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Volume 82 ♦ Number 20

The Riches of Grace

*And of his fulness have all we received,
and grace for grace.*

John 1:16

What a beautiful confession of faith! Here is a personal confession of those who have experienced and tasted the marvelous grace of Christ. This is the confession of those who have sought Christ and have found Him, of those who have been implanted into Him by a living bond of faith. This is the confession of those who have received Him, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And having spiritual contact and fellowship with Him through faith, they learned to know Him as the super-abundant fountain of grace.

This is the confession of us all. It is the confession of the apostles,

of the evangelists, and of all those to whom they preached the gospel and who received it. All have received Him. He is the fullness from whom all receive and are satisfied.

What a wonderful Christ we have! What an amazing source of spiritual abundance is in Him. Grace for grace: a never-ending stream of grace!

Grace is, first of all, a virtue of God. As such it is the glorious beauty, the blessed pleasantness, the sweet attractiveness of God's eternal and infinite goodness. God is the sum of all infinite perfections. And as the only good, He is supremely fair, beautiful, and pleasant. He is such in Himself, apart from any relation to the creature. All God's perfections are eternal, as He is the I AM also in His grace. As the triune God He eternally beholds the beauty of His perfections and is attracted to Himself.

Grace is also an attitude of divine favor. This He assumes eternally with relation to the people of His choice in His eternal counsel

of election. Eternally God has His people with Him and before Him, not as they are in history, in their sin and corruption, but as He sovereignly conceives of them in His good pleasure. He beholds no sin in them, only beauty, perfection, and glory. Continually they are before Him, and always He is inclined toward them in eternal lovingkindness and He regards them in favor.

Furthermore, grace is the revelation of God's eternal good pleasure of favor to the people of His love as they come into this world as sinners, guilty and damnable. By nature they are children of wrath, who walk in darkness and increase their guilt daily. Even to them that have forfeited every token of God's favor and have made themselves worthy of eternal damnation God reveals Himself as gracious, justifying the ungodly, forgiving their iniquities, adopting them as His children, and making them worthy of eternal life and glory. All of this is in Jesus Christ, who on the accursed cross shed His lifeblood for His people and was raised again on the third day for their justification.

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But we are not finished yet. Grace is also a mighty power of God operating through Christ in His Spirit, whereby He changes the sinner from a cursing rebel into a praying child, from a blaspheming fool into a praising saint. By grace the child of God is called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and instilled into his deepest heart is the new life of the risen Lord. God, by this same grace, cleanses and sanctifies him by His Spirit through the Word of God, preserving him in the midst of the world of darkness and corruption. In this way God prepares His children for the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that never fades away. Such is the grace of God that quickens the dead, as a power operating in His people unto salvation. By grace are ye saved!

This marvelous grace of God is the sum of all the spiritual riches and gifts and blessings with which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ fills us from above. Grace is one, but it is amazingly rich in diversity of blessing. The many blessings include a new life, faith, hope, righteousness, forgiveness of sins, adoption unto children, love of God, and peace that surpasses all understanding. We can add to that patience, strength to fight the battle, comfort and consolation, light and joy, knowledge and wisdom, the resurrection from the dead and eternal glory. Such is the grace of Him who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

The effect and reflection of all these riches and favors of the God of our salvation become manifest in our life. By the power of God's grace the sinner becomes good and beautiful before God and man. The redeemed child of God cries out: "O my God! Grace, thanks, be to Thee!"

Indeed, grace for grace, one gift of grace followed by another, so that we are overwhelmed by its riches. Hardly do we have time to receive and appreciate and give

thanks for one blessing, when another is bestowed upon us. The stream is continuous, never ending. We could not live, stand, or persevere, except for that constant stream of grace. This shows that all of our salvation is of grace and never of anything else. Never is it conditional; never does one gift of grace put us in a position to merit the next. The stream is inexhaustible. Out of His fullness we all receive constantly and abundantly grace for grace.



The fountain of this grace is Christ Jesus our Lord, the Son of God and the Son of man. As the Son of God He is God of God and Light of Light. He is the Word that was in the beginning with God and that was God, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. In Him is light and life and glory and eternal joy. He is the fullness of grace.

He is also the fountain of abundant grace for us, for all His people. Ordained to be so, He is the Head of His church, that He might be the Captain of their salvation, that through Him God might lead all His children to glory. He is God's own Mediator, the strong arm of the Lord, that He might take their sins from their shoulders. He represents them in the hour of judgment and blots out the guilt of their iniquities. Garments of righteousness He gives, so that His beloved might dwell in the house of God forever.

As the Son of man He was revealed in the fullness of time and became flesh to dwell among us. And we beheld His glory! The Lord of all was seen in the form of a servant, the infinite in the limits of flesh. The eternal fullness appeared in our emptiness. In this way He bore our iniquities on the cross, completely emptying Himself in order that He might become our fullness.

He gained the victory, as is evident in His resurrection on the

third day. God raised Him from the dead, and thus gave Him the testimony that He had finished His work. O yes! All our transgressions were blotted out. Sin in the flesh was condemned forever through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death was swallowed up of life. Thus He became the inexhaustible fountain of all grace.

The same Lord that descended also ascended up on high, where He was clothed with all power in heaven and on earth. Of the Father He received the promise of the Spirit, in order that by that Spirit and through His Word He might cause the fullness of His grace to flow into our emptiness forevermore. Thus He becomes the light that dispels our darkness, the righteousness that overcomes our unrighteousness, and the fire of love that consumes our hate.



"And of his fulness have all we received." And we might add here, "sovereignly so." We did not accept it, did not take it. We received it, not of ourselves, but as a gift from on high. In us there is no power of receptivity for Him and for His grace. In us there is nothing but darkness, and we will never turn to the Light unless He first penetrate our darkness. He must first break the shackles of iniquity that hold us in bondage. We lie in the midst of death, and before we can even drink from the fountain of life and grace, the power of His resurrection must break the bonds of death.

This fullness we have received by faith. By the activity of faith we become deeply conscious of our own emptiness, of our darkness and death, of our sin and iniquity, of the hopelessness of our state. We apprehend Him as the fullness of our complete redemption. By faith we long for Him. We long to drink from the fountain of His grace and to taste that the Lord is good.

It is all received of Him. Even faith we receive from Him. Out of Him that power of faith is made active. We are never first. Nor is it thus, that His act whereby He imparts His fullness to us, and our act whereby we receive His fullness, meet in cooperation to accom-

plish our salvation. He is first, always first. He imparts His fullness to us, and we receive. He gives us faith, and we believe. He draws us, and we come. He calls us to the fountain, and we drink. Always grace for grace, without

end. No flesh may glory in His presence.

In this light let us take this very personal confession upon our lips, glorifying the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. Out of His fullness have all we personally received, even grace for grace. 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

On-Site Reflections on the Free Offer (6)

As indicated in our previous article we intend to look a bit more closely at Matthew 5:43ff., pointing out where the free-offer interpretation goes astray.

In our last article we noted and responded to the charge of the promoters of the WMO (Well-Meant Offer) that we 'high-Calvinists' are in many instances guilty of claiming to have a greater love for certain lost sinners than God does, because we claim there are many sinners whose salvation in love we seek, but whom God does not love at all, but only hates.

Our response is, guilty as charged.

However, for the sake of accuracy, let us be clear. Our claim is not that we have a "greater" love for certain lost sinners than God does, because the certain sinners of whom we are speaking are those for whom God has no love at all, never has, never will. Not according to Scripture. To state it as clearly as we can, our contention is that we as disciples of Christ love many whom God does not love at all, whom He has reprobated (the

Esau of this life), whom He neither has, nor ever had, any intention of saving (for instance, the greater part of that apostate Israel living when Christ spoke the very words of Matthew 5:43ff.); *and, we assert, to this God Himself calls us.* To this the sovereign and electing God calls us for His own secret and predestinating purpose, as He works out His 'saving' and 'condemning' will.

And please note that we speak not only of God's 'condemning' will, but also of His 'saving' will. In fact, we mentioned 'saving' first, because with God 'to save' is always His first and primary purpose. So it must be with us. And yet God's purpose of passing a just condemnation upon the reprobate ungodly is also always part of the picture.

Any proper interpretation of Matthew 5:43-48 must keep this in mind.

And note further, we are not saying that we know *who* the elect and *who* the reprobate are in the state of unbelief (that belongs to the secret and hidden things of God); we are simply saying that many of those whom we love, and to whom we are called to do good, will prove in fact to be reprobate according to God's own predestinat-

ing purpose and will. God does not call us to start speculating about who may or may not be what; in fact, He sternly forbids us to engage in such guesswork, calling us rather to do good to all indiscriminately (in love), leaving the fullness of knowledge and purpose to Himself as Almighty God.

It is in this context that we assert that Matthew 5:43ff. does not teach that God loves all men (nor, for that matter, that God loves all those whom He calls us to love). The WMO men insist it does - if not directly, then by clear and necessary implication. But it does not.

We can understand their reasoning, based on a surface reading of the text; just as we understand why many might conclude, on the basis of a first reading I Timothy 2:3-6, that it teaches a general atonement, or that Revelation 22:17 ("And whosoever will, let him take...") teaches free willism. But, in the light of the rest of Scripture, do they? Is this what the apostles are actually teaching in such passages? Not according to Reformed insight and explanation. So it is with Matthew 5:43ff.



The reasoning of the WMO men is clear. Christ calls us to

Previous article in this series: August 2006, p. 436.

love our enemies, namely, even those who hate us, and to do good to them. Basically this amounts to loving all men with whom we have contact, none to be excluded, not even our enemies, loving them also as our neighbors. And, since Christ says this in the context of showing ourselves to be children of God (i.e., reflecting the character of God as our Father), what must one conclude but that God must also love all men without distinction?

Surely this is the clear and necessary implication.

Not so. Such a conclusion is indeed an inference made by many, but that is exactly the problem - it is but an inference. And not a necessary one at that.

Let us be clear what we are saying here. We are not saying that this text is *proof against* a free-offer kind of love; for that there are plenty of other texts in Scripture. We are saying that Matthew 5:43ff. offers *no proof for* any free-offer gospel. Such is something that must be read into the text. Matthew 5:43ff. requires no free-offer idea in order to interpret it as it stands, nor to bring home Christ's point with power.

And further, to insert a WMO concept requires one to do violence to any number of other scriptural passages.

What Christ is doing here is giving incentive and reason why we are to love even those miserable, abusive, ungrateful enemies of ours, loving many more than only those who love us - loving even those who have failed to treat us with the respect and consideration we are sure we so richly deserve (at least I do! I do not know about the rest of you!). And the reason Christ gives is that God also has loved such miserable ingrates throughout the centuries, and He still does, as we well know. Christ is saying to His disciples, "Now, knowing that, go and do thou likewise. Do that in order to demonstrate that you understand what

love and goodness has been shown to you as abusers of God and His Word." Yes, a love shown even to us who were once counted as the enemies of God (Eph. 2:11ff.).

But note well, declaring that God has loved and saved *many* abusive ingrates through the centuries, and has turned enemies into friends, is not the same as saying He loves or has loved *all* the abusive ingrates of the human race. That the text does not say.

Christ chose His wording carefully.

The simple, undeniable fact is that at no place in the passage does Christ utter the words, "...for your Father also loves all men" or "...for your Father also loves all of His enemies," as if that is the reason why we are to show love to all with whom we come into contact - we are to love even our enemies, because God loves all His enemies, i.e., those who hate Him. He does not. Some He does and has, but nowhere in Scripture do you read that God loves all His enemies. Nor does Christ say that in this text.

The passage says that God makes His sun to rise on all men without distinction, on the evil and the good, and that He sends on all the cheering rain. He does good to all alike. Therefore so must we. But that still does not say God loves them all alike. The sending of sunshine and rain does not indicate God's desiring a salvation for all. In His sending of good things upon many of the ungodly, God has a different purpose in mind, even as He has in our love for many of our neighbors.

Indeed, we are called to love all of our enemies. But that's not because God loves all of His, or ours either. That is not what Christ is saying. What Christ is saying is, we are called to love all of our enemies *because God loved us*, even us who were once God's enemies. That is the significance of verse 46, "For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not

even the publicans the same?"

It is obvious that Christ here is reminding His disciples of a love that goes beyond the love of publicans, which is only for those who also loved them. Christ is reminding them of God's love, which love loved even those who did not love Him. But that does not mean that Christ is saying that God loves *all who do not love Him*. That is to read something in the text that is not there. The conclusion is an extrapolation without any basis. Rather, the proof for this love of God for those who did not love Him is *His love for some*, namely for them, Christ's disciples. God loved and loves me, and many others who make the same testimony (Gal. 2:20), who did not love Him at all. Who am I not to love others likewise?

Not only is this all that is necessary for Christ to make His point, but in this way He makes His point in the most personally powerful way.

We say again, to maintain that Matthew 5:43ff. teaches that God has a love for everyone because we as His children are to love all of our neighbors is an unwarranted inference. It reads something into the text that Christ carefully avoids saying. And it puts one at odds with the rest of the Scriptures as well.

What serves as motive for the believer to love and to do good to one's enemies is not an imagined love of God for all humanity and for all our enemies besides. All that is necessary is the knowledge of God's particular, personal love, namely, that I was once numbered among God's enemies (as was a certain young, arrogant Saul of Tarsus of old), and yet He loved me, and returned me good for evil. When I reflect on that love of God, I have more than enough incentive to love my own personal enemies. And when I actually *do reflect* unto others that love of God for me (what God was willing as the Divine parent to endure from me),

then I show as well that I am a child of God.

And if we need any more motivation to love our enemies, consider that any number of them may prove to be elect after all, maybe even from our own household.

We say again, not only is a free-offer notion not found in the text, neither does the text require such to bring its message home with power. Why do such, when all it does is to force one to place this passage into contradiction with other passages, and then necessitates calling upon a paradox once again to “save the day”?

But there remains another question in all of this, and that is, what is God’s purpose in all of this? Why will Christ, God’s Son, have us express such a self-effacing, self-denying, much-enduring love to all?

The answer is twofold: the first (and surely the primary) reason is that our rendering good for evil in longsuffering love is a means God is pleased to use in a powerful way to draw others unto salvation. Consider I Peter 3:1ff. and the calling of the Christian wife towards an unbelieving and perhaps even harsh husband: “that...they also may without the word be won by the (chaste) conversation of the wives.”

But the second part of the answer is that this is also the way God is pleased to work out His decree of reprobation, working out damnation of the ‘non-elect,’ and bringing upon them their just condemnation. I am

not saying this is a thought we are to relish. In fact, there is evidence in Scripture that indicates quite the opposite (which we intend to consider next time), but this is a fact of Scripture and revelation. And we must be willing to be used by God as such, if that is His will. It is no different than it was with Paul and the gospel word that He was

In His sending of good things upon many of the ungodly, God has a different purpose in mind, even as He has in our love for many of our neighbors.

to bring to the Jews first of all, which Word he knew would serve, in instance after instance, as a savior of death unto death. As he cried out, “And who is sufficient for these things?” (II Cor. 2:16). But such was his calling.

So that salvation might find God’s true Israel, Paul went forth and did good, bringing the Word, knowing that, even as he opened his mouth and preached, God was using it to harden and judge the larger segment of his beloved kinsmen. And yet, even in this hardening and condemning aspect of the good gospel preaching, Paul was so bold as to call himself a “sweet savor of Christ” unto God (*nota bene!*). In other words, what Paul was doing was pleasing to God, even in his bringing the Word that was to serve as condemnation unto so many. It was so intended by God all along. It belonged to God’s deeper purpose. And Paul had to bring himself into submission to that reality.

And note as well, this purpose of God to use the witness of His people unto the condemnation of many is not something hidden. It is revealed and known. God in His Word has made it plain that He will use us in that way. What is hidden is *who* God is pleased to harden as a reprobate, *why* this one and not that one (me, or you!), but not that God will use the good words and actions of His own in this hardening way. That is not hidden at all. Paul could not be plainer.

We must also be willing to be used in this way if God so wills.

But our larger point is this, that this twofold purpose and effect not only belong to the preaching, but are also part of the reason why God will have us do good to all men and to show love to our enemies. It may not be why we want to do these things (does anyone *want* to

have his parental instruction used to harden and condemn his own children?), but it still belongs to why our Lord calls us to do these things.

So it is also in Matthew 5:43ff.

Again we reiterate, to prevent any misunderstanding, that the main reason we are called to return good for evil is not so that many may be condemned through us. God’s central reason surely is His good pleasure to use such to bring even those of our enemies to conversion and faith. But this unto-condemnation-purpose remains one of the reasons why God will have us to love and do good to the neighbor. And it has that *outcome* as well, a divinely appointed outcome, to a definite number no less.

But God says, “You leave that with Me. You simply do unto others as I have done unto you.”

A passage that brings this all home with some power is Romans 12:20, 21. We will quote it next time when we consider it in more detail. It is a passage hotly disputed and universally altered. Few, it seems, want to live with the plain teaching of this passage. Not even very many good men. Certainly not the WMO men. They find this passage as difficult to come to terms with as Romans 9:13. So they change its explanation to fit their WMO presuppositions. Yes, of all things, they allow their theology to rule their exegesis.

Strange as it may sound – that the WMO theologians of all men should allow their doctrinal presuppositions to rule their exegesis, preventing the ‘freedom’ of explaining a text according to its plain meaning (ask the late ‘rationalist’ Gordon Clark and that notorious ‘scholastic dogmatician’ Herman Hoeksema about such persistent charges) – yet so it is.

Next time we will consider the Romans 12:20, 21 passage and the light it sheds on the above discussion, as we bring our analysis of the free offer to a close. 

Of Synods and Assemblies

June is the time of year in which many of the denominations meet in Assembly or Synod. With understandable interest, one reads reports of decisions taken which will affect the denominations involved. It is not only with interest, but also with a great degree of dismay and disappointment, that one reads some of the decisions taken. Surely one can find many of the decisions made to be proper. Yet we are most concerned about those decisions that point to rapid apostasy within the churches and denominations. It is, however, foretold in Scripture that these things must come to pass before the end of this age comes (Matt. 24:11-13).

The Episcopal Church in America is itself wracked by dissension on the issue of ordination of bishops who are gay and living in a "committed" relationship with one of the same sex. At the same time, the Anglican churches are also divided on this issue within the U.S. branch. It may well be that the U.S. branch will either leave the broader union or be put out of it. Commentator Cal Thomas, of the Tribune Media Services, quoted in the *Grand Rapids Press*, writes:

The new leader of the Episcopal Church in America, Bishop Katharine Schori, says she does not believe homosexuality is a sin and that homosexuals were created by God to love people of the same gender.

As the Episcopal leadership continues to huff and puff to catch up with the world, it would be helpful if it could tell its members what it regards as sinful behavior, or will the very concept of sin

soon be up for negotiation in order to avoid giving offense to anyone?

Truly what Paul, the Apostle, warned would happen in the "end times" is coming true in our day: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine, instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy NIV).

Meeting in convention in Columbus, Ohio, the denomination passed a resolution expressing "regret" for consecrating a homosexual bishop three years ago, but it declined to repent of its action. On Tuesday, they voted to continue consecrating homosexual bishops and to permit same-sex unions. But reversed themselves 24 hours later and adopted a resolution to avoid consecrating *additional* gay bishops.

Bishop Schori says, "The Bible tells us about how to treat other human beings and that's certainly the great message of Jesus—to include the unincluded."

...Maybe the question for Bishop Schori and her fellow heretics should be: if homosexual practice is not sin, what is? And how do we know? Or is it a matter of "thus saith the opinion polls" and lobbying groups, rather than "thus saith the Lord"? With the bishop's "doctrine" of inclusion, why exclude anyone? How about applying the religious equivalent of "open borders" and let everyone into the church, including unrepentant prostitutes, murderers, liars, thieves and atheists. If the Episcopal Church denies what is clearly taught in scripture about important matters like sexual behavior, why expect its leaders to have any convictions about anything, including directions to Heaven?

The national Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) de-

sires to adopt, among many other decisions, more "gender-inclusive" names of the Trinity. Richard N. Ostling, of Associated Press, writes:

The divine Trinity - "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" - also could be known as "Mother, Child and Womb" or "Rock, Redeemer, Friend" at some Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) services under an action Monday by the church's national assembly.

Delegates voted to "receive" a policy paper on gender-inclusive language for the Trinity, a step short of approving it. That means church officials can propose experimental liturgies with alternative phrasings for the Trinity, but congregations won't be required to use them....

It seems that there are many in the denominations who would foist on the churches the most outrageous and irreligious changes, as though they seek to outdo others. At bottom, it is an attempt to undermine the Word of God by promoting these changes and by denying to be sin that which the Word condemns.

The matter of homosexuality arose again at the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America at its meeting in Pella, Iowa. From a report appearing in the *Grand Rapids Press*, June 10, 2006, we read:

In previous decades the RCA labeled homosexuality a sin, and a proposal from the church's Zeeland Classis calls for a reaffirmation of those statements. Also up for debate is a request to cut ties with the United Church of Christ, which endorses same-sex marriage.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, RCA general-secretary, said "it's always possible to get nuances and new perspectives" through discussion, but changing the church's position on gays is not

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the intent of the dialogue. The purpose is to help each other understand different interpretations of Scripture and minister better to gays, he said.

"The dialogue is set within a clear framework," he said. "We're not going to keep fighting."

Delegates must decide what to do with Kansfield, who lost his job as head of an RCA seminary in New Jersey and had his ministerial credentials suspended because, in 2004, he performed the marriage of his daughter, Ann, to another woman.

A controversial proposal would shift his supervision from the General Synod - which disciplined him last year - to his local classis, or group of churches, which may be more sympathetic to homosexuality.

Kansfield earlier this year asked for a new trial, but agreed to drop the request in exchange for the transfer.

I understand that this shift of the case to the local classis was approved. This seems to be very strange - to treat such a serious matter at a classis that might rescind a synodical decision of last year. As the report states, this classis is "more sympathetic to homosexuality." Some affirm that this classis will likely vindicate the man and remove his suspension.

The Christian Reformed Church also has taken several decisions that ought to concern us as well.

1) It designated the Today's New International Version (TNIV) of the Bible as acceptable for use in the CRC churches. In addition to objections raised against the NIV, this revised edition is designed to use "gender inclusive language." It goes another step further in eroding the inerrant, verbal inspiration of Scripture.

2) Synod affirmed that First CRC of Toronto, Ont. has resolved the issue of homosexuality (it had earlier approved placing practicing homosexuals in the offices in the church) and brought it into accord

with the CRC's position. (However, an examination of First Toronto CRC's Web address, <http://www.firsttorontocrc.org>, shows clear violation of the teachings of the Canons of Dordt in proposing a universal and unconditional love of God for all peoples. It also appears to embrace those of differing "sexual orientation" and affirms that all those who confess Jesus Christ as their Savior have rights of "full participation of membership, sacraments, and leadership in this congregation.") It remains to be seen how the CRC will reconcile this with their synodical decision.

3) Synod also voted to remove the word "male" from the qualifications for ecclesiastical office listed in their Church Order. (An earlier synodical decision allowed each Classis, if it wished, to set aside the limitation of the Church Order restricting the offices to the "male.") If this change is adopted by Synod of 2007, it will take immediate effect in the churches. As something of a "sop" offered to the conservatives, synod also decided that women ministers or elders would not be permitted to serve as delegates to synod or as synodical deputies. The supporters of "women in office" deplored that whereas synod took two steps forward in removing the word "male" in the relevant article, it took one step backward in restricting synodical delegates and synodical committees to male members.

4) Synod decided to retain Question and Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism, but to put brackets around the part that denounces the Roman Catholic mass as a "condemnable idolatry" and to explain that these paragraphs do not reflect the official teaching or practice of today's Roman Catholic Church and are not confessionally binding on members of the CRC.

This last seems to be a most appalling distortion of the facts, and indeed, as Charles Honey of the

Grand Rapids Press headlined this decision, "Synod Makes Up With Catholics." I have not had the opportunity to read the study and report upon which this decision has been based, but several concerns come to mind.

First, is it possible that for the past 450 years the churches have misunderstood Rome? Or has Rome in fact changed its stance on the mass? Was it in fact an "accursed idolatry" in the days of Martin Luther and John Calvin, but now no longer so because the view has changed? Martin Luther said, "The Mass in the Papacy must be the greatest and most horrible abomination, as it directly and powerfully conflicts with this chief article, and yet above and before all other popish idolatries it has been the chief and most specious...." Was Luther wrong? Or has the Roman Catholic Church now changed its position?

John Calvin writes in his *Institutes* (Vol. 2, p. 721, Eerdmans 1949), "Now, let the Romanists deny, if they can, that they are guilty of idolatry in exhibiting bread in their masses, to be worshipped instead of Christ...." Was Calvin judging them wrongly - or has Rome changed today?

The well-known dogmatician Louis Berkhof also emphasizes essentially the same thing and writes of the Romish view as "the elevation and adoration of the host...." Would that not be "accursed idolatry"?

It seems very clear that the Reformers and those who followed after them for the past 450 or more years all basically agreed: Rome's position is idolatry. Were these all wrong - or has Rome indeed changed?

We must listen to Rome as it speaks through its official and binding documents. At the Council of Trent, A.D. 1563, Rome expresses its position over against Luther and subsequent Reformers and Protestants. As far as I know, the *Decrees of the Council of Trent*

have never been amended, altered, or rescinded. I quote only a small portion of that creed:

(On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist) Canon I. -If anyone denies that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist there are truly, really, and substantially contained the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the whole Christ; but shall say that He is in it as by a sign or figure, or force, let him be anathema.

Canon II. - If anyone says that in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the entire substance of the wine into the blood, the species of the

bread and wine only remaining, a change which the Catholic Church most fittingly calls transubstantiation: let him be anathema....

Canon V. - If any one says that the special fruit of the most Holy Eucharist is the remission of sins, or that from it no other fruits are produced: let him be anathema.

Canon VI. - If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the only-begotten Son of God is not to be adored even outwardly with the worship of latria (the act of adoration), and therefore not to be venerated with a special festive celebration, nor to be borne about in procession according to the praiseworthy and universal rite and custom of the holy Church, or is not to be set before the people publicly to be adored, and that the adorers of it are idolators: let him be anathema.

(The Sources of Catholic Dogma,
Henry Denzinger,
B. Hender Book Co., 1957)

“Anathema” is to be accursed. The teaching of the Roman Catholics, so it clearly appears in their creed, is that the Protestant and Reformed condemnation of transubstantiation and the worship of the elements of the bread and wine is accursed. They have not put any of this in brackets with a footnote that this is no longer the view of the Roman Catholic Church and that its members are no longer obliged to believe it.

I ask: what is incorrect in the answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, question 80, in light of their official dogma as quoted above? And if this answer offends good Roman Catholics, ought not Protestants be as much or more offended at the “anathemas” hurled at them by the Roman Catholics?



Things Which Must Shortly Come To Pass

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Chapter Two

The Intermediate State (4)

In the preceding three installments of this series on eschatology, I have set forth the Reformed doctrine of the intermediate state of the elect believer. At the moment of death and by means of death, which Christ has made the servant of our salvation, God separates the soul and the body. What God has joined together in the creation of man in the beginning and in the conception of

each individual human, God can, and does, put asunder. In the body, the believer sleeps in the grave until Christ awakens him in the resurrection of the body. In the soul, the believer is raised by Jesus into conscious, heavenly life and glory immediately upon the believer's dying.

The intermediate state of the believer in his soul means uninterrupted covenant communion of the believer with Jesus Christ. Indeed, there is closer communion. The communion with Christ is no longer “through a glass, darkly” (I Cor. 13:12), but direct: the soul's vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The communion is no longer hindered by the sinfulness

of the believer, a sinfulness of soul, as well as of body. Christ's resurrection of the soul of the Christian at the moment of death has purged the soul from all defilement of sin. In the soul, the believer is now perfectly holy.

In addition, the communion with Jesus Christ, who in His resurrection has become heavenly, is more intimate because the soul of the believer is no longer earthy, that is, thoroughly adapted to earthly life, so that even its knowledge of Christ, though true, is after an earthly manner of thinking. Christ's resurrection of the soul of the child of God at the moment of death has transformed the soul. Christ has made it heavenly, that

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is, has thoroughly adapted it to His own heavenly life. It is still a human soul. But it is a human soul that is now heavenly. In his soul, the believer now can know and embrace Christ after a heavenly manner. This is richer knowledge and closer fellowship than the believer enjoyed in his earthly life. Although the subject is the resurrection of the body, the contrast in I Corinthians 15:47-49 between earthy humans and heavenly humans implies that the soul of the believer in the intermediate state is a heavenly soul and that the life and experience of the heavenly soul are much better than those of the earthly soul.

The intermediate state, therefore, is a grand aspect of the Reformed believer's hope. It is not the main aspect of his hope. The main aspect of his hope is his expectation of, and longing for, the resurrection of his and all the saints' bodies. But the intermediate state is an important aspect of the believer's hope. That otherwise fearful enemy, death, will be for him deliverance from sin, entrance into conscious life and glory with Jesus Christ, and a change into a higher, indeed the highest possible, quality of human life. The world talks about "quality of life." Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and it never entered into the heart of man to imagine the quality of life that God has prepared for those who love Him: *heavenly* life. Why then do we not desire this heavenly life, which we will have at death, more than we do?

The comfort of the intermediate state for the believer is that at death he will be delivered from sin and the sorrows of earthly life and transformed into heavenly life *at once*. At the instant he closes the eyes of his body in death, the eyes of his soul open on God in Jesus Christ and the realm of heaven. Death does not have even a temporary victory over the elect believer, who falls asleep in Jesus. From the spiritual condition of see-

ing God dimly in the mirror of the preached Word by faith, the dying believer passes, immediately, to a face-to-face vision of God in the personal Word, Jesus Christ. Why then do we fear death, as so often we find ourselves doing?

In this hope, the Reformed believer lives all his days in the valley of the shadow of death. In this hope, he goes down, deliberately, into the darkest shades of the valley when God makes known to him that his days run out. In this hope, his family gives him up, and buries him. In this hope, the sorrow of the militant church over the loss of a member is tempered.

Naturalism and Modernism

The Reformed church must guard this aspect of her hope. There are attacks upon it. I have already pointed out that sheer, naturalistic unbelief, which expresses itself in the theory of evolution, consigns all humans to utter hopelessness. Man dies like the beast. He has no future. Therefore, all his life, with its achievements and joys, is for nothing. Although thousands of despairing teachers of evolution in the state schools train their students thus to despair, with enthusiasm, with smiles on their faces, and with contempt for the hopeful doctrine of creation, the truth is that both teachers and students "through fear of death [are] all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15). They are slaves of death, which raises the question, "Why would any Reformed believer send his children to a school in which the children are instructed by slaves of death and in which they form friendships with slaves of death?"

Essentially the same is the unbelief of theological modernism. Denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lord from heaven, it also denies the resurrection of the Christian. It denies, not only the resurrection of his body, but also the resurrection of his soul at the moment of death. According to

theological modernism, death puts an end to humans, believers as well as unbelievers. Death puts an end to believers, not only with regard to their body, but also with regard to their soul. All that lives on after death are the occasional, and increasingly faint, memory and the fading name on the tombstone. The message of theological modernism is, "Death wins!" Of those who have hope in Christ only in this life, the apostle declared that they are of all men most miserable (I Cor. 15:19). This raises the question, "Why do churches deliberately open themselves up to modernism's proclamation of death, and why do professing Christians remain in churches that fall away into the celebration, Sunday after Sunday, of death and the grave?"

Soul Sleep

Of more urgent concern to us are certain doctrinal errors that rob the believer of his hope of life with Christ in the intermediate state. The first of these is the error of soul sleep. As the name indicates, it is the teaching that the soul is unconscious between the moment of death and the resurrection of the body. Opposing the error in a treatise entitled, "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists," Calvin described it as the notion that "the souls of the deceased sleep without any feeling or consciousness, until the day of judgment" (John Calvin, *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines*, Baker, 1982, pp. 119, 120). Caustically, Calvin charged that those who teach this doctrine, "in the place of white robes, give souls pillows to sleep on" (*Treatises against the Anabaptists*, p. 127).

One form of the error is the denial that the soul of man is a substance, or essence, which can, therefore, exist apart from the body. Man's soul is merely the animating principle of the body—that

life-force that enables the body to breathe and function. Accordingly, one's death involves the perishing of his life-force, or soul, as well as the death of the body. The death of the believer is total. The entire man slumbers in the grave, until Christ awakens him in the day of His coming. Calvin called attention to this form of the doctrine of soul sleep, in his "Brief Instruction": "Some do not think that the soul is a substance, or an entity having essence, but solely the power that a man possesses while alive that helps him breathe, move about, and perform the other actions of life" (*Treatises against the Anabaptists*, p. 119).

As is evident from these quotations of Calvin, soul sleep was an attack on the hope of the child of God in the face of death by the Anabaptists at the time of the sixteenth century reformation of the church. Against this false teaching, Calvin wrote his first theological work, *Psychopannychia*, about which more later, as well as in the later "Brief Instruction," quoted above.

No one should suppose that the error is merely of historical interest. In the 1960s, the teaching of soul sleep occasioned a split in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). Preaching Q. 57 of the Heidelberg Catechism ("my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head"), Rev. B. Telder denied the plain teaching of the Catechism that man is composed of soul and body and that at the moment of death the soul of the believer is taken up to heaven, consciously to live with Christ.

In a book entitled *Sterven ... en Dan? Gaan de Kinderen Gods, wanneer Zij Sterven, naar de Hemel?* (Kok, 1960; the English translation would be, *Dying ... and Then? Do the Children of God Go to Heaven when They Die?*), Telder defended

his attack on the Reformed doctrine of the intermediate state. He criticized the teaching of Q. 57 of the Catechism as philosophical: "the terminology more of the scholastic theologians than the sound words of Scripture" (p. 33; all quotations of Telder are my translation of the Dutch—DJE). The view that man is composed of two substances, a body and a soul, Telder condemned as Greek philosophy, wrongly taken up into Protestant theology through the bad influence of Calvin (pp. 20, 21, 152).

The hope of the intermediate state, according to Telder, is unbiblical: "The entire thought that a part of man, his 'soul,' is not subjected to death, that his 'soul' escapes death, is foreign to Scripture" (p. 29). Telder explained away all the passages in Scripture that teach the intermediate state. His (mis)handling of Luke 23:43 ("today shalt thou be with me in paradise") is typical. Christ merely told the penitent evildoer that he would be with Christ "today" in the realm of the dead (Dutch: "dodenrijk") (pp. 36, 76).

Telder contended that the whole man dies. The entire man is in the grave. The only hope of the Christian is the resurrection of the body. There is no conscious life with Christ whatever between the moment of death and the resurrection of the body (pp. 37, 38).

Telder was strongly influenced by the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. It came as no surprise, therefore, that also the "Reformational" (not to be confused with "Reformed"), Christian Reformed theologian Gordon Spykman had serious problems with the confessional Reformed doctrine of the intermediate state. For Spykman too was a disciple of Dooyeweerd and his colleague, D. H. T. Vollenhoven, whose philosophy rejected the view of man as body and soul. Indeed, the phi-

losophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven was the basis of Spykman's published dogmatics, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Eerdmans, 1992).

Spykman claimed to hold the truth of an intermediate state. He denied that our death "consign(s) us to a state of dormancy, soul sleep, or unconscious existence" (*Reformational Theology*, pp. 550-552). But having rejected the classic Christian and creedally Reformed doctrine that man's nature is composed of body and soul (pp. 233-245), Spykman was at a loss to explain the conscious life of the believer between his death and the resurrection of his body. He admitted as much. He spoke of a "breakdown in rational comprehension" (p. 244). "What it means ... to be alive spiritually, apart from our present historical existence, baffles our minds" (p. 552).

The explanation Spykman offered of the intermediate state is unintelligible, false, and impossible. His explanation was this: "Bodily the whole man dies. Spiritually the whole man lives" (p. 244). The explanation is unintelligible. What it means that at death the whole man lives spiritually, no one understands, including Spykman, as he himself acknowledged. The explanation is false. On the view of everyone, the man's body, which is certainly part of the "whole man," is in the grave. The "whole" man, therefore, does not live after death, whether spiritually or otherwise. An important part of the "whole man"—his body—is dead. The explanation is impossible, impossible, that is, on Spykman's theology of the nature of man. If man is not body and soul and if, therefore, the whole man dies, there is nothing in which a man can live with Christ after death. Denial of the soul as a real, though immaterial, substance, which, though wonderfully united with the body in life, so that man is a unity, nevertheless can be sepa-

...soul sleep was an attack on the hope of the child of God in the face of death...

rated from the body at death is the denial of the intermediate state.

Contemporary evangelical theologians understand that denial of a substantial soul implies the loss of the intermediate state. There is no longer any talk of the “whole man’s somehow living spiritually” upon death and before the resurrection of the body. The whole man dies. The only hope—not the *chief* hope—of the Christian is the resurrection on the world’s last day. Hans Schwarz writes:

Since we are not endowed with divine qualities that could make us hope for a gradual purification of an immortal soul, our only hope for ultimate fulfillment is beyond death, in the resurrection from the dead (*Eschatology*, Eerdmans, 2000, p. 280).

For Schwarz, the comforting

teaching of the Reformed churches that at death the elect believer is taken up in his now purified and transformed soul to live with Christ is illegitimate and unnecessary speculation. “It is neither necessary nor legitimate to speculate on an intermediate state between death and resurrection” (p. 291).

This rejection of the intermediate state by soul sleep and by the related teaching of the death of the whole man gives death a victory. The victory is temporary, for the believer will be raised one day, but it is a victory. Death cuts the believer off from conscious communion with Christ. Thus, death robs the believer of the spiritual, eternal life that he received in regeneration and that he enjoyed by faith. Death robs him of this life completely. Death wins—for a time.

Such brave souls as Hans

Schwarz may not need the comfort that death cannot separate him from Christ, not for one instant, in the face of that last enemy, the “king of terrors,” but for most of us weak and fearful Christians this comfort is necessary. God Himself thinks so. He gives this comfort in His word. It is not enough in the face of death to cling by faith to the promise of the resurrection of the body. I must also have the promise that as one who lives and believes in Jesus I shall never die (John 11:26).

“Today,” says the merciful Savior, to every dying penitent on his deathbed, “you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

The truth of the intermediate state is not philosophical speculation. It is the comfort of the gospel.

(to be continued) 

Decency and Order

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Erasure of Baptized Members (1)

Introduction

Articles 76 and 77 of the Church Order concern the discipline of those who are communicant members of the church. These articles outline the steps that a consistory is to follow in carrying out Christian discipline, as well as the procedure for excommunication of those who do not repent of their sins.

The Church Order, however, is silent on the matter of the discipline of non-communicant, that is,

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baptized members of the church. Nothing is said about the subject of “erasure,”* as we commonly refer to it. The term cannot be found in the Church Order, and there is no reference in the Church Order to the practice as we carry it out.

This is not to say that the practice is not derived from biblical principles that are set forth in the Church Order. It is, and it is a practice that has a long history in the Dutch Reformed Churches. The Reformed churches have always recognized that those who have been baptized are, by virtue of their baptism, members of the church (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 74). As members of the church, they are subject to the su-

pervision and discipline of the church. It is because they are members of the church that the honor of Christ and the holiness of the church are at stake in their confession and walk. Baptized members, therefore, who deny Christ and live in an ungodly way must be dealt with by the elders, no less than wayward confessing members. And if they continue impenitent in their sins, they too must be excluded from the church and set outside the kingdom of heaven.

* The Dutch Church Order authorities refer to erasure as *royeering*. The word means essentially the same as “erasure.” It refers to a striking off, an expunging of something, and hence, erasure.

For the sake of these members, as well as for the sake of the rest of the congregation, particularly the young people of the church, discipline must be exercised over these erring baptized members.

Although our Protestant Reformed Church Order, in line with the original Church Order of Dordrecht, says nothing about erasure, a number of other Reformed denominations have included in their Church Orders articles dealing with excommunication of non-communicant members.

The Free Reformed Church of North America, for example, has done this. Article 77 of its Church Order is entitled "Excommunication." Point "C" of this article reads:

C. Admonition and discipline of members-by-baptism:

1. When baptized members who have arrived at the years of discretion because of indifference regularly withdraw themselves from the worship services in their own denomination, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them, and when they continue to be indifferent and disobedient, exclude them from the Church.

2. Members by baptism who have been excluded from the church, and who later repent of their sin, shall be received again into the church, after a period of probation, followed by public confession of guilt and confession of faith.

3. When baptized members who have arrived at the years of discretion regularly stay away from the worship services in their own denomination because they usually attend church elsewhere, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them. When they continue to be disobedient, the Consistory shall deal with them as they may be required in accordance with the Church Order.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are another denomination that has included the matter

of the discipline of baptized members in their Church Order. Part of Article 68 of their Church Order, the article that deals with excommunication, addresses itself to the excommunication of baptized members. The pertinent part of the article reads:

In case a non-communicant member hardens himself in sin, the consistory shall in the same manner inform the congregation by means of public announcements. In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement—which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained—the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned and a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place. The time between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

The Canadian Reformed Churches also have an adopted "Form For The Excommunication Of Non-Communicant Members" (*Book of Praise*, p. 607 ff.) which is distinct from their "Form For The Excommunication Of Communicant Members."

Some History From the CRC

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s the synods of the Christian Reformed Church in North American (CRC) wrestled with the matter of erasure of baptized members. Two overtures from two different classes requested the CRC Synod of 1946 "to provide the churches with a liturgical form to be used when delinquent baptized members are placed outside of the visible church" (Acts of Synod 1946, p. 58). Already in 1928, with the publication of his *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, Prof. William Heyns had expressed a desire for a form for excommunication of baptized members.

... a Form for this act of discipline, the need of which has been felt

and expressed in the Netherlands also, would be very desirable. Such a Form, elucidating and emphasizing the inestimable value of the privilege of being a participant in the Covenant of Grace and a member of the Church of Christ, would give much-needed instruction, would add to the solemnity of the occasion, and would cause this solemn act, like others, to be executed in the language of the Church (p. 254).

The Synod of 1946 appointed a committee to consider the need for the creation of such a form. The committee reported to the 1948 Synod, recommending that a study committee be appointed to compose a form for excommunication of non-communicant members, and also to recommend "a more suitable and edifying mode of procedure" (Acts of Synod 1948, p. 39). That advice was adopted and a study committee was appointed.

The study committee brought its report and finished work to the Synod of 1950, presenting to the synod both a "Formulary for the Excommunication of Non-Confessing Members of the Church of Christ" and a recommended procedure that intended to establish unanimity of practice in the churches. By way of introducing its new form to the synod, the study committee informed synod that it proceeded on the premise that erasure is to be identified with excommunication.

... erasure is virtually excommunication. It matters not whether one has been cut off from the church as a member by baptism or as a member by profession of faith, the simple and dreadful fact is that in both cases one has been put beyond the pale of the church. In both cases members are *excommunicated* (Acts of Synod 1950, p. 239).

Throughout its proposed Form, the study committee consistently referred to the discipline of non-confessing members, not as "erasure," but as "excommunication." Be-

sides recommending a new Form, the study committee also presented a proposed “better mode of procedure.”

The procedure in the discipline and excommunication of baptized members shall consist of three announcements to the congregation. The first announcement shall be made to the congregation without mentioning the name of the erring member. The second announcement shall mention the name after the advice of Classis has been obtained. The third announcement shall be a notification to the congregation that until the present moment all arduous and patient labors spent upon the erring member of our church seem futile, and that in case said member shows no signs of repentance his excommunication will take place at a designated time. Each announcement is to be accompanied with an urgent exhortation to the congregation to pray fervently for the erring member (Acts of Synod 1950, p. 243).

The proposed Form triggered considerable debate at the synod. The discussion seems to have focused particularly on the status of non-communicant members. The majority of the delegates were of the opinion that the study committee had not distinguished carefully enough between membership by baptism and communicant membership in the church, and that it was improper to equate these and to refer to the discipline of both as “excommunication.” The result of the debate was that synod referred the whole matter back to the study committee, expanding its membership by two members. The decision of the synod reads:

To recommit this matter to the study committee enlarged by two additional members, asking them to rewrite it [the proposed Form, R.C.] keeping in mind the following matters:

1. Synod believes the covenant doctrine should be simply enunciated.

2. The distinction between erasure and excommunication should be clearly marked.
3. The form to be read should be clear and brief.
4. The matter should be offered to the church at large for discussion. *Adopted.* (Acts of Synod 1950, p. 40.)

In 1952 the newly expanded study committee informed synod that they had not yet finished their work and requested another year to complete their mandate. The study committee brought its report finally to the Synod of 1953. It recommended the adoption of a new “Form For Erasure Of Members By Baptism.” Although the Form was much briefer than the previously recommended Form, throughout the new Form (notwithstanding the reference to “erasure” in the title of the Form) the committee consistently referred to the discipline of non-communicant members as “excommunication.” As far as the procedure, the study committee recommended the very same procedure as had been recommended to the Synod of 1950. The new report and Form did not fare well at the Synod of 1953. The advisory committee expressed to the synod

... the opinion that the Study Committee has not fully carried out the mandate given unto it by the Synod of 1950. Although the revised form which it now offers is more brief and does enunciate the covenant doctrine more simply than its previously proposed draft, it does not do justice to the second point in the mandate of Synod, namely, “the committee in rewriting the form should keep in mind that the distinction between erasure and excommunication should be clearly marked.” This second point of its mandate the committee has not carried out, at least not in the sense wherein it was intended by Synod. On the contrary, the Study Committee has virtually wiped out the distinction between the erasure of baptized members and the excommunication of communicant members. It

even characterizes the exclusion of baptized members as being “excommunication” without any qualification (Acts of Synod 1953, p. 48).

In line with the assessment of its pre-advice committee, the synod rejected the recommendations of the study committee on the following grounds:

- a. The Committee has not presented adequate reasons for the cessation of the use of the traditional term “erasure.”
- b. While the exclusion of baptized members is excommunication in a sense, there is a distinction between this and the exclusion of communicant members, which ought to be reflected in the official terminology (Acts of Synod 1953, p. 49).

Once again the whole matter was referred back to committee for further study and reformulated recommendations.

The Synod of 1955 was presented with majority and minority reports from its study committee. The majority report recommended a new Form, taking into consideration the original instructions of the Synod of 1950. The minority report questioned the need for a form in light of the fact that “In all their history the Reformed Churches up to the present time ... have not had official forms for use in public worship for the ‘exclusion’ of members by baptism” (Acts of Synod 1955, p. 429). Undoubtedly taking its lead from the minority report, the synod decided to seek to determine whether there was a pressing need and a real desire in the churches for such a form, especially in light of the fact that efforts to produce a form spanning several years had proved unsuccessful (Acts of Synod 1955, p. 98). At this point the whole matter was dropped and nothing further was done in the CRC regarding adopting a form for erasure of baptized members.

(to be continued) 

Worship in His Fear: (3) The Blessing

When we worship God, we consciously enter the presence of our Father who is in heaven. We humbly approach Him in order to praise and adore Him. Through this means we enjoy covenant fellowship with Him.

This is a most holy activity. And because it is, we must be sure that our worship is done “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

To worship God “in spirit” means our worship may not merely be outward and external, but must be spiritual and from the heart. The Lord does not look at and see what men do (the outward appearance and activities), but the Lord sees the heart (I Sam. 16:7). He therefore requires heart-worship from His people.

To worship God “in truth” means we worship Him, not as we wish or please, but as He Himself tells us in His Word. As the holy and majestic God, He alone determines how we may come before Him and what we may do in His presence. This means that He also determines the elements that are to be included in worship.

One of those elements that He requires is the blessing. The blessing occurs near the beginning of our worship service, in close con-

nection with the salutation and votum. It is a part of worship in which God speaks to His people. This is clear from the fact that the blessing comes to us “from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is God who says to His church, “Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you!”

It is not difficult to find biblical basis for the inclusion of this blessing in worship, for it appears in all of the New Testament epistles that were written to specific churches. In each of them, the blessing of God is pronounced upon His church. (See, for example, Romans 1:7, I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:3, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2.)

This blessing is an important element of worship. It is not to be viewed as something insignificant, so that it matters little if someone comes late to church and misses it. It is necessary for the people of God to hear and to receive it. Receiving it by faith, the worshiper is spiritually blessed.

The blessing is first of all a promise from God. When God, through the minister of the Word, pronounces this blessing, He is promising to give His people His “grace, mercy, and peace.”

But this blessing is more than simply a promise. Through the blessing God also actually bestows these things upon His church. When He speaks, He speaks powerfully. He therefore causes those

who are His to receive these blessings from Him. He speaks, and by the power of His speech we receive grace, mercy, and peace from our God.



God first promises to give, and then does give, grace.

Grace is three things. It is first of all the unmerited favor of God. It is unmerited, for we deserve God’s wrath. However, Christ has earned for us the favor of God. For the sake of Christ, therefore, God always has an attitude of love and favor toward us. And when God, through the minister, pronounces “Grace to you,” we are assured of His favor. We do not have to be afraid of Him, but may approach Him with the confidence that He will receive us. In worship, we may come boldly to God’s throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

Grace, in the second place, refers to God’s beauty. That God is a God of grace means God is spiritually beautiful. He is glorious, majestic, holy, pure. When therefore He bestows grace on us, He makes us beautiful as He is. Through Christ He takes away the ugliness of our sin and guilt. He makes us saints, who are holy in His sight. Thus again we can enter His presence with confidence, for we are, by His bestowal of grace, pleasing in His sight.

Grace, in the third place, refers to the power of God’s Spirit in us. God’s grace (Spirit) makes us spiritually strong, so that we are able

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to fight against temptations and sins. God's grace (Spirit) enables us to stand against the wiles of the devil. And God's grace (Spirit) empowers us to live a life of thankful obedience to Him. When the minister pronounces the blessing, God's Spirit works by that Word in our hearts to strengthen us against sin and to equip us to live as we ought.

What a blessing that when we come into God's presence to worship Him, God not only promises, but also actually bestows His grace on His church and people. God speaks, and we receive.



God also promises to give, and does give, mercy.

God's mercy is first of all His compassion. He is aware of our afflictions, and has pity upon us. He is not distant and disinterested, but knows all our distresses. He is aware not only of our physical troubles, but also and especially our spiritual. Seeing our misery on account of our sins, He pities us.

But God's mercy is more than just pity. In His mercy He also reaches out to His people and delivers them. He does something to alleviate our suffering. He reaches down as the almighty God and lifts us out of our miseries and comforts our souls.

God in His mercy delivers us, through Christ and His Spirit, from all the terrible power and effects of sin. He rescues us from the guilt and shame of sin, as well as from the punishment of sin. He saves us from the powerful control of the devil. He comforts our souls by assuring us that we are forgiven through the cleansing blood of our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

When God's blessing is pronounced upon us in worship, we receive and are assured of this mercy of God. And His mercy is great, for "the Lord is full of mercy and compassion for distress, slow to anger and abundant in His grace

and tenderness" (Ps. 103:8, in Psalter #280).

What a blessing to come into the presence of a merciful God! How this inspires our hearts to worship and praise!



Finally, God promises to give, and also gives, peace.

The peace He gives is spiritual peace. We are not promised and given earthly peace, so that there is no hatred, no fighting, and no unrest in society and the world. We are promised and given peace within, a peace of the heart. This true peace of the heart can come only from the assurance that we are at peace with God Himself. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). We are given this peace by means of the Spirit's work through the blessing.

Christ has earned this peace by removing our sins and reconciling us to God. Because of Him, all enmity between God and us is gone. Anything and everything that stood as a wall of separation has been removed. We have been reconciled to Him through His Son. For the sake of Christ, God has forgiven our sins and restored us again to His favor and love.

Receiving this peace, we are blessed indeed. For then we have the assurance that God is never against us, but always for us. We are therefore able to be calm and to remain undisturbed by the troubles that come our way. Being at peace with God means we are safe now and safe to all eternity as those who are the heirs of eternal life.

Through the blessing, God causes us to receive and thus to experience within our hearts that we are at peace with Him. What an invaluable gift that is!



It is important that we hear the

blessing that is pronounced upon us by God in the right way. That right way is that we are very conscious of our need for God's grace and mercy and peace. These gifts mean nothing for us if we are not deeply aware of our need of them – that is, if we are not deeply aware of our sin. They mean nothing for us if we love sin and are not troubled by it. They mean nothing for us if we think we are able to find and be at peace apart from God and Christ. However, when the child of God is, as he should be, greatly troubled and burdened by his sins, then God's gifts of grace, mercy, and peace are valuable and rich.

The true child of God hears the blessing, therefore, in the awareness of the many spiritual struggles of his earthly life. He hears it in the context of the daily struggle with the ungodly among whom he lives. He hears it in the context of being constantly tempted to sin against God and the neighbor. He hears it in the context of the many afflictions and troubles he experiences every day of his earthly pilgrimage. He goes to church on Sunday longing to hear and to receive the blessing from God.

What a blessing, in light of our need for God's grace and mercy and peace, to hear God say to us at the beginning of our worship service, "Grace, mercy, and peace be to you!" What a blessing to know that He speaks, and it is done – He pronounces grace, mercy, and peace upon us, and we receive them.

May we therefore pay close attention to this important element of worship and by means of faith consciously receive what God promises and gives. And may we do this, not only for our comfort, but also in order that God be properly praised and honored as we worship Him in spirit and in truth.



The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (5) Implementing the Practice Today

Scripture indicates that the church through her deacons must care for her sick, aged, widows, orphaned, and others who endure earthly trials, even if such are not poor. Reformed churches in the past have done this. In this article we examine the question how Reformed diaconates today, and particularly those in developed countries such as in the United States and Canada, might implement this practice.

What follows are not rules, but ideas and suggestions. The purpose of this article is to encourage deacons of Reformed churches to face these questions: are we showing compassion and mercy to this group of people in the congregation? and what more could we do to fulfill this aspect of our calling as deacons?



At almost any time in the life of a congregation, God blesses it with some who, although not poor, are still in need of help for other reasons.

The sick and aged often need help with transportation to and from doctors visits, stores, and church. They may need assistance with home health care, legal or financial matters, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, changing light bulbs, putting batteries in the

smoke detectors – the list could go on.

New mothers, or mothers who have physical ailments, may need help with meals, housecleaning, or laundry.

All of the above-mentioned services might be needed by adults who have physical handicaps. And to parent a handicapped or “special needs” child requires a commitment of time and energy that few can imagine. Such parents might need some in the congregation to learn the particular nature of their child, and the specific treatments that the parents give the child, so that they can help the parents with their handicapped child in times of emergency or while the parents take a short break from the full-time care of their child.

Such members of the congregation have needs that are not monetary. Perhaps they could even afford to pay a person to assist them with their household needs, or to hire a taxi for their transportation. Perhaps some medical organization could help them with their home health needs, or some social organization with their handicapped child. Such arrangements are not necessarily wrong. However, the congregation and deacons might consider helping such for at least two reasons: first, to prevent poverty – that is, so that these other arrangements and sources of help do not put a strain on the family’s finances; and second, in order the better to show the love and care of the members of the body for each other.

Many such members of the congregation also have family

members to help them. That the family should help its own in need is the teaching of God in I Timothy 5:4: “But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.” Notice *how* the text stresses the duty of family members to help needy relatives: first, it teaches that the descendants – children and nephews – are to care for the ancestors. We think of nephews not as descendants, but as extended family. In this text, however, the word “nephews” translates a Greek word that means “descendants,” thus referring to grandchildren. Second, the text teaches that such descendants are to care for their relatives because they are family. The text does not teach that this burden falls only to those descendants who live under the same roof as the needy widow, for the phrase “at home” could better be translated “with respect to one’s own house,” where the word “house” means “family.” The help that the family members must give their needy relatives the text calls a requiting, or a paying back. In earlier years the widow mother gave her time, energy, and possessions for the care of her children; now her children are to give of theirs for her. This they must do in love and gratitude not only to God, but also to their mother and grandmother.

The principle of family helping family the text applies specifically to a widowed mother and her children, or a widowed grandmother and her grandchildren.

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However, the application can be broadened in at least two ways. First, it can be broadened to apply to one of any relation - whether ancestor or descendant, or a member of an extended family. The family must help its own. Second, it can be broadened to apply to any kind of needy relative. It speaks specifically of the widow, but can be applied to the orphan, the sick, the aged, the handicapped child, etc.

The point, however, is that the widows, aged, sick, and otherwise afflicted members of the congregation might not need any help from the deacons, because they have family members to help them. This is good. But the deacons should investigate to be sure that such is the case, rather than simply assuming it; and the deacons should be ready to help them at any time such need is required.

Other times the congregation informally, or one of the church's societies, undertakes such tasks. Particularly new mothers are often lavished with meals and baked goods, apart from the deacons making any arrangements for such. Again, this is good. But where it is not happening, the deacons do well to arrange for these things, for the deacons are the official ministers of the mercies of Christ.

The implementing of this practice begins, then, with knowing the needs of the members of the congregation, and knowing whether they have any other sources of help. Each diaconate ought regularly to read through the directory of the congregation, with the questions in mind whether any of the families have particular circumstances that warrant the deacons asking them if they need help in any way.

In one way or another, many Reformed diaconates are doing these things. Many of them visit widows at least annually, sometimes presenting them with a gift basket. Many diaconates draw up a schedule for transporting the elderly

to and from church. A committee visits a family in which a member has recently been hospitalized, not only to see if the family needs benevolent help with the medical bills, but also to see if the sick member needs any other hands-on assistance during the recuperation period. Another committee is assigned periodically to monitor the situation with a family or member who has chronic needs.

Christ's compassion and mercies are thus manifested! And, through the diaconate, the members of the congregation show that they care for Christ, inasmuch as they care for the needs of one of His brethren! For this commitment of the deacons to their work, the church praises God. Happy is the church that has such deacons.



To say that such tasks are the work of the diaconate, however, does not mean that in every instance a deacon or committee of deacons must do the work personally. The deacons may fulfill this part of their work by arranging with others to do it, and by asking these "others" to give a report of their labors to the deacons. In this respect the care of the non-poor differs from the care of the poor themselves, whom the deacons must assist personally.

For various reasons it is good that the deacons be assisted in carrying out this aspect of their work. First, the deacons are not usually able to give such help during the day, when much of it is needed, because the deacons are themselves busy at work. Second, sometimes the needs of a woman are personal, and it would not be appropriate for a deacon to attend to them.

Some Reformed diaconates carry out this work by appointing a committee of members of the congregation to assist them. This committee is made up both of men and women, and every year a part of the committee is replaced. Thus

the work does not fall only to a few. The task of this committee is to arrange for the practical, hands-on care of the sick, elderly, shut-ins, and other such members of the congregation. Such a committee functions as a sub-committee of the diaconate. It must limit itself to the mandate that the deacons gave it, and must report regularly to the deacons about the work it is doing.

Other diaconates do not have such a committee; but they are free to ask individual members of the congregation to assist them in dealing with particular individuals in the congregation. For example, the deacons might ask a certain person of the congregation to be personally responsible for transporting an elderly person to and from church. Or the deacons might ask another qualified member to assist someone with certain financial and legal matters. Or the deacons, being aware that one member of the congregation needs medical assistance in the home, ask another member of the congregation who is a nurse to give such help.

Scripture indicates that two sorts of people in the church are particularly able and authorized to assist the deacons in this way. Wives of deacons are one such sort. Apparently this is why God in I Timothy 3:11 prescribes the qualities that a deacon's wife must possess. Interestingly, no mention is made in Scripture of the qualities necessary for elders' wives; only for deacons' wives. The implication is that deacons' wives must assist their husbands in their work at certain times - thus the wives themselves must be "grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things."

The other such group is the widows over 60, of whom the inspired apostle writes to Timothy in I Timothy 5:9ff. To them was entrusted some of the care and supervision of those members of the church who were particularly afflicted.

So Scripture permits deacons to make use of others in the church, also of women, to help them care for the needy. Yet the fact that both I Timothy 3:11 and I Timothy 5:9ff. give prescription regarding what kind of woman may help is a caution to deacons to be judicious in soliciting helpers. Not only must

these helpers be physically able to do the work that the deacons ask of them, but they must be also spiritually equipped to do the work in love, having charitable hearts, and having control of their tongues so that they not be given to gossip.

Reformed diaconates, discuss and evaluate the ideas and sugges-

tions set forth in this article. See to it, before God, that you are caring for the needy of the congregation. Use what means God has given you, including other godly members of the congregation, to that end. And do it, in the service of Christ, and to the glory of God!



Islam (7)

A Former Muslim's Response to Islam

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

I Chronicles 12:32

Introduction

In March of 2006 Brigitte Gabriel gave a speech for the Religious Studies class at Memphis University in Tennessee. Her Lebanese upbringing had exposed her to firsthand Palestinian terrorism as well as anti-Jewish and anti-Christian propaganda in her native Lebanon. Prior to her speech the Religious Studies professor, David Patterson, began receiving threatening e-mails in which Gabriel was described as one of "the true enemies of Islam." Things only got worse on the day of her lecture. The front several rows of the lecture hall were occupied by men and women dressed in distinctive Muslim clothing. At-

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tempts to silence her were finally extinguished with the help of ten policemen. Afterward when Muslim audience members, yelling angrily at her, swarmed the stage, the police whisked her out of danger through a side door. Gabriel gave her response afterward with the following e-mail:

The intimidation takes its toll on you. I was dreading this all day, ever since my hosts told me they had been receiving hostile e-mail about my lecture. It was weighing so heavily on my heart. My stomach was in knots. I got a migraine headache. I knew I was going into battle, and there was no way out of it. I was nervous and stressed. Each time this happens, I hate it and it makes me feel that I don't want to do it anymore. But I will do it. I will never stop. If we stop, the Islamists will have won. We cannot allow that to happen.¹

In our attempt to understand events like this as they relate to the current face-off between Islam and the West we have briefly written about the history and beliefs of Islam. More recently we have been discussing the reactions of various groups from the West to the beliefs and present practices of Islam. In this article we intend to present a former Muslim's response to Is-

lam by means of an interview. We recognize that this is but one individual's understanding of the situation, and that other former Muslims might see some things a bit differently. Nevertheless we believe this viewpoint will serve a little more to broaden our perspective of God's sovereign rule in this all-important conflict of the twenty-first century.

The Interview

C. Kalsbeek: "Just briefly, Hussein, tell us a little bit about your family situation and education?"

Hussein²: "I was raised in Kenya in the Coast province. This province was predominately Muslim. My dad was a livestock farmer. He received the title 'Al Hajj,' which means 'the pilgrim,' after making the pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's holiest city, in Saudi Arabia. So my family is a very strong Muslim family. My father had three wives. My mother, the youngest of all, is the only one of my parents alive. I went to Islamic school, *madrassa*,

1. Phyllis Chesler, "Embattled author vows: I won't be silenced by 'Islamists,'" *The Washington Times* 17-23 April, 2006: 13.

2. The interviewee has requested that his last name be withheld.

when I was young and studied Islam. There was also a secular school which started up, and I ended up also attending the secular school at the same time. Having graduated from *madrassa*, I started boarding school full time in 7th grade."

CK: "What's it like to live as a believer in Islam?"

H: "Muslims, you know, have the five things that they do (reciting of the creed, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, ck), and the sixth one is jihad. They get up very early in the morning, before the sun comes up, for morning prayer, then noon prayer, also at three or four o'clock, at sunset and about two hours after sunset. Also fasting during the month of Ramadan is compulsory. Muslims in my home area pay 2.5 percent of their income to the Mosque and give as they are able to poor people."

CK: "You said the sixth thing was jihad. When you were in school did they teach you that that was important?"

H: "No, I was Sunni. I was taught that jihad is to fight temptation—which is not mentioned in the Qu'ran. But the Shiites insist one has to 'fight for the cause of Allah.' You've probably read chapter 9 of the Qu'ran. That chapter is reminiscent of militancy in Islam during Prophet Muhammad's time. No doubt they're out to convert by force if opportunities arise."

CK: "What effect did your conversion to the Christian faith have on your relationship to the rest of the family?"

H: "For fear of persecution I was advised by some Christians not to inform my family of my conversion right away. The people who prayed for me to convert instructed me to be quiet about my faith until I was done at least with college. They were afraid for themselves—should

my family and Muslim leaders discover that they prayed for me to convert—and for me because Islam commands that an apostate be killed. But my family found out through my schoolmates at the boarding school, and then I was persecuted."

CK: "What forms of persecution did you experience?"

H: "It was the month of Ramadan in 1990 when my family found out. I received threatening letters while I was at a high school about 100 kilometers from my home. I was told not to come home from school for the April holiday. In spite of that, I went home, because I did not know where else to go. The following day my mom told me that I ceased to be her son, and she asked me to leave her home before the worst happened to me because I refused to get up early, before dawn, to eat in order to observe the fast. So I left.

"After I was sent away, my parents falsely informed the government that I had deserted the family while I was under 18 years old. Then I was summoned to appear before a Kenyan government 'court.' A chief is the head of a government administrative unit called a location. He is granted powers under the Kenyan constitution to arrest and detain. He has the administration police at his disposal to carry out those duties, which are sometimes carried out arbitrarily.

"I appeared for the hearing and was told that I had to go back home to my family. On the way home from the court my family informed me on the spot that I had to renounce my faith. I did not know what to say, but the Holy Spirit gave me the strength to say that I would not renounce my faith. When I was home they poisoned my food, so I had to separate from my biological family in May of 1990, after which I lived in different parts of the country with various Christian families from other tribes for about six years. There I

also suffered some persecutions, but not to the degree that another Kenyan convert from Islam went through. He was beaten severely and almost stabbed to death for converting to Christianity."

CK: "Now let's discuss some things about the religion and practices of Islam. Are all Muslims in basic agreement on anything?"

H: "All Muslims are in agreement on the keeping of the five pillars. Jihad is the only one on which they are not in agreement, as I explained earlier."

CK: "We keep hearing from some that Islam is a religion of peace. In light of what is being practiced by some Muslims today, is that really true?"

H: "Originally it was a religion of peace, but as it gained power and prominence it became very demanding: 'You have to do this or else.' The progression of the revelation in the Qur'an clearly demonstrates that that peaceful beginning has been abrogated."

CK: "Is it true that Muslims may read the Qu'ran only in Arabic? If so, how do those who cannot read the Qu'ran know what it requires of them?"

H: "Yes. Muslims are not required to read the Qu'ran and understand it. They must be able to recite certain passages of the Qu'ran during the five daily prayers. About 95% of Muslims in the world cannot read and understand the Qu'ran. They can recite it in Arabic for prayers, but they do not know what it means. So they must rely on their Imams (spiritual leaders, ck) to tell them what the teachings of the Qu'ran require."

CK: "Is there such a thing as 'moderate Islam?'"

H: "No, there is no such thing as a

'moderate' Islam/Muslim. Do you know how many Muslims there are that call themselves Muslims but don't even go to the mosque or observe the five fundamental deeds? You have to live by this (pointing to the Qu'ran, ck). There is no such thing as moderate Islam, you are Muslim or you are not. And being a Muslim is doing the fundamental deeds, which include *jihad*."

CK: "Aren't there a lot of Muslims, though, that would say we shouldn't do these violent things like the attacks on the Twin Towers, or the killing of other Muslims in Iraq?"

H: "When it comes to the way the Qu'ran and Hadith put it, any Muslim who says that Islam is a religion of peace or doesn't advocate coercing people into the Islamic way of life is not a Muslim."

CK: "But there are people that say they are Muslims and don't agree with the violence of Islam, aren't there?"

H: "They only say that for political reasons because they are covering up what they really know is true. Islam enjoins Muslims to exercise *al-Taqqiyah* (dissimulation). They can even denounce or renounce Islam under compulsion, provided they do not purpose it in their hearts, and still remain Muslims. Muslims in the West are exercising it. You will notice that they don't condemn the Muslim acts of terror, because that is contravening Islamic teachings. But as they gain in numbers and prominence, they will come out in the open, which is what we see happening in Europe and Nigeria today."

CK: "What about the present Danish cartoon issue. Are those cartoons of real concern to most Muslims? Those things were produced way back in September of 2005, and now all of a sudden in February of 2006 the cartoons become a big issue. What's going on here?"

H: "I'm pretty sure those cartoons are being used for political reasons. Muslim leaders use the cartoon riots as a means to rally their people against the Western nations. Both Syria and Iran were in trouble with the United Nations around the same time. Islamic leaders also use diversionary tactics, like rallying their subjects to demonstrate against the West, in order to divert their attention from Islam's inconsistencies."

CK: "In your opinion, is there good reason for Islam to be angry with the West? It seems that a lot of commentators will say that what is going on today is a reaction of Islam to what the West has done in the colonization of Muslim lands in the nineteenth century and in taking advantage of them economically? Is there anything to this?"

H: "Islam blames the West, but this is just another diversionary tactic. For example, if it weren't for the occupation of Israel, Islam already would have been exposed for how bad it is. The situation in Israel makes Islam look good because the Palestinians there are suffering, and it's easy for them to blame the Palestinian problem on Israel, the United States, etc. The whole business there is keeping the rest of the world from knowing what true Islam is really like. And because of the situation in Israel, it's easy for them to stir up their people against those who are supportive of Israel. The Palestinian problem serves as a means to rally Muslims against the West. If there were peace there—they don't want that to happen—then their real problem with the West would be known by all: the freedom of religion. Islamic leaders are afraid of that, because it is only through religious freedom that many would come to know true Islam."

CK: "Can there be peaceful coexistence between Islam and the West?"

H: "No, true Islam says we have to be governed by the Shari'a ... period. Only if the West is compatible with the Shari'a can there be peaceful coexistence. Their diametrically opposite ideologies would make that impossible to achieve."

CK: "So you are really saying that Islam is not willing to stay on its side of the world and leave the West alone?"

H: "Islam is not going to leave the West alone, because it is Islam's worst enemy. The West has to abandon its quest to spread freedom throughout the world. The other problem is this: Muslims multiply fast. A time will come when they will say, 'All right, there are millions of us in Michigan, carve us our own state out of Michigan, which will be under the Shari'a.' I tell you, Islam's goal is to take over the world."

CK: "In your opinion, what is going to result from the clash between Islam and the West? Do you see any patterns developing as to where this will end up?"

H: "Hopefully Islam will be exposed for what it really is, otherwise the West is going to be taken over. Islam has been hibernating in the West, but look at what's happening today in France and in other parts of Europe."

CK: "You say 'exposed.' What if they are exposed, what is that going to do?"

H: "I believe a lot of Muslims will abandon their religion if it is exposed for what it really is. Many Muslims don't know very much about Islam and what it stands for. Most of them just accept it because they were raised with it. The only thing that keeps many in the religion is that they are afraid of what happens if they don't."

CK: "In conclusion, if someone from the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) reads this interview and the former article about CAIR, is there any danger that the *Standard Bearer* will receive some unpleasant responses from that organization?"

H: "I don't think so. I'm quite sure those guys are pretty scared. What we are saying is no different from what others have said, and they (CAIR) don't want bad publicity. We shouldn't be worried about that very much."

CK: Thank you, Hussein. In my next *Standard Bearer* article I intend to discuss what Issachar's response to Islam should be. If I may, I would like to include some of your input on that subject as well.

H: Yes, Lord willing we can do that.

Postscript

As earlier mentioned, it may be that our interviewee sees things differently than other former Muslims. Strikingly similar, however, is the viewpoint of another former Muslim, Ibn Warraq. To illustrate that our interviewee is not alone in his evaluation of Islam, we submit the following excerpts from the much published Ibn Warraq:

To ask whether Islam can come into the twenty-first century is to ask whether Islam can be divorced from Islamic fundamental-

ism. Yet the root cause of Islamic fundamentalism is Islam itself.

Poverty is not the root cause of Islamic fundamentalism. Modern Islamists are mostly middle-class young men who are highly motivated, upwardly mobile, and well-educated.... Nor is the existence of Israel the cause of Islamic terrorism. Even Benjamin Netanyahu (Israeli prime minister from 1993 to 1996) admits, "The soldiers of militant Islam do not hate the West because of Israel, they hate Israel because of the West." ...Nor is Islamic terrorism caused by American foreign policy. If anything, U.S. policy toward the Arab and Muslim world prior to 2003 has been accommodating toward Muslim interests....

Ten years ago (in 1994) I wrote that the principal victims of Islamic fundamentalism are Muslims: men, women, children, writers, intellectuals, and journalists. That's still true—as it is true that the theory and practice of jihad was not concocted in the Pentagon but derived directly from the Qur'an and Hadith, from Islamic tradition.

Unfortunately, Western liberals and humanists find this hard to accept. They are pathologically nice: they believe that everyone thinks as they do. They assume that all people, Islamists included, have the same desires and goals in life. Contrary to this naïve view, Islamic fundamentalists are the utopian visionaries. Their goal is to replace Western-style liberal democracy with an Islamic theocracy....

Dare we hope for an Islamic reformation? ...At this point, some misguided liberal Muslims

will offer a have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too argument. On their view, the real Islam is compatible with human rights; the real Islam is feminist, egalitarian, tolerant of other religions and beliefs and so on. They then go on to re-interpret the many embarrassing, intolerant, bellicose, and misogynist verses in the Qur'an in wildly creative ways. But intellectual honesty demands that we reject such dishonest tinkering. The holy text may be open to some reinterpretation, but it is not infinitely elastic. Sooner or later we must come to terms with what the Qur'an actually says.

...(E)very tenet of Islamic fundamentalism derives directly and altogether legitimately from the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the Hadith. Moderate Muslims there may be, but Islam itself is not—can never be—moderate.

If Islamic societies are to be reformed, this must occur in spite of Islam, not in harmony with it. Questions of human rights must be brought out of the sphere of religion and into the sphere of the civil state. In other words, religion and state must be separated....

When such a Reformation is complete, Islam would exist within a secular state, relegated to the realm of the personal where it would wield limited power but could nonetheless continue to provide consolation, comfort, and meaning to millions of individuals.³

3. Phillip Margulies, editor, *The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Detroit, MI Greenhaven Press, 2006) 172-177.

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

This summer girls ages 7-15 and members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC were invited to come to-

gether and have fellowship with other girls from the church. Hudsonville promoted this twice-monthly "Girls Fellowship and Activities Program" as a great opportunity for young girls to strengthen friendships over the summer and start becoming women of the church.

The first session began on Mon-

day morning, June 19, with the younger girls using the book "Sticky Situations." This book has several different stories in which a problem arises. After reading the story, the girls must decide what multiple-choice answer is the best solution to the problem. Using God's Word as a guide, the girls tried to determine how God tells

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

us to handle this problem, and why the other choices would not be correct in the eyes of the Lord.

The older group discussed women of the Bible using the book "Lost Women of the Bible" as a reference. Plans called for this group to look at women that God placed in the Bible as examples for women of the future church.

After Bible study, the remaining time was spent in activities that were meant to teach and inspire the young girls to help others in the church now and for years to come. That first week the girls not only enjoyed Bible study but also spent time picking strawberries and making strawberry jam. Later meetings gave the girls opportunity also to make flip-flops and to crochet a bookmark, sew a pillow, and do some baking.

The council of the Hull, Iowa PRC held an informational meeting on June 26 concerning the work toward starting a daughter congregation. Following that meeting, the council of Hull made available in their fellowship hall a sign-up sheet for any who may be interested in being part of a daughter congregation. Signing that sheet did not commit one to membership in a daughter congregation, but was intended to help Hull's council identify those who may be interested, with a view to determining overall interest, possible location, etc.

The consistory of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada voted recently to return to our denominational Subsidy Fund more than \$8,000 that was sent to them in February as part of their subsidy support for 2006. This decision was taken because their General Fund had accumulated, through the regular giving of their congregation, a balance of over \$20,000. Immanuel gave thanks to our heavenly Father for granting them the financial prosperity to lower their need for subsidy this year.

Earlier this summer, members of the Byron Center, MI PRC were informed that Dr. David Torlach, along with his wife and their five

children (9-17), from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, planned to affiliate with their congregation during the three years that he will be attending our seminary. Byron Center considers it a privilege to host them, just as they did the Mark Shand family a few years ago. The family arrived on Monday, July 24, and by that time Byron Center had found them rental housing and provided all the furnishings that go into a busy household of seven members. The committee coordinating all these details also arranged a grocery shower for the family just before they arrived, which included all the necessities for the kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms.

Evangelism Activities

The Reformed Witness Committee of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI sponsored again this year a Summer Class Series entitled "God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace" at their church for five weeks this summer, beginning June 27. The speaker at all these classes was Prof. H. Hanko. Over the course of these five meetings, Prof. Hanko looked at questions ranging from the history of covenant theology, erroneous views of the covenant, the place of children in the covenant, and the blessings of covenant theology.

The Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI has made available for your listening or downloading, the three messages given at the Women's Retreat held recently at the Byron Center, MI PRC. They can be found on line at www.trinityprc.sermonaudio.com.

School Activities

With thanksgiving to our covenant God we rejoice to report that the Society for Protestant Reformed Education in Wingham, ON Canada was organized Thursday, July 6. Twelve men considered and approved a constitution presented by a volunteer steering committee, and signed as organiz-

ing members of the society. A five-member Board was elected. May God continue to bless this endeavor.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults and Young People of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL once again sponsored their canoe trip to the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. This year 27 young men and women, plus several only young in heart, enjoyed a unique adventure in God's wonderful creation July 17-22.

Young People's Activities

The week of July 24-27 approximately 400 young people from our churches met at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa for their annual young people's convention. This year's convention, hosted by the young people and congregations of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs, looked at the spiritual calling of young people to "Run the Race," based on Hebrews 12:1, 2. Monday's speech was entitled "The Course We Run," by Rev. S. Key. Tuesday's speech was entitled "The Discipline Required," by Rev. A. Brummel. And Wednesday's speech, by Rev. D. Overway, was entitled "The Strength for Victory." Many thanks go out to the two congregations involved in this year's convention. Unless you have had the experience, you can hardly imagine how much work it takes to keep 400 young people busy for five days.

Minister Activities

We congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Rodney Kleyn, who were blessed with the birth of a baby girl, Anna Kate, born June 30. She was 8 lbs. 10 oz. and 21 in. long. Anna joins Sarah, Alyssa, Matthew, and Aaron in the Kleyn home.

Candidate Andrew Lanning has accepted the call extended to him by Faith PRC in Jenison, MI; and Rev. Spriensma, currently serving as missionary in the Philippines, has accepted the call from Kalamazoo. 

THE STANDARD BEARER

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Jeanette VanBaren and Mrs. Shirley VanBaren on the passing away of their sister-in-law,

MRS. ESTHER HEYS.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President
Gysbert VanBaren, Clerk

NOTICE

Seminary Convocation will be held on September 6, 2006, at 7:30 P.M. in First PRC of Grand Rapids. Prof. Gritters will be the speaker.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 21, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. WILLIAM SMIT, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We express our thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the many blessings that He has given to them and to us through them. May our Father's abundant blessings continue to rest upon them from above for Christ's sake alone. "Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1a).

✿ Peter and Linda Smit
William, David, Lanae, Lorraine,
Suzzana, Dirk

✿ Fred and Cathy Hanko
Mandy, Kyle, Brent, Eric

✿ Dorothy VanKoughnett
✿ Rev. Richard and Tricia Smit
John, Rebekah, Jay, Irene,
Rosalyn, Seth

✿ William and Faith Smit
Peter, Anne

Lacombe, AB Canada

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Richard and Jeanette Kamminga in the death of Jeanette's only brother:

MR. ROBERT OFFRINGA.

May they find their comfort in God's word in Psalm 32:18, 19: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in fame."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Mr. Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

NOTICE

The RFPA Annual Meeting will be held on September 21 in Faith PRC at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Dykstra will speak.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Peace PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mr. Garry Eriks and to Scott and Beth VanderGriend and their family in the death of their dear wife, mother, and grandmother,

MRS. JOAN ERIKS.

May they be comforted in these words from I Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Rev. Steve Houck, President
William De Jong, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC wish to offer their Christian sympathy to Mr. And Mrs. Craig VanderVeen following the passing of Craig's mother,

KAREN VANDER VEEN.

May they be comforted by God's word in Psalm 62:7: "In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

REMINDER

Young people in the PRC who live away from home while attending college may, on request, receive the *SB* free of charge at their college residence. Please notify the *SB* business office as soon as possible.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathy to their members, Mr. and Mrs. Steve DeBoef and family, as well as to our former missionary, Rev. and Mrs. Wayne Bekkering, in the loss of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother,

MRS. JULIA WOODRUFF.

May they be comforted by the words of the psalmist in Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me into glory."

Rev. Steven Key, Pres.
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for September

Date	Topic	Text
September 3	"Christian Education"	Deuteronomy 6:6-9
September 10	"The Dedication of the Walls"	Nehemiah 12:27-47
September 17	"The Separate Life"	Nehemiah 13:1-4
September 24	"Why Is God's House Forsaken?"	Nehemiah 13:4-14