in part), it carries no more authority than human "just so stories."

Modern-day Issachar lives in a postmodern world that sometimes makes little more sense than Kipling's fantastic, entertaining stories for children. Who would have ever "thunk" that the Devil's lie, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), would actually lead to this? While we should be careful not to get carried away by our "satiating curiosity," one cannot help but wonder how much longer the Lord will allow this nonsense to go on before He returns in judgment. In the meantime, like the elephant's child, Issachar can expect those merciless spankings!



1. Gene Edward Veith Jr., "Postmodern Times: Facing a World of New Challenges and Opportunities," *Modern Reformation* September/October 1995: 17-18.

2. E. J. Dionne, "Snarling pack of conservatives mangles SCHIP family," *The Grand Rapids Press* 13 October, 2007: A14.

3. Jan Groenendyk, "The Snare of Misdirected Pity (1)," *The Outlook* December, 2002: 5.

4. John Suk, "Our Agenda for Synod 2002 (2)," *The Banner* 3 June, 2002: 4.

5. Charles Honey, "Discussion on gay Christians starts here," *The Grand Rapids Press* 20 October, 2007: C1.

6. Honey: C3.

*In the Presence of Mine Enemies* is the title of a book relating the experiences of Christian missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham when kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf (bearer of the sword), a violent Muslim terrorist group operating in the southern Philippines. This horrendous ordeal, which began on May 27, 2001, finally ended after one year and eleven days with the death of Martin and a nurse and the gunshot wounding of his wife, Gracia. While this is shocking for many of us who live in the United States in relative peace and security and enjoying freedom of religion and assembly, for many Christians this is not the case. Are you aware of the constant persecution and ill treatment of many Christians globally? Here are several examples from various global areas.

On November 7, 2007 it was reported that in India a young Indian evangelist and shepherd, Vipin Mandloi, was shot and killed. On October 14, Vipin left his house to go to a nearby mountain to graze his goats and sheep near a Hindu temple. Three Hindu priests came and shot Vipin, angry that he had become a Christian. News sources claim that his decision to follow Christ prompted the priests to give him as a sacrifice to the goddess Kali. This same region has become notorious for crimes against Christians, including the gang rape of four nuns and the looting of their convent in 2001. Fifteen militants broke into the convent at 2 A.M., looted the facility, and later forced the four nuns to a nearby field and gang-raped them.

There is growing concern about attacks against Christians in several parts of India. In the state of Orissa, news emerged that on October 27, forty Hindu militants beat a Chris-

tian worker, Phiroj Lima, while he was praying for the sick in the hospital and distributing Christian tracts. Earlier, Hindu militants dragged four pastors to a Hindu temple on charges of "forced conversions." The pastors were released after twelve hours of beatings. Other pastors were threatened after Christians refused to give contributions and to participate in Hindu temple festivities.

Such persecution is happening not only in the rural areas but even in India's capital, New Delhi. Hindu militants disrupted a Christian meeting and manhandled the speaker on October 28. In Andhra Pradesh, local residents repeatedly forced Christians to eat meat offered to the Hindu goddess Durga. When pastor Bikku Lal and some of his church members refused, they were beaten.

In Iran, a Christian couple were punished by whipping for "apostasy" from Islam. Six officials believed to be of the feared religious police visited the home to carry out the punishment. Although the husband was indeed a former Muslim, he became a Christian many years ago. The wife was born into an Assyrian Christian family. The couple were among a group of Christians who were arrested while meeting for worship in a house in a town northwest of Tehran. This too is not an isolated case. But despite the dangers, Iranian Christians staying outside the country plan to return. The Iranian Church Netherlands said that it plans to train 4000 Iranian Christians who fled their country to return to Iran to preach the gospel. There are an estimated 40,000 Iranian exiles living in the Netherlands.

In Beijing, China, Zhou Heng is a Christian pastor and manager of a registered Christian bookstore, the Yayi Christian Book Room. He was arrested, beaten, and detained on August 3 for allegedly receiving three tons of Bibles from South Korean Churches. Zhou was forced to sleep on a concrete floor for the first

month of detainment, then put in a cell with fourteen other inmates who were directed by prison officers to beat him, in an attempt to make him testify against himself. After several imprisonments, he was released to his rented house, but was subjected several times to severe beatings that left him unconscious—by officers of the Public Security Bureau (PSB), one of China's main law enforcement agencies. Chinese authorities have also shut down a multimillion dollar branch of the Australia based Enoch Group because it allegedly promoted Christianity and hired Christian workers. High-ranking officials said that the central Chinese government was upset that the Enoch Group hired a large number of Chinese Christians. Local Christians there say that the latest raids are aimed at sending a strong warning signal to other foreign businesses in China owned by Christians. There are fears within the Communist Party that evangelical Christians will use the upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing to spread Christianity in the country.


In Jakarta, Indonesia, a court has sentenced forty-one Christian leaders to five years imprisonment on charges of blasphemy. These leaders, at a prayer gathering in December 2006 in East Java, openly prayed that Muslims "come to know Christ." Criticizing Islam, and especially evangelism, are sensitive issues in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. In June, three Indonesian women who were serving a prison sentence for including Muslim children in a church program in West Java were released under international pressure.

In Kuduna, Nigeria, Muslim extremists on October 12 beat to death a 24-year-old Christian, Henry Ogbaje, with wooden clubs. The following day, a young Christian man, Basil, was killed with a sword. This violence followed a

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Surprised we should not be. Did not Jesus warn: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved"(Matt. 10:22)? "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach

you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets" (Luke 6:22, 23). "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Pet. 2:21). "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you....Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (I Pet. 4:13-16).

us pray for our fellow Christians. And what shall we pray? Not that the Lord take away persecution, but rather that He give grace, so that our fellow saints remain strong in their faith and witness. May this lead us to pray for ourselves here in the States, that we may be bold in our witness and faith, that we may love Christ more than our lives or reputation among people. And as the evil days approach, and the kingdom of Antichrist appears, let us pray that we may be willing to fill up the sufferings of Christ, and rejoice that we are counted worthy. Yes, we stand in the presence of our enemies, Christ's enemies. May God give us grace to stand antithetically and boldly, confessing Christ and His righteousness. 

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

**R**ev. Steve Key, pastor of the Hull, IA PRC, accompanied by his wife, Nancy, left early Monday, October 29, for speaking engagements in Singapore and Penang, Malaysia. After meetings in Singapore, the Keys traveled to Penang, Malaysia. Rev. Key spoke twice on November 3. At their request his first speech was on "The Life of John Newton," and his second speech was on "John Newton and the Doctrine of Grace." Rev. Key also preached twice in Penang on November 4. On November 6 the Keys traveled back to Singapore where Rev. Key spoke at the Covenant ERCS Reformation Day Conference. The theme of this conference was, "The Relevance of the 16th Century Reformation for Today's Christian." From that main theme Rev. Key spoke twice on the Reformation as, "Restoring the Foundation for Healthy Church Life," and "Restoring the Foundation for Chris-

tian Piety." Rev. Key was also scheduled to speak for a youth retreat on Saturday, November 10, on the topic, "How Can the Second Generation Carry the Torch of the Reformation." On Sunday, November 11, Rev. Key preached twice for the Covenant ERCS congregation. Rev. and Nancy returned home late Tuesday, November 13.

Members of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland were busy in October and November sponsoring three Reformation lectures around their area. Their pastor, Rev. Angus Stewart, spoke October 26 at Portadown Minor Town Hall, November 2 at the Ballymena Protestant Hall, and November 9 in Limerick City. On all three evenings Rev. Stewart spoke on the theme, "Lessons from the Reformation for Today."

The Lynden, WA PRC also sponsored a Reformation Day Lecture on November 2. Their pastor, Rev. Ron Hanko, looked at questions related to the Reformation, and his speech, entitled "Church Reformation: Past and Present," answered the questions: 1) What is church reformation? 2) Is it needed today? and 3) What can we learn from the past?

The Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC invited their neighbors to a lively lecture entitled, "Soul-Food: You feed your body. You feed your mind. Who's feeding your soul?" This event was held in the Music Room at Kalamazoo Christian High School on November 16. The lecture was given by Kalamazoo's pastor, Rev. Audred Spriensma, with a question and answer period afterwards.

The ladies of the Edgerton, MN PRC hosted the annual Fall Combined Ladies League Meeting on October 23. Prof. Robert Decker spoke on "Ministering to Ministers."

December 15, 2007/Standard Bearer/143

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

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WI PRC called all interested members of their congregation to a meeting on November 12 for the purpose of giving information and answering questions about a proposed building addition. Randolph's consistory is proposing that they build a new sanctuary to the north of their existing sanctuary; and that they turn their current narthex and sanctuary into a much larger narthex. Plans also call for additional upstairs bathrooms and an upstairs nursery. The proposal, if approved, would also mean a complete renovation of the exterior of the current building to integrate it with the exterior of the proposed addition, and that Randolph expand their parking lot. This proposed addition would double Randolph's seating capacity. The proposed addition and parking lot expansion would mean that Randolph's current property is fully developed. Because this was only an informational meeting, no vote on the project was taken, and no debate or discussion of the merits of the proposal was permitted. Opportunity for all of that would come at the scheduled congregational meeting on December 10.

Members of the First PRC con-

gregation in Grand Rapids, MI enjoyed a Request Night Program Sunday evening, November 4. The program included a variety of numbers by people of all ages and some audience singing.

The Loveland, CO PRC participated in a Talent Night Program Friday evening, November 9. Any members with talent they were willing to share were encouraged to sign up. Others, who did not have a talent they wanted to exhibit, were encouraged to bring a pie. Personally, the "News" would add that anyone who can bake a pie has talent.


### Mission Activities

Rev. Allen Brummel was installed as Home Missionary in Sioux Falls, SD on November 8 in the Edgerton, MN PRC, with Rev. Dennis Lee preaching on Zechariah 4:6-10, and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop officiating for the installation. The following Lord's Day, November 11, Rev. Brummel preached his inaugural sermon in Edgerton in the morning and then in Sioux Falls in the evening. Rev. Brummel chose to bring God's Word from John 3:29,30 on the theme, "Decreasing for Christ's

Sake: the Confession, the Motivation, and the Evidence."

Rev. Arie denHartog, along with several elders and deacons from the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, visited the Pittsburgh Mission from November 1-5. During this visit family visitations were conducted. The delegates also planned to have meetings with Home Missionary Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma and the Steering Committee. Rev. denHartog preached one of the services on November 4. While there, the visitors from Southwest were able also to attend Pittsburgh's annual Reformation Lecture. On November 2 Rev. Bruinsma spoke on "Righteous in Christ."

### Young People's Activities

The young people of the Michigan churches met together at the Grandville, MI PRC on Sunday, November 11 for their Thanksgiving Mass Meeting. Rev. Carl Haak spoke to the young people on "Remembering the Persecuted Church," from Hebrews 13:3. Rev. Haak reminded the young people of how richly God has blessed us with freedom here and how different it is for so many other Christians over the world. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE!

Eastside Christian School of Grand Rapids, Michigan is seeking applicants for a new administrator to start in the fall of 2008. Inquiries may be made to Dan Monsma, [dan@monsmalandscape.com](mailto:dan@monsmalandscape.com) or Erin Windemuller, [windemuller@sbcglobal.net](mailto:windemuller@sbcglobal.net).

### NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2007, at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 1, 2007, our parents and grandparents,  
**THOMAS and VICKY  
VAN OVERLOOP,**

celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We are thankful to God for the many years that He has given them, and pray that He will continue to bless and preserve them in the years to come. "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his ways" (Psalm 128:1).

\* Brandon and Kelly VanOverloop \* Heather VanOverloop  
Thomas, Addison \* Hillary VanOverloop

\* Eric and Heidi Mowery  
Parker, Whitney

Hudsonville, Michigan