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Volume 83 ◆ Number 6

Godly Joseph

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost....

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Matthew 1:19-20, 24-25

In the immediately preceding context there is set forth the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Beginning with Abraham, Matthew traces the line of Jesus. Included in this line are four women, three

of whom are stained with the sin of adultery, and the fourth, Ruth, is of the line of Moab, who was conceived in the sin of incest between Lot and one of his daughters.

When we come to verse 16 we see something different from what is seen in the preceding verses, where in the entire line there runs the word "begot." But here Joseph is set forth as the husband of Mary, of whom, says Matthew, was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Then, to explain what is meant by this, Matthew shows in what wise Jesus was conceived and born.

The text sets forth the only possible way in which Jesus Christ could be our Savior. He was conceived, not by man, but by the Holy Ghost. Thus He was truly God and at the same time sinless, righteous man. Born in any other way would have made His being our Savior impossible.

Therefore, in order that there be no doubt as to what was already suggested in verse 16, Matthew now fully explains. Mary was

found to be pregnant before Joseph and Mary came together, meaning that Joseph was not the father of the child within her. Mary's being with child was the work of the Holy Spirit. This was confirmed by the appearance of an angel to Joseph, who explained to him that this was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as found in Isaiah 7:14. This is further confirmed when we are informed that Joseph knew not Mary until the birth of Jesus. All of this establishes the miraculous birth of Jesus as the wonder of grace.

However, all this by way of introduction. Let us look more closely at the difficult position in which Joseph finds himself.

We notice in verse 19 that Joseph is identified as the "husband" of Mary. The two of them were engaged, that is, espoused (v. 18). Engagements in the day of Joseph and Mary meant much more than engagements in our day. Today, engagements are a promise to one another to marry, but which promise has no legal or binding charac-

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ter. If either the man or the woman for one reason or another wishes to break the engagement, the one simply tells the other of the fact. There may be sadness for one or both, or it may be mutually agreed on.

For Joseph and Mary it was different. Engagement was of a binding nature. The bridegroom and bride would pledge their troth to each other in the presence of witnesses. In a restricted sense this was essentially the marriage. That is clear from both the text and its context because, from the moment of espousal or betrothal, Joseph is called Mary's *husband* (v. 19); and Mary is called Joseph's *wife* (v. 20). According to the Old Testament regulation, unfaithfulness in either of the betrothed was punishable with death (Deut. 22:23, 24). Therefore, no further vows or ceremonies were needed.

Only the "coming together" (v. 18) was yet to take place. Though the two were legally espoused, it was considered proper that an interval of time elapse before husband and wife would begin to live together in the same home. This home-bringing, the bringing of the bride to her husband's house, was made a festive occasion, with a procession and a feast following. Confer the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. It was before Joseph and Mary had begun to live together, with all that this implies both as to domestic and sexual relations, that Joseph discovered Mary's pregnancy.

Indeed, this was a shocking discovery for Joseph. You can imagine his disappointment. He truly loved his wife, and to think that she had been unfaithful to him, even to the extent of becoming pregnant by another man, was truly heartbreaking. He was torn with grief because of what his eyes saw in this gentle woman, whom he had always found to be a model of purity and who still bore this character.

Whether Mary revealed her

pregnancy to Joseph or whether he saw her obvious condition the Scriptures do not tell us. The Scriptures simply tell us that she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. However Joseph may have found out, we know that it was not right away, for the angel first directed Mary to her cousin Elisabeth in the hill country, there to commune with her friend. As far as Joseph was concerned, Mary left it all in the hands of the Lord. This was an act of absolute reliance upon God, all the more admirable in light of the circumstances. And we know how the Lord did not disappoint her and her faith. The Lord is gracious.

We stated in the title of this article that Joseph was a godly man. Our text tells us that he was a "just man," putting him in the same category as Zacharias and Elisabeth, who were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." In this same category we find Simeon who was "righteous and devout." That Joseph was "just" refers both to his heart and to his conduct. Therefore, as a truly religious Jew, Joseph could not think of consummating his marriage with Mary under the present circumstances, no matter how much he loved her.

At the same time he "was not willing to make her a public example," revealing that he was kind and tenderhearted. Although he was hurt deeply and very disappointed, yet in his love for Mary he did not want to do anything that would hurt her.

So what was Joseph going to do? He had two choices: either to charge Mary with adultery and thus make her a public example, letting such Jewish law as was in force at that time take its course. This was the harsher way that would have exposed Mary to public disgrace, which was exactly what Joseph wanted to avoid. Or there was the gentler, milder way, to make use of the lax divorce laws

of the Jews, and without charging her with any crime, give Mary a letter of divorcement, stating the cause in a veiled way or stating none at all.

This was what was going through Joseph's mind when the angel of God appeared unto him. Joseph did not simply dream about this angel. The angel of Joseph's dream was real, he "appeared." When God sends an angel messenger to a sleeper, He never has the least difficulty in demonstrating that the appearance in the dream is actual. Joseph knew that this angel had been at his bedside that night. It was just as real to him as was the earlier appearance to Zacharias and Mary and later to himself in chapter 2:13.

The instruction of the angel was clear. Joseph must recognize the divine work of God upon Mary and take her to himself to wife. In but a few simple words the angel reveals one of the greatest mysteries ever to take place. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." This was just what Joseph needed to hear. For a child to be conceived apart from the instrumentality of man in the normal way was unheard of and humanly impossible. Joseph would never have believed it had not an angel sent by God conveyed this information to him.

Now Joseph has God's word concerning the child, an infallible word of truth that takes away all his fears and misgivings. He could take unto himself his dear wife. What joy must have flooded his soul. He understood that he could now be Mary's protector, providing for her physical needs and defending her honor over against all malicious slander.

There is also joy for us in this message of the angel. In this truth of the virgin birth is the guarantee of salvation for God's people, for apart from this kind of birth Christ could not have been their Savior. If Christ had been the son of Joseph and Mary by ordinary gen-

eration, then He would have been a human person, and as such a sharer in Adam's guilt, hence a sinner unable to save Himself or others from sin. In order to save us, the Redeemer must in one person be both God and man, sinless man. The doctrine of the virgin birth satisfies both of these requirements. It reveals to us Jesus Christ, one divine person with two natures: divine and sinless human.

Joseph unquestioningly obeyed

the angel of God. He took Mary to himself as his wife, but he "knew her not" till Jesus was born. This, also, is part of the God-ordained plan for our salvation. Joseph presents to us a beautiful example for us to follow. He walked in willing submission to God's revelation. He accepted the word of the angel as the very word of God Himself, and obeyed accordingly.

So we are called to walk this season. There are many who deny

the truth of God's revelation in this text. We must not listen to them. They are haters of God and of His Word. Nor may we cover up the wonder with all manner of outward celebrations. But hearing God's Word, we humbly worship Him. So did the shepherds on the night of His birth. So did the wise men from the East some time later. We too bow in adoration before our Savior.

O blessed Savior! 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Victory at Bethlehem

Some 2000 years ago, in the insignificant town of Bethlehem, a baby boy was born into the humblest of circumstances. This firstborn child of a young woman far from home was born in a cattle stall, wrapped in whatever scraps of cloth the mother had been able to accumulate, and laid in a manger. And so came into the world the child named in His tongue Jehovah-salvation (Jesus), because the angel testified that this One would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

The lowliness of this birth is important theologically. It points to the fact that the promised Messiah came in the state of humiliation. He was born in abject poverty. His humble birth already indicates that the way of the Savior was to be a life of suffering and humiliation.

Yet that is not the whole story, as we all know. This child Jesus is a wonder. The angel Gabriel instructed Mary concerning this wonder saying, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). *God* was born in Bethlehem. Or, ex-

pressing it as the Spirit gave John to write, the Word who was from the beginning, who is God, "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-14).

Not only that, but the Bible makes plain that the birth of Jesus was a victorious entrance into the world. Hebrews 1:6 relates that when God brought "in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." This Jesus came as Lord. Such was the testimony of the angel to the shepherds—"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

This victorious character of Jesus' birth can be understood only as connected with His cross. Of course, the same is true of all Jesus' activity—His whole life and all His teaching, miracles, and suffering—none of it can be rightly understood except as related to the cross. The miraculous birth of Jesus was for the purpose of going to the cross.

Jesus' first coming *is* victory. It is a full and complete triumph. Nothing can be added to improve it. All that God sent Him to ac-

complish, Christ did. This includes the full salvation of the elect, the full redemption of the creation, the full destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the utter defeat of the kingdoms of this world.

This truth of Jesus' victory must be maintained over against the erroneous teaching that Jesus' first coming was not the victory. It must be defended in the face of the assertion that Christ does not now *rule* over the present creation, but only *claims* ownership and sovereignty over it.

The idea is touted in Reformed circles that the victory of Jesus in His first coming was only the *start* of an unfinished war. According to this view, Satan moved in and took over God's creation, just as an army of soldiers might invade a foreign country and occupy it with military force. Then in His first coming, Jesus launched a counter-offensive in order to reclaim his rightful dominion. Some, indeed, will say that by His death and resurrection Jesus achieved victory in principle. However, this "victory in principle," they maintain, only established a beachhead, an entry point, from which His armies can

go forth to conquer the whole earth.

Comparison is made to the fighting by the Allied forces in World War II. According to this analogy, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was necessary for victory just as D-Day (the huge invasion of Normandy in June of 1944) was necessary to break Hitler's stranglehold on Europe. Yet that massive invasion was only the start of fighting that would lead to V-Day in 1945. Similarly, it is said, Christians today are Christ's soldiers, fighting against the agents of Satan for full control of the earth—a "mop-up" operation.

That understanding of Christ's first coming and subsequent history is altogether wrong.

First, it is a dualistic view of history. A dualism maintains that two opposing powers inhabit the universe. In this case the two powers are God and Satan. They are the forces of good and evil. They have separate origins, separate bases of power, and separate organizations. They battle each other all through history, seeking to destroy the other and take full control of the universe. This dualistic view of Scripture teaches that God will ultimately triumph due to His superior power.

The Reformed believer recognizes immediately that dualism denies the sovereignty of God. It denies that God is the Creator of all things, all of which, including Satan and his host, are but creatures dependent on God for their continued existence.

The truth is, Satan did not, like some foreign power, "invade" God's earth and take control. Rather, God formed Satan, endued him with power, and determined that he would fall (which Satan did in willful rebellion). Likewise God willed eternally that Adam and Eve, made king and queen of the earthly creation, would heed the temptation of Satan and rebel (which they willingly did). *God* cursed man and the creation un-

der man. *God* in perfect judgment then gave man into the bondage of Satan, to whom God gave the power of death (Heb. 2:14). The Bible teaches no dualism, but the absolute sovereignty of God.

Secondly, the "D-Day" theory of Christ's first coming is wrong because God never lost His creation. Believers today join the church of the old dispensation singing "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24.1). God maintains full control over His world—watering the hills from His chambers; causing the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man (Ps. 104:13-14). Moses demonstrated to reprobate Pharaoh that God is in control, telling him, "As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD'S" (Ex. 9:29). God repeated the same message to His people more than once (Ps. 50:12; Deut. 10:14). God never once allowed men to believe that Satan had taken over His world, and that Christ had to reclaim it.

Third, that Jesus did not come to displace an invader (Satan) and reestablish His control is evident from the truth that He came as Lord (Luke 2:11). The Christ is very man, but also very God. As God, He ruled over all, so that everything, and everyone, accomplished His sovereign will. For instance, when Satan entered into Judas' heart to betray Jesus, God sent Satan. In this way Judas became God's agent to bring Jesus to the cross on that Friday.

When the Sanhedrin came together illegally to judge Jesus, God controlled them, so that they condemned Jesus to death and brought Him to Pilate. When Pilate was faced with the distasteful task of condemning and executing an innocent man, his heart was in the hand of the God, who turned it as He willed.

God was executing His counsel, and all these men were doing whatsoever God's "counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). Through God's sovereign control of devils and men, Jesus became accused for our sakes, paid for our sins, and crushed the head of the serpent.

Fourth, this false presentation of Christ's first coming leaves the outcome of the battle up to men. Despite the pious reassurance that Jesus achieved victory in His death and resurrection, this theory implies that Christ's soldiers, like the Allied troops of WW II, are still fighting *for* the victory. The proof is that the supposed "mop-up" operation demands fierce fighting against the agents of Satan. Fighting for what? Fighting to establish the rule of Jesus Christ, that is, to make His *claim* of dominion a *reality*.

Convinced by this false propaganda, these folks insist that the Christian's calling is to realize Christ's dominion over this earth. Some pursue this goal by means of "regaining" or "redeeming" creation—going through all the spheres of creation and setting things right, according to God's law for each sphere. In an effort to make this sound proper, they may call their activity *reformatio*nal. Some are busy cleaning up this dirty creation, joining hands with unbelievers, who supposedly have common grace in order to cooperate with believers to improve the creation, thus establishing Christ's rule.

Others seek to establish Christ's rule by political means. They insist that Christians must band together to obtain seats in congress or parliament and must pressure their leaders to rule in a way that establishes Christ's law or rule in the land.

Others are determined through education to bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"—something Paul did through preaching (II Cor. 10:5).

Still others are digging trenches in culture wars, hoping to establish the claims of Christ upon the morals of society. And some strive to extend Christ's rule over the earth through preaching.

The final outcome, and the coming of Christ's kingdom, depends on the diligence of the Christian soldiers. One proponent of this false teaching, Al Wolters (*Creation Re-gained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*), illustrates how God's people can and must regain the creation for Christ in each sphere. After discussing one such example, that of dance, he concludes: "...the kingdom of God will not come in its fullness without the redemption of this area of human celebration and enjoyment also" (p. 95).

All this is misguided zeal, at best. And it is devilish at worst. In most instances, efforts to establish Christ's rule in the earth are closely related to a failure to recognize the true nature of Jesus' kingdom. It is a heavenly and spiritual kingdom, not an earthly.

Miss that, and one can only conclude that the first coming of Christ was a complete failure. It was not even the establishment of a beachhead. It was a defeat of the worst kind.

In His three and a half years of unceasing labor, Jesus did not change Jewish society one whit; He did not exert influence on the leaders; He did not get a "Jesus for king" movement started (in fact, He killed that movement). After years of hard work, Jesus had but a handful of faithful followers, and even they forsook Him in His darkest hour. His own people rejected Him. His rulers condemned Him to death. And the great world power of the day, represented by Herod and Pilate, joined in condemning and crucifying Him.

He died. He was buried. He lost.

That brings us to the heart of the issue. This erroneous teaching is premised on the false notion that Jesus' "victory" in His first com-

ing was in name only. The fact is, however, the victory has been won. Christ Jesus truly accomplished it in His first coming.

To be clear on this, in a sense it is right to speak of Satan's "control" of this sin-cursed world. He is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), and, "the god of this world [who] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (II Cor. 4:4). His power, graphically demonstrated in the demon-possession recorded in Scripture, is terrible. As we have noted, God justly placed man under that dreadful control of Satan. Indeed, Christ came to deliver His people from the one who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14).

How? Not by some mortal combat with Satan, as if Jesus had to wrestle His people from Satan. Rather, Christ's saving work is the work of redemption first of all. His work involves bearing the guilt of His people, paying for their sins, thus redeeming them from the punishment of sin, death, and Satan's power. In fact, Christ came to redeem the whole creation from the curse placed on it for man's sake (Rom. 8:21).

But how, specifically? By satisfying the justice of *God*. Christ came to fulfill God's righteous demands—perfect obedience, atoning sacrifice, substitutionary death. If Christ accomplished this, He would deliver His people from the power of Satan.

Surely then we can see that in this work Christ battled against *the* enemy of God. Satan opposed Jesus by every means at his disposal. He stirred up ungodly men to seek Jesus' life before He could accomplish God's will (Herod, the people of Nazareth). He used the unbelieving lawyers and Pharisees in attempts to pit Jesus against God's law. Above all, he tempted Jesus to be unfaithful to God—to forsake the way of obedience, the way of suffering, the way of satis-

fying God's wrath for His chosen.

But none of these attacks deterred Jesus. He did His Father's will perfectly. Jesus was victorious—completely victorious.

Approving of this complete victory—for nothing less than complete victory could have pleased God—God lifted Jesus out of the grave. And then, "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Jesus ascended as a conquering general, leading "captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8). From God's right hand, Jesus rules over all things by the sovereign power of His might. He rules in the hearts of His people by His sovereign grace. But He rules sovereignly in every sphere of life.

It is important for believers to be reminded that this same Jesus is Lord over all now. All over the globe, wicked men strive, and it appears that they are opposing the rule of Christ. Indeed, they are spiritual rebels, opposed to Christ. And yet, even their raging (for which they are accountable) only serves His purposes.

The perverse act of a blasphemous rock star fulfills Christ's purpose to reveal the depravity of man, and expose the full horror of Adam's root sin.

Profane man turns upside down the creation order with regard to the marriage of one man and one woman for life—and thus demonstrate man's total rebellion against God—even to his own hurt. No one is outside the rule of Jesus Christ.

Christ will continue to rule over all. He has even told His church what He will bring to pass as He opens the seals of God's counsel. He will unify the false church around the lie, so that the hearts of many men will be revealed. These "pious" reprobates will reveal their hatred of the Lord Jesus by killing the believers and openly bowing the knee to the *man* of sin who represents Satan.

The Lord will bring together all the nations of the world, again using Satan as His agent. Christ determines the great persecution for His purposes of cleansing the church and filling up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1:24).

Christ Jesus rules. God has given Him full power over all creatures (Eph. 1:19-22). There is not one square inch of the creation that is outside of His sovereign power.

Even the birth of the Savior demonstrates that He is Lord. The Incarnation is the wonder of all

wonders. That babe in Bethlehem’s manger is God Himself. In Him the divine and the human are perfectly united. What incomprehensible power!

The soldiers of Jesus Christ do indeed fight in this time between His first victorious coming and His triumphant return. They fight for the cause of Christ and against sin and Satan. The only weapon they need is the one Christ has given—His powerful Word. Thus they preach His truth, and send it over all the earth, for it is the power of God unto salvation. By the Word

His spiritual kingdom is established, and the sovereign power of might is replaced by the sovereign power of grace in the hearts and lives of His people.

Believers are certainly called to fight, but their fighting is not for an earthly kingdom. Our warfare is not aimed at regaining the creation—Christ already redeemed it. We fight not *for* the victory, for Christ has already accomplished it, and the victory is ours through faith in Jesus (I John 5:4). We fight *in* victory—the victory of the Lord, born in Bethlehem. 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Korterling

Evangelism in the Established Church (4) *Practicing Personal Evangelism*

Part E, Personal Evangelism’s Impact on Church Extension

With this article, we bring to a close our consideration of the work of evangelism in the established church. As we noted before, most of this work is done by a local church extension committee. This committee is instructed to come up with projects and ideas for extending the gospel beyond the confines of the local congregation. The focal point of congregational involvement is the worship services. The pastor, elders, and deacons, along with all the members, lift up their testimony of praise to Jehovah in the midst of the neighborhood. This act alone is most significant as a form of witness or evangelism to the world. Usually we put a signboard on the

lawn in front of the church to announce our worship services, and add, “Visitors Welcome.” Yet, we all know that seldom, if ever, does a non-member come to worship with us because of that signboard. We are sincere in our invitation, but it is quite ineffective in moving people to come inside. Some churches make it more “attention getting” by using the electronic format with catchy sayings. One wonders whether such gimmicks are not more distractions than actually aids in evangelism.

Non-members must be invited to come and worship. This being true, our church extension committees are given the mandate to come up with programs that go beyond our worship services to acquaint people with our ministry as a church and to invite them to participate with us in the good news of the gospel.

In this series of articles we have tried to demonstrate that all these efforts by the church extension

committee must involve personal evangelism by our membership if they are to attain the goal. The key to any effective outreach effort must include our members consciously and actively reaching out to neighbors and acquainting them with our efforts and inviting them to participate.

In this closing article I want to demonstrate this more specifically.

When we assess various possibilities of outreach projects, we quickly realize that some efforts must be rejected because of their secular emphasis. I have in mind the efforts of a church to be a community church and establish some sort of contact with neighbors by hosting an antique auto show in the parking lot. This might draw a crowd of auto enthusiasts, but more than likely if any effort is put forth to add a religious flavor, it would be offensive because people would then readily know that the auto show was a ruse for religious promotion.

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Previous article in this series: October 1, 2006, p. 15

There may be times when a society of the church or school may sponsor a public event such as a soup supper, a pancake breakfast, or such like in which the extended families and people of the community are invited. This is usually done for goodwill, especially in small communities. Even then, with some planning such as adding the singing of a vocal group of the church or a brief message by the pastor, it is possible to use such opportunities for evangelism.

I know instances where a neighborhood meal was promoted in connection with some event that easily has religious overtones. Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, Mother's Day, or something of that sort can provide an opportunity to invite the neighbors to visit the church for some eating and fellowship that includes religious music and a message. Social and spiritual can coincide rather easily in such instances.

It ought to be obvious that if we avoid secular events completely and focus on those that include an opportunity to have spiritual fellowship with the neighbors of the church, such events can contribute to significant outreach. Personal evangelism comes to the foreground in two ways. First, the members must invite the people to come to the event; this is the most effective way to have people come. Second, the members must interact with these neighbors once they show up and demonstrate a loving and caring interest in their lives and well-being. These events blossom when the members exercise their calling to share the gospel by personal evangelism.

Let me now list some possible events and activities that church extension committees could consider. The purpose of this list is to demonstrate that *all* of the activities prosper when the members engage in personal evangelism in connection with the event.

We hold public meetings, whether our worship services, pub-

lic lectures, Bible Studies, or Vacation Bible School. Obviously, we do not equate public worship with the other ways of teaching. Our emphasis here is simply that they are public and we desire others to come and attend. The worship service is the intimate fellowship between Christ and His church, to be sure. The preaching is Christ speaking to His beloved to whom the church responds in affectionate words of praise. Even then, we desire visitors—we desire Christ to add to this church such as should be saved. Hence we seek the presence of visitors and inquirers at our worship service.

From this point of view, the same is true with public lectures, when a specific topic is considered for the benefit of the listeners. You may have discussed a topic over coffee with your neighbor, and now your pastor is going to give a lecture on the same subject. You will be excited to invite this neighbor to come and listen. Be sure you offer to pick him up or meet him at the door and sit with him, as this helps greatly to overcome the barrier of unfamiliar surroundings.

By Bible Studies we refer to those sponsored by the local congregation and held in the church building, to which visitors are always welcome. In addition, we also can have specially conducted Bible Studies in other areas of the community. These can be advertised and promoted in the community. The purpose of such studies is to have non-members come to learn the Christian perspective, or more specifically the Reformed faith.

The same is true for Vacation Bible School. It is directed to neighborhood children. Care must be taken that the effort to organize a VBS is not simply a baby-sitting service for neighborhood moms or

a fun-time for kids with little or no religious meaning. When planned correctly, VBS can be effective to reach children with the gospel. It is a time when covenant moms can share their skills of teaching (their prophetic office) with children of the neighborhood as well as their own. It ought to be clear that the success of VBS is contingent on the membership acquainting people with the meetings and inviting them to come. These may be neighbors, colleagues at work, fellow students at school, extended family, or such like. The point is that we have been talking to these people about our faith regularly, we have shared with them many concerns, which include the value of children. They know the burden of our heart, and now there will be an opportunity for them to send their children to a VBS where such truths are taught and cherished.

We can make great use of audio and video recordings of our public meetings when extended promotion is given by our members who talk about Sunday's sermons and public lectures and then offer copies to neighbors or fellow workers. We can hold seminars or workshops on subjects

such as child-rearing, marriage, evangelism. Much work goes into preparing these messages, and with a little effort the recordings of these messages can be very useful for promoting the truth as it relates to these areas of doctrine and life. Here too, the efforts of a church extension committee are limited to advertising in some appropriate manner. It is far more effective if everyone who has attended or who has enjoyed the tapes of such meetings puts forth effort to talk about them with others and distribute them far and wide. We wonder how we can have opportunity to

Be sure you offer to pick him up or meet him at the door and sit with him, as this helps greatly to overcome the barrier of unfamiliar surroundings.

witness? Here is just such an opportunity. This is the key role of personal evangelism.

We face the same problem with our literature. A good place to start is to sit down with our people and ask them what sort of subjects and questions they encounter when they talk spiritually with their neighbors. Notice, I did not say what kind of subject do *we* want to talk about with our neighbor. I ask, rather, what sort of subject do *they*, the neighbors, want to talk about. We will discover that concerning most of those subjects we do not have an appropriate pamphlet or tract that we can give to them. This exercise will help us focus on the needs and interests of our neighbors so that we can converse with them. It will also help prompt us to write pamphlets and tracts that address these subjects. You notice that if we do this sort of thing, once again the key force is not the production of the pamphlet, but the need for and distribution of this material. That involves personal evangelism.

There are many other activities that evangelism committees can consider. Let me list a few as we have done before.

In our efforts for mass distribution of material, we must exercise care that we do it legally. We must keep in mind that we live in a world where many people are offended by efforts for outreach, and it may even be prohibited by law. This may relate to street evangelism, which is forbidden in some areas, or it may be illegal to go from house to house, which is called solicitation, and public signs are posted warning against such activity. We must exercise care not to violate such laws, even though we may have the best of intentions to evangelize.

There are, however, many places and ways in which public distribution of materials is permitted. This may be anything from having a booth at the county fair, to going from door to door in neighborhoods. It can include hos-

pital visitation, prison ministry, spending time with old folks in a rest home. In many of these instances there are certain restrictions listed, or at least there is a certain behavior that becomes a Christian, and we ought to learn good manners and sensitivities in those areas where we are allowed to evangelize. But the point I want to make here is that all these efforts involve personal evangelism in which the individual Christian is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who enables him to fulfill his prophetic office as given by Christ.

Some of our evangelism committees spend a lot of time and effort in newspaper evangelism. This is hard work for the writer of such articles. It takes a certain skill to set forth the truth of God's Word as it relates to a specific topic and to say it in a way that today's world can understand. One of the biggest obstacles we have to evangelism is the language we use. We have beautiful theological words that precisely identify truth. They are of utmost importance to us who are within the household of faith. It enables us to preach and communicate effectively together. Yet, we must be aware that when we evangelize those who are not familiar with the Bible and the historic truths, we have to use language that is understandable to the general public. This is why it is so difficult. Now, after all this work is expended in producing such a public testimony of truth, unless all of us consider it our duty to promote such writing, it will pass virtually unnoticed. What a splendid idea to cut out the writing and take it along to work and point it out to those who are around you. Did they notice this writing in the paper? What do they think of it? Do they agree and, if not, why not? Then personal evangelism contributes to the effectiveness of the efforts of the evangelism committee.

I want to close with one area of outreach that is most up-to-date and also very effective. That is the

world-wide-web of the Internet. Our denomination has put out a very thorough web page through the efforts of Rev. VanBaren. Many of our individual churches are doing the same. I am sure that, as time goes on, we will learn many new ways to be more effective. As technology works its way down to the common folk, we will all learn how to make greater use of the posted sermons, messages, and information that abounds. Once again, what are you doing as a reader to promote the web? Yes, one thing about the Internet is that anyone can run a search program and discover any of our literature on the net. A personal touch, however, is the real key for promoting the gospel of the Reformed faith. Our denominational web page address (www.prcanet.org) is so easy that anyone can remember it and can refer people to it. So often you may not have a pamphlet handy, or you know there is a recording of a certain speech or sermon, and you wish you had it with you to give to the person to whom you are speaking. Just remember, almost all this material is available to anyone who has access to the web—and that is almost everyone. All you need to do is refer them to the denominational web page. Make use of it in your personal evangelism. It is a powerful tool that God has provided for us.

I trust that as I bring this series of articles to a close, it may motivate you, the reader, to take seriously your own role in personal evangelism and to come to appreciate that you too can make a contribution to the good work that your church extension committee is putting forth. As we promote their efforts, we will have plenty of opportunity to explain the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

We close with a reminder that personal evangelism is God's work through us. We must be obedient to Him and pray that His Holy Spirit will use us to promote the gospel to His glory. 

Child (ren)

For unto us a child is born. What reason for the church, especially believing parents and their children, to celebrate! Because a child is born unto us, children born of us are saved! But sadly, this good news is lost on many Christians, even mothers and fathers. Though perhaps ecstatic that Jehovah saves by this child born unto us, they suppose that children born of us are denied that salvation. The Father who loved, nurtured, and delivered His own child Jesus, supposedly does not do the same for our children. The Father who gave the covenant sign of that love to His child will not allow us to do the same for our children. For unto us (adults) a child is born. Strange Father.

Fact is, the Father of the child Jesus saves our children. Among those He brought through the Red Sea and into the promised land were little children held by believing fathers' hands or in mothers' arms. And for forty years they were led by Moses, whom this Father had saved as child from certain destruction (Heb. 11:23). The Father who established the child Jesus as Mediator of the covenant includes children in that testament of grace (Heb. 9:15). To them He swears, "I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8). They are His heritage and gracious reward (Ps. 127:3). He loves those children, even before they are born or have done good or evil (Heb. 12:6; Rom. 9:11). He promises godly mothers like Mary, "The fruit of thy womb is blessed, even within thee" (Deut. 7:13; Luke 1:42; Ps. 147:13).

The Father who caused His child Jesus to grow strong in the Spirit of grace, promises the Spirit of Jesus to children (Acts 2:38-9). He fills them with that Spirit, so that they can rejoice at the presence of Christ, like the child John (Luke 1:15, 41). Through that Spirit He calls children (Acts 2:39). When He does, they respond, like little Samuel, "Speak; for thy servant heareth" (I Sam 3:10). By that Spirit He sanctifies them, so that among His people without blemish, well favored, skillful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge, are children like Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:4-17).

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Because unto children a child is born, God issues the laws of His kingdom to them also. He addresses an entire commandment (5th) to children redeemed from the bondage of sin and death. Much of Proverbs is written to "my son." God instructs parents to teach His law diligently to their children (Deut. 6:7), and He expected Abraham to do so for his child Isaac (Gen. 18:19). Through such instruction in the Holy Scriptures, He makes children wise unto salvation (II Tim. 3:15). To be an officebearer in Jesus' church, one must rule his children well (I Tim. 3:12). And the Father of Jesus calls ministers "to turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children" (Luke 1:17).

If unto us a child is born, it should not be surprising that God's favorite name for us is not His people, men and women, or elderly, but children. We are the children of Abraham, children of Israel, children of God, children of the promise, children of the light, children of the resurrection, little children, sons and daughters of God. We are exhorted to follow God as dear children (Eph. 5:1). Rather than requiring that children become adults to be saved (as some suppose), Jesus said to adults, "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). By Jesus we are predestinated unto the adoption of children (Eph. 1:5). By that Spirit of adoption we all cry out as children, Abba, Father (Rom. 8:15).

This child Jesus born unto us is the Savior of children. He becomes much displeased with those who hinder His work with children (Mark 10:16). Better to be drowned in the sea tethered to a millstone, than that we should offend even one little child of Jesus (Matt. 18:6). To believing parents, His church, and officers Jesus commands, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." This child born unto us is the Good Shepherd, who gathers lambs with His arms, carries them in His bosom, and gently leads those with young (Is. 40:11). Of such children is the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:4). So when in faith we take our children to Jesus, He will take them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and bless them. For unto us (and our children) a child is born. Rejoice! 

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (3)

or the Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel

upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Introduction

In the two preceding articles I have contended that, despite the vigorous controversy in the Dutch Reformed tradition over the issue, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands settled the issue whether election governs the covenant, very early in their history. In two early, official documents, these churches taught that there is a close relation between the eternal decree and the historical covenant of grace and that this relation is election's governing the covenant. The two documents are the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism" and the Canons of Dordt.

That the Reformed churches in the Netherlands established this relation of election and the covenant as early as 1574, when the baptism form was first adopted, and 1618/1619, when the churches adopted the Canons of Dordt, should not surprise us. The churches then were living in the conviction of the Reformation gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular grace alone, which gospel is rooted in predestination. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands simply applied the gospel of sovereign grace to the covenant.

The preceding article began a demonstration of the relation of elec-

tion and the covenant in the Reformed baptism form. It examined the important line in the doctrinal section of the form, "And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ."

This article continues the examination of the baptism form, considering the controversial phrase describing the infants who are to be baptized as "sanctified in Christ."

Infants "Sanctified in Christ"

That the Reformed baptism form views the covenant children of godly parents as the elect among their offspring, and therefore sees the covenant as governed by election, is evident also from the first question in that section of the form that is an admonition to the parents.

Whether you acknowledge that, although our children are conceived and born in sin and, therefore, are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ and, therefore, as members of His church ought to be baptized?

Regardless of the age-old controversy that has raged over the phrase "sanctified in Christ," the meaning of the baptism form is clear. "Our children" are cleansed from the pollution of sin by their union with Christ through His sanctifying Spirit in them. By this sanctifying work of the Spirit of Christ in them, they are

living members of the church, the body of Christ, made up of all the elect who are gathered out of the world by the Son of God (Heid. Cat., Q. 54). This internal cleansing is based on Christ's shedding of His blood for them on the cross. And this cleansing of "our children," which unites them to Christ's body, the church, is a reality already before they are baptized, since it is the reason why they ought to be baptized: "and, therefore, as members of His church ought to be baptized."

Obviously, it is not true that all of the physical offspring of believing parents are "sanctified in Christ." The experience of godly parents teaches otherwise. Scripture also teaches otherwise, both in its history and in its doctrine. There are Cains, Esaus, Joels and Abiahs, Absaloms, and Manassehs. There are those young people who, having been baptized, having been reared in the truth, and having made public confession of faith, tread the Son of God under their feet, count the blood of the covenant with which they were sanctified an unholy thing, and insult the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). It is evident, therefore, that the form refers to the elect infants of believing parents and that the form considers the elect infants to be the children of believers.

It is also the plain teaching of the form that the Spirit of Christ as a rule regenerates the elect children of believers in their infancy, already before their baptism. They ought to be baptized, not because someday they will be sanctified, but because they already are sanctified.

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Previous article in this series: November 15, 2006, p. 82

Since the form, including the admonition to the parents, was adopted by the Reformed churches in the Netherlands as early as 1574, this was the doctrinal position of the Reformed churches from the beginning of their history.

Inasmuch as the baptism form is an official document of those Reformed churches that stand in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the form binds all these churches to this doctrinal position concerning the covenant and the baptized children of believers.

Nevertheless, many of these churches repudiate the doctrine of covenant children clearly taught by the first question to parents in their own baptism form. In every case, the reasons for this repudiation are doctrinal in nature. These churches reject the doctrine taught by the first question. They are determined to hold a doctrine of covenant children that differs from that taught by the first question. The reason for their repudiation of the doctrine taught by the first question is not that the language of the first question is unclear, or that the language permits the contrary doctrine held by these churches.

There are two main objections to the doctrine taught by the first question among churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Both offer a different explanation of the language of the first question than that given above, an explanation that legitimizes their doctrine of the covenant, of covenant children, of the salvation of covenant children, and of the significance of infant baptism. Although these two objections differ from each other, they have this in common: both insist that the children of believers referred to in the phrase, "they are sanctified in Christ," are all the physical offspring of believers without exception. Both objections deny that the reference is to the elect infants.

All Are Merely Set Apart Outwardly

One objection is raised by those churches maintaining the doctrinal

position that infants of believers are merely outwardly and formally set apart from children of unbelievers. Because the infants of believers have this privileged position in a Christian home and in a Christian church, some of them are more likely to be converted when they grow up than are other children. This is all that "sanctified in Christ" means. This is all that the covenant promise to the children of believers means. This is all that infant baptism means. "Sanctified in Christ" in the first question of the baptism form has nothing whatever to do with any inward, spiritual cleansing of the infants from sin and nothing to do with any union of the infants with Jesus Christ by the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.

In fact, according to this position, all the infants of believers, with the exception of the elect among them who may die in infancy, are and remain spiritually dead, spiritually separated from Christ, and spiritually in Adam, until some of them may be converted in later life. Their spiritual condition is and remains the same as that of the children of unbelievers.

Not only does this baptistic doctrine govern the interpretation of the phrase "sanctified in Christ" in the baptism form, but it also governs the view that the churches who hold this doctrine take of the covenant itself and of the covenant promise. God's covenant promise to be the God of the children of believers does not mean that He will be the God of our infant children *when they are infants*. But it merely means that He will be the God of our children *when they grow up, become teenagers, or even young adults, and are converted*. That is, God will be the God of our children when they are no longer children.

Likewise, the covenant of God with believers and their infant children does not mean that infant children are actually included in the covenant as small friends of God, or in the kingdom as little subjects of

Christ the king. All of them are, in spiritual reality, strangers from the covenant of promise and foreigners regarding the kingdom. That is, they are all outside of Christ.

Infant baptism does not signify infant salvation, that is, the translation of the infants of believers from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, by the regenerating work of the Spirit uniting the infants to Christ. Not at all! It merely signifies that the infants of believers, who are and remain outside of Christ, are set apart outwardly for evangelistic work by church and parents in the hope that some of them someday may be converted as adults.

This is the doctrine, and corresponding explanation of the phrase, "sanctified in Christ," of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations, the Free Reformed Churches in North America, and, as the recent book *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (P&R, 2003) shows, many other Reformed and Presbyterian churches as well.

Merely Outward "Holiness" in Light of the Form

It is not my purpose in this article to criticize this essentially Baptist doctrine. I have done this in my book *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (RFPA, 2005). My purpose here is to demonstrate that the explanation this doctrinal position gives of the phrase "sanctified in Christ" in the Reformed baptism form is false.

First, to explain "sanctified in Christ" as a mere outward and formal setting apart of the infants unto Christ does not harmonize with the description of the infants in the first part of the first question of the baptism form. In the first part, parents are asked to acknowledge that "our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself." Only then follow the words,

“yet that they are sanctified in Christ.” The natural condition of our infants as conceived and born in sin and subject to all miseries, including condemnation, is not merely outward and formal. It is real, actual depravity and guilt. It is real, spiritual union with Adam. So, likewise, is their sanctification in Christ, which is contrasted with their depravity and guilt, a real, actual spiritual cleansing of them by virtue of their new union with Christ.

If their sanctification in Christ is merely outward and formal, their corruption and guilt are, likewise, merely outward and formal.

Second, the first question significantly describes the sanctification of the infants of believers as a sanctifying of them “*in Christ*.” This is decisive for the issue whether the sanctifying of them is an inner, saving work of the Spirit, or merely a certain formal act by the church. Those who insist that the phrase in the first question refers merely to an outward and formal setting apart of the children, and not to a saving work of the Spirit in infants, find the biblical source of the phrase in I Corinthians 7:14, where the apostle assures believers married to unbelievers that “your children ... are ... holy.” The defenders of a merely external and formal “holiness” then argue that the holiness of the children in I Corinthians 7:14 must be a merely formal, “positional” holiness, since the passage teaches that also the unbelieving husband or wife is “sanctified” by the believer.

Even if it be granted that the holiness of the children of a believer married to an unbeliever spoken of in I Corinthians 7:14 is merely an outward position, rather than inward cleansing (*which is not the case*), nothing has been decided concerning the phrase “sanctified in Christ” in the baptism form. For the phrase in the baptism form adds two words that are not found in I Corinthians 7:14: “*in Christ*.” The source of the phrase, “sancti-

fied in Christ,” is not I Corinthians 7:14, at least not I Corinthians 7:14 exclusively. This is why it was a mistake in the edition of the *Psalter* used by the Protestant Reformed Churches that someone inserted a footnote giving I Corinthians 7:14 as the biblical basis of the phrase “sanctified in Christ.”

The source of the teaching of a holiness “*in Christ*” is such passages as I Corinthians 1:2: “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” Regarding the sanctifying of the children of believers, the source is such passages as Ephesians 6:4: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord [Jesus Christ].”

“In Christ” describes the sanctifying of the infants as taking place in the union the infants have with Christ. This is a real, spiritual union. This is the living communion of covenant fellowship with Christ. Although the infants of believers are by nature in Adam, by virtue of God’s gracious covenant promise to them they are in Christ. In that covenantal union with Christ, they are sanctified—really, inwardly, spiritually cleansed from sin and delivered from condemnation. It is only by virtue of this spiritual union with Christ the Lord, as Ephesians 6:4 teaches, that they can and do obey their parents, from their earliest childhood. For children who are merely outwardly set apart unto Christ, obedience to the fifth commandment is an utter impossibility.

A third evidence that the explanation of the phrase “sanctified in Christ” as meaning merely outward and formal “holiness” is false is the fact that every other mention of holiness, or sanctifying, in the baptism form refers to inner, spiritual cleansing from sin. The reader may verify this for himself.

Fourth, explaining “sanctified in Christ” as merely outward and formal runs stuck on the important words that immediately follow in the first question. The first ques-

tion does not only say about the infants of believers that they are sanctified in Christ. It also says that they are “members of His church.” They are members of His church before they are baptized, for membership in His church is the reason why they ought to be baptized. And they are members of His church by virtue of being sanctified in Christ.

The baptism form cannot mean that the infants are members of the instituted church. They become members of an instituted church by virtue of their baptism. But the form says that they are members of Christ’s church already before they are baptized. Membership in Christ’s church is the reason why they ought to be baptized. The form teaches that the infants are living members of the universal body of Christ, made up of all the elect. They became members of the body of Christ when they were “sanctified in Christ.” Sanctification in Christ, which alone baptizes one into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13), is the inner, regenerating work of the Spirit in these infants. It is the work in our children that the baptism form joyfully announced in its opening line: “The principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism are these three: First, that we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, in so much that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God *except we are born again*” (emphasis added).

The language of the baptism form is clear and conclusive: “sanctified in Christ” is the saving work of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of the infants of believers, already in their infancy, in accordance with the covenant promise that God will be the God of our infants, and in accordance with the obvious significance of *infant* baptism. But this is true only of the elect children of believers. The form regards the elect children of believers as the true (spiritual) children of the covenant. 

Baptism: Sign of God's Unconditional Covenant (2)

God's everlasting covenant is a covenant of irresistible, particular grace. Therefore baptism, the sign of the covenant, must be a sign and seal of this irresistible grace. Many, however, reject this truth, and instead teach a conditional covenant of resistible, common grace. Whether this is said to be a condition to get into the covenant or to stay in the covenant, either way it amounts to teaching that God's grace is resistible, and that the salvation of God's people depends on something that they must do.

Different views on the covenant manifest themselves in different views on the sacrament of baptism. Wrong views on the doctrine of the covenant will result in wrong views on the meaning, the recipients, and the significance of this sacrament. Those who teach that a person must fulfill a condition to get into the covenant will view the infant children of believers to be outside the covenant. This stands to reason, seeing as it is impossible for an infant to fulfill any condition. The most common example of those who hold to this view is the Baptists. They view the infant children of believers as being outside the covenant, and this is why they do not give them the sign of the covenant. We begin by considering the truth concerning baptism over against this error of the Baptists.

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Previous article in this series: September 15, 2006, p. 493.

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Children of Believers: Members of the Church

Baptists deny a fundamental truth of the Reformed faith—the truth that children of believers are in the covenant and church of God. God's church, according to the Baptists, consists only of confessing believers. They adamantly deny that children of believers are included in the church of Jesus Christ.

Some Baptists might be quick to point out that they do have children, even some young children, as members in their churches. But if they do have children as members, these children are members not because they are children of believers, but because they have made confession of faith. This is an important difference. We maintain that our children, even our little infants, are members of God's church as children of believers. Since God establishes His covenant with believers and with their children, these children are included as members of God's church. The Baptists, however, deny this and insist that one must first fulfill the condition of making a conscious confession of faith before they are included in the covenant and church of God.

Scripture, however, teaches that when God establishes His covenant with some, He establishes it also with their children. This was clearly the case in the days of the Old Testament. When God established His covenant with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, for example, He established it also with their children.

Noah: "And God spake unto

Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you" (Gen. 9:8, 9).

Abraham: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7).

Isaac: "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him" (Gen. 17:19).

Jacob: "And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham" (Gen. 28:4).

David: "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven" (Ps. 89:28, 29).

This is also the case in the days of the New Testament. When Christ poured out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, His disciples began to speak in tongues. This event made known that the time had come for the church to be gathered out of all nations through the preaching of the Word. It was on this occasion that Peter preached the gospel and said to the people,

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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:38, 39).

There are other passages in which it is clear that the promise to Gentile believers in the days of the New Testament is a promise not only to them, but also to their children. When the Philippian jailor asked Paul what he had to do to be saved, Paul and Silas responded with the following command and promise:

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:31).

Paul and Silas were obviously not Baptists. They did not hesitate to tell a Gentile, which this Philippian certainly was, that if he believed, he *and his house* would be saved. They did not need to inquire first about whether the jailor had children and how old they were. These men simply proclaimed the same truth that believers had known and confessed for centuries—the truth that when God saves a person, He saves his children as well, although not head for head.

In both dispensations the promise of the gospel has been for believers and their seed. When God establishes His covenant with a person, He establishes it also with that person's children. When our Savior brings an individual into His church, his children also become members. Such was the case in the old dispensation. Such is still the case today.

God establishes His covenant with the children of believers. Thus they are members of His church as children of believers, before they mature spiritually and are able to make a conscious confession of their faith. And since they are in God's covenant, and are members of God's church, they must receive the sign of the covenant, namely, holy baptism.

Infant Baptism: A Believer's Baptism

If infant children of believers are in the covenant and church of God, then these young children must actually be believers. Only believers are members of God's church. All unbelievers are excluded. So these children must have the beginnings of faith, even though they are not aware of it. And as believing members of God's church, they must receive the sacrament to which they have the right in Jesus Christ.

The sacraments are for believers, not unbelievers. This is true not only of the Lord's Supper, but also of baptism. Baptists argue that by baptizing infants we are guilty of giving to unbelievers that which is only for believers. This, however, is not the case. When we baptize the infants of believers, we are indeed baptizing believers.

This is what Reformed parents confess when they bring their children to be baptized. Before their child is baptized, believing parents must publicly confess that they believe the following:

...although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of His church, ought to be baptized.

When Reformed parents answer "yes" to this, they are publicly confessing that infant children of believers are genuine believers. To say that they are sanctified in Christ and members of Christ's church is to say that they are believers. Only believers are sanctified in Christ, and only believers are members of Christ's church. Our infants do have genuine faith. They do not yet have conscious faith, which is a faith that one is aware that he has. But the bond of faith has already been breathed into their hearts. They are believers. They are just not aware of it yet.

Jesus showed this when He blessed the infant children of believers, and declared that such children were in the kingdom of God.

And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God (Luke 18:15, 16).

These children that Jesus blessed were infants, and blessings can be received only through the bond of faith, which these children must have had. Jesus declared that the kingdom of God consists of such children, that is, of such children of believers. And if these children are in God's kingdom, then they are in God's church, for the instituted church is the manifestation of the kingdom of God on this earth.

Some Baptists have tried to get around this by teaching that infant children of believers are heirs of the kingdom while not yet being in the kingdom itself. The kingdom belongs to such children, they may say, but they are not actually in it. But this is not what Jesus teaches here. When He says the kingdom is "of such children," He is saying that the kingdom consists of children such as these. Such children are already citizens of the kingdom; they are members of the church. In addition, the blessings Christ gives are the blessings of His kingdom. Only those who are truly in the kingdom can receive them.

A well-known and beautiful illustration of this is John the Baptist's leaping for joy in his mother's womb. John was filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born, and actually leaped for joy when the voice of Mary was heard by his mother, Elisabeth. How could this be if he did not have faith? It is only through the bond of faith that a person is engrafted into Christ and receives the

blessings of the Spirit from Him (Eph. 3:17).

Only in Christ are blessings found. So to receive any blessings one must be joined to Christ by means of faith. This faith our children receive, and they can receive it even while they are being formed in the womb. And those who have faith, and who receive the bless-

ings of the Spirit through faith, cannot be denied the sacrament of baptism.

All this serves to emphasize the truth that baptism is a sign of God's unconditional covenant. John the Baptist received the blessings of the covenant before he was even born. What condition could

he have fulfilled? The salvation he received, and the salvation that children of believers today receive, is all of God's grace. This is the comforting promise that baptism signifies and seals. Only this promise can give genuine comfort, strengthening the faith of us and our children. 

The Prophetic Aspect of the Deacons' Work (1) The Argument That There Is Such an Aspect

Is it proper to speak of the deacons' work as having a *prophetic* aspect? Are Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster right to devote a page of their book to the subject of "The Deacon As Teacher"?¹

After all, Scripture requires that bishops be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2), but makes no such requirement regarding deacons.

Scripture further indicates that in the New Testament the exalted Christ functions as prophet through the office of pastor in the church. So the inspired apostle indicates that God gave the New Testament church "pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). But Scripture clearly teaches, and Reformed believers confess, that the office of pastor and that of deacon are distinct from each other.

This distinction the apostles emphasized when they exhorted the church at Jerusalem to find seven godly men to serve the widows. Thus the apostles would be

relieved of serving tables, the better to devote themselves to their God-given task: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

While these passage emphasize the distinction between the various offices in the church of Christ, they do not forbid us to speak of a prophetic aspect to the work of the diaconate.

Properly understanding this aspect of their work, deacons ought to be the more confident and bold to bring God's Word to God's people in their needs.



That deacons are required to handle the Word of God is the fundamental evidence that the work of the diaconate has a prophetic aspect.

This requirement is found specifically in our Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons, which requires deacons "not only [to] administer relief to the poor and indigent with external gifts, but also with comfortable words from Scripture."² That the deacons must "administer" these comfortable

words suggests that deacons must do more than merely read the Scriptures. At the very least, they must explain and apply the passage sufficiently that the poor and distressed are comforted by it.

Our Church Order, Article 25, requires deacons "to visit and comfort the distressed."³ While the article does not explicitly require the deacon to open up the Scriptures, all true visitation does require the deacon to read and apply the Scriptures. This we have demonstrated in a previous article.⁴

Other Reformed confessions and synods have also indicated that the work of the diaconate has a prophetic aspect.

Article 25 of the French Huguenot document "Ecclesiastical Discipline, 1559" required the deacons, as they distributed the alms, "to catechize in homes," while Article 26 forbade them to "catechize in public."⁵

Article 55 of the "Church Order Selected from the Acts of the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht held on 15 June 1574" reads:

Visiting the sick belongs to the office of the ministers of the Word,

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and it is risky to assign other persons to that task. Therefore, the ministers shall request the elders and deacons to help them with their task. They shall do so because their office in comparison with other Christians requires more with respect to visiting, comforting, and strengthening the sick, the poor, and members in need of comfort.⁶

This explicitly required deacons to help the minister as needed with the work of visiting the sick. The reason why deacons were to do so was specifically grounded in the work of their office. Not explicitly mentioned, but certainly assumed, is that this visitation must involve bringing the Scriptures to God's people in their need.

Not only to the poor or sick, but also to those who have the means to support the deacons, this prophetic aspect of their work may be directed. We read in "The Articles of Wesel 1568": "They [i.e., deacons, DJK] ought also to diligently admonish those who can afford it to come to the help of the need of the church and the want of the poor."⁷



That the deacons' work has a prophetic aspect is suggested in Scripture by the fact that the Old Testament priests were required to teach God's law to Israel. God emphasized to Aaron the need for him to be holy and to know the law, "that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses" (Lev. 10:11). Israel was reminded to "do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you" (Deut. 25:8). The blessing upon Levi, pronounced by Moses just prior to his death, was that Levi would "teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law" (Deut. 33:10). Ezra was a priest who returned from captivity having "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). Rebuking the priests for failing to teach,

Malachi says, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 2:7).

That Old Testament priests were required to teach God's law indicates that also the deacons of Christ in the New Testament must teach. The office of deacon in the church is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament office of priest in Israel.

Particularly the high priest's work involved prophecy. God clearly instructed the high priests to bless the children of Israel by pronouncing the words of the familiar Aaronitic blessing (Num. 6:22-27). God's final words in this connection are, "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (v. 27). Efficaciously to bless God's people in God's name by God's command is to speak as God's spokesperson. It is to prophesy. To prophesy does not necessarily require one to have a new revelation from God, or to speak about things future. To speak God's word to God's people on the basis of past revelation is prophecy.

That the high priest's work involved prophecy is confirmed by the fact that Caiaphas prophesied of Christ's death (John 11:49-52). This is a unique and remarkable prophecy, by a corrupt high priest who did not manifest true faith in Christ. Nevertheless, Scripture indicates that he prophesied in the capacity of high priest: "But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation" (v. 51). We take Calvin's point to heart: "Must we conclude that, because *Caiaphas* once *prophesied*, every word uttered by the *high priest* is always a *prophecy*?" (commentary on John 11:51). No; not every word uttered by the high priest was prophecy. But high priests, in their official capacity as such, could and did prophesy.

The reason why God assigned priests this duty is not simply that the office of prophet was not perpetual in the Old Testament. It is

true that at times, sometimes for hundreds of years, God's people heard no new revelation by a prophet. Also true is that, by contrast, the office of pastor is a perpetual office in the New Testament. But the real reason why the priests were to teach the law is because of how the law related to their work on behalf of Israel. First, the law prescribed exactly how Israel must worship God. The priests, through whose agency Israel worshiped God, were to teach the people this right manner of worship. Second, by virtue of the work of the priests, as a picture of the work that Christ would do for His church, God viewed and treated Israel as holy. Therefore, they must live as God's holy people. Because the law spelled out how to live as God's holy people, the priests were to teach the law.

1. Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster, *The Deacons Handbook: A Manual of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 1980), pp. 143-144.

2. *The Psalter With Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1927; revised edition [PRC], December 2002), p. 106.

3. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2002 edition, p. 14.

4. *Standard Bearer*, vol. 81, issue 3, p. 65; November 1, 2004.

5. "Ecclesiastical Discipline, 1559," *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government*, ed. David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 138.

6. Richard R. DeRidder, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual, including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches* (the original work authored by P. Biesterveld and Dr. H.H. Kuyper), (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 69.

7. DeRidder, p. 33.



It must be explained how, if the work of the diaconate has a prophetic aspect, the office remains distinct from that of pastor.

First, the *fundamental work* of the office of deacon is distinct from that of pastor. To speak of a prophetic *aspect* of the deacons' work is to indicate that the deacon is not *fundamentally* a prophet. Fundamentally, the office of deacon is that of administering the mercies of Christ to the poor and needy through physical, earthly gifts. The work of the deacon is fundamentally that of gathering and disbursing of alms. The deacons are to teach only to the extent that their teaching serves the gathering and disbursing of alms.

The pastor, by contrast, is fundamentally a prophet. Teaching God's Word to God's people is inherent in the work of his office. He cannot perform the duties of his office any other way than by teaching. Because the knowledge of God's Word and the ability to teach it is fundamental to the office of pastor, God requires of bishops that they be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2), and the apostles resolved to give themselves over to "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

The same was true in the Old Testament. The prophet was called to speak the Word of God to the people of God. This involved receiving and imparting new revelation, and calling the people to faith and obedience. The priest's calling, by contrast, was to offer sacrifices for sin, to intercede for the people, and to bless the people. In fulfilling this obligation, he was to teach the people the law of God—for God would not be pleased with the temple worship of the people, if they did not strive to conform to His law. That which the priests taught the people did not consist of new revelation, but of the Word of God already revealed to Israel. The exceptional cases in which priests were given new revelation (such as Samuel) are cases in which God appointed one man to both the office of priest and that of prophet.

Second, the distinction between the offices of deacon and pastor is to be found in the scope of their teaching.

As regards *whom* they teach, the pastor must teach the whole congregation, while the deacons teach one segment of it—the poor, sick, and others in need.

As regards *what* they teach, the pastor must teach the whole coun-

sel of God, while the deacon teaches only that part of the counsel that regards the work of the deacons. We expressed this earlier when we said that deacons are to teach to the extent that their teaching serves the gathering and disbursing of alms.

As regards *where* they teach, the pastor teaches publicly in the worship service, while the deacon teaches the individual members privately.

These distinctions are biblical. The church must know and implement them. Those who understand this are not likely to blur the two offices. Throughout church history, especially for the one thousand years before the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s, the church did lose sight of the proper work of the office of deacon, and did often assign to deacons work that belonged properly to another office. Today as well, it is possible that the church fall into this danger. But she guards against it by understanding and implementing the biblical distinction between the offices.

Having attempted to demonstrate clearly that the work of the diaconate has a prophetic aspect, we will next examine the various ways in which the deacons might implement this aspect of their work. 

Guest Article

Rev. Angus Stewart

Advanced Notice: BRF Conference 2008

It was not that long ago that the *SB* carried a report on the 2006 British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference at Cloverley Hall in England, and already it is providing information about the 2008 BRF Conference.

Rev. Stewart is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

Speakers and Subjects

The biennial general meeting at last August's BRF conference settled upon the speakers for the next conference: Professors Engelsma and Hanko, who have served us so well in the past. The theme too was decided: "The Work of the Holy Spirit." We are already looking forward to six quality lectures and good fellowship on this

worthy subject. The conference venue was decided to be somewhere suitable in the green island of Ireland, either North or South, as the BRF Council thought good.

Site

After many discussions, telephone calls, e-mails, and visits, the site for the 2008 BRF Family Conference has now been booked. Our

venue is the Share Centre (also called the Share Holiday Village) in County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland, just minutes from the border with the Republic of Ireland. Share is located on a 60-acre site right on the tranquil shores of Upper Lough Erne, part of the largest inland waterway in Europe, which eventually, as the River Shannon, enters the Atlantic Ocean at Limerick.

Besides the attractive location, Share Village is also the largest activity centre in Ireland. Water sports on the lake include kayaking, canoeing, windsurfing, dinghy sailing, and keelboat sailing. For the younger children, there are the options of banana skiing or the more sedate setting of the small beach. The Inishcruiser, a 57-seat, luxury, heated cruiser, will suit all age groups. The one and a half hour boat trip explores some of the lesser known and most beautiful parts of Lough Erne, including a nearby castle under the care of the National Trust.

Also on site, there is an indoor swimming pool, a sauna, a steam room, and a fitness suite, as well as pool tables and equipment for archery and fuzzleball (which I had never heard of before). There are 30-foot climbing walls (indoor and outdoor), professionally designed in order to offer exciting climbs for beginners to experts. Activities for smaller children include pottery, mosaic, mask-making, batik, T-shirt printing, and pedal go-karting, besides a shallow, indoor swimming pool, a soft play room, and an outdoor play park.

The more technical activities are led by qualified and experienced members of the Share staff.

The accommodation sleeps up to 220 people—arranged in cozy chalets or in the modern style “Farmhouse.” All rooms are double-glazed and have central heating for year-round use and comfort. Currently over 80% of the accommodation is en-suite, and by

2008 this percentage may well be even higher.

Importantly, all of Share’s facilities have been built for guests with disabilities, to ensure freedom of access and independence. Even the Inishcruiser is fully wheelchair accessible, with onboard toilets. The conference site itself is flat, being on the edge of a lake. So the less able-bodied and the elderly will be well catered to.

Some, especially in the British Isles, may be interested to know that Share has a campsite, situated in a secluded wooded corner. There are 13 sites for caravans with electric hook-ups and 24 spaces for tents. Laundry facilities are available both for those in static and in mobile accommodation.

We may well take a day trip to the Ulster American Folk Park. Of special, but not exclusive, interest to those from the US and Northern Ireland, this fine museum explains the immigration from Ireland to America, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and traces the success (or otherwise) of the immigrants in the new world. The Ulster American Folk Park also includes an extensive open-air museum (www.folkpark.com).

Why the Advanced Notice?

In general, conference centres are being booked further and further in advance. So the BRF needs to put its name down for a venue early. And once it is booked, why not let everyone know as soon as possible? Then people can begin to think about it and plan for it early, in God’s will (James 4:15).

More specifically, since the Share Centre has 220 beds, we have potential at this BRF conference to have a larger group than usual. If enough people sign up, we could have the centre all to ourselves. We think that the beautiful location and the wide range of activities will make this site especially attractive to young people and therefore to parents, and even older

saints, who will, no doubt, enjoy spectating! All this on top of what we fully expect will be superb, Reformed lectures on “The Work of the Holy Spirit,” the blessed presence of the living God with us! Share Village has a good website, complete with colour pictures, which should give you a good feel for the place, so why not look it up (www.sharevillage.org)?

Also, Share requires notification of bookings and payment earlier than most venues. Thus the BRF needs full payment, from those joining us for the conference, at latest two months before the conference begins.

Since this site is in Northern Ireland, we would envisage a number of Protestant Reformed saints wanting to see the new Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) building, which should be well completed by the summer of 2008. Moreover, Philip Rainey, a member of the CPRC, is proposing driving a group of visitors in a minibus around some of the sites of special interest in Northern Ireland for a couple of days after the conference. Thus some may come for the 2008 BRF Conference itself (Friday 25 July–Friday 1 August) and then join the CPRC for worship in our new building (Sunday 3 August) and take advantage of the minibus tour through parts of Northern Ireland (Monday 4–Tuesday 5 August).

More details will be provided as they become available through the *British Reformed Journal* (for subscribers), the BRF website (www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk), and Julie Rainey, the BRF conference booking secretary (jhrainey31@yahoo.com).

We hope that many of you will be able to join us, in God’s will, for the tenth biennial BRF Conference on “The Work of the Holy Spirit” at the Share Centre (25 July–1 August, 2008). 

Issachar vs. the Scribes, Revisited¹

"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

Most people realize that the news media do not just report. They frame and package the news. Stories reflect the mind-set and values of the newsroom."²

Evidence that this assessment of John Leo as expressed in his editorial in *U.S. News & World Report* is correct abounds. A few examples, as expressed by those in positions of power in the news media, will suffice: Richard Salant, former president of CBS believes, "Our job is to give people not what they want, but what we decide they ought to have."³ Benjamin Crowninshield, former executive editor of *The Washington Post* said, "I'm no longer interested in news. I'm interested in causes. We don't print the truth. We don't pretend to print the truth...."⁴ But none is more telling than a speech of CNN founder Ted Turner to the Radio and Television Directors Association. In that speech Turner expounded: "You bet your bibby we take a position.... News is what you News directors interpret it as.

News is what we at CNN interpret it as. The people of this country see the news we think they ought to see."⁵

We must be careful here, however. Certainly there is *some* news that does not need interpretation, news that we *can* receive without much concern. Take for example news reports like the robbing of a Fifth Third Bank, or an accident at the corner of Wilson and Riverbend, or the rape of a student on the GVSU campus, or a tornado that touches down in Caledonia. It is true that with news stories like these we need not have much concern for news media bias, *unless ...* the man killed in the accident was a homosexual; *unless ...* the bank teller was black and the robber was white; *unless ...* the raped student became pregnant; *unless ...* the car that rolled over spilled some gas into the ditch, which ran to the river, which ran to the ocean, which in turn polluted the whole earth; *unless ...* the bank customer who thwarted the robbery used a handgun; *unless ...* the e-unit medic that appeared on the scene was an illegal immigrant; *unless ...* the bank robber was on welfare; *unless ...* the tornado destroyed a Mosque; *unless ...* the bank robber was a Republican; *unless ...* the rapist was a soldier on leave from Iraq.

In other words *watch out* when the incident being reported or the documentary being presented involves what could be numbered among "the PC (Politically Correct) Twelve," viz., race,

gender, the poor, homosexuality, politics, religion, immigration, abortion, education, the environment, gun ownership, and the war in Iraq.

Understanding the times as we do, we are aware of the work of false prophets, including the sometimes blatant news media deception all around us. Our Lord warned us of this in Matthew 24, and the apostle Peter warns us concerning our "adversary the devil ... seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). We know that! We know there's a world of ideas being promoted under the instigation of Satan seeking to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. That presents present-day Issachar with the urgency to be on guard, and especially to lead the covenant children God has placed in his care to an understanding of news media deception. We and our children need the tools, and the skills to apply them to news media reports, that will help us discern the truth and the lie. The rest of this article and two to follow will be an attempt to provide some of those tools.

That there is deception in the news media is nothing new. Thomas Jefferson, one of the founders of this country, is reported to have said: "The man who never looked into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them, insomuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to the truth than he whose mind is filled with half truths and errors." Considering that, one might consider a monastic approach to the news (seclusion from the news) for

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fear of being deceived. However, that approach would hardly fulfill our responsibility to watch for the return of our Lord and seek to observe the signs of His return. So expose ourselves to the news media we must, but in the process we must exercise great caution and develop a healthy skepticism of what is reported.

Often the key to detecting deception in news media reports is the ability to identify media bias. The application of eight questions to news media reports may be helpful in identifying bias in news media reports. In the process of discussing these eight questions we will use examples from current news media reports, and in connection with each question we will examine current reporting on the so-called "global warming" issue. (Incidentally, the position of the undersigned with respect to global warming is that the impact of human activity on the current climactic warming cycle is miniscule, if existent at all. As you read through the article, you will see why.)

Who Is Reporting?

A key problem in the news reporting industry involves those who claim to be, and even view themselves to be, unbiased in their reporting. We and our children need to know that *everyone* has a bias. A person's world and life view (worldview) will affect how he interprets what is happening in the world. That's true for all of us!

A recent article from the *Grand Rapids Press* illustrates that very nicely. The article was titled: "10 Things contribute to obesity, experts say." One of the ten, according to the article, is that, "Darwinian natural selection contributes because fat people out survive skinny people." If a person has a worldview that includes evolution, he necessarily must interpret changes that occur within the species (increased incidence of obesity

in this case) in light of his view concerning the survival of the fittest. On the other hand, a person with a worldview based on Scripture will likely suggest one possible cause of obesity is the sin of gluttony. Thus quite different conclusions are reached based on one's worldview: the one viewing it as a good thing and the other a bad thing.

If the one doing the reporting does not express his bias at the outset (which would be the honest thing to do), the viewer or reader of the report has the task of identifying it. One bit of information that will help is to know something about the publication in which the report is made. There are helpful studies available that attempt to identify media bias. One example is a chart published in the *AFA Journal*, which compares the major U.S. newspapers, news magazines, and television news programs to the average U.S. Representative and U.S. Senator. According to this survey all of the above (with one exception) had a decidedly more liberal bias than our congressional representatives. The one exception was Fox News Special Report, with Brit Hume.⁶

Having a general knowledge about the various sources is helpful. With respect to reporting on specific issues such as global warming, affirmative action, and homosexual marriage, knowing something of the bias of the publication in which the issue is discussed is of utmost importance. One ought not expect a fair treatment of origins theories in *National Geographic* for example. For *National Geographic*, evolution is a dogma. Interestingly, the cover and pages 2 and 3 of its November 2004 issue asked this question: "Was Darwin Wrong?" The answer found on page 4: "NO. The evidence for Evolution is overwhelming."

Sometimes it is also helpful to know something about the specific author of a news report. If one is

seeking objective information on the global warming issue for example, he might be wise to avoid the writer of the following: "(We need) a coordinated global program to accomplish the strategic goal of completely eliminating the internal combustion engine over, say, a twenty-five year period."⁷ The writer of that, Mr. Albert Gore, has demonstrated a significant bias on this issue. Read what he has to say to help understand his side of the issue, but certainly not for an objective view concerning global warming.

Are All Sides Fairly Represented?

This leads directly into a discussion of the importance of determining whether or not a news report fairly presents both sides of an issue. Especially in connection with the reporting of political issues, both sides rarely are presented fairly. Quite often the opposing view will be presented very simplistically and/or inaccurately. This is the old "straw man" tactic. For example, if the issue is taxes, the one who is for tax breaks, or lower taxes, is made out to be against the poor. And the one who is for raising taxes is obviously against the middle class. It doesn't seem to matter that there could be numerous other reasons for tax cuts or tax increases.

1. See the March 1, 2002 *Standard Bearer* for the original article on this subject.

2. John Leo, "Making Media Accountable," *U.S. News & World Report* February 28, 2005:71.

3. Fred Gielow, *You Don't Say*, Boca Raton, Florida: Freedom Books, 1999) 113.

4. Gielow 117.

5. Marvin Olasky, "Ted's the Man," *World* December 15, 1997:30.

6. *AFA Journal*, April, 2005:7.

7. Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York, Penguin Books 1992) 325.

In the example cited above concerning *National Geographic* magazine, never is the creation option to origins presented. It is dismissed out of hand, mostly by simply ignoring the existence of the opposing position. *National Geographic* appears not to concern itself with the fact that many scientists are having difficulty reconciling the theory of evolution with science. Nor does it seem to matter how many books are written by the likes of Philip Johnson that demonstrate the unreasonableness of the theory of evolution, even in terms of science itself. (See Philip Johnson's book *Reason in the Balance*.)

With respect to the global warming issue, seldom are both sides fairly presented, as demonstrated by the following:

On Feb. 19, 2006, *CBS News's* "60 Minutes" produced a segment on the North Pole. The segment was a completely one-sided report, alleging rapid and unprecedented melting at the polar cap. It even featured correspondent Scott Pelley's claiming that the ice in Greenland was melting so fast that he barely got off an iceberg before it collapsed into the water. "60 Minutes" failed to inform its viewers of a 2005 study by a scientist named Ola Johannessen and his colleagues showing that the interior of Greenland is gaining ice and mass and that, according to scientists, the Arctic was warmer in the 1930s than today.⁸

Another example of the lack of objectivity involves the March 19, 2006 program on "60 Minutes" that trumpeted the seriousness of an impending global warming disaster, with nary a word from the opposing view. When questioned concerning the lack of objectivity in the program, *CBS News* correspondent Scott Pelley "justified excluding scientists skeptical of global warming alarmism from his segments because he considers skeptics to be the equivalent of

'Holocaust deniers.'"⁹ End of story! No need then to listen to the other side.

Who Are the Sources?

When considering the sources of news media reports, our concern is that quite often sources will be used that "have an ax to grind" with respect to the issue. For example, caution should be exercised if a media report concerning abortion relies on a member of NOW (National Organization of Women) as an objective source, or if a member of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is the only or the primary source for a report on animal rights. In other words, if the source is someone like wildlife ecologist and associate professor of Northern Arizona University Dr. Paul Beier, who has said, "But now we know that if we're going to have mountain lions around, maybe they're going to eat us every now and then. I'm comfortable with that..."¹⁰ It would be nice to know that, before we put too much stock in his opinions.

Another concern is with reports that leave the sources anonymous. So the report begins something like this: "Scientists say ..." or, "Sources close to the president say ..." or, "A general who for security reasons desires to remain anonymous says" To give news reports of this nature much credibility would be foolish.

Take for example the *Time* article titled "6 Reasons Why So Many Allies Want Bush to Slow Down."¹¹ The article assumes what needs to be proven, i.e., that many allies want Bush to slow down. So throughout the article you read over and over again, "Many Europeans want..."; "Most Europeans..."; "European governments want..."; "Europeans worry..."; "Europeans are offended..."; etc. We might want to ask, "Who specifically are these Europeans?" And, "How was the author able

to discern what most of them think concerning President Bush's actions toward Iraq?"

In this connection consider once again the example of the global warming issue as presented on "60 Minutes." In seeking to determine the reliability of the main source, James Hansen, it might be helpful to know that he had partisan ties to former vice-president Al Gore, and that he was funded by a grant of a quarter million dollars from the left-wing Heinz Foundation run by Theresa Heinz Kerry.¹²

Also, if the source used is Stanford University Professor Stephen Schneider, it would be important to know that he wrote: "(We) have to offer up scary scenarios [about global warming and destruction of the environment], make simplified, dramatic statements, and make little mention of any doubts one might have.... Each of us has to decide what the right balance is between being effective and being honest."¹³ By the way, Schneider is the man who in 1989 wrote the book *Global Warming*. Let's see...he wrote that book just 13 years after he endorsed Lowell Ponte's book "The Cooling." Hmm!

... to be continued. 

8. James Inhofe, "A Challenge to Journalists Who Cover Global Warming," *Human Events* October 23, 2006: 16.

9. <http://epw.senate.gov/speechitem.cfm?party=rep&id=263759> (a speech by Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma on the floor of the Senate).

10. Gielow 177.

11. Johanna McGery, "6 Reasons Why so Many Allies want Bush to Slow Down," *Time* February 3, 2003: 34.

12. <http://epw.senate.gov/speechitem.cfm?party=rep&id=263759>

13. Gielow 165.

Evangelism Activities

Continuing now with Reformation Day lectures from various of our congregations, we can report that the Wingham, Ontario PRC hosted a Reformation Day lecture on October 31 in their church. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on the topic, "The Crucial Emphasis of the Reformers on Christian Piety."

On October 27 the congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC sponsored a Reformation lecture. Their pastor, Rev. R. Hanko, spoke on the topic, "The Priesthood of All Believers."

That same evening in Iowa, the Reformed Witness Committee, made up of members from the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs, along with members from the Edgerton, MN PRC, sponsored a Reformation Day lecture in the B.J. Hann Auditorium on the campus of Dordt College. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on "The Reformation and the Covenant." In this lecture Prof. Dykstra hoped to demonstrate how the truths of the Reformation laid the necessary foundation for the Reformed doctrine of the covenant.

The Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC sponsored a lecture held on October 31. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the topic, "Justification and Good Works."

As part of its evangelism outreach to the community, the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada sponsored a Reformation lecture on November 3. Their pastor, Rev. R. Smit, spoke on the theme, "I Believe in the Holy

Ghost: The Church's Confession Regarding the Holy Spirit."

Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, spoke October 31 in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, on the subject of "God's Unconditional Covenant." Rev. Stewart hoped to consider the question of whether the covenant is a bargain between God and man, where God lays down the conditions and man is required to keep them. Or is this covenant made by God alone, with man being the recipient by grace of God's covenant blessings?

Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, Indiana has made a request to AIM (Active in Missions) to collect Reformed books on their behalf for use in their prison ministry. Soft-cover books are preferred, but hard cover books are also welcome. Check with your church to see if there is a box for books to be donated. Books will be collected until the end of the year.

Mission Activities

Rev. and Mrs. Jason Kortering left for Singapore November 14. They have been asked to return to Singapore by the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. They will remain in Singapore, the Lord willing, for a period of six months. Let us pray for the blessing of the Lord upon their labors there for the good of His church among the saints in Singapore.

A delegation from the Doon, IA PRC, Elder Alan VanBemmel and Rev. David Overway, and the Foreign Mission Committee, Elder Allen Brummel, made a visit to our denomination's mission work in the Philippines in November. Plans called for these men to be there November 8 through Novem-

ber 20. While there they were to hear confessions of faith from some of the members of the Berean Fellowship, obtain the approval of Doon's consistory, and announce those confessions and baptisms on Sunday, the 12th. The next week included observing the Pastors' Training Class, taught by our missionary, Rev. A. Spriensma; making a trip to Gabaldon; attempting to determine the future needs of the field; and beginning discussions on what the relationship between the Berean church, Doon Council, and our Protestant Reformed denomination will be in the future. The public confessions and baptisms were scheduled for the first service on Sunday, the 19th. The organization of the Berean Fellowship into an instituted congregation, with the installation of officebearers, was scheduled for the second service. A very busy and wonderful day. Certainly a witness to the fact that God gathers His church from all the nations, enriching His church with the diversity of every nation, tribe, and tongue. May our church in Doon and the rest of the denomination rejoice in God's marvelous work and grace.

From the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, WA we learn that on Wednesday, November 8, an association to establish a Christian school in the Spokane area was formed. This association planned to take immediate serious steps toward that goal. All confessing members of the fellowship were strongly encouraged to join. There was a sign-up sheet for those interested, and a meeting was to be scheduled to discuss service and financial obligations and to form committees.

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

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Missionary Rev. W. Bruinsma, accompanied by his wife, was scheduled to be with the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC November 9-12. He led a Bible study on Friday and preached both services on Sunday. Fayetteville is also making plans to have a series of lectures held at a neutral site. The first lecture in this series will be given, the Lord willing, by Rev. Bruinsma on the topic: "Who Determines Right and Wrong."

The Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland's web site (www.cprc.co.uk) contains hundreds of

written pieces, the Covenant Reformed News, pamphlets, articles, etc. Millions of people from all around the globe are searching the worldwide web for biblical material every day. A number of saints have already translated items on their web site into other languages, including Portuguese, Russian, Dutch, German, and Spanish. Covenant is looking for more helpers to translate items from English into various tongues, and they are willing to mail free books to willing and capable volunteers. Are you interested in spreading the bib-

lical and Reformed faith around the world through translating material into another language or languages? Then e-mail Rev. A. Stewart at pastor@cprc.co.uk for more details.

Young People's Activities

The members of our churches' young people's societies in West Michigan were invited to a Young People's Mass Meeting held on Sunday afternoon, November 12, at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Rev. C. Haak spoke on "Thanksgiving." 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 28, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

**PETER and FRAN
FEENSTRA,**

celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to God for the instruction that they have given to us in God's Word. God has been faithful to His promise to continue His covenant in succeeding generations.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

- ❖ Tom and Cherie Cammenga
Travis, Cody, David,
Jonathan, Brennan
- ❖ Mike Feenstra
- ❖ Mark Feenstra and fiancée
Bethany Haak
Grandville, Michigan

First PRC of Holland MI Winter Conference 2007

"The Antithesis:
Godly Living in Ungodly Times"

January 12:

"Antithetical
in a Technological Age"
—Speaker: Rev. Daniel Kleyn

January 19:

"Antithetical
in an Age of Covetousness"
—Speaker: Rev. Garrett Eriks

January 26:

"Antithetical
in an Age of Great Immorality"
—Speaker: Prof. Herman Hanko

All three dates are Fridays.

Speeches will begin at 7:30 P.M. and refreshments and fellowship will follow each speech, D.V. Tapes of the lectures will be available upon request.

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2007, at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

Have you recently visited the
RFPA website?

Reminder:
The *Standard Bearer* archives
are available at
www.rfpa.org.