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Volume 83 ◆ Number 12

Songs and Prayers

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

James 5:13

How much time do you and your family spend in prayer?

How often do you sing praises to God?

It's probably true that the church of the past spent more time in those activities than we do today. Today we tend to be too preoccupied with all the forms of entertainment that have come into our homes—radio, television, DVD's, and computer and video games.

The word of God that James brings to the church calls us both to pray and to sing psalms.

James speaks of those who are afflicted and those who are merry. That describes every one of us. We find ourselves either in affliction that brings sorrow, or in prosperity so that we are merry. Some-

times there is a combination of both in our lives.

We are instructed how to respond.

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.

Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

It is important that we heed this instruction. This is God's wisdom to bring us safely to our eternal home, both in affliction and in prosperity.



Is any among you afflicted? Is any merry?

To be afflicted means to suffer evils or hardship of any kind.

At the beginning of this chapter we learn that members of the church to which James wrote this epistle were being defrauded by the rich, so that they found themselves in desperate straits. James also mentions in this chapter the affliction that the prophets suffered in the form of persecution.

Affliction also comes to our lives. It comes in the form of sickness, bereavement, poverty, broken relationships, and disappointment....

From the parallel phrase in this passage that speaks of being merry, we must also emphasize that affliction brings sadness, fear, worry, and certainly tears.

There is much of this affliction in life. In fact, sometimes affliction can be a long-term, ongoing reality in our lives.

But James also speaks of being merry.

To be merry means to be full of joy, to be of good cheer. There are many things that bring such joy to our lives. These include good health, material prosperity, marriage, children, peace in the family, peace in the church, and peace in the nation. We may summarize all these good things by the term prosperity.

There are also these kinds of things in our lives. Sometimes we enjoy prosperity for long stretches of time.

What we must understand is that both affliction and prosperity are sent to us by the hand of God.

The secular world, under the influence of the error of evolution, maintains that all things happen by chance—both good and evil.

Many in the church world be-

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lieve that the good things in life certainly come from the hand of God but that affliction and tears come not from God but from the devil.

The Bible is clear that nothing happens by chance but that all things come only by the hand of God.

Proverbs 22:2 teaches, "The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all." Are you rich so that your life is full of joy? The Lord made you rich. Are you poor so that your life is one of struggle and disappointment? The Lord made you poor.

Then we have the example of Job's affliction, cited by James in verse 12 of this chapter. Even though the devil had his hand in Job's great suffering, it is ultimately God who afflicted Job. It was only with God's permission and in God's power that the devil brought suffering to Job. This was also Job's understanding. We read in Job 2:10 that Job responded to his complaining wife, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

This is all in keeping with Ephesians 1:11, which emphasizes that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

We must also emphasize that whatever God sends is for our profit. We are assured of this in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

All that God sends us in life is sent in love and is designed in His perfect wisdom to serve to bring us in the best possible way to glory. This is easy to see when the hand of God sends prosperity, so that we are merry. It is not so easy to see when the hand of God sends affliction, so that we are filled with sorrow.



Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

Prayer is the privilege God has

given to us in Jesus Christ to communicate with Him heart to heart. In prayer we are able to pour out our heart to God. The word used here for prayer is a general word for prayer. It includes prayers of thanksgiving and also prayers of supplication.

James also speaks of singing psalms.

We must not think here of a distinction between psalms and hymns. The phrase "sing psalms" is only one word in the original and means to sing praises to God. This certainly includes the Old Testament Psalms. The Psalms without exception praise God for His goodness, greatness, power, wisdom, and the works of salvation He accomplishes for His people. But there are many other spiritual songs that also praise God, many of them based directly on Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures.

Sad to say, there are many songs in the church that do not praise God. Many express a distorted theology that detracts from God. Many also are man-centered. These are not the kind of songs that James has in mind.

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.

We are called repeatedly in Scripture to pray. We are to pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:18). We are to continue instant (steadfast) in prayer (Rom. 12:12). We are to continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving (Col. 4:2).

Especially in the face of affliction we must pray. Affliction brings with it many worries, anxieties, heartbreaks, and needs. These we must bring to God in prayer.

But we must also be thankful in these prayers. No matter how heavy the hand of God comes to rest on us, we always have things for which to be thankful. And we must express this in prayer. This certainly is suggested in Philippians 4:6: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

It is also good and necessary to sing praises to God in affliction. The heavy heart of the afflicted is lifted by the songs of praise that reflect on God's salvation for His people.

But in the face of affliction it is above all necessary to pray.

Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

We are called repeatedly in Scripture to sing praises to God. "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises" (Ps. 47:6). "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name" (Ps. 68:4). "Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely" (Ps. 147:1).

This is appropriate especially when we prosper by the hand of God, so that we are filled with joy and merriment. How obviously God has blessed us when we prosper. We should praise and honor Him with songs of praise. These songs naturally flow from a merry heart.

It is also appropriate to pray. We should thank and praise God in prayer. And we should in prayer ask God to enable us to use His bounty aright.

But first of all it is appropriate to praise God in song.



These prayers and songs are necessary in order for God's purpose in sending both affliction and prosperity to be accomplished.

The purpose of God in both affliction and prosperity is our eternal good. Through prosperity God gives us the resources necessary to maintain our covenant homes, churches, and Christian schools, to promote the gospel, and to assist the poor, all of which are necessary for our spiritual health and well-being.

By affliction God purifies us as gold is purified by fire, to make us

fit for greater service and ultimately for our place of glory in heaven.

However, for this purpose of God to be accomplished, we must receive both prosperity and adversity in faith. Only by faith will we use the prosperity we receive by His hand in a way that will contribute to our spiritual well-being. Without faith we will squander God's good gifts to our hurt. Only by faith will we have the patience to profit from affliction. It requires

patience to profit from affliction instead of turning away from God in resentment and rebellion. This patience requires faith.

And therein is the importance of prayer and singing God's praises. These are both acts of faith. They also increase our faith, so that we may profit from both affliction and prosperity. Those who neither pray nor sing praises to God will lose ground in their spiritual life, both in the face of adversity and in the face of prosperity.

And so we come back to the

question with which we started. How much time do you spend in prayer and in singing psalms in your family and personal lives?

Songs and prayers have equipped the suffering ones with patience to endure and to profit from affliction. They have empowered God's people to use His good gifts to profit their spiritual lives and the lives of others around them.

Let us be a people who both pray and sing praises to God. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Evil Fruits of the Conditional Covenant (3) Unbridled Divorce and Remarriage

In the previous editorial, we took note of the obvious trend of increasing instances of divorce and remarriage in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world. The issue is ultimately an exegetical matter, and readers are encouraged to read works that discuss the pertinent passages of Scripture. Yet there is also a significant theological issue, which has to do with the bond of marriage, and which is related to the question, is the bond of marriage breakable? While all agree that it *ought not* be broken, few insist that only God through death dissolves the bond of marriage. Since marriage is a picture of the covenant of grace, a theological justification for a breakable marriage bond is found in a conditional, breakable covenant. In this final article on divorce and remarriage, it is our purpose to demonstrate that con-

nection and draw some conclusions.

In 1985 a significant defense of the unbreakable bond of marriage appeared in the book *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus*.¹ Two capable theologians, William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, took the bold stand that Jesus taught no remarriage after divorce. They demonstrated that this was the virtually unanimous position of the early church. They provided solid exegesis to support the early church's conviction about what Jesus taught. It was a courageous, if unpopular, stand for truth in the face of a swelling tide of approval for no-fault divorce for any reason and a wide-open remarriage policy.

Sad to say, Heth and Wenham are now divided on this issue. In the Spring 2002 issue of *The Southern Baptist Journal*, Wenham wrote a fine, exegetically-based article entitled "Does the New Testament Approve Divorce after Remarriage?" His answer is, No, the New Testament does not. In the same issue,

Heth wrote "Jesus and Divorce, How My Mind Has Changed."² He no longer believes that Jesus forbids remarriage after divorce.

What made Heth change his mind? He points out a number of influences. The first is, to put it baldly, peer pressure. When Heth and Wenham co-authored *Jesus and Divorce*, they took note of the obvious fact that they were opposing the majority of the evangelical world on this issue. Apparently Heth had the notion that their book would change the views of many evangelicals. But, alas, he discovered that more evangelicals approve of remarriage today than in the 1980s.

The second factor that influenced Heth was that scholarship was against them. He noticed that nearly all the "weighty" American commentaries on the gospels written since 1984, and the significant reference works rejected their exegesis. It troubled him that "the best of the evangelical scholarship had read our material and found it wanting" (p. 5).

Parenthetically we note that if

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2007, p. 244.

Luther had changed his convictions to fit the majority views of the theologians, and to agree with the reigning scholars of his day, there would never have been a reformation of the church connected with him.

A third influence on Heth, and this is another disappointment, is that Heth listened to the siren song of higher critics. Higher critics set themselves above the Bible with their stance that the Bible is subject to the ordinary literary criticism to which any book may be subject.

Accordingly, Heth informs us that the majority view allows at least two grounds for divorce—adultery and desertion—and subsequent remarriage for at least the innocent party. However, when the gospel accounts record Jesus forbidding all divorce except for fornication and prohibiting any remarriage, then we are to understand that Jesus' statements are either "rhetorical overstatement" (read: exaggeration) or "generalizations." Heth, being more conservative than many in the majority camp, favors the latter. But generalizations are subject to exceptions. For example, it generally snows in Michigan in January. However, there are exceptions. Thus Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage, but there are exceptions to this general rule.

In the midst of this wholesale capitulation to the "majority position," Heth presents the theological justification for his change of mind. That theological basis, he maintains, is that the covenants of the Bible may be both violated and dissolved. Although Heth does not in this article expressly apply this to God's covenant of grace, everything in the article indicates that all biblical covenants can be dissolved. In any case, Heth insists that this allows the marriage bond to be dissolved.

But how did Heth come to this conclusion about biblical covenants? In a word, with new understanding of Near Eastern cov-

enants and the Jewish practice of divorce. Heth frequently expresses his indebtedness to the book *Marriage as Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi*, by G. Hugenberger. According to Heth, this work "draws upon all the pertinent ancient Near Eastern and related biblical legal and narrative material touching on betrothal, marriage, divorce, and sexual offences" (p. 17).

From the same book, Heth became convinced "that a study of the covenantal nature of marriage could help resolve some of the remaining difficulties in comprehending the biblical ethics and practice of marriage; and one such difficulty is the dissolubility of marriage, i.e., what constitutes covenant breaking" (p. 18).

Over against the position taken in the book *Jesus and Divorce* that biblical covenants are inviolable and unbreakable, Heth became convinced from Hugenberger's work that "in terms of Hebrew usage covenants may be both violated and dissolved." He adds that with this new understanding, "I knew immediately that my no remarriage view had been placed in jeopardy" (p. 18).

It may be noted that biblical covenants surely can be broken—as for example Abraham's covenant with Abimelech, or with his servant Eleazar. However, it is quite another matter to conclude that a covenant bond formed by God Himself—be it the covenant of grace or the bond of marriage—can be broken by man or as a result of man's activities. But we return to Heth.

After pointing out that the consummation of marriage is an important element in confirming the covenant of marriage, he writes: "It should be obvious now that sexual infidelity is a particularly grave violation of the marriage covenant, a sin against both the covenant partner and against God, and if covenants can be violated and dissolved, this sin strikes at the marriage covenant in a unique way" (p. 19).

No one can dispute the seriousness of adultery, in light of Jesus' allowing that as the only ground for divorce. However, that leads Heth to conclude that "the Genesis 2:24 'one flesh' relationship that results from the covenant of marriage ratified by sexual consummation is not an indissoluble union, just one that should preeminently not be dissolved, and a sexual sin like adultery is the preeminent violation of the marriage covenant" (p. 19).

Next Heth argues that desertion is also a ground for divorce, and for remarriage. Not surprisingly, since the marriage bond can be dissolved, Heth concludes that there may well be other grounds for divorce than adultery and desertion.

Heth's line of argumentation is logically correct. His premise is that biblical covenants, and that would include the covenant of grace, are broken by man's sin. That is to say, a real relationship of love and friendship between God and man is dissolved if a man violates the covenant and rejects God. Then we may piously repeat the Scripture's teaching that the covenant of God is unbreakable (Ps. 89:34; Lev. 26:44; Jer. 33:20, 21). Perhaps we could consider that a "rhetorical overstatement" intended to convey the idea that the covenant *should not be broken*. But it is sometimes broken. Or, perhaps it is a "generalization." Man is commanded not to break it. But there are exceptions. Man can and does so violate God's covenant that it is broken, and it is dissolved—just like the covenants of the ancient Near East nations.

And so it must follow that marriage, a picture of God's covenant of

1. The book was first published by Hodder and Stoughton in London in 1984, and in 1985 in Nashville, Tennessee by Thomas Nelson. An enlarged edition was printed in 1997, and a third edition in 2002.

2. The issue is still available online at http://www.sbts.edu/Resources/Publications/Journal/Spring_2002.aspx

grace, is likewise breakable, violated by sin, and dissolved by divorce.

Be reminded that every conditional covenant is a breakable covenant. God establishes His covenant with every baptized child. The child can break that covenant relationship so that it is no more.

However, that theological error bears the fruit of a complete overturning of Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage. Let us assume for the moment that one holds that adultery is the only ground for divorce, and in such a case, divorce dissolves the marriage bond. If the bond is dissolved, there is no legitimate reason to forbid remarriage for either party.

The next step is that, although it is a sin to divorce for a non-biblical reason, yet, if a man does divorce his wife for a wrong reason, and then marries another, he is guilty of adultery at that point, and the wife may remarry.

If one adds desertion as a legitimate ground, there is no limit to divorce and remarriage, for anyone who divorces his spouse, obviously has deserted her. So she may remarry. And since the bond is dissolved by the divorce, so may the husband remarry.

The question is, is the bond of marriage dissolved either by sin or by divorce? The Protestant Reformed Churches stand almost alone in maintaining that the bond of marriage is not dissolved by either. Only God, through death, can dissolve what He has "put together."

It was not always so. According to the official web site of the Christian Reformed Church, "the long-standing position of the CRC from 1908 on was that people who remarry after an unbiblical divorce are living in continual adultery." That position, maintained until 1956, was based on the idea that the bond is not dissolved by divorce, except in the case of a divorce on biblical grounds.

But that position is impossible to maintain. If divorce dissolves the bond in some instances, why

not in all. Then there is no continual adultery in any remarriage. Thus the Christian Reformed Church now teaches:

Permanent unity in marriage is possible in Christ and is demanded of Christ's disciples who are married. Marriages should not be dissolved; divorce is contrary to God's will. *However, by persistent and unrepented sin, people can put asunder what God has joined together.*³ [Emphasis mine, RJD.]

This position is in complete harmony with the conditional covenant that is maintained by the Christian Reformed Church.

I end this article with a special plea for Reformed and Presbyterian believers to examine this relationship closely. Do see that holding to a conditional (and thus, breakable) covenant of grace leads to a breakable marriage bond, which in turn opens the door to unrestrained divorce and remarriage. On the other hand, do understand that an unconditional (and thus unbreakable) covenant is the theological foundation for an unbreakable marriage bond.

My plea is directed to Reformed believers to turn their churches back from the wholesale perversion of marriage, and to honor marriage as a picture of the unbreakable covenant of grace.

My plea is especially for Presbyterian friends. We recognize that the Westminster Confession has made your position creedal—divorce on biblical grounds dissolves the marriage bond for the innocent party. Historically, the arguments for the WCF's position were not those of Heth, of course. We acknowledge that the teaching of the WCF was that of Calvin and the Reformation generally.

In spite of that, we respectfully urge you to examine the issue afresh, and reconsider your position. Your own confession allows you to do so. For the WCF rightly insists that only Scripture is the rule of faith and life (Chap. 1, Art. 2). It points out that

synods and councils may err and have erred (Chap. 31, Art. 4). All Reformed and Presbyterian believers are to be continually proving their confessions in the light of Scripture. If you agree that the Scriptures teach an unbreakable, unconditional covenant of grace, is it not necessary to reevaluate the WCF's position on divorce and remarriage?

Additionally, even though the WCF teaching on divorce and remarriage is that of the Reformers generally, yet theology has been set forth more clearly since the days of the Reformation and the WCF. It is right to speak of a development of doctrine in that sense. The doctrine of the covenant has received significant attention and development among the Presbyterians and the Reformed since the time of the Reformation. What we ask is, at least be willing to examine the issue in light of the development of the doctrine of the covenant.

To all who come to the conclusion that God's covenant of grace is an unbreakable, unconditional covenant of grace, may God also give the grace to stand with us against the "consensus," the "majority position" on the covenant and on divorce and remarriage.

The unconditional covenant will never disappoint. It is a glorious, firm, sure covenant that God establishes with the elect in Christ—who is the Head of the covenant, as the WCF maintains. Such a covenant affords unspeakable comfort to believers because it is unbreakable—as God Himself promises.

And all who allow the clearer passages of Scripture to speak (WCF, Chap. 1, Art. 9), and square the teaching on marriage with this glorious unconditional, unbreakable covenant, will never be disappointed. For God, and His Word, will be honored. Marriage will be maintained for life. Marriage will be honored, strengthened, and thus be a great blessing in the church. 

3. http://www.crcna.org/pages/positions_marriage.cfm

Dangers In and For Education

Education is a wonderful thing. It is a necessary thing—perhaps especially in today's world. God has given us minds in order that we might learn, talents and abilities that must be developed for use in His service. But we must recognize that education can be and is a powerful tool in the hands of an unbelieving world. This is nothing new. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, insisted upon teaching "the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans" to the young princes of Judah who had been taken captive (Dan. 1:4). What an opportunity! The youth are so impressionable, so susceptible to peer pressure, so easily influenced. The powers that be are using the same tactics today with increasing fervor. Gene Edward Veith reports in *WORLD* magazine, January 13, 2007, on "One-world education":

Public schools trying to bolster their academic quality are turning to what they publicize as "AP and IB courses." "AP" refers to Advance Placement, toughened-up classes that can earn college credit. But "IB" is a different animal. "International Baccalaureate" courses follow a globalist, relativistic curriculum that many taxpayers would object to.

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the brainchild of British educator, A.C.D. "Alec" Peterson, who wanted to develop a standardized global curriculum. Its purpose, in the words of the IBO website, is "developing citizens of the world."

Currently nearly 2,000 schools in 124 countries—with some half

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million students—are using the IBO curriculum. This includes 500 schools in the United States, each of which pays the Geneva organization between \$5,000 and \$9,000 per year. For that, IBO will provide the curriculum, give teachers special training, and even do some of the grading.

IBO, now affiliated with the UN, has a clear appeal to fans of a one-world government. But why would public-school districts, most of which are required by law to be locally controlled, give up their control to a company in Switzerland?

Unlike the curricular chaos in many of our public schools, the IBO curriculum is well-organized, comprehensive, and interconnected. Farming out assessment responsibilities and setting grading standards all the way in Switzerland gives schools a cover for academic standards. So IB courses probably are academically superior to the usual public-school offerings.

But their content is not much different and possibly worse. "Knowledge," according to IBO's website, "is considered to be an in-depth understanding of significant ideas, not merely the acquisition of facts and skills." And this "understanding" that replaces objective learning consists largely of environmentalism, peace studies, leftist politics, and above all, multiculturalism.

The IBO goal is the formation of students "who understand that other people with their differences, can also be right." Not just that other people can be right, but that people with differences can "also" be right. At the heart of the IB approach is a view that no actual culture holds the truth.

The keystone course for the International Baccalaureate diploma is "Theory of Knowledge." Not "theories," but "theory." While it is fine for high-school students to study epistemology, this is a course in postmodernist epistemology. This theory employs a "hermeneutic of suspicion" that

undermines the very possibility of accepting any kind of objective truth.

It does take a certain kind of braininess to convince oneself that it is true that there is no truth, and it is no wonder that major universities—the patrons of postmodernist theory—are impressed with all of the young relativists clutching their IB diplomas.

But this philosophy does not produce a good education; rather, it produces a mindset in which good education is impossible.

The analysis of Gene Edward Veith is right on target. The IBO curriculum would mold and develop "citizens of the world" all right—citizens of the worldwide kingdom of the Antichrist! This well-developed program harks back to Babylon's educational efforts to shape its "citizens." As Veith describes the content of this curriculum, in a word, it amounts to HUMANISM. This will be the essence of the religion of the Antichristian kingdom: MAN! Man's exaltation, man's happiness, man's peace, man's prosperity. Francis Schaeffer defined "humanism" in *How Should We Then Live?*: "Man beginning from himself, with no knowledge except what he himself can discover and no standards outside of himself. In this view Man is the measure of things...."

But this educational attack on the youth isn't limited to public school systems. David Rogers (with files from Joanne Laucius) reports in *National Post* (Canada October 24, 2006) on a Quebec crackdown on the curriculum in Christian schools in that Canadian province. The government in Quebec is threatening to shut down any institution that does not follow the provincial curriculum and teach Darwinism:

The Quebec Ministry of Education has told unlicensed Chris-

tian evangelical schools that they must teach Darwin's theory of evolution and sex education or close their doors after a school board in the Outaouais region complained the provincial curriculum was not being followed.

"Quebec children are legally required to follow the provincial curriculum... but these evangelical schools teach their own courses on creationism and sexuality that don't follow the Quebec curriculum," said Pierre Daoust, director-general of the Commission Scolaire au Coeur-des-Vallees in Thurso, Que. Mr. Daoust's complaint sparked the province-wide investigation.

Quebec law requires school boards to assure the Ministry of Education that every child between the ages of six and 16, with the exception of home-schooled children, receives an adequate education, he said. But the 20 elementary and high school students who attend a school operated by Eglise Evangelique near Saint-Andre-Avellan, Que., are being educated according to a Bible-based curriculum and their high school diplomas will not be recognized anywhere in Canada, he said.

Supporters of Eglise Evangelique, part of the l'Association des églises évangéliques du Québec, counter that the school teaches a "world view" that is essential for their students. "We offer a curriculum based on a Christian world view rather than humanistic world view," said Alan Buchanan, chairman of a committee that reorganized the school's administration this past summer, as well as a former Quebec public school teacher. Mr. Buchanan said Eglise Evangelique teaches evolution as well as intelligent design. "We want the children to understand what they're going to meet in the outside world, and also what's wrong with the theory," he said. "We also teach that [there is] a better theory—that God created the universe and so on." While the school doesn't teach sex education, it does teach biology, he said. "You have the Christian world view that says sex should only be in the marriage and a public school system that teaches kids

about sexuality," Mr. Buchanan said. "We believe students should be taught abstinence." He said the school met provincial guidelines during two reviews conducted in the 1990s, although they were asked to add a Canadian history course.

Ministry spokeswoman Marie-France Boulay said yesterday the province will negotiate for several weeks with an unspecified number of evangelical schools to determine whether they can meet provincial standards that include the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution....

The Quebec government knows of about 30 unlicensed religious schools in the province, including Hasidic schools and several evangelical Christian schools in Montreal, said Dermot Travis, who served on Quebec's Comité sur la langue d'enseignement, a tribunal that hears special cases from the province's educational system. Other religious denominations may operate faith-based schools as well, but no one really knows where they are. The Quebec government has known about unaccredited religion-based schools for years, but has tolerated them for fear of offending the denominations sponsoring them...."

Clearly the issue is not whether the basic tenets of evolutionism are presented (and repudiated) but whether they are taught as science, as truth! The Education Minister of Quebec is seeking to force a uniformity of curriculum upon both public and private schools. Christian schools had better toe the line and teach the provincial curriculum or face the threat of closure. This clearly illustrates the potential danger of government intrusion into the area of education, which is properly a parental responsibility. The "learning of the Chaldeans" is made mandatory. The threat to Christian schools in Quebec reinforces my suspicion that in many places the laws and regulations are already in place that could close Christian schools if the will to enforce them is there.

But what is perhaps the most frightening threat regarding education proceeds right into the home. WorldNetDaily reports in an article entitled, "Court Upholds Nazi-era ban on homeschooling" (September 29, 2006):

A new ruling from the European Human Rights Court has affirmed the German nation's Nazi-era ban on homeschooling, concluding that society has a significant interest in preventing the development of dissent through "separate philosophical convictions." The Strasburg-based court addressed the issue on appeal from a Christian family whose members alleged their human rights to educate their own children according to their own religious beliefs are being violated by the ban....

The family had appealed under the European Convention on Human Rights statement that: "No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."

But the court's ruling said, instead, that schools represent society, and "it was in the children's interest to become part of that society. The parents' right to education did not go as far as to deprive their children of that experience," the ruling said. "Not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the integration into and first experience with society are important goals in primary school education," the court said. "The German courts found that those objectives cannot be equally met by home education even if it allowed children to acquire the same standard of knowledge as provided for by primary school education.

"The (German) Federal Constitutional Court stressed the general interest of society to avoid the emergence of parallel societies based on separate philosophical convictions and the importance of integrating minorities into soci-

ety," the ruling said. The court noted it was a similar argument that arose in Holland earlier, where a politician, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, sought to close down all religious schools because only the state could properly teach children "tolerance."

The U.S.-based Home School Legal Defense Association has confirmed that nearly 40 homeschooling families are embroiled in legal battles over the issue in Germany. The group, which has quickly growing influence around the globe on the issue of homeschooling, said the German families are facing persecution for trying to educate their children in a Christian atmosphere without exposing them to the state's harmful secular values, especially sex education....

Yes, these are days that ought

to fill us with concern and trepidation regarding the education of our children. What do all of these things tell us? First of all, be thankful for that which we still have. Don't take for granted the opportunities we have to give our children a genuinely Christian education.

Secondly, let us labor while it is yet day: "the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). Let us be "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15). May we be diligent in our homes to bring up our children in the fear of the Lord. Let us continue to establish and maintain parental, covenantal Christian schools as long as we are able.

Today, "Babylon" has a lot at its disposal! The temptations are

great. Government financial support, a "free" computer for home-schoolers; it all sounds appealing. The Babylon of this world wants to erase the memory of Jehovah in our children and mold them into its God-denying pattern.

Yet, ultimately, these efforts will not succeed! Why not? Because, by His grace, God enables covenant parents to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. And in the strength of the Word and Spirit of God, our children and grandchildren will refuse the king's meat and stop the mouths of lions!

Don't allow a day to pass without consciously, by word and example, training your children in the way in which they ought to go. Jehovah reigns! And the conclusion: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen..." (Rev. 18:2). 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek

Issachar vs. the Scribes, Revisited (2)

"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 12:32

(In the previous article under this title we set forth, from the lips of some of those in power in the realm of the news media, how they "frame and package the news" to "reflect the mind-set and values of the newsroom." In addition we briefly examined three of the "es-

sential eight," i.e., the eight questions to ask concerning news reports that may be helpful in identifying media bias. In this article we will proceed to examine the last five of those "essential eight.")

How Are the Characters Characterized?

Bias on the part of reporters is often easily detected by how they identify or label those *about whom* they report. What we are looking for here is the use of what is sometimes called "ad hominem" (attacking the person) and/or "poisoning the well" (name calling and/or labeling an individual or group). Look for labels such as "wing nut," "Christian right," "right wing," "radical right wing," "left wing," "radical left,"

"radical Christian right," "lunatic fringe," "dogmatic," "hawk," "dove," etc. If these kinds of labels are used in reporting, it is often an attempt to dismiss the ideas of others without the use of substantive arguments to refute them.

A classic example of how this works is recorded for us in Matthew 11. Here Jesus castigates the Scribes and Pharisees for rejecting His message simply because He was, as they said, "a friend of publicans and sinners."

Another example of the use of this tactic involves some of those who promote their thinking that global warming is caused by human activity. We mentioned earlier the ideas of CBS correspondent Scott Pelley, who labeled those who are skeptical of global warming as the equivalent of "holocaust de-

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niers." In Pelley's way of thinking, his label of those who differ with him is ground enough to discard their ideas.

Former vice-president Albert Gore does something similar in an interview published in *Time*. In response to the statement by the interviewer: "There are many people who still doubt the science. Senator James Inhofe, head of the Senate's environmental committee, has condemned global-warming science as 'hoax,'" Mr. Gore responds, "...there are people who believe that the moon landing was staged in a movie lot in Arizona. Another reason is that some of the largest polluters are still putting millions of dollars a year to hire pseudo scientists to confuse people into thinking that this crisis isn't real."¹ Here Mr. Gore characterizes Senator Inhofe as the equivalent of a moon-landing denier, which apparently means that his arguments need not be acknowledged, much less refuted. Obviously, this can be a very handy way to field challenges to one's position on an issue—especially if their arguments are difficult to refute.

What Is the Tone of the Report?

In addition to casting doubt on opposing arguments by labeling the messenger, there is the tactic of labeling the message and/or messenger by means of the tone of a news report. Often the tone of a news media report is a dead giveaway of author bias.

One example of an author's tone is sometimes called "chronological snobbery." In an attempt to discredit an opposing view he simply labels the position as "old-fashioned," "puritanical," or with some other derogatory label that suggests that it is not in keeping with the times.

A sarcastic tone also often gives away a reporter's bias. An example of this is seen when much of the media was trying to link the Bush administration to the Enron scandal. *Time* magazine had a

lengthy article about the supposed connection, and in the process wrote the following: "It was one more intimate link between Enron and the Bush team, one more unwelcome story at a time when the President is hoping his *big* (emphasis CK) speech will change the subject...."² In this case, that one little word "big" betrays a tone that should give the reader cause to question the author's objectivity. The reader might ask himself, "Why would the news writer use that word in this context?"

Adoration is another form of tone that is easily identifiable. Read news stories and editorials that relate to the female U.S. senator from New York and take note of the positive or negative adjectives used, and one will most often be able to identify a news reporter's bias. Try this one for example: "It has become axiomatic (in this case because it happens to be true) that Senator Clinton is really smart. She has a sharp mind buttressed by an encyclopedic knowledge of key issues and a work ethic that is Calvinism on steroids."³ Wow! After reading that, the reader would be wise to question the author's objectivity on the subject at hand.

The April 3, 2006 cover story of *Time* exemplifies another form of tone: namely hysteria. "BE WORRIED. BE VERY WORRIED." "EARTH AT THE TIPPING POINT." "HOW IT THREATENS YOUR HEALTH." Those headlines, along with a front cover picture of a polar bear on a tiny iceberg surrounded by water, leaves little doubt about where the story is heading. Reader, beware! By all means read the article, but do so with discernment.

How Are Statistics Used?

When polls or statistics are cited in news reports, the reader would be wise to be somewhat on guard. The framing of the poll's questions is all-important. Sometimes the one financing or conduct-

ing the poll has a preconceived notion concerning a desired outcome. If that's the case, the poll questions will be framed accordingly. When reading news reports that include the use of polls, the question should be asked, "What position benefits from the results of this poll?" The reader should then consider if the framing of the questions in any way contributed to the outcome of the poll.

A case in point concerning the improper use of statistics to validate a position is the work of Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s. Recently it has been discovered that his work was seriously flawed. It seems that it was his intent to make it appear that the homosexual lifestyle was much more common than it actually is. Kinsey concluded, on the basis of his fraudulent work (primarily in the sample that he used in his study), that about 10% of the United States population was homosexual. That conclusion, combined with the old "bandwagon" fallacy (if a lot of people are doing it, it must be okay), significantly contributed to the success of the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s and the widespread acceptance of homosexual perversion in our society today.

Another example of questionable use of statistics involves the global warming debate. The July 24, 2006 *Los Angeles Times* featured an op-ed by Naomi Oreskes, a social scientist at the University of California San Diego and the author of a 2004 *Science Magazine* study. Oreskes insisted that a review of 928 scientific papers showed there was 100% consensus that global warming was not caused by natural climate variations. This study was featured in Al Gore's film, which portrayed future disastrous consequences of global warming: "An Inconvenient Truth." Apparently there is a problem with Oreskes' study, however. In a critique by British social scientist Benny Peiser, we learn that the *Science Magazine* analysis ex-

cluded nearly 11,000 (more than 90%) of the papers dealing with global warming. Also pointed out was that less than 2% of the climate studies in the survey actually endorsed the so-called "consensus view" that human activity is driving global warming and some of the studies actually opposed that view.⁴

Statistics indeed! The only question for the discerning reader to determine is "Are they being used to reveal the truth or something quite different?"

Is Necessary Information Left Out?

More difficult than examining statistics and polling data is the task of determining whether or not all the available pertinent information on a given subject has been presented. Perhaps the best approach is to compare how different news sources treat the same event or issue being reported. By comparing, for example, what *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *The New York Times* says with what *World*, *Human Events*, or *The Washington Times* reports concerning a given issue may be very helpful. Consider a few examples how leaving information out can distort the news.

In the aftermath of hurricane Katrina it was reported that more blacks died as a result of the hurricane than whites. That was true, of course. What was not often reported, however, was that when evaluated on the basis of the number of blacks versus the number of whites *living in the affected areas*, percentage-wise more whites died than blacks. In an apparent attempt by some to create a race discrimination issue, that fact was conveniently left out.

Standard Bearer readers who followed the Joe Wilson, Valerie Plame, Niger/Iraq, yellow-cake, and the so-called "outing of Valerie Plame" as reported by the mainstream media, very likely never heard that Plame was not a *covert*

CIA agent, that *she* recommended her husband Joe Wilson for the trip to Niger, or that Wilson's own report actually supported the likelihood that Iraq was seeking "yellow cake" from Niger⁵—all information that was conveniently left out to make it seem that Plame was "outed" in retribution for her husband's exposing President Bush as a liar. By the way, as it all ended up after two years of accusations and innuendo, it was not the Bush administration, after all, that had exposed Plame, but a-no-fan-of-Bush-man by the name of Armitage. Whether one agrees with the president's policies in Iraq or not, the credibility of a news source that leaves out critical information such as this, for the obvious purpose of making the administration look bad, should be questioned.

Another example of the withholding of information is seen in the present global warming debate as presented by much of the mainstream media. Have you ever heard from the mainstream media that there are credible scientists out there, as reported in the October 18, 2006 issue of *The Berean Call*, who disagree with them?

20,000 scientists, of whom about 2,700 of them are physicists, geophysicists, climatologists, meteorologists, oceanographers or environmental scientists, who are in a position to understand the global warming issues, have signed the following statement: "There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gases is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth's atmosphere and disruption of the Earth's climate."

Nor does the mainstream media inform us of their poor record when it comes to reporting climatic disasters in-the-making. They neglect to tell us of the February 24, 1895 *New York Times* headline: "Ge-

ologists Think the World May be Frozen Up Again." Nor do they tell us of the March 27, 1933 *Times* article, "America in Longest Warm Spell Since 1776: Temperature Line Records a 25-year Rise." Then there is the December 29, 1974 *Times* article on global cooling where it was reported that climatologists believed "...the facts of the present climate change are such that the most optimistic experts would assign near certainty to major crop failure in a decade." Neither are we informed about the evidence that led many scientists to believe there was a time in the Middle Ages when it was so warm that the Vikings grew crops in Greenland.⁶

While the leaving out of information on the part of a news source does not necessarily mean their position is wrong, it should lead one to look for a bias, and maybe even question their reliability as a source.

Is False Reasoning Used in the Report?

The reliability of a news source also should come into question when false reasoning is present.

One type of false reasoning that the discerning Christian should be able to identify is what could be labeled "hasty generalization." An

1. *Time* interview, "10 Questions for Al Gore," *Time* December 4, 2006:6.

2. Cathy Thomas, Karen Tumulty, and Michael Weisskopf, "Enron Spoils the Party," *Time* February 4, 2002:19.

3. Anna Quindlen, "The Hillary Questions," *Newsweek* October 30, 2006:74.

4. James Inhofe, "A Challenge to Journalists Who Cover Global Warming," *Human Events* October 23, 2006:18.

5. Fred Barnes, "Is the Mainstream Media Fair and Balanced?" *Imprimis* August, 2006:3.

6. Inhofe 17-18.

example that comes to mind involves the recent case of Florida Republican Congressman Foley. The false reasoning by some in his case went something like this: Foley is a Republican pervert who attempted to seduce a House Page. Since he is a Republican, all Republicans need to share the blame.

Another example of hasty generalization used recently involved the Rev. Pat Robertson: Robertson says Hurricane Katrina was sent by God to punish the U.S. because we allow abortion. Pat Robertson is a Christian. Therefore all Christians who are against abortion are of the same mind.

"False cause" is another type of false reasoning that is often used in media reports. An example might involve Christians who preach

against abortion. If someone murders an abortion provider, Christians are responsible because the murderer is merely acting in response to Christian anti-abortion teaching.

Another example of "false cause" involves the gruesome murder of Matthew Shepherd in Wyoming a number of years ago. Those who believe that homosexual behavior is a sin are the cause of the murder because the murderers were simply acting according to that belief. By the way, it appears that more and more of this type of reasoning is being used to malign Christians and their beliefs.

Furthermore, the global warming theory itself may be an example of false cause. The case for global warming as a result of human activity is built on some very tenu-

ous arguments. Especially is this true when one considers past global climatic fluctuations, which included warming trends even before the existence of the internal combustion engine.

A Little Perspective

Clearly, modern-day Issachar must exercise care when evaluating news reports. The questions discussed above may be helpful in identifying media bias, but the presence of media *bias* does not necessarily indicate the presence of media *deception*. As recorded in a former article, everyone has a bias. The question is, "Does the media reporter try to lead the reader to adopt his position by means of deceptive reporting?" Issachar, beware!

... to be continued. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

A Reformed Response to the Reformed Baptist View of Baptism & the Covenant (concl.)

The Reformed Baptists say that infants were circumcised in the old dispensation because the old covenant included a promise of earthly blessings of common grace to all of them head for head. But this, we have pointed out, was not the case. There were no earthly blessings of common grace to anyone. There

were only heavenly blessings of saving grace, and these came only to the elect children.

So why were they all circumcised, if they did not all receive a promise of saving grace? As we pick up where we left off, let us begin by considering the answer to this question.

Infants in Both Dispensations Included in God's Covenant of Saving Grace

Infant circumcision took place back then for the same reason that infant baptism takes place today. It is because when God makes His covenant with a person, that

person's children are also included in the covenant. Since this means the covenant promise concerning salvation is to the children no less than to the adults, the children receive the sign of the covenant, which before was circumcision and now is baptism.

But this is precisely the point that Reformed Baptists deny. They, like all Baptists, deny that children of believers are in God's covenant of saving grace. These Baptists may have some children as members in their churches, but these children will be members because they have made confession of faith, not because they are children of be-

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lievers. God, according to them, deals individualistically when He saves people (saving an individual here and an individual there), rather than organically (saving not only an individual, but also the generations that come from that individual).

Reformed Baptists deny that God saves people in this organic way. In fact, they deny that He ever saved people in this way. Just as they deny that infants of believers are included in God's covenant of grace today, so they also deny that Israelite infants in the old dispensation were included in this covenant of God's saving grace. They do say that Israelite infants were included in the covenant in the days of the Old Testament. But—and this is the key—they deny that the covenant blessings that came to these children were spiritual blessings of saving grace.

The old covenant, according to them, was really twofold—a covenant of saving grace and a covenant of non-saving grace. The infants of believers were circumcised because they were in the covenant as a covenant of common, resistible, non-saving grace. But these infants were not, in their view, in the covenant as a covenant of irresistible saving grace. Thus by inventing this twofold view of the old covenant, they attempt to explain away the fact that infants were circumcised, while continuing to deny that God has ever saved His people in an organic way in the line of continued generations.

The fact is, however, that the covenant promise to the infants of believers has always been a promise of irresistible, saving grace. This was the promise that came to Israelite infants in the old dispensation, and it is the same promise that comes to infants of believers today. In both dispensations God has established His covenant with believers and their seed, as has already been proved from Scripture. Here we add that this covenant has always been a covenant of irresistible, saving

grace. God has never established a covenant of resistible, ineffectual, common grace with anyone.

Why All Receive the Sign, If Not All Receive the Grace

When speaking of the relationship between baptism and grace there are two fundamental errors into which many fall. Some deny that grace comes to anyone by means of baptism. To them this ceremony is really an empty sign, and not a means of grace. There are others who say that grace comes to everyone who receives the sacrament. These people inseparably connect the sign and the thing signified and teach that all who receive the sign receive the grace pictured by it. In short, there are some who say that baptism is a means of grace to everyone, and there are others who say it is a means of grace to no one. And both groups are wrong.

The truth is that baptism is really a means of grace, but it is a means of grace only to the elect believers who receive it. Grace really is received by means of baptism, but it is only the believing recipient of baptism who receives this grace. Applying this to the infants that are baptized, it is only the elect infants whom God has regenerated and into whose hearts God has breathed faith (though that faith is not yet a conscious faith) who are blessed by means of the sacrament. God's grace is always particular, whether referring to the grace that comes by means of the preaching or the grace that comes by means of the sacraments.

But then why were all the Israelite infants circumcised, if not all of them received grace? And why today are all infants of confessing believers to be baptized, if the grace of God pictured by the sacrament is given only to some of them?

To understand the answer to this question it is helpful to think of two pictures together—the picture of baptism and the picture of

the church. The sacrament of baptism is a picture of the real baptism (the baptism with the Holy Spirit), and the instituted church is a picture of the real church (the body of Christ consisting of all the elect). The sacrament and the instituted church are both pictures, and it is helpful to consider these two pictures together.

Putting them together we can say that all the infant children of believers head for head are baptized and all of them head for head are members of the instituted church. They all receive the picture of baptism and they all are members of the picture of the church.

Now we switch over to consider the realities. Just as everyone head for head who receives the picture of baptism is a member of the picture of the church, so everyone head for head who receives the real baptism is a member of the real church. By considering the two pictures together and the two realities together, the truth on this matter is seen clearly.

The same thing could be said about the Israelite infants in the old dispensation. The sacrament of circumcision was a picture of the real circumcision, and the nation of Israel was a picture of the church. All the male infants head for head were to be circumcised, and they all head for head were members of the nation of Israel. This served to picture the truth that all those head for head who received the *real* circumcision were members of the *real* Israel. Romans 2:28, 29 speaks of this very truth:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

All those who received the outward sacrament were Jews outwardly, and this pictured the fact

that all those who received the inward circumcision (the circumcision of the heart) were Jews inwardly.

In summary, pictures go with pictures, and realities go with realities.

An Explanation of the Phrase "Repent, and Be Baptized"

Baptists frequently point out the fact that the Scriptures often speak of repenting and believing before being baptized. It is true that there are a number of passages that could be cited to support this:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved... (Matt. 16:16a).

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12).

So why is it that we read in a number of places of conscious faith and repentance preceding baptism?

A key thing to remember here is that this was taking place during a time of transition from the old dispensation to the new. Now that Christ had come to fulfill all the ceremonies of the old covenant and to confirm the new covenant by His death and the shedding of His blood, the people were being called to receive a sign of this new covenant, namely baptism, which would replace the Old Testament sign of circumcision. Furthermore, this change was taking place at a time when the people were being called to engage in church reformation. Israel, who was the church in the old dispensation, had become apostate. Now the time had come for people to separate themselves from this apostate institute, and to reform into New Testament

churches. So at the same time that there was this transition from the days of the old covenant to the days of the new, there was also a calling to separate from the old church institute and to reorganize into new instituted churches.

This transition would begin with adults leading the way. Adults had to confess their sins and their faith in Christ before they and their children could receive the sign of baptism and be added to the church. And when adult believers repented, believed, and were baptized, then their children also received this covenant sign. This was true not only among the Jews who believed, but also among the Gentiles. We see this clearly in the conversion of the Philippian jailor, who was a Gentile. The apostles told him that if he believed on Christ, then salvation would come not only to him, but also to his house. Then, believing this promise, not only the jailor was baptized, but also all of his children.

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway (Acts 16:31-33).

This same practice still takes place today. When the preaching comes to those who are not members of a true instituted church, the people are called first to repent and believe, and then to be baptized. Repentance and conscious faith still precede baptism in such a case. But then once a person confesses his or her faith, the sign of baptism is joyously administered not only to the confessing adult, but also to his or her children.

Explaining to Our Children the Meaning of Their Baptism

It is important not only that we

baptize our children, but also that we show them what their baptism means. Baptism is said to be a banner that our children bear—something that distinguishes them from the world. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this in the answer to question 74:

...they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers...

This same truth is found in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession, which says that by baptism:

...we are received into the church of God and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to Him whose ensign and banner we bear, and which serves as a testimony to us that He will forever be our gracious God and Father.

It is true that we must tell our children that not all children of believers are children of God, and that one must not base his assurance that he is a child of God on the fact that he has one or two believing parents. But this does not mean that we can neglect this testimony of God that comes to our children through baptism.

Baptism serves as a testimony not only to us, but also to our children, that God will forever be our gracious God and Father. This is a testimony that really comes to our children, and it comes to them when they are baptized. Take note of the wording of our Baptism Form:

For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us that He doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for His children and heirs....

And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us that He doth wash us in His blood from all our sins....

In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ....

Think of the wonderful testimony of God that comes to our children when they are baptized! What a comforting promise that is sealed unto them by baptism. This testimony is something we must

tell them and explain to them. How can we keep it from them? They need to hear this. They need the comfort and assurance that it gives to their soul.

By bringing this testimony to our children, and applying it to their faith and life, we see the power of this comforting Word of God. We see them confess from the heart and with confidence that

God is their Father, and we see them gradually show by their life that Christ really is their Lord. This promise of God is not weak and ineffectual. It is a powerful promise that causes us, and our children, to do our part in the covenant willingly and cheerfully. Powerful and efficacious is the promise of God. And it is this not only for us, but also for our children. 

Sounding Out the Word

Rev. Carl Haak

Present Sufferings Weighed with Future Glory

A beautiful portion of the Word of God is ours for today. It is found in Romans 8:18: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

The apostle Paul is speaking under inspiration for every believer in whom lives the Spirit of Christ. Note the words: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." This Word of God is supremely personal. The apostle Paul is obviously speaking of what he knows and feels himself by the Spirit testifying within him.

Suffering. Who among men could so well expound upon suffering as the apostle Paul? You remember the words of our Savior

concerning Paul at his conversion, when Ananias was sent to him: "I will show him how great things he must *suffer* for my name's sake." From his marvelous conversion to his martyrdom, Paul suffered greatly as a result of his being brought into union with Jesus Christ.

But Paul says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that *I* shall have." That is, as surely as I know I suffer with Christ, so surely I know I will be glorified. And more. When I contrast the sufferings with the glory, I can only conclude that those sufferings are not even worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be mine.

This verse is personal. It is our testimony. Everyone who is led by the Spirit of God can make this confession: "We know that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the future glory in Christ. And we know something more. We know that our present sufferings *work* glory. They are the way to glory. They are the very

hand of God to prepare and mold and teach us." But you ask: "How can we know that? How can we know that the future glory far exceeds the present suffering? How can we know that the present sufferings are actually our servants to work glory?"

Go back to the first verse in Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." On the basis of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know that we have been united to Jesus Christ. By the wonder of the Holy Spirit we have been made alive in Christ, made heirs of glory, made the children of God. We know, on the basis of Christ's work, that all things, including our sufferings, work for our good. Standing before the cross, standing before the empty tomb, seeing the ascended Lord of glory, receiving the Holy Spirit of Christ within us—on the basis of all of these things we too *reckon*, we too do some *estimating*. And we estimate that the sufferings that come to us from the hand of God in this present life are not worthy to be

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compared with the glory that shall be ours in Christ.

The apostle Paul is really referring here to a scale—an older scale, in which two weights were balanced, the one with the other. He is saying to us that we must put all the weight of the present suffering on the one side of the scale and then compare it to the weight of the future glory that shall be ours. So, let us do that.

On one side of the scale we are to put the sufferings of this present time. How can we do that? How are we going to weigh that? From Adam until the day of Jesus Christ, there has been one great sigh and groan of grief. In the world, for sure. The world experiences war and poverty, disease, famine, abuse of children, mental hospitals, prison. There is not one spot on earth where the curse is not felt.

We as the people of God united to Jesus Christ are not exempt from the sufferings of this present time. The Bible tells us plainly that a very full measure of sufferings shall be sent to believers by the heavenly Father. Psalm 34: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Psalm 6: "I make my bed to swim ... with my tears." Psalm 73: "Waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." That is, as you would twist a wet rag and squeeze out the last ounce of water, so, says Asaph, "a full cup of sufferings are sent to me."

There are the physical sufferings: old age and deformities, cancer and heart disease, diabetes and arthritis, burns and dementia. There are the mental sufferings: depression, despair, mental stress, fears, and worries. There is grief. We come to the bedside of our husband or wife, child or parent, and we watch them die. They are taken from us. They are gone. A lost child, or perhaps a wayward child or young man or woman who walks away from the truth in Jesus Christ—great grief!

And death. No, I do not like to think of death. And you do not either. But the reality is, for you and for me, that we shall die. Unless Jesus comes first, we will die.

Those sufferings are great in themselves. We must not be foolishly pious and think that as Christians we ought not feel the pain or the sting of suffering. So great are those sufferings that, of ourselves, we could only try foolishly to escape. They are great and heavy.

Now the apostle Paul is telling us two things about the present sufferings. He tells us, first of all, that they are sent in connection with Christ. Secondly, he tells us that they are of the present time. Let us first consider that they are of this present time.

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time...." That is very comforting. For the Christian, suffering belongs *only* to the present time. That is not so for the wicked. For them, suffering only begins a little bit in this world. But, no matter how great the sufferings of the child of God may now be, the Bible tells us that they are confined to the limits of our earthly sojourn. Those sufferings, then, are transient. Sorrows, says the psalmist, may come for an evening, but joy shall return in the morning.

But, as I said, those sufferings, in the second place, come to us because we belong to Christ. Going back to verse 17 in Romans 8, we read that we are "joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." That we suffer with Christ means, first of all, that as children of God we experience the hatred and the rejection of the world. Jesus said in John 15, "As they hated me, they will hate you also." We read in Philippians 1:29 that it is given onto us "not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." In II Timothy 3:12 we read that "all that will live

godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Because of our union with Christ, the world of sin will hate us.

Still more. Sufferings with Christ mean that now it is the will of God to mold us for glory through suffering. In Hebrews 2 we read that the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ, was made perfect through suffering—and that in this way, too, the way of sufferings, God wills our sanctification. Sufferings do not just happen in your life. God takes hold of you, child of God. God comes in suffering to mold, to shape, to prepare, to teach. God uses those sufferings to cause the hope given you to burn brightly in your heart. God pulls you from the earthly and sets you on the heavenly.

The present sufferings, however, are great. And they are unavoidable. You must, through much affliction, enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

But now let us look at that future glory. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." What is that future glory? How can we weigh that?

Glory is the perfection of all that Christ has earned for us. It is the final kingdom. It is heaven right now. And at the day of Christ's return, it is the new heavens and new earth where God shall be all and in all. It is real. By faith we hold it today. It is the end of all of God's purposes in Christ, when we shall dwell with Him while eternity moves on, when we shall be brought before the face of God in Jesus Christ and rejoice with all the joy of the presence of the living God.

Glory? What is that? Glory, really, in its heart, is the radiation of God or the outshining of God. As the sun in the heaven shines, so God, in Himself, is glorious. He is supremely, only, perfectly

lovely. And shining out of Him are all of His perfections, that is, His glory. And this shall be revealed to us in the final paradise of God. When all is brought to its conclusion we shall be brought to glory. Then we shall stand before Him and we shall see Him as He is. And we shall be satisfied. Glory in the Bible is always described to us as that place where God is, where God's fellowship is to be enjoyed, where we shall be lost in the eternal brilliance and magnitude of the living God, where God shall be all and in all, where God shall dwell among us and wipe away all tears.

But now notice that the apostle Paul does not speak of glory itself but of the glory that shall be revealed in us. He does not say that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be shown us, or that shall surround us, or shall be near to us. But he says the glory that shall be revealed in us. Each child of God shall shine. All the beauty of God will be reflected out of the child of God. Emitting from each child of God will be a stream of glory, each radiating the message: "My God, how beautiful Thou art! Thy majesty, how deep." The righteous shall shine as the stars in the heaven. They shall sparkle with the holiness of Jesus Christ.

It means that we shall be given perfect knowledge. With Paul in I Corinthians 13 we confess that now we know in part, but then we shall know face to face, even as we are known. Now we believe, but we cry out, "Help Thou our unbelief." Sometimes, under the veil of our suffering, we ask, "Why, Lord, why? I can't, Lord, I can't do that." But then we will know and we will rejoice in the way that God has led us. And every truth of God will become clear to us. We will see the perfect will of God. We will drink in the majesty of God, deeper and deeper into the fullness of God.

We will be given perfect holiness. Never will we will, think, or say anything contrary to God. We shall awake to righteousness. We read in I John 3 that it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, like Christ.

Then we shall have joy. In one word, satisfied. When I awake, I shall be satisfied with His likeness. There shall be perfect union between our will and our thoughts, our heart and our deeds. We shall have fellowship with God. Who can tell of this glory? What tongue, what words, what thoughts, what sanctified emotions?

Now, let us weigh them together, shall we? Let us evaluate, compute, and calculate. Put all the suffering of this present time on the scale. Then, on the other side, put the glory that shall be revealed in us. The apostle Paul says, they cannot be compared! The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared to that glory.

I was thinking that perhaps a good illustration would be if we were to take one little grain of Lake Michigan sand and put it on one side of the scale. Then, we would take Mount Everest, that tallest of all mountains, and pull it up by its roots and place it on the other side of the scale. Then I thought, now there is the comparison between the grain of suffering and the weight of glory.

But the apostle says there is no comparison. They cannot be compared. Even my illustration does not catch it, does not show it. The sufferings are temporal, the glory is eternal. The sufferings are the weight of the cross that we bear, but we cannot compare that to the crown of glory that shall be ours.

But, you see, they cannot be compared, also, because suffering works glory. It is all glory. It is all our victory in Christ. The suffering of this present time serves the glory of the children of God. It is

attached to that glory. It is the way of God to prepare and mold, to teach and to bring to glory. The Word of God to us is not simply, "Bear up now under your sufferings, for it will one day be over." But the Word of God is, "Right now, through Jesus Christ, in the midst of your present sufferings, you are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. Even your sufferings, your tears, your griefs and sorrows — they must serve your glory!" That is the Word of God.

Suffering is the hand of God to pull you back from vanity. Sufferings are the fingers of God to mold you to His image. They are the chisel of God to sculpt and cut away carnality. And they are the servants of God to usher you to the portals of glory. Here is our faith. Here is our victory. All things work together for good to them that love God. All things are our servants. All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. That is our victory. Nothing less!

Do you believe this? Do you compromise your faith before the world? Do you try to avoid suffering for Christ? There is one word: Repent!

Do you, in the midst of your sufferings, become bitter and resentful, and do you tell God that He made a mistake? There is one word: Repent!

By faith, I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory. How do I know? There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. In Christ we are more than conquerors. In Christ, God says, I have loved you from everlasting. I have made you rich. Now, God says, I swear, I will glorify you in Christ through all things, and one day you shall be where I am and you shall see My glory shining through you. And you will be satisfied. 

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (15)

The Fifth Disputation, Chapter 3:7-12 (continued)

10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

It is evident from verse 10 that Israel's sin was primarily the sin of not giving the tithes at all, or giving only part of what God required. These sins are found in the church today as well. How often is it not the case that God receives only what is left over after we have gotten what we wanted, and what is left over is usually just a pittance. Nevertheless, there are other ways in which this sin is committed. When we give grudgingly, even if we give liberally, then we rob God, for our grudging covetousness is a failure to recognize that everything we have is His. Viewing it as our own we rob Him to whom it all belongs.

The same is true of those who give only to get. Those leaders who promote giving only to enrich themselves, and those who believe the lie that giving is primarily a way of getting even more in return from God (they speak of casting

their bread upon the waters, Eccl. 11:1), are also robbing God. They give not out of gratitude to God for His great mercy, but only to fill their own pockets at His expense.

That God promises to be liberal to those who give liberally does not contradict what we have said. Indeed, His liberality precedes our giving and is the reason for it. We do not, cannot, give anything to Him unless He has first given us all things in Christ; and then we give not to get more from Him, for what more can He give, but to acknowledge His great goodness and to show our gratitude.

Yet, in the way of showing our gratitude to Him in giving we experience and enjoy His goodness to us. The person who gives sparingly or grudgingly shows that he has experienced nothing of God's great goodness. The person who gives from the heart and in gratitude shows that he is already enjoying God's goodness, that he knows it and appreciates it. He has seen the windows of heaven opened and blessings poured out greater than he would ever ask or think.

Nor may we conclude from this verse that material prosperity is promised to all those who give liberally. Even if it were promised, it could not be the motive for giving, but it is not promised. In the Old Testament it was true in a limited way, especially for the nation as a whole, that faithfulness in these

matters brought material prosperity, but even then it was not necessarily true on an individual basis. What is more, material prosperity, though it can picture the blessing of God, does not in itself constitute that blessing. If it did, the poor would have to conclude that they have forfeited the blessing of God, and the rich would be able to think that they had His favor. Indeed, we would all conclude that the ungodly have more of His favor than His people, for the experience of God's people is often that of Asaph in Psalm 73: "Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.... All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (vv. 7, 14).

The blessings promised, therefore, are, in principle, spiritual and heavenly. They are the blessings of salvation—what the New Testament refers to as the riches of God's grace and the blessings that are in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3, 7).

That God speaks of "proving" Him is not in the bad sense of tempting Him by doubting Him and His goodness (cf. Ps. 78:18; 106:14), but in the sense of putting His mercy and goodness to the test by doing as He commands. Israel would find in doing this, Malachi says, that God is full of loving-kindness and tender mercy; that He is abundantly good to those who fear and serve Him. The word amounts, then, to a promise and guarantee of His goodness.

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Previous article in this series: February 1, 2007, p. 201.

There is some dispute about the last phrase of verse 10. Some understand it to mean that God promises to give more than enough, more than is sufficient for the needs of His people. Others understand it to mean that He promises to give perpetually and without end. The latter interpretation seems to be the more correct, in that the similar phrase is translated in Psalm 72:5: "as long as the sun and moon endure." In any case, however, it is evident that God is promising blessing beyond what we would ever ask or think (Eph. 3:20). He promises blessing as Jehovah of hosts, the covenant God of His people, the one to whom belong all the hosts of heaven and earth, all of which serve Him and accomplish His purpose and which He will use to give blessing to His people.

God also shows us here that our giving is primarily directed to the work of the church, the ministry of the gospel, and the well-being of God's people. "Give," He says, "that there may be meat in mine house." In the Old Testament the tithes were for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, for the upkeep of the temple, and for the support of the poor. So it is in the New Testament. Our offerings are not first of all for world relief or world hunger, but for the maintenance of the ministry of the gospel, to provide a living (not an enrichment) for the ministers of the gospel, and for the care of the poor and widows. We give to God by giving to the work and support of His church, and give in that way for we can give Him nothing directly. He is, after all, the one who is "dwelling in a light which no man can approach unto: whom no man hath seen, or can see."

11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Apparently the Jews were suffering the judgments of God on the crops and fields for their unfaithfulness. The verse speaks of disease, probably a blight of some kind, that was destroying the produce of the vines, as well as of the devourer. The latter refers to plagues of crop-destroying insects described by God in Joel as "my great army," an army that included the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and the palmerworm.

Again, we must note the difficulty in seeing specific acts of God's providence—diseases, plagues, famines, poverty, war, etc., as well as material prosperity—as evidences of His disfavor or favor. The difficulty arises out of the fact that events and occurrences and providences are not themselves the favor or blessing of God. Thus sickness, poverty, and trouble can be blessings to God's people, and wealth and health a curse to the ungodly.

We believe that it is impossible, in both the Old and New Testaments, to make any such consistent connection on a personal level, and that it is only on a national or worldwide scale that this can be seen. In other words, viewed at large, earthquakes, war, famines, and plagues are signs of God's judgment, even though the individual child of God need not fear, when he is caught up in these things, that God's displeasure rests on him personally.

Here, as a nation, Israel would see God's favor in material prosperity and in a withdrawal of the plagues that were destroying their livelihood. In the New Testament we see God's displeasure with our own nations and with the whole world of the ungodly in that such plagues are not removed, but rather increase.

Nevertheless, it should be evident that the judgments God sent on Israel's fields and vineyards are fulfilled in the spiritual plagues He sends on an unfaithful church in the New Testament. The result of

these plagues was prophesied by Amos: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." In such times of famine the church is dry, barren, and unfruitful—terrible times for those who remain faithful.

12. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

God promises Israel through Malachi that their prosperity would be an evidence of His blessing even to the nations around them. The difficulties they had previously experienced would vanish, their life in Canaan would be a life of ease and plenty, so much so that they would be envied by those who witnessed their prosperity.

This promise was never fulfilled literally. God is speaking of the future spiritual prosperity of His people. Stuart says:

The Israel of Malachi's day was a defeated little remainder state under Persian domination consisting of some of the former Judah and some of the former Benjamin, much of it still in ruins, its capital city still largely unpopulated (Neh. 11) and its people eking out a hardscrabble existence in an area of the world that no one could ever call "lush." But the future would hold for them things that they had never experienced, expressed here, as is typical in the prophets, in grand materialistic terms, though surely having their ultimate import in terms of the people's spiritual relationship to God.*

Because of this lack of literal fulfillment, there are those who believe that these promises still re-

* Douglas Stuart, *Malachi*, in Thomas Edward McComiskey, *An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, vol. 3, p. 1372.

main to be fulfilled in a future earthly millennial kingdom. We know, however, from the Word of God, that Israel is now a spiritual people (Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6-8; I Pet. 2:9, 10), that the promises concerning the land and their prosperity in the land are fulfilled in their blessed salvation and in the eternal blessedness of heaven (Heb. 11:9, 10, 13-16).

It is therefore the spiritual prosperity of the church that is prophesied and that fulfills the prophecy of Malachi. The church is a delightsome land, for there are the promises of God in Jesus Christ. There Christ rules as the everlasting King of His people. There His people enjoy the forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, and the work of the Holy Spirit. There they are separated, as Israel was in Egypt, from the spiritual plagues that fall upon the ungodly: terror,

a troubled conscience, hopelessness, separation from God, the failure of marriage and family, violence, deceit, and all the other judgments of God upon this present world. A delightsome land indeed!

It is also heaven and its blessings of which Malachi speaks. There can be no doubt of this in view of the word of God in Hebrews 11:16, which speaks of a better and heavenly country, and Revelation 21 and 22, which give us a glimpse of that delightsome land:

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth,

neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

And they shall see his face: and his name shall be in their foreheads.

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever (21:22-22:5). 

Guest Article

Mr. Greg VanOverloop

P.R.A.I.S.E.

(Protestant Reformed Applications In Special Education)

This article is an appeal to all of us to learn about and better understand Protestant Reformed Special Education. The article is written to all of us and is meant to be educational and motivational. There is a Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education. It was started some time ago. The society/board has and does support many different aspects in our day schools. The foundation for the society is covenantal

and a beautiful picture of the communion of the saints. It has and does receive great support from across the United States and Canada. This society is a marvelous gift of God. The society has been and is being blessed but has a great need.

The society started as a meeting in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in the early 1980s. The idea for such a society was a brainchild of Rev. VanBaren and Professor Hoeksema along with their wives. The initial meeting was held with a board being elected. The purpose and goal of the society is summed up in this constitutional mandate, "The pur-

pose of this society is to provide God-centered education for those who cannot at the present time receive instruction in our present schools because of mental and/or physical handicaps." This board set out to raise funds, find a teacher, and communicate with parents of children who were not attending a Protestant Reformed School because of learning disabilities. They also communicated with the denomination as a whole. A couple of years later a room was provided in one of our schools, with a special education teacher, along with 3-4 children.

Since then the society has supported a teacher in Lynden, Wash-

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ington; a program in Loveland, Colorado; and a resource room at Eastside, Adams, Hope, Covenant, and Heritage Christian Schools in west Michigan. The programs are Resource Room in nature. Children in these rooms typically do not have a higher level of needs. These children would therefore attend a Protestant Reformed School even if the Special Ed society did not exist.

Are the children in our Resource Rooms benefiting from the work of this society? Yes. Are the children's school experiences enhanced by their work in these Resource Rooms? Yes. The society's mandate, as expressed in its statement of purpose, has been the education of a number of children with higher learning difficulties. These children's labels include Learning Disabled, Autism, Downs Syndrome, etc.

Protestant Reformed Special Education's main thrust is financial. It raises money to help fund the above programs. There have been numerous teachers, aides, and volunteers to date. Hundreds of children have been touched by this society and board. Not only has and does the society fulfill its mandate, but it does much more. Children who need help have it available with much more concentration and focus than in the past. The different programs supported are being improved each year with a view to narrowing the knowledge gap between the special-ed child and the regular-ed child. Most amazing it is when, after many different children are given diagnostic tests, followed by appropriate remedial help, some of them actually overcome their difficulties.

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for

of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).

We should all thank the teachers, aides, and volunteers who "suffer" our children. We should thank, too, the "regular ed" children of our school, because they are an important aspect of educating those children with large learning disabilities. Many a teacher can testify to the support and help provided by children of our schools in this program. Often the support, helping hand, kind and gentle words, and quiet admonishing of a child to a child with special needs is most powerful. Parents, be encouraged to teach your children why children with severe needs are and should be a part of our schools. Also, encourage your child, as a member of the body of Christ, to help the teacher with children with special needs when asked.

The society has received much money over the years in order to support these programs. The Lord has given the society willing men to labor for this effort. God be praised for His gift of Protestant Reformed Special Education and His guiding hand in its existence.

Why should Protestant Reformed Special Education be supported? One reason is the covenant. The mysterious bond of friendship within the Trinity has been extended as a precious gift to those most undeserved. God as our Friend has spoken it in eternity. He, majestically sovereign, all powerful, all glorious, takes us to Himself in His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He gathers us in His arms, puts His hands on us, and blesses us with everything we need for our earthly pilgrimage. We struggle often to get out of His arms, yet they are unrelenting. We hate Him, are ashamed of Him, ne-

glect His love letters to us, yet He loves us. Incomprehensible, unbelievable, amazing!!! We hear His covenant in the preaching of His Word, we taste it at the Supper, we see it all around us, we touch it at baptism. Yes, we touch it when we hold our child forth to receive the sign that God saves us in our generations. We are asked at baptism, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein to the utmost of your power?" We see and hear, at baptism, the need for educating our children on the basis of God's Word. We see and hear, at baptism, the need for educating our children in an institution that is an extension of our homes. Ought this not to be true for the child with special needs too? "Suffer the little children...."

The other reason for supporting Protestant Reformed Special Education is based on the communion of the saints.

Nay, much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon those we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part that lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it (I Cor. 12:22-26).

Prof. David Engelsma, in his book *Reformed Education*, speaks to verse 23 of I Corinthians 12 in this way:

The school is for *all* the covenant children. It is not for the bright or college-bound children only. The covenantal character of the school would demand that special attention be paid to the inferior student. In the kingdom, the law is that we "bestow more abundant honor" on the "less honorable" members of the body" (p. 18).

Also, brotherly love is addressed in Hebrews 13: 1, 3b. "Let brotherly love continue. Remember... them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

How can you support Protestant Reformed Special Education? First is prayer. Pray for those involved in this amazing work: the parents, teachers, aides and volunteers, the children with the special needs, and the children that will interact with them. Another way is to be involved in some way with these children—if not at school,

then in some other way socially. Faith Protestant Reformed Young People's Special Needs program or the Grand Rapids area Christian Fellowship Group are two shining examples of how our young people and young adults can enrich the lives of children and themselves.

Also, continued financial support is needed. The society has never lacked for money to support the programs. But the need is always there. It is your generous gifts that allow it to happen.

Last, and hardly the least, of the society's needs is members. The society needs your help in this way: to become a member and to attend its annual meetings. The society is too small, at 50 men, and with only half attending the meetings. You are needed because the cause is important to all of us. Your school is affected by this society. Your children are affected by this society, ei-

ther directly through its programs or by your child(ren) attending a school affected by this society's programs. The burden of this society cannot rest in the hands of a very few. More are needed to hold up and support this little institution that is so broad in scope. Please consider this need.

In conclusion, special needs children are God's gift to us, just as all children are. They are not our children, they are His. We know this from what He tells us each Sunday. And in His Word we have read it. All our institutions—home, school, and church—have recognized the fact that these children are ours to care for and nurture. Let our actions "suffer" these special children. God is praised when we care for them. He is honored when the gift of grace we receive is so overpowering. Praise Him! 

Book Reviews



A Concise History of Christian Thought, by Tony Lane (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). Pp. x-336. \$19.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof Herman Hanko.]

The author, professor of historical theology and director of research at the London School of Theology, has given us a very worthwhile book. It can best be called a biographical history of doctrine. It is unique in that it traces the development of doctrine from the early church to today by means of biographical sketches of the church's theologians and what they taught. The description of their teachings is enhanced by pertinent quotes from their writings.

The author has covered a wide field of theologians. He has divided them into five categories: The Church of the Fathers to AD 500, under which he treats twenty-five theologians and councils; The Eastern Tradition from AD 500, under which are treated ten theolo-

gians and councils; The Medieval West (AD 500-1500), under which are treated twenty-five theologians and councils, including the pre-Reformers; Reformation and Reaction (1500-1800), under which are treated thirty-three theologians and the chief confessions adopted during this period; Christian Thought in the Modern World (1800 onwards), under which are included forty theologians and various important documents produced during the period.

The biographical sketches are short, as well as the descriptions of the doctrines treated. It is a bird's-eye view of the history of doctrine, rather than a detailed and scholarly study. But its sketchy character gives the book its value for God's people who are interested in church history and are eager to learn the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ in the church. One will meet many people of whom he has heard much: Athanasius, John of Damascus, Francis of

Assisi, John Wyclif and John Hus, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Blaise Pascal, Schleiermacher, Tillich, Charles Finney, G. C. Berkhouwer, John Stott, Karl Barth, Hans Kung, and a host of others. One will also learn of the important councils that were held, the documents drawn up at different times in the church, and the creeds of the post-Reformation times.

One weakness of the book, no doubt due to its format, is the failure to show that doctrine *develops*. The church in any given age stands on the shoulders of the church that lived in earlier days. The truth develops as an unfolding of a rose from a small bud to a fully developed flower. The same is true of the lie. Heresies do not usually arise out of the blue. In heresy there is nothing new under the sun, but each heresy is an old one, clothed in different rags, and showing the wrinkles of age. The book is a photo album, not a moving picture. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

The council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC approved the request of our Seminary that their pastor and council oversee the internship of Mr. Heath Bleyenberg from July 1 through December 31 of this year. Seminarian Bleyenberg is in his third year of seminary, is a son of the Edgerton, MN PRC, and currently is a member of Hope PRC in Walker, MI. The bulk of work for the intern is preparing and delivering a minimum of nine sermons during the six months of the internship. In addition, the student must teach a minimum of two catechism classes per week, lead a minimum of two Bible Study Societies weekly or biweekly, attend some consistory meetings, take part in some family visitation and counseling sessions, and, either in the company of the pastor or on his own, do some sick visiting and comforting of the bereaved.

The members of the Byron Center, MI PRC got together Saturday afternoon, February 10, for their annual sliding party at Byron Center Jr. High School. Sliding started around 3:00 P.M. and lasted until dinnertime, which was at Adams Christian School at 6:00 P.M. This year, unlike some in the past when the sliding had to be cancelled for lack of snow, the party came off without any problems. There was plenty of snow and cold to go around.

At its meeting on January 2, the council of the Randolph, WI PRC appointed a Future Building Expansion Committee. This committee's mandate is to make recommendation to the council regarding a building expansion, in light of the fact that Randolph's sanctuary is full every Sunday,

with an increasing number of members sitting on chairs in their narthex. In addition, Randolph's council called a congregational meeting for February 12. At that meeting the council presented a proposal to their congregation to allow the newly appointed Future Building Expansion Committee to spend money for services required to do conceptual planning and cost-estimating for any building plans.

The February 4 bulletin from the First PRC in Holland, MI contained an invitation to the men of First to meet together that afternoon for the inaugural meeting of a Men's Chorus. All men interested in singing were welcomed to join.

On Sunday, February 11, members of our churches in west Michigan were invited to Faith PRC in Jenison, MI for a late-winter program presented by the Faith Choral Society.

School Activities

Members of the PTA of Hope PR Christian School in Walker met together February 8 to hear Mrs. Sarah Decker speak on the topic, "Why Can't Johnny Read—What's going on in the Brain?" Mrs. Decker explained in detail why some students struggle with reading, and what can be done to help them.

The ladies of the Loveland PR Christian School Fundraisers in Loveland, CO delivered flowers for two local flower shops on February 13 and 14 as a way to raise money for their school.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL planned a Gym Night for Friday, February 9 at Lansing Christian's gym from 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. High school age and older were invited. Pizza and refreshments were provided.

The Jr. Young People's Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI hosted a mother/daughter/sister dinner Saturday, February 10 at their church.

The Young People's Society of Randolph, WI PRC invited the young adults and young people of our Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL for an exciting weekend of skiing and fellowship together February 3 or 4 in Randolph. The group from Bethel left their church parking lot around 8:00 A.M. Saturday morning, arriving in Randolph in time for a pizza lunch with Randolph's young people. After lunch the group spent time together discussing the booklet "The Evil of Drama," written by Rev. R. Smit, with the remainder of the afternoon spent in fellowship and games. Sadly, the weather proved too cold for skiing, so the young people of Randolph made alternate plans for a night at the gym. The group from Bethel stayed overnight in Randolph and attended worship services with the congregation there on Sunday, arriving back in Roselle Sunday evening. The consistories of each congregation also approved a pulpit switch between Rev. J. Mahtani and Rev. D. Kuiper for that Sunday as well, so each congregation enjoyed a guest pastor that Lord's Day.

The Young People of the Doon, Iowa PRC hosted a supper for members of their congregation on February 5. In addition to a delicious meal, the young people offered valet parking before the meal, and an opportunity for couples to have their picture taken sometime during the evening. Donations were accepted to help finance this year's young people's convention.

Members of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to dinner on February 9 at their church. This opportunity for dinner and fellowship was hosted by Lynden's young people, and the money raised was also in-

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

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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Michigan

tended to help support this summer's young people's convention.

The young people of the South

Holland, IL PRC enjoyed a ski outing at Bittersweet Ski Resort in Michigan on Saturday, February 10. The young people traveled to-

gether by bus, arriving back sometime around 9:00 P.M. after a day of fun and fellowship together. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA extends their sympathy to Berend and Janine Meelker, Henry and Karen Meelker, Laurie Jabaay, and their families in the death of

ANDREW MEELKER.

We bow to God's infinite wisdom and mercies and find comfort in His Word as found in Isaiah 55: 8, 9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Neva Feenstra, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On February 3, 2007 the Lord, in His infinite good pleasure, called to heaven the 17-year old son of Berend and Janine Meelker of the Hope PRC of Redlands,

ANDREW JON MEELKER.

The council of the Hope PRC of Redlands extend their sympathy to Deacon Henry Meelker and family in the sudden death of their nephew. May God comfort us with the words of John 14:3: "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
John K. Feenstra, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2007, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezena
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adults' Society of Hope PRC of Redlands express their Christian sympathy to Chad, Brent, and Deanna Meelker and family; for the Lord in His divine sovereignty and love called their brother,

ANDREW MEELKER,

unto his eternal home. We pray that they may receive comfort and peace in the words of I Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Joel Hendriks, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest PRC extend Christian sympathy to Mrs. Peter Feenstra and family in the sudden death of their husband and father,

PETER FEENSTRA.

May they be comforted in the promise of God, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Mr. Marvin Kamps, Pres.
Mrs. Clarence Kuiper, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, IL extends its Christian sympathy to our vice-president, Mr. Michael Feenstra, in the sudden death of his beloved father,

MR. PETER FEENSTRA.

We pray that God will bear you up in His everlasting arms. "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the LORD" (Psalm 27:14).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Mr. Arthur H. DeJong, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

In thankfulness to our Heavenly Father for His covenantal blessings, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

WILLIAM and PATRICIA DE JONG, who will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary on March 25, 2007, the Lord willing. We give thanks to our Lord for the years He has given to them and for the faithful instruction they have given to us through their teaching and godly example. It is our prayer that God will continue to be with and bless their marriage, and that their joy together may always be in Him.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD forever; for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26: 3, 4).

* Nathan and Brenda Dykstra

Kaitlyn, Emmalie

* Paul and Erin DeJong

Jenna, Evan

* Michael and Beth Vermeer

Caleb

* Joanna DeJong

Beecher, Illinois

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On January 29, 2007, the Lord in His sovereign good pleasure called home

MRS. THERESA LENTING.

The Consistory and congregation of South Holland PRC convey their sympathy to her family. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

NOTICE

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Melinda Bleyenberg at 616-453-8898 or e-mail darylmel@altelco.net by April 2, 2007.