

THE *April 15, 2006* STANDARD BEARER

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Volume 82 ◆ Number 14

Risen As Firstfruits

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

I Corinthians 15:20

There were those in the church of Corinth who denied the resurrection of the dead. It is not clear what exactly their position was. Most likely they taught that when the believer dies his soul is glorified in heaven but his body remains forever in the grave.

The apostle Paul refutes this error by arguing backwards. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then Paul has been a false witness with his resurrection gospel. More importantly, their faith in Christ is vain, and they are yet in their sins. Indeed! If Christ is not risen but is still dead in the grave, His death on the cross accomplished nothing of eternal

value — neither for Him nor for those who put their trust in Him.

But now is Christ risen from the dead!

There is indisputable evidence that Christ is risen from the dead. After His resurrection He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of Paul himself, as of one born out of due time (vv. 5-8).

And not only is Christ risen, He is risen as firstfruits of them that slept.

How important this truth is to convince those who denied the resurrection of the dead.

How comforting for those who fall asleep in Christ.



That Christ is risen as firstfruits means, first of all, that Christ is the first to be raised from the dead.

This is evident from the term “firstfruits.”

This term refers to the very first fruits of the harvest. The small-

grain harvest of Canaan lasted approximately seven weeks, beginning with the barley harvest at the time of the Passover feast and ending with the wheat harvest at the time of the feast of Pentecost. Israel was required to present to the Lord as a wave offering the firstfruits of the barley harvest. This was the first of the fruit that the Lord would provide that year.

From this idea the term “firstfruits” came to mean the first of anything. According to Romans 16:5, Epaenetus was the firstfruits of Asia. This means that he was the first convert in Asia. In like manner the house of Stephanus was the firstfruits of Achaia (I Cor. 16:15).

Similarly, that Jesus is risen as firstfruits means that He is the first to be raised from the dead.

This deserves some explanation.

Jesus was not the first ever to be raised from the dead. In the Old Testament the son of the widow of Zarephath was raised from the dead by Elijah, as was the son of the Shunammite woman by Elisha. Jesus Himself, during the course of

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His earthly ministry, raised three individuals from the dead — the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus.

That Jesus was raised from the dead as firstfruits means therefore that He was the first ever to be raised in the particular manner in which He was raised.

Certainly Jesus' resurrection was different from all those that preceded His.

This is evident from the circumstances surrounding His resurrection. First, Jesus was not at the gravesite at the time of resurrection, as were the others raised before Jesus. The women found only an empty tomb. Secondly, Jesus' grave clothes were left behind, but intact, as though Jesus' body had simply passed through them. This had never happened before with previous resurrections. Finally, the risen Jesus appeared a number of times in some very unusual ways. He would appear suddenly and then disappear. He would not always appear in the same form. Sometimes His disciples did not immediately recognize Him. And, strangest of all, Jesus, in His resurrection body, would enter rooms, the doors and windows of which were locked. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

All this points to especially two things about Jesus' resurrection. First, His resurrection was a change from the earthly to the heavenly. All other resurrections had simply been a return to this present earthly existence. But through Jesus' resurrection, His body was made spiritual, changed from the earthly to the heavenly, adapted to dwell in heavenly places. Secondly, Jesus' resurrection was a resurrection unto life. All others raised before died again. Their resurrections did not enable them to escape the clutches of death and the grave. But Jesus was raised to eternal life, far beyond the grasp of death.

This was the nature of Jesus' resurrection because of the nature of His death on the cross. His

death was an atoning death. Although He personally had no sin, God laid the sin of others upon Him. And the wages of sin is death. That death in all its horrors Jesus endured perfectly and fully. In so doing, He paid the price of the sin laid upon Him. For that reason, death could no longer hold Him. His perfect sacrifice demanded a resurrection to eternal life and glory. And so, on the third day, God raised Him from the dead to eternal life with a body fit for heaven.

Of this kind of resurrection, Jesus' resurrection was the first.

He was risen as firstfruits.



But that Jesus is risen as firstfruits means also that His resurrection guarantees our final resurrection into glory.

Again we go back to the harvest. The firstfruits of the harvest were the guarantee of a full harvest. If the Lord would bring the crops to the point that the people could gather the firstfruits, He would certainly provide for them the whole harvest. And so the term "firstfruits" also came to mean that which guarantees more later on.

This also applies to the resurrection of Jesus. That Jesus is risen as firstfruits means that His resurrection guarantees our resurrection from the dead.

When the Lord returns at the end of the ages, there will be a general resurrection of the dead. Scripture speaks of the resurrection of life for those who have done good, and the resurrection of damnation for those who have done evil (John 5:29).

Our concern is the resurrection of life. Those who have lived and died in Christ will in the day of Christ's return appear before the judgment seat as righteous in Christ. Consequently, their resurrection will be a resurrection of life. They will be raised with a heavenly body fit to dwell in the new creation. And they will be raised

to eternal life, far beyond the clutches of death. Their resurrection will be the same as Christ's resurrection. As Philippians 3:21 teaches, He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

Of this final resurrection of life into glory Christ's resurrection is the guarantee.

And, again, Christ's resurrection is such a guarantee because of its connection to the cross. Jesus' perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross demanded His glorious resurrection. Death could no longer hold Him. And death could no longer hold Him because He had paid the price of sin through His atoning death. But whose sins brought Jesus to the cross? It was not His, but ours. We have sinned. We have made ourselves worthy of a horrible death. God in mercy put it all on Christ. Our sin became His sin. At the cross He paid the price of our sin. For that reason, the cross that demands the resurrection of Christ into glory also demands our resurrection into glory — and the resurrection of all those who know Him in faith.

Indeed, Christ is risen as firstfruits.

We and all who belong to Jesus Christ by faith have in His resurrection the guarantee of our own resurrection into glory.



Because of this we can fall asleep in death.

Notice that Christ in His resurrection has become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Death is often described in the Bible as sleep. In verse 5 of this chapter Paul speaks of the 500 that saw Jesus after His resurrection, some of whom have fallen asleep. He means that they have fallen asleep in death. When Lazarus died, Jesus responded, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth" (John 11:11).

On the basis of these and similar passages, some have concluded that the soul of man falls asleep at

death and remains in an unconscious state until the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body. This, however, is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture that at death the soul of the believer is immediately taken up to Christ in a conscious state of glory. And at death the soul of the wicked unbeliever awakes in hell.

The Bible identifies the death of the believer as sleep, in order to give the believer hope in the hour of death.

When we fall into bed at night weary and tired, we do so with the expectation that our sleep will bring us to the dawn of a new day refreshed and full of energy.

The same can be said for the believer who lies down to die at the end of life. He is weary and worn after many years. His body is weakened with sickness and old age. But he has the assurance that there will dawn for him a new and

eternal day. With the dawning of that day he will awake from the grave with a body that is renewed and refreshed, ready to serve the Lord with eternal joy in a new creation. His death is but a short sleep.

The believer has that assurance and hope because Christ is risen as firstfruits, guaranteeing his own resurrection.

With this hope we can not only live happily but also die happily.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Intelligent Support of PRC Missions

The mission labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches are worthy of heartiest support and earnest prayers.

Mission work stands at the heart of the church's labors. Doing missions is obedience to Jesus Christ's last words to His church. It is nothing less than obedience to divine commission. About this, the apostle Paul once said to king Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the divine vision." The PRC must not fail to carry out this mandate.

That missions consumes from one quarter to one third of the entire budget of synod—recently that was a half million dollars for the year—is no little indicator of need for support and prayers. Of the over \$800 per family per year in the synodical budget, as much as \$300 and more has gone to support missions.

The cause of missions demands as much support and interest as the seminary of the churches. Missions is nothing without the seminary; without training—thorough train-

ing—missionaries cannot serve. But the seminary "cumbereth the ground" (Luke 13:7) if it does not have as a fundamental goal to provide preachers for the congregations and for missions.

Missions requires a high place on the agenda of the synod and the local consistory meetings. It is no afterthought of consistories. And this is not only because the church visitors will inquire about the matter every year. Christ is pleased with consistories that think of missions. Christ wills that consistories not allow missions to get crowded out by other matters. "Church Picnic," "Consistory Social," and even "Building Committee Report" must not take precedence over "Evangelism Committee."

Failure to be zealous in missions, either congregationally or denominationally, will soon lead to the church's ruin under God's judgment for disobedience.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are presently busy in missions. Their missionaries re-

ceive support, prayers, attention, and visits. The calling churches spend themselves in their oversight of their missionary. The mission committees (both domestic and foreign) give countless hours of work every month in obedience to Jesus' call, with hope of Jesus' promise in Matthew 24:14: "...then shall the end come."

Intelligent Support

But the hearty support and earnest prayer for missions should be *intelligent*. That is, the support should not be blind funding of the mission cause, and should be more than vague prayers for God to "bless the missionaries." *Intelligent* support of missions in the churches will make it possible for us:

- 1) to offer thanks for what measure of faithfulness God has given us in missions;
- 2) to avoid drifting into the foolish ways, means, and goals of much of modern mission work;
- 3) to grow in our obedience and correct any errors that are too

easily committed in the work of missions.

In this editorial I remind our readers what the Lord of the church has given us the privilege to do in missions recently.

For the past twelve years Rev. Thomas Miersma has been working as the PRC's "Western Home Missionary." Currently in Spokane, Washington, with his wife, Jan, and three sons, Rev. Miersma is working toward the establishment of a congregation. Loveland, CO, PRC is the calling church, working with the supervision of the PRC's Domestic Mission Committee (DMC).

Rev. Angus Stewart has been in Ballymena, Northern Ireland since 2001. Rev. Stewart is a native of Northern Ireland, while his wife, Mary, is from the States. The Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship there is bringing to the PRC synod this summer a proposal for organization. The fellowship has flourished by God's blessing of Rev. Stewart's work, which follows eight years of labor by Rev. Ronald Hanko. Hudsonville, MI, PRC is the calling church. Although Northern Ireland is across the sea, the missions performed there are under the supervision of the Domestic Mission Committee.

In the Philippines, Rev. Audred Spriensma has worked since 2002 with a number of groups that showed interest in the PRC and that asked us to "come over and help." He and his wife, Alva, and daughter Jessica live in that (sometimes dangerous) distant island nation, with the hope that the Lord will also soon bless the work in the organization of congregations. Doon, IA, PRC is the calling church. The Foreign Mission Committee oversees the work for synod.

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma recently accepted the call to serve as the PRC's eastern home missionary, stationed in Pittsburgh, PA. Ordained in 1978, Rev. Bruinsma is no stranger to missions, since he served in Jamaica for five years in

the 1980s. Rev. Bruinsma moves to Pittsburgh following eight years of work there by Missionary/Pastor Jai Mahtani. Southwest, GR, MI, PRC is Rev. Bruinsma's calling church.

Could the Young People's Societies (or other societies) consider a project to make a world map, pinpointing the home-location of each missionary and the various places he travels in his work? Then the saints could come together regularly to discuss the work of missions, praying for the Lord to prosper the work in specific ways. Praying for laborers in the harvest may bring the same result that it did when the disciples prayed for laborers—the *disciples themselves* were called.

Faithful missionaries are martyrs — in both senses of the word *martyr*. A martyr is first a *witness* of Jesus Christ. A martyr also *gives his life* in his witness of Christ. Although these men and their families may not *end* their earthly life at the hands of persecutors, they *give* their lives for the cause of Christ in missions. They crucify personal desires and open themselves up to the possibility of great disappointments. Leaving family and friends, they do not "count their earthly lives dear to themselves." Sometimes they ask their wife and children to travel with them across the country like gypsies for a year. Even so, they "finish their course with joy ... to testify of the gospel of the grace of God" (see Acts 20:24).

In the time of the great world wars, when the church's sons were fighting in other countries, efforts were organized to write letters to "our boys." Missionaries are soldiers too, on the front lines, waging a more important battle. They are isolated. Few other soldiers are beside them, laying down their lives with them. They could use letters. Regular letters. Letters from all over the denomination. What better project for a Sunday afternoon than this, to keep us from

the temptations of reading the newspaper or doing homework. Some Bible study groups have organized such efforts, to the encouragement of the missionaries. Could others?

The PRC missionaries labor in the right way, too. We should not take this for granted. It is rare, today, that a missionary has as his *modus operandi* the simple preaching of the gospel, publicly and "from house to house." But this is the work of the PRC missionary. Every PRC missionary. He preaches.

Recently, Missionary Thomas Miersma visited Michigan to confer with the Domestic Mission Committee. While he was in the area, he spoke to the seminary students about the fundamental principles of mission work. In a fascinating hour for all the students, Missionary Miersma illustrated the principles with anecdotes from his own missions experience. What came across loud and clear was this simple truth: God gathers, defends, and preserves His church by means of preaching. Christ "blows his trumpet" on the mission field, gathering His people to meet Him, directing them on their way to the land of promise, giving them weapons to fight the foes. By preaching! Preaching the Reformed faith. Preaching the whole counsel of God. Preaching Christ crucified, risen, exalted at God's right hand, head of the church.

In the next editorial I will point out the rarity of this. We may be thankful that the Lord gives us missionaries whose determination is to *preach*.

The PRC missionaries do it right. They preach.

When the preaching bears fruit of gathering God's elect, a *church* is organized with a membership under the rule of elders.

This organized church, then, does not become an instrument for *another* goal—building the kingdom. This is the new thinking in missions: the church is merely an

instrument to build the *kingdom*. But the church *is* God's kingdom. That is the old thinking in missions. Next time I will also show that. But what a blessing that the Lord still gives our missionaries, consistories, and denominational committees the will and ability to carry out His commission to gather the elect and organize churches.



Our missionaries do a marvelous job of informing the churches of their work with regular newsletters. In addition to all their other work—some of it “busy-work”—they write reports to their calling consistory and newsletters for the churches. These are appreciated and beneficial for the churches’ *intelligent* support of missions.

Because we ourselves have heard the word “with joy of the Holy Spirit” (I Thess. 1:6), let us rally behind the missionaries and the cause of missions. Let us “strengthen what remains” by God’s grace among us. Let us, as officebearers and members of the churches, do all that strength and wisdom allow us to do, that *this* great cause may flourish among us till the Lord returns.

Michigan area bulletins report that a committee of First PRC Grand Rapids is sponsoring a Mission Awareness Day this June. Sectionals will promote understanding of the mission work in the


PRC. Days like this have a history in the PRC. Twenty years ago, at synod’s request the Mission Committee organized a “Rally” to promote the cause of missions. In two different areas of the country, all the congregations in an area were invited to attend speeches about missions. For four evenings running there were speeches, prayers, and singing, all of which ended in an all-day “field day” (see 1983 *Acts of Synod*, pp. 29, 30, 91). This was not the first rally. Let June’s not be the last. And what about the other areas of the country?

Calling churches invite neighboring congregations to hear the news of their missionary when he “comes to town” on furlough. This ought to continue. The PRC membership ought to fill the sanctuaries at these meetings—with parents *and children*. Could the mission committees send representatives to these meetings to show support of the work and call the members to fervent support of the missionary and his family?

Then, the mission committees could volunteer their members with prepared presentations to visit churches on a Sunday evening, during a Bible Study evening, or to Young People’s meetings, or Mass meetings, to explain the workings of the committee, their relationship to the calling churches, and the particular work of one or two missionaries.

But let our support of missions be primarily from the local congregations—from the ministers and members of the local churches. Let us not forget to pray for missions and the missionaries, regularly. More than during a “Mission Emphasis Week.” Missions need prayers weekly—in the catechism classes, in the congregational prayers, in the homes during family devotions. Let families read the missionary newsletters during one evening’s family worship in the week. Afterwards, the children can be reminded to pray for that missionary family and field.

If the churches pray for strength and wisdom to support the cause of missions, God will give what they ask, as it is asked in harmony with His will. But He will not give what we do not ask (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 45). Let us ask!

Missionaries, we pray for you, that utterance may be given unto you, that you may open your mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which you are ambassadors: that therein you may speak boldly, as you ought to speak. We know, and want to know, “how you do.” The beloved brethren and faithful ministers have made known unto us most of your things. Peace be to thee, brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (see Eph. 6:19-23). 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ The Pressure for Conformity

There is increasing evidence across the world that Christians are being forced to conform to what the world considers acceptable action towards others—or face

the consequences. What is considered to be acceptable is not determined on the basis of Scripture, but rather on the prevailing “morality” of the day. In some places it has become a “hate crime” to condemn homosexuality and to label it as sin. It is considered criminal in some nations to condemn other religions. Woe be to those who draw cartoons about certain religious figures. Such can generate riots across

much of the earth. There is the cry to impose restrictions on “freedom of speech” when it relates to certain religions or condemnation of certain sins.

In the United States there is still “freedom of speech” to a degree not seen in many other countries. However, one can discern changes in our land. Attempts are being made to limit “freedom of speech” so as to prevent the

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condemnation of many serious sins.

A periodical published in South Africa called *Christian Action*, in 2005, Vol. 3, has an article titled "Hate Speech," by Mrs. D. Scarborough, which warns concerning the dangers facing Christians today:

The South African Government wants to introduce a "*Prohibition of Hate Speech Bill*." The draft is published on the website of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

The Constitution, Chapter 2, Section 16, demands that "advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm," be outlawed. Surely no Christian would disagree, because hatred, except of evil and sin, is forbidden in the Scriptures....

The envisaged Hate Speech Bill is designed to complement a more comprehensive bill, namely the 'Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Bill.' This is based on the United Nations' 'Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.' South Africa signed this Convention and is therefore obliged to make 'the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred a punishable offence.' Not only racial superiority and hatred will be declared a crime, but the 'propagation of religious superiority' will also become a punishable offence. A transgressor will, on first conviction, be fined or imprisoned for up to 3 years, and on second conviction fined and/or imprisoned for up to 6 years.

"Hate" or "superiority" speech will, however, be a crime only when it is expressed in "public." A "public place," says the proposed bill, "includes any place to which the public have access as of right or by invitation, whether express or implied, and whether or not a charge is made for admission to the place." The question then is: Are churches public or private places? Can a minister be punished if he

preaches against idolatry and sin and if he extols the Christian life as being superior to the pagan?

In other countries, e.g. Australia, Sweden, and Canada, "hate speech" laws are being used to suppress such religious teaching. In Sweden a minister was sent to prison for speaking out against homosexuality, and in Australia two Pentecostal pastors, Daniel Scot and Danny Nalliah, were tried and sentenced. Their punishment was to run 4 big newspaper adverts costing \$70,000 which would declare their guilt of having offended Muslims. They had held a seminar about the Muslim religion and had quoted from the Koran. Pastor Scot explained: We are not "promoting hatred... but rather protecting people's right to know what other religions teach.... If a girl, for example, wants to marry a Muslim man, I believe it is important that she knows that, under the Qur'an, she may be beaten or, if her husband chooses to marry up to another three women, that is perfectly acceptable under Islamic law."

The writer continues by pointing out:

It is clear then that the aim of the hate-law advocates is not to protect people from being insulted, but rather to shackle the Christian faith and ethic and to establish moral equality in a secular society.... All over the world Humanist governments are busy introducing hate speech laws because they are tired of Biblical Christians putting up resistance against sin laws which, among other things, sanction abortion, pornography, prostitution, homosexual 'marriage' etc.

A similar reminder about the limitations being placed upon "free speech" is found in an article called, "Free speech on the run" by John Leo, appearing in the *Grand Rapids Press* on March 9, 2006. John Leo is a well-known conservative editorial writer who reminds us in his article that increasingly "free speech" is being squelched. He

writes of "the spreading practice in Europe, Canada of setting up some groups in law as beyond criticism."

Law professor Eugene Volokh calls it "censorship envy." Muslims in Europe want the same sort of censorship that many nations now offer to other aggrieved groups.

By law, 11 European nations can punish anyone who publicly denies the Holocaust. That's why the strange British historian David Irving is going to prison. Ken Livingstone, the madcap mayor of London, was suspended for four weeks for calling a Jewish reporter a Nazi. A Swedish pastor endured a long and harrowing prosecution for a sermon criticizing homosexuality, finally beating the rap in Sweden's Supreme Court.

Much of Europe has painted itself into a corner on the censorship issue. What can Norway say to pro-censorship Muslims when it already has a hate speech law forbidding, among other things, "publicly stirring up one part of the population against another," or any utterance that "threatens, insults or subjects to hatred, persecution or contempt any person or group of persons because of their creed, race, color or national or ethnic origin...or homosexual bent"?

No insulting utterances at all? Since most strong opinions can be construed as insulting (hurting someone's feelings), no insults means no free speech.

It's not just Europe. In Canada, a teacher drew suspension for a letter to a newspaper arguing that homosexuality is not a fixed orientation but a condition that can be treated. He was not accused of discrimination, merely of expressing thoughts that the state defines as improper.

Another Canadian newspaper was fined 4,500 Canadian dollars for printing an ad giving the citations—but not the text—of four biblical quotations against homosexuality....

Leo continues by expressing thankfulness that in the United

States we have not yet reached such extreme positions. Still, the trend is clear. Laws are being put in place that speak of “hate crimes.” In some countries a “hate crime” could be anything that condemns another’s action, calling it sin (as: homosexuality). Even the Bible could be outlawed because it condemns homosexuality, adultery, etc.

One can easily envision how persecution of the church might take place also in our land. It will all be according to the law of the land. Those condemning certain sins and rejecting other religions as false will be fined and imprisoned because of their “hate crimes.” This sort of development is another of the signs of the times.

■ The Instruction of the Children

In the WorldNetDaily, January 9, 2006, there is an article reporting on Richard Dawkins, who presented a two-part series about religion on United Kingdom television. The report stated:

Controversial scientist and evolutionist Richard Dawkins, dubbed “Darwin’s Rottweiler,” calls religion a “virus” and faith-based education “child abuse” in a two-part series he wrote and

that begins airing on the UK’s Channel 4, beginning tomorrow evening.

Entitled “Root of All Evil?,” the series features the atheist Dawkins visiting Lourdes, France, Colorado Springs, Colo., the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and a British religious school, using each of the venues to argue religion subverts reason.

After he condemns all expressions of religion, he continues with harsh condemnation of the teaching of religion to children:

In part two, “The Virus of Faith,” Dawkins attacks the teaching of religion to children, calling it child abuse.


“Innocent children are being saddled with demonstrable falsehoods,” he says. “It’s time to question the abuse of childhood innocence with superstitious ideas of hellfire and damnation. Isn’t it weird the way we automatically label a tiny child with its parents’ religion?”

“Sectarian religious schools,” Dawkins asserts, have been “deeply damaging” to generations of children.

Dawkins, who makes no effort to disguise his atheism and contempt for religion, focuses on the Bible, too.

“The God of the Old Testa-

ment has got to be the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous, and proud of it, petty, vindictive, unjust, unforgiving, racist,” he says. Dawkins then criticizes Abraham, compares Moses to Hitler and Saddam Hussein, and calls the New Testament “St Paul’s nasty, sado-masochistic doctrine of atonement for original sin.”

Such is the growing opposition to the church on this earth. There may well be a drive to eliminate Christian school instruction or insist that these schools not teach Creationism in the science classes—because the view is not “scientific.” Dawkins insists that religious instruction in the Christian schools has been “deeply damaging” to generations of children. How quickly such a view can be translated to the law of the land forbidding Christian parents from “brainwashing” their children with instruction from Scripture. Make no mistake about it: the opposition to the Scriptures and Christian preaching and instruction is growing. Over against that, the church must be steadfast and faithful to continue godly instruction even if it results in fines and imprisonment. 

Ministering to the Saints


Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (3) The Example of Calvin’s Geneva: The “Funds”

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2006, p. 303.

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f the two institutions in Geneva that served those in need, one was the hospital. As we noted in our last article, this was an “institution” in the sense in which we use the term today — it had a building, a board of directors, and full-time and vol-

unteer staff. Here the poor, sick, widowed, orphans, travelers, and others found help. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the hospital was overseen by the deacons of Geneva.

The other institution was a “fund,” a monetary endowment set

up to assist certain people in their needs, something like the benevolent fund that each church supports. This differed from the hospital, in that while the former dispensed acts of mercy, these funds were the source of monetary gifts. But, like the hospital, this was an avenue by which the deacons of Geneva cared not only for the poor, but also for those with other needs.



In our last article we noted that many people, persecuted for their faith in their homeland, fled to Geneva for refuge. These came from France, Italy, England, and other countries. At first Geneva supplied their needs by means of the General Hospital, providing a temporary bed and some food. But because the influx of refugees put a great strain on Geneva's resources, many in Geneva were unwilling to welcome additional refugees. So on June 15, 1545, "the council attempted to chase the poor foreigners out of town. They were to be assembled, given alms of bread, and commanded never to come back to Geneva again."¹

Ten days later, one of the early French refugees, David de Busanton, died and left a sizable sum of money to the poor refugees in Geneva. This money was one of the first recorded donations to a fund that was called the *Bourse Francaise*, or "French Fund," a fund established by French immigrants to help other French refugees. This fund existed for at least 250 years, during which time it was primarily a source of help to the needy, although it later was used also to finance the church's missionary work and book publications.

At least two other, similar funds were instituted, each targeting a different nationality of refugees.² The *Bourse Italienne*, or "Italian Fund," was founded about 1545, and ceased existence in 1869, when its remaining funds were given to the General Hospital. The Italian Fund apparently never suf-

fered from a shortage, and even gave of its surplus to the French Fund when the latter was short of resources. The *Bourse Allemande* cared primarily for the German refugees, but was used also to help immigrants from England, Sweden, Poland, and the Netherlands. This fund was smaller and shorter lived than the other two. Of these three funds, the French Fund was the largest, possibly the most often used, and certainly the one of which most is known, because its records have been preserved.

These funds were financed by private donations from residents both of Geneva and of the native homeland. Collectors were entrusted with soliciting such donations. Yet social, if not moral, influences put pressure on those who had the means to give: "People of substance, in Geneva, were expected to contribute. The notaries of the city of Geneva, who wrote wills, were required by law to remind their clients of their responsibilities to charity."³ The reason for this pressure, however, was no longer Rome's view of the merit of almsgiving, but the Reformation understanding of gratitude and service.



The help given by these funds was diaconal and benevolent in nature.

It was diaconal in nature as regards the kind of people helped; primarily they were needy fellow believers. That they had genuine need was certainly a criterion for them to be considered worthy of help: "The limited funds of the *Bourse* were not intended for the derelict poor, those who were considered unwilling to work, lazy and slothful vagrants and vagabonds...." In addition, the deacons gave money from these funds to those who had "a healthy blend of religious conviction, humility, appreciativeness, and good behavior." That the funds were primarily for those who were Reformed

in faith is evident from the full title of the French Fund as found in the legal documents drawn up by the notaries: "the fund for the poor French foreigners who have taken refuge in this city for the Word of God."⁴

It was diaconal in nature as regards the kind of help that was given. This help was always given to alleviate the earthly and bodily needs of the people. These needs were many and varied. Remember that by examining the work of the deacons in Calvin's Geneva we are supporting the contention that it is the duty of the Reformed deacons today to care for God's people not only in their poverty, but also in their other bodily afflictions and needs. The following lengthy quote demonstrates the diversity of needs that the deacons who administered these Funds met:

Their expenditures ranged in duration from the overnight viaticum given to travelers, to lifelong support granted to people who were unable to fend for themselves because they were sick, disabled, or aged. Between these two extremes of partial to full support, help was given for long or short periods of time to widows, orphans, unemployed able-bodied men, and families who were temporarily unable to meet all their expenses. According to need, the deacons

1. Jeannine E. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse Francaise* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1989), p. 34.

2. Olson, page 129; and Alexander M. Zeidman, *The Care of the Poor and Indigent in Geneva in the Latter Half of the Sixteenth Century* (Master's thesis, Knox College of Toronto, 1965), pp. 86-90.

3. Jeannine E. Olson, "Calvin and the Diaconate," *Calvin's Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1992), p. 245.

4. All the quotes in this paragraph are from Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare*, pp. 138-140.

provided the poor with a weekly subsidy, clothes, firewood, a bible or psalter, a place to stay, a mattress, bedclothes, and occasionally an allotment of grain. Besides meeting these needs of daily subsistence, the deacons met extremities by providing medical care, drugs, guardians for the sick, hospitalization, wet nurses for infants, and foster homes for older orphans. In order to teach people to read and to provide them with a trade, the deacons paid school and apprenticeship fees.⁵

Not the least evidence that this help was diaconal in nature is the fact that those who oversaw the funds were themselves called to the office of deacon.

The rules of the French Fund dated January 5, 1581⁶ required that five deacons be appointed to oversee the fund, each of them serving an annual term, but eligible for reelection. (Over the years, the number of deacons assigned to this work varied according to the need.) In selecting these deacons, the qualifications of I Timothy 3:8ff. were to be followed. These deacons were to meet “ordinarily one time per week” to conduct their business. One of the ministers of the church of Geneva would be present at every meeting to give advice, and to return to the company of pastors with any matters regarding which the deacons needed help.

Specific attention is given in these rules to the “duty of attentively visiting the ... poor even when there are sick people, giving order that those sick ones be cared for by the doctor, surgeon, and apothecary....” Not only does this again support our contention that the deacons were to care for all the earthly needs of the people, but it shows that the help given was diaconal in nature in a fourth respect: the deacons *visited*, caring for the soul as well as the body. The rules of the French Fund did not explicitly require the deacons to care for the souls of the needy by

reading the Scriptures and praying; but scholars are in general agreement that the duties of these deacons were not only financial, but also pastoral. Olson suggests that Scripture reading and prayer “were so commonly performed that they were not remarked upon,” that is, that none thought it necessary to include this in the rules.⁷

While the General Hospital and the various Funds did provide many of the same services, and while both were overseen by the deacons of Geneva, the two institutions were distinct.

First, as regards the involvement of the deacons in each, we should understand that different deacons were assigned to the oversight of the Hospital than were assigned to the oversight of the Funds. In other words, these were two different ways in which the deacons sought to serve the people.

Second, it appears that the church had even tighter control of the Funds than of the hospital. We raised the question in our last article whether the hospital could truly be called an ecclesiastical institution of mercy, or whether it was more of a civil welfare organization. In fact, it seems to have been a mixture of both. This question can hardly be raised, though, regarding the Funds. They were clearly the church’s ministry of mercy to those in need.

Third, the work of the hospital involved more of the “hands on” care of the poor and needy, while that of the Funds involved more monetary care. “Unlike the hospital, which usually dealt in commodities, the Bourse generally made cash disbursements.”⁸ This does not mean that the disbursements were always to the poor and needy themselves; they were often made directly to a doctor, or wet nurse, or other service provider, for the services given to the needy person.




That the deacons in Geneva undertook such a work is noteworthy.

First, it is a testimony to their understanding that the real needs of God’s people have both a physical and spiritual dimension, and that the physical dimension involves not only poverty, but also any other earthly need that the people themselves were unable to supply.

Second, it indicates that they had a heart for the need of *all God’s people*! So many other cities helped only their own native poor, and excluded refugees and foreigners; Geneva became a haven for Reformed refugees largely because these refugees knew that in Geneva fellow saints would show them brotherly love and care.

Third, it is an indication of the great zeal that the deacons had for their work — and the continued funding of the Funds indicates the great zeal that the people had for the relief of the needs of fellow believers. The amount of money given was large; the amount of work done was immense; but rather than shying away from it, the deacons and people of God put their heart into the work, and did it to the best of their ability.

The legacy of this work still exists today in those Reformed churches in which the deacons busy themselves in the care of the poor and needy, and in which the people in the pew support the work of the deacons with their gifts and prayers. 

5. Olson, “Calvin and the Diaconate,” p. 245.

6. An English translation of these rules is found in Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare*, pp. 104-106, from which the following two quotations are taken.

7. Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare*, p. 77.

8. William C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin’s Geneva* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983), p. 215.

Blood

Blood is an amazing fluid. Blood is the life of all flesh (Gen. 9:4). From one blood, God made all nations on the earth (Acts. 17:26). The blood of grapes is life-giving juice (Gen. 49:11). Taken by faith, the blood of the New Testament grape enlivens the weak and sickly (I Cor. 11:30). Since blood is the life of animals, it could not be eaten with their flesh; God gave it as an atonement for souls (Lev. 17:11-14). The old covenant blood purged almost all things: It was splashed on door-frames, sprinkled on the altar, law, instruments of worship, ears and garments of priests, and on men, women, and their children (Heb. 9:19-21). Yet, this blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). The Lamb's blood must be sprinkled (I Pet. 1:2). We must have faith in that blood (Rom. 3:25). And when we eat His flesh, we must also drink His blood (John 6:55), so His life dwells in us and we in Him (John 6:56).

Rightly we associate murder with blood. But all sin against our neighbor sheds blood; not only by killing, but by swearing, lying, stealing, and adultery, blood touches blood (Hos. 4:2). The sinner has blood in his mouth (Zech. 9:7), is polluted with blood (Hos. 6:8), is a bloody man (Ps. 59:2), lies in wait for blood (Prov. 12:6), and builds with blood (Hab. 2:12). David, guilty of adultery and murder, rightly cried out to be delivered from blood-guiltiness (Ps. 51:14). He knew blood is an infallible and everlasting witness to sin. It cries out with a loud voice that reverberates in God's ears from the ground where it is spilled (Gen. 4:10). It leaves an indelible stain. Long after their murder, God still saw the blood of Naboth (II Kings 9:26), Abner and Amasa (I Kings 2:5-31), the Gibeonites (II Sam. 21:1), the prophets slain by Jezebel (II Kings 9:7), and the blood of every saint from the A in Abel to the Z in Zacharias (Luke 11:51), which is precious in His sight (Ps. 72:14). The blood-stain of the murdered promptly transfers to the head of the murderer (II Sam. 1:16), to his hands (Gen. 4:10; Isa. 59:3), and to the congregation that tolerates him (Deut. 19:13). For his part in killing Jesus, Judas was buried in the field of blood (Acts 1:19). While Pilate vainly tried to

wash away Jesus' blood, the multitude gladly said, "Let it be on us and our children" (Matt. 27:24-25). It was theirs anyway, because all who reject Jesus are guilty of His blood (I Cor. 11:27; Acts 18:6) and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing (Heb. 10:29).

God avenges all shedding of innocent blood, either by man or by beast (Gen. 9:5). It is one of six abominations before Him (Prov. 6:16-17). He pleads against the wicked with blood, makes blood pursue them, waters their land with blood, and sends blood into their streets (Ezek. 28:23; 32:6; 35:6; 38:22). When Christ returns, it will be a day of bloody vengeance. Announcing His return, the seas and the moon will become as blood (Rev. 6:12; 16:3). He will make the wicked drink waters of blood for the blood they shed (Rev. 16:6). His clothes will be spattered with blood (Rev. 19:13; Is. 63:3) as He treads the winepress of the earth wherein is found the blood of the prophets and saints (Rev. 14:20, 18:24) who cry out from heaven, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

But the saints are saved by His blood. Inasmuch as we are flesh and blood, Jesus took part of the same (Heb. 2:14). But since flesh and blood cannot inherit His kingdom, those given to Him are born not of blood, the will of the flesh, or of man, but of God (John 1:13). For them, Christ drained His life-blood. It dripped from His head (Luke 22:44) and came from His side (John 19:34). His blood is most precious (I Pet. 1:19). His blood justifies (Rom. 5:9), sanctifies (Heb. 13:12), purchases (Acts 20:28), cleanses from all sin (I John 1:7), obtains eternal redemption and forgiveness (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7), brings us nigh (Eph. 2:13), allows us to enter into the holiest place (Heb. 10:19), purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14), reconciles all things in heaven and earth to God (Col. 1:20), gives eternal life (John 6:54), and makes our robes white when washed therein (Rev. 7:14). Let us sing a new song to God for Jesus, who by His blood has done all this for us—a people otherwise stained head to toe with blood—and redeemed us to God out of every kindred, tongue, and nation (Rev. 5:9).

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The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (7)

The Second Disputation: Chapter 1:6-2:9 (continued)

2:1. *And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.*

2:2. *If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.*

2:3. *Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts, and one shall take you away with it.*

The chapter break here is particularly unfortunate. The first three verses of chapter 2 record God's judgment on the priests for the sin of despising and polluting His offerings, the sin just mentioned in the last verses of chapter 1.

The commandment of which God speaks is not His law concerning the offerings. That law the priests knew, though they callously disregarded it. The word "commandment" is used in a more general sense and refers to the word of judgment and cursing that God speaks against the priests. It is a curse that He commands against them, especially designed for them. That curse comes on

them for two things, for their actual disobedience and for their refusal to hear God's rebuke and "lay it to heart."

The curse is referred to as a commandment because it comes by the sovereign disposition of the great King and Judge, but also because it comes upon these priests through God's commands to the creation: to the wind and rain, to the fields and crops, to the blight and grasshopper. This commandment, therefore, is the Word by which God exercises His providential control over all things and by which they serve His purposes.

The word "if" does not suggest that there was any doubt about the reaction of the priests — they were so hardened and callous in their disobedient wickedness, that God does not even pause before telling them that He had cursed them already. The word "if" has more the force of a strong oath here, as it does so often in the Old Testament, so that the idea is really this: "Since ye most surely will not hear and lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."

God's curse is a terrible thing. It is the powerful and effective word that He speaks against the sinner that drives the sinner out of God's presence into hell. This curse God speaks not only against the priests themselves: "I will even send a curse upon you," but upon their blessings, that is, upon all the good temporal gifts God had given them.

The passage makes it abundantly clear that such things are "blessings" only in a temporal and limited away, for they can be cursed and become a curse to those who have them. They do not, in other words, represent in themselves the favor or love of God for those who possess them.

That God promises to curse their blessings can only mean that He would in the end take all those things away from them so that they would be left with nothing, but even while they still possessed them He would bring them nothing but grief and trouble and wrath through them. Of this Psalm 73 speaks when it reminds us that God uses such things to set the sinner in slippery places, and Proverbs, when it tells us that under the judgment of God even the daily labors of the ungodly are sin (21:4).

Here again God reminds those to whom He speaks that He is the LORD of hosts, whom all things serve. If He commands temporal things to be a blessing and mark of His favor, then they will surely be that, but if He commands them to bring His disfavor upon those who have them, then that too will surely happen.

God does not just speak in general terms of His curse, however, but tells them exactly how He will curse them and judge them. His judgment will come both upon the fields and upon their work. The seed referred to in verse 3 is not their children, but the produce of the fields. In corrupting it as they had corrupted His offerings (the same word is used),

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God would take away their very livelihood, and leave them impoverished and hungry. Their covetousness and greed, rather than getting them what they wanted, would have the opposite effect. Ultimately, of course, that curse would leave them forever desolate in hell. That God sometimes leaves the wicked to prosper in their wickedness does not mean that He allows them to have what they want and to enjoy it. With Asaph, we must see their end, and their end is destruction and desolation.

That God would spread the dung of their solemn feasts upon their faces means that He would bring them to dishonor and shame in the eyes of the people just as they had dishonored Him before the people. As they had treated their priestly work like dung, so God would make them like dung in the sight of the people. When they appear before the people to do their priestly work, it will be as though they had dung spread on their faces, and they will be polluted and despised in the eyes of the very people whose favor they curried and whose gifts they coveted and for whom they had forsaken their calling.

That the dung would be the dung of their own solemn feasts means that the contempt with which they had treated God's ordinances would be learned by the people, so that they would themselves become contemptible in the sight of the people who would no longer honor them and support them and come to them.

How often that happens. For the sake of earthly things and the favor of men, the leaders of God's people forsake their calling and treat God's commands with contempt, doing whatever they please in the worship of God. To their own surprise, the end result is not that they have the support and honor of the fickle multitude, but that they are treated with the same contempt that they have shown and the people go their own way,

no longer supporting them in the work or even coming to them as representatives of God.

This is always the end result of apostasy, that the people no longer even come to worship God, to the temples in which these men have corrupted the worship of God, and they become wholly secular and worldly, as has our society here in the west, so that there are fewer and fewer who show any interest at all in the things these corrupt leaders tout as the worship and the service of God.

And just as dung is carted away and disposed of, so God disposes of this corrupt priesthood, whether it is that of the Old Testament or of the New. In Israel He did that when He brought all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, including the priesthood, to an end. Finally He does that when He throws all idolaters and those who love and make lies into hell.

2:4. And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

2:5. My covenant with him was of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

2:6. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

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

In this closing section of God's word to the priests, He examines their sin from the viewpoint of His covenant with Levi. God calls that covenant with Levi a covenant of life and peace, and He speaks of the duties of the priesthood as their covenant obligations. That covenant the priesthood had violated and broken by their wickedness. Their sin, in other words, was covenant unfaithfulness.

That covenant with Levi was established when the Levitical priesthood, through Phinehas the son of Aaron, showed great zeal for God and for His holiness by killing in the act at Shittim, on the borders of Canaan, a man of Simeon and a woman of Midian who were openly committing fornication. God said of Phinehas and his descendants at that time: "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:12, 13).

That this covenant with Levi is part and parcel of the same covenant mentioned elsewhere in Scripture is evident from the fact that God speaks of it as "my covenant." It is not a different covenant, nor different in nature from God's covenant with Abraham, with Israel, or with David. That this covenant is a relationship, part of the relationship between God and His people that is always at the heart of the covenant, is clear from verse 6, which speaks of Levi walking with God.

God's covenant as a relationship between God and His people is described in especially three ways in Scripture. Sometimes one finds the covenant formula or a variation of it: "I will be thy God and ye shall be my people" (cf. Gen. 17:7). At other times Scripture speaks of walking with God and of fellowship with God (Gen. 5:22; 6:9), and in a few passages of friendship between God and His people (James 2:23), but the idea is always the same, that of a close relationship between God and His people.


That covenant of God is always viewed in Scripture as one and everlasting, and therefore also as an unconditional covenant, which is made and preserved by God alone without man's help. That is true here also. Levi's unfaithfulness, though it can be described as covenant breaking, is not the end of

the covenant, but shows the need for a priest, a messenger of the Lord who would not break the covenant and through whom God's covenant with Levi would be kept forever.

That this covenant with Levi was part of God's covenant with Abraham and with Israel should be immediately evident in that Levi represented Israel to God and God

to Israel. Levi's unfaithfulness in the covenant was Israel's unfaithfulness, and the calling that Levi had in the covenant was Israel's calling, fulfilled through Levi as their representative before God.

God's word in this passage begins, therefore, with a reminder that God had sent Malachi to call Levi and, through them, the whole nation back to covenant faithfulness.

The command, as we have seen, refers to the word of condemnation and judgment that Malachi brought, but it was sent in order that the priests might themselves repent of their wickedness and return to God and that through them the people might do the same, and that thus both God and His people might once again enjoy together the blessings of His relationship to them. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel (2)

Introduction

Walter Rauschenbusch is usually considered the father of the modern social gospel. Born in Germany into a Lutheran family with strong pietistic Lutheran influences, he became a Baptist when his family immigrated to America and joined the Baptist Church.

Early in his college career, influenced especially by the liberal Horace Bushnell, he was moved to ever greater distances from his relatively orthodox roots in the direction of a newer and more modern doctrine that equated orthodoxy and piety with solving social problems.

It was a time of great change in America. Immigrants were crowding America's shores and filling the city with poor families looking for means of living. The Civil War had proved that northern industrial might was superior to southern tra-

ditions, even though the South clung to them with almost fanatical tenacity. There were no government welfare programs, no free handouts, no wars against poverty led by congress, no governmental support of lazy people and crooks. America was full of social problems.

When Rauschenbusch was ordained into the ministry in a Baptist Church, he began his ministerial career in New York City in a congregation that lived adjacent to "Hell's Kitchen," a New York slum of tenement buildings that teemed with poor people and was a microcosm of the worst "in the land of the free and the home of the brave."

It was here that Rauschenbusch developed his social gospel philosophy.

Rauschenbusch's Ideas

Early in his college studies, Rauschenbusch came to question the substitutionary atonement of Christ. In an essay that he was required to write, he had the opportunity "to question 'ransom' or 'substitutionary' theologies of the atonement, that is, the deep-seated tradition that Christ's death occurred as a 'payment' for the sins of humanity" (Christopher H.

Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always But Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch*, Eerdmans, 2004, p. 39). In the same essay he wrote, "What was Christ's theology of salvation? He preached that men are sinful; that an entire change must take place in them by entering into a new and spiritual life; that God is very sorrowful over their absence from him and will be delighted to welcome them back to his love; ... and if they do not come they will have to bear the terrible consequences of their refusal" (quoted in *The Kingdom...*).

Such a view of the atoning sacrifice of the Savior is dreadful and a trampling underfoot of the blood of the covenant. It is, for all its dreadful denial of the miracle of the cross of Christ, an inevitable consequence of distorting the gospel by changing it from a gospel of salvation from sin to a gospel of salvation from material poverty. No atoning sacrifice of Christ who pays for sin is necessary to make a poor man rich.

During the time of his work in New York City, he and other like-minded ministers formed "The Fellowship of the Kingdom," an informal group whose aim was to

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promote social consciousness to alleviate social wrongs. This group remained active and influential for many years, and proved a forum to develop the implications of the social gospel.

The social gospel, clearly, is not the proclamation of the cross of Jesus Christ as God's work of redemption and salvation through faith in Christ. The gospel is one of doing good to the outcast and downtrodden. The only obligation it laid upon men was to love their neighbor, not now in the sense of seeking his salvation, but by putting bread on his table, cleaning the filth from his home, finding a job for him, and enabling him to secure medical help when needed.

Conversion was abandoned, and taking a bath was substituted for it. The battle against sin became a battle against cruel industrialists and entrepreneurs. The banners under which the church marched had emblazoned on them: "Down With Unemployment."

As a matter of fact, the church as an institution was considered almost an irrelevance. It was of no practical use, except to inspire the well-off to get out of the safety of the sanctuary into the teeming streets and slums where all the action was. "The institutional church," said Rauschenbusch, "is a necessary evil" (quoted in *The Kingdom...*, p. 123). Organizations, neighborhood meetings, spirited group discussions could accomplish the same purpose that the church strives to accomplish, and perhaps more effectively.

In 1907 Rauschenbusch published his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. This book was to be his definitive work. It pushed him into the limelight and on up to the peaks of fame. From this book it became clear that Rauschenbusch had become a social reformer rather than a preacher. He insisted that he was only following in the footsteps of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ; for Christ Himself was nothing more than a social reformer, although

surely He was an outstanding example to us all when He was willing to suffer and die at the hands of callous church members who refused to fulfill the one precept of the law: "Love thy neighbor."

Rauschenbusch had no use for the Reformation, and, more particularly, for Calvinism. He considered the churches faithful to the Reformation to be guilty of distorting grossly their gospel message. He scorned the great confessional heritage of the church and found the doctrines that the whole church had confessed an albatross around the neck of those committed to these doctrines. He literally started the church in a new direction, which was at right angles to the direction that the church, under the leadership of the Spirit, had walked for 1,800 years.

Rauschenbusch's View of the Kingdom

The keystone of a social gospel is the notion that Christ's kingdom must be understood in purely human terms. A succinct way of putting it was: "The heaven is the Kingdom. It is not in Heaven but it is here.... The best way to get the self ready for Heaven ... is to get this world ready for God" (quoted in *The Kingdom...*, p. 90). Rauschenbusch put the matter more dogmatically in a speech to a graduating class in Oberlin College:

Every department of human life, — the families, the schools, amusements, art, business, politics, industry; national policies, international relations, — will be governed by the Christian law and controlled by Christian influences. When we are bidden to seek first the kingdom of God, we are bidden to set our hearts on this great consummation; to keep this always before us as the object of our endeavors; to be satisfied with nothing less than this. The complete Christianization of all life is what we pray for and work for, when we work and pray for the

coming of the kingdom of heaven (quoted in *The Kingdom...*, p. 106).

Rauschenbusch was confident that the day would come when the whole world would be Christianized, at which time the kingdom of Christ would be established and all the promises of God would be fulfilled. He was the great optimist and he held every hope for ultimate victory here in this sad world of sin.

The movement reached its apex just before World War I. That war was a major blow to his beliefs and his optimism, especially because he was confident that German culture would lead the way in the establishment of the kingdom, and German culture produced nothing but the chaos of a great and terrible war.

The Truth of the Matter

One need not have a profound understanding of today's ecclesiastical scene to know that, though Rauschenbusch's dreams ended in the nightmare of World War I, his ideas live on.

His ideas live on in all liberal theology that repudiates the atoning sacrifice of the cross and defines religion in terms of the dogoodism of a social gospel. But his ideas, though now from the viewpoint of a more conservative theological position, also live on in postmillennial thinking, which promises us a better day when the Reformed faith will be held worldwide, when Reformed principles will determine the character of all societies' institutions, and when the knowledge of God will cover the whole present earth from sea to sea. His ideas live on in the common grace tradition of Abraham Kuyper and the Law Philosophy of Amsterdam, made popular by the Institute of Christian Studies in Canada, and taught in some major conservative colleges. His ideas live on in all teaching that defines a significant part of the Christian's life and calling as "making this world a better place in which to live." The shadow that Rauschen-

busch cast over today's church is long and dark.

I cannot set down in detail the biblical and confessional position over against all this corruption of the gospel. A brief outline of the main points will have to do.

The church of Christ is not an irrelevancy, but the only important institution in the whole world. I speak now of the church that bears the marks of the true church of Christ: the faithful preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, the exercise of Christian discipline. It is the most important institution because it is the one institution that God has established to accomplish His own eternal purpose. All the rest of history has no meaning or importance except insofar as it serves the church.

The church has only one purpose in this world: the preaching of the gospel. Every effort to involve the church in any other work but the preaching of the gospel is an attempt to distract the church from its only calling. If ever the church abandons that calling, or no longer faithfully limits itself to that calling, then the church has become an irrelevancy. What a wide gap between Scripture and a social gospel. Rauschenbusch claimed that when the church preached the gospel it was an irrelevancy; Scripture says that when the church fails in her calling to preach the gospel, Christ spews it out of His mouth in disgust.

The preaching of the gospel is the church's only task because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. It is the one means that God uses to save a church that He has chosen from all eternity, that Christ purchased with His blood in a sacrifice that He made on the cross, that paid the penalty for sin and satisfied God's justice, and that is destined to live with Him in covenant fellowship in heaven.

The gospel proclaims that the human race is depraved, guilt-ridden,

corrupt in all it does, unable to rescue itself, unwilling to go any way but towards hell. The gospel proclaims that faith in Jesus Christ is the way, the only way, of escape from this dreadfully dangerous and hopeless world in which we live. The gospel puts a blanket curse on all man's endeavors as capable only of contributing to greater evil, greater trouble, greater condemnation. The gospel assures men that an infinitely bright and glorious future awaits those who believe in Christ Jesus.

The gospel causes a bright light to shine in this world in its present state and shows those who have received the gift of faith that to want a world here on earth is to be a fool of the worst sort, for here is only sin, and where sin is, there is suffering and trouble, violence and death. The bright hope of the future for the redeemed is in a great work of God when the wicked will be punished, the curse on this creation removed, the earthly made heavenly, and former things are no more.


The siren call of the social gospel is the call to love one's neighbor as oneself. The Reformed Christian would joyfully agree with those who strive to make the world a better place in which to live, if only men would understand what love is. Is it love to put a drunk "on the wagon" when the wagon is on a steep hill that drops into hell? Is it love to feed an empty belly in which is found the bitter gall of the cancer of God's curse? Is it love to clean up the slums and make them glittering cities in which men carve out with their riches an inheritance in the gloomy and fiery abode of eternal destruction? What good is a social gospel in a world of sin?

The Reformed believer must "love his neighbor as himself." Of course. Our Lord told us that. But our neighbor is our wife or husband with whom we are called to live in our home in harmony and peace, and not our wife or husband that we drag into a divorce court.

Why is it that those who shout the loudest about loving our neighbors cannot love the one neighbor who lives next to them? How can we love the poor man in the ghetto if we cannot love our spouse?

The towering command to love is a noble calling. It is not a mere do-goodism. It is not a clean-up-the-neighborhood campaign. It is not the formation of a Christian political party. It is to seek the eternal salvation of our neighbor. We may and must seek his salvation with a bag of groceries when he is hungry, with a thousand dollars when he cannot afford surgery for his child; but all that material help is important only when we bring to the needy the gospel, with and through the bag of groceries, and call that neighbor to repentance and faith in Christ. We love that neighbor when we do what we can to point him to the only hope there is in this world of sin.

The believer knows with absolute certainty that this world will never be a better place. It will only become worse as sin develops and wickedness grows. Nothing can improve it, for the world's problems are the result of sin, and the solution does not lie in building affordable housing for the downtrodden, but in the cross of Christ. And while the base of the cross of Christ sinks down into hell where our Savior suffered hell's torments, it also reaches up to heaven to carry us out of hell's fiery abode into the splendor and sinlessness of the abode of the angels.

To keep one's eyes fastened on this world is to fail to see the flames of hell licking around every human endeavor in this world. It is also a failure to see that there is no hope here in this creation. Just as Rauschenbusch's dream for the future was shattered by the smoke and flame of World War I, so shall all hope of all those who dream of a kingdom of Christ here in the world go up in smoke when Christ comes again to judge man and deliver His beloved church. 

Evolution: the Only Religion Allowed in Public

In December of 2005, the Federal District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania issued its decision in the case of *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*.¹ The case received national attention as one of the first challenges to the teaching of “Intelligent Design” as an alternative to the theory of Evolution. The district court’s opinion was not appealed, and therefore the decision is not binding precedent for other districts. However, the decision and the rationale behind it have already been relied on by others in making challenges to perceived intrusions of religion into the public sector. This article will first examine the facts of the *Kitzmiller* case, and then the history of the struggle between teaching of evolution and creation in the public schools. Finally, we will look at the implications of the decision and the reasoning behind it for Christians.

The facts of the case are as follows. On October 18, 2004, the Board of the Dover Area School District (DASD) passed a resolution stating:

Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin’s theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, intelligent design. Note: Origins of Life is not taught.

The Board later announced that students in ninth grade biology

class would be read a statement stating:

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and eventually to take a standardized test of which evolution is a part.

Because Darwin’s Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations.

Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People*, is available for students who might be interested in gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves.

With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the Origins of Life to individual students and their families. As a Standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on Standards-based assessments.

The theory of Intelligent Design (ID) is a theory that the world was made by some intelligent being who created all things. Some of the parents of children in the school district filed suit to stop the teaching of ID. They argued that it was actually thinly veiled creationism, was not actually science, and was unconstitutional under the Establishment Clause.

The Legal History of Evolution in the Classroom

To understand the current legal landscape surrounding the issue of the public teaching of creation or evolution, one must look at the history and development of Supreme Court jurisprudence in this area. The court’s 139-page decision in *Kitzmiller* discusses this history in some detail. A brief review of this history reveals a changing trend from a time when teaching creation was accepted and teaching evolution was illegal, to the point that the opposite is true.

The court noted that “[t]he religious movement known as Fundamentalism began in nineteenth century America as a response to social changes, new religious thought, and Darwinism.”² The court attributed laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution to this rise of fundamentalism. In 1925, this culminated in the famous *Scopes* “monkey trial,” in which a public school teacher was tried and convicted for teaching evolution.³

In 1968, the legal landscape changed dramatically when the United States Supreme Court struck down Arkansas statutes prohibiting the teaching of evolution.⁴ Proponents of creation sought at least to counterbalance the teaching of evolution by introducing creation as an

1. *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Dist.*, No. 04cv2688 (M.D.Penn. filed Dec. 20, 2006).

2. *Kitzmiller*, at 7-9.

3. *Scopes v. State*, 154 Tenn. 105 (1927).

4. *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1968).

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alternative, but the courts rejected this as violating the Establishment Clause.⁵ Opponents of evolution then sought to introduce creation as a form of science, but the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1987 that this too violated the Establishment Clause.⁶ The prohibition against teaching evolution had come full circle to a prohibition against teaching creation.

The Court's Decision

The court in *Kitzmiller* ruled that the DASD Board's policy regarding ID violated the Establishment Clause as well. The court found that the resolution and statement, as quoted above, promoted biblical Christianity over other religions. In reaching this conclusion, the court applied both the Endorsement Test, which has been used in some First Amendment cases, and the three-part test set out in the *Lemon* case.⁷

The court looked at the context in which the policy arose. The court considered evidence of Board members' statements in newspapers, board minutes, and other sources to find that there had been statements that certain board members wanted to get Christianity back into the public school classroom. The court also considered the traditional battle of fundamentalism against the teachings of evolution. Based on this evidence, the court found that the "objective observer" under the Endorsement Test would know of the opposition to evolution and interpret the board's actions as an endorsement of Christianity.

The court then spent a considerable amount of time addressing the "purpose" of the board's actions under the *Lemon* test. The court looked at the actions and statements of individual board members, such as an offering collected by the church of one board member for the alternative textbook, *Of Pandas and People*. The court found that all of this evidence demonstrated that the policy had

a religious, rather than secular, purpose. The court also ruled that the effect upon the children of the school district was to advance Christianity over other religions, in violation of the "effect" prong of the *Lemon* test.

Analysis of the Court's Decision

The court's decision has the effect of keeping the teaching of ID out of the classroom, but the public school classroom has never been the best place to teach children about the origins of the universe. Instead, the most troubling aspect of this decision is that it is part of a continuing line of case law in which the courts fail to see or acknowledge that the state endorsement of evolution impinges on the religious freedom of Christians, which is also a violation of the First Amendment.

Under the court's analysis, any public action supported by "fundamentalist" Christians is somewhat suspect, because fundamentalism is by nature a reaction against modern philosophies. Case law, as interpreted by the *Kitzmiller* court, demonstrates a presumption that fundamentalist Christians seek to oppose evolution and replace it with biblical teachings. This places Christians at a disadvantage because, when the "objective observer" element of the Endorsement Test, or the "purpose" prong of the *Lemon* test are applied, there is almost a presumption that action by Christians is taken to promote biblical Christianity over other religions. In this case, the DASD policy was strikingly neutral on its face, merely indicating that other theories were possible and that evidence does not exist to support every part of the theory of evolution. The statement certainly does not advance a belief in biblical creation as we know it. But the court looked at the prior case law prohibiting any teaching of creation and the intentions of Board members as gleaned from newspaper articles, board minutes, and testimony of others, and ruled the policy unconstitutional.

Even more disturbing is the establishment of evolution as official state teaching, regardless of its incompatibility with biblical Christianity or any other religion. The DASD policy as stated merely allowed room for ID, Creation, or other theories. The court in *Kitzmiller* purported to analyze the criticisms of evolution and ID, and proceeded to rule that while ID was unscientific, evolution had no real "gaps" that could generate doubt about its truth. The court took great pains to explain that it was not taking a position on whether outside forces produce changes in the world,⁸ but then proceeded to confirm the theory of evolution as the only theory that could legally be taught. This logic is striking in that it is the equivalent of saying "It is possible that God created all things, but the schools will only teach that He did not." No alternative to evolution could even be suggested.

The *Kitzmiller* case is unique in that some of the DASD board made very strong statements about getting Christianity into the public schools. It is possible that a policy of suggesting an alternative to evolution could be upheld if such strong language were not present. But under the reasoning of the *Kitzmiller* case, any available information will be searched to determine whether the policy could possibly be motivated by fundamentalist thinking or opposition to evolution. This leaves Christians in the position of having to hide their true motives in desiring that an alternative to evolution be allowed. Although this reasoning has been limited thus far to public school teaching about evolution, the rationale could apply just as easily to other areas of public life.

Current case law in this area is extremely one-sided in its allowing the promotion of evolution at the expense of the free exercise of Christianity or other religions. This is illustrated by a quote from the *Kitzmiller* court in describing the

effect of the DASD policy on the families protesting the policy. The court stated:

Plaintiffs believe that ID is an inherently religious concept and that its inclusion in the District's science curriculum interferes with their rights to teach their children about religion. (Citations omitted). Plaintiffs additionally testified that their children confront challenges to their religious beliefs at school because of the Board's actions, that the Board's actions have caused conflict within the family unit, and that there is discord in the community.⁹


The exact same argument could be made about the effects of the teaching of evolution on Christian families. If parents wish to teach their children that a triune God created all things by merely calling them into being, that instruction is undercut by the teaching of the public school. The children are confronting challenges to their religious beliefs unless the children believe the instruction they are given in school, in which case there would be conflict within the fam-

ily unit. The *Kitzmiller* court quotes Phillip Johnson, the founder of the ID movement, as saying that the "Darwinian theory of evolution contradicts not just the Book of Genesis, but every word in the Bible from beginning to end. It contradicts the idea that we are here because a creator brought about our existence for a purpose."¹⁰ However, in the court's view, this statement only proves that Christianity is incompatible with evolution, and therefore must not be allowed in the classroom.

The *Kitzmiller* court's concern for parental instruction seems also to conflict with the ruling in the case of *Fields v. Palmdale School District*,¹¹ discussed in this rubric in the March 1, 2006 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. In that case, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed parents' complaints that their children were given information of a sexual nature because the right to control their instruction "does not extend beyond the threshold of the school door."

Conclusion

The court's decision in

Kitzmiller illustrates a trend in American jurisprudence in which courts fail to see intrusions on Christians' free exercise of religion by theories such as evolution. When Christians seek to leave room at least for the exercise of Christianity, courts suspect that this is an attempt to force Christian teachings in place of the supposedly "neutral" teachings of the world. The dominance of Judeo-Christian thought in public life seems to be steadily being replaced with philosophies and worldviews which are incompatible with Christianity. 

5. *Daniel v. Waters*, 515 F.2d 485 (6th Cir. 1975).

6. *Edwards v. Arkansas*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

7. *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1970).

8. *Kitzmiller*, at 82.

9. *Kitzmiller*, at 129.

10. *Kitzmiller*, at 27.

11. *Fields v. Palmdale School District*, No. 03-56499 (Ninth Cir. filed Nov. 2, 2005).

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

His Brother Abel

Brothers and Sisters

The relation of brother to brother is the first, which after that of husband to wife, has originated among men.

After having heard of Adam and Eve, we hear of Cain and Abel, even with the dreadful outcome

that the one brother murders the other.

This last is not accidental, and points to the grave danger that lurks in the brotherly relation.

Cain killed Abel, not because Abel had put anything in his way, but because as brother he stood in his way.

Cain was first alone, and when Abel came to stand alongside of him, the significant question arose, how to live with a second of like position, after higher ordinance, on a footing of peace and love.

Adam and Eve did not stand

as two equals alongside of and over against each other. In Adam there was superiority above Eve, and, above all, Adam and Eve complemented each other. She was "over against him as a helpmeet."

But such was not the case with Cain and Abel. These two were of one sort, both were *men*. And they stood on the foot of equality; both indeed were sons in the same family.

What Adam and Eve called their own, they put together as in one fellowship, and for nothing could one envy the other. But Cain

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and Abel had to make division.

Also Adam and Eve were destined, till their death, to remain united in the marriage bond; but presently Cain and Abel would each go his own way.

Even now this standing in the way of a brother is sometimes strongly evident.

There is an only child of rich parents. Presently he becomes heir to a million. But see, years after, a brother is born, and that little brother, if he lives, costs him half a million.

Or there is a king who has two sons. The younger can become king *provided the older dies*. The death of his brother would bring him the crown, but in case his brother lives, he is nothing, at most he is prince, but ... his brother's *subject*.

So you perceive at once what germ, what seeds of envy and sanguinariness, can nestle in the seemingly so simply relation of brother to brother; and that germ, those seeds, lodged in Cain's heart, and so was shed the blood of Abel.

The blood of *righteous* Abel, since in his heart Abel repressed these germs of brother-sin and overcame, while Cain fed them, cherished them, and as poisonous weeds allowed them to spring up in his heart.



Parents who discern this know their calling, in the training of their sons, to look carefully to the germination of this poisonous weed.

Also by reason of other interests.

It can scarcely be denied that in children generally certain traits of father and mother repeat themselves.

One time the likeness may be more striking, the other time weaker, but rarely is the likeness altogether wanting. The proverb "like father like son" conveys the general understanding of this.

But, and to this we would point, that likeness is rarely entire

in a single child; and a father of six sons will readily discover in each of them one of the main traits of his own character dominate. One will repeat more the trait of his heart, the other the trait of his thinking mind, a third the trait of his executive ability.

And this among brothers is so frequently the bitter fruitful cause of dissension and estrangement.

This would not be so if the main features in our own character always belonged together. But we know better. All too often these traits of our character wage bitter war in our own person, and only with difficulty and by heroic inward effort are they reconciled one with the other.

But when these same traits of our character, which are reconciled in us, embody themselves in our children severally, and thereby show themselves the more one-sidedly, it lies at hand, that among these sons the selfsame war breaks out which we have waged in our own heart, but now without the tie which the unity of our own person strung between them.

Or again, father and mother can be very different as to character, and then it is possible that in one son the character of father and in the other son the character of mother repeats itself.

But while this difference of character with man and wife found a counterpoise in their marriage-tie, between brothers this counterpoise is altogether wanting.

Their taste and tendency go out in an altogether different direction, and not infrequently father and mother then forget themselves so pitifully, that from sympathy for their own image, by showing preference and choosing sides, they make the estrangement yet more critical.



Against this natural poison, which, by sin, has been infused into the relation of brother to brother, a strong antidote had to be provided; and this God the Lord gave us [in

His grace]....

Christ Himself has sanctified the brother-bond.

He has deigned to adopt God's elect as His brethren.

And in connection with this blooms that sacred brotherhood in all that are born of God.

Born from one Father, and therefore all brothers together in the fellowship of the Only-Begotten.

And it is this brotherhood out of which a sacred glow shines upon the brotherhood among sons in the same family.



In our Christian families, therefore, the relation between brothers and brothers must be nobler and more choice than is thinkable outside of the Christian domain.


Yet one must not depend for this all too greatly upon the natural course of things.

Father and mother, who were privileged to sanctify their sons in one Baptism, have to see to it in training them that they draw the brotherhood closer between their sons.

It should not suffice them that in their household it becomes no Cain and Abel's game. The brother-bond must also cast off positive fruit. There must not merely be no envy, but love must be cultivated. And that not only after the sons have grown up, and the characters have formed themselves; but this work of reconciliation and of brothering and of union must begin in their earliest youth. Already at their games.

That sisters also can exert a sanctifying influence on this, shows many a blessed experience even in our days.

But yet the sons themselves, as soon as they awake to fuller consciousness, must look to this very seriously.

They too should know what dangerous sparks they carry about in their own heart; and their prayer and their intent must be to prevent every outburst of the evil fire. 

Evangelism in the Established Church (4)

Practicing Personal Evangelism

Part B, Seeking the Salvation of the Lost

God is a God of order. Within the covenant sphere He uses believing parents to nurture, influence, and mold the hearts of children. Outside the covenant sphere He uses believers to reach out to others to share the gospel with them and, by the work of His Holy Spirit, to draw them within the covenant sphere.

In mission work, God has bound together the preaching of the gospel and the personal witness of the believer as His ordained way to save souls. This is true in a mission field of labor and it is true in the established local church. The link between the local church and the non-Christian is the witness of the individual child of God.

True, mission outreach has as its focus the non-Christian. By saying this, we do not negate the care and burden we have for one who may already be converted but has not come to enjoy the true doctrine of the Bible or to enjoy the freedom of the new life in Christ that the Bible espouses. Both of these people become the burden of the missionary in his labors as well as of each one of us as we witness to our neighbors. There is something special about the unbeliever who is lost in sin and, without God's mercy to save him, will perish. Though the task may be more difficult, the urgency becomes more profound.

Our heart of love reaches out to the most destitute because we know God is able to save, should He desire. When God desires this and brings it to pass, nothing can match the deep joy that flows from our hearts for His love and mercy shown to such a sinner. If you shed a tear of joy when your child makes public confession of faith, you can identify with what I am saying here. This converted heathen becomes your spiritual child in the Lord. Our admiration for God's sovereignty is renewed as we witness firsthand His power to save.

Now I want to focus on a simple question, what is the goal of personal evangelism?

The answer is that, since personal evangelism is intimately connected with the preaching of the gospel, the goal is the same: the salvation of the sinner. To put it differently, the goal of personal evangelism is the conversion of the sinner to God. Now we have to explain that a bit, especially in light of so much confusion that takes place in connection with wrongful evangelism.

Frequently we hear that personal evangelism is "to win souls for Christ." I know the Bible uses that term in Proverbs 11:30, and when used from that perspective, it is proper. However, so much man-centered evangelism uses that term in connection with what is called "confrontational evangelism." The emphasis ends up this way: we witness to someone who is not a Christian and the goal is that, on the spot, at that very mo-

ment, the sinner is converted to God and becomes a Christian. The idea is that we must confront the sinner with the demands of the gospel and, if we do it correctly, this is the occasion for his immediate salvation. It is this sort of notion that has given rise to the notable "four spiritual laws," which supposedly have saved thousands of souls. We reject all such notions and do not see the role of personal evangelism that way. It is far more correct to speak of personal evangelism as "sowing seeds" and sharing the content of the Word of God with one who is interested and praying that the Holy Spirit will use it in His own time.

Similarly, we ought not to speak of the goal of personal evangelism as bringing in the masses for Sunday worship. Again, we believe that part of the blessing of God on personal evangelism is that God may use it to bring others under the preached word of God. But the man-centered emphasis of the modern "Church Growth" movement has the perspective that teams of members go out and witness to others and make the gospel so attractive that we may expect thousands to respond. This may produce a mega-church all right, but the focus is not on the pure word of the gospel, but rather on what man wants and finds attractive.

Still others speak of the Christian as being the "salt and light of the world." Their perspective on Matthew 5:13-16 is that the goal of personal evangelism is to get people to be a good element within society

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itself. Now, we would never deny that the Christian is the best citizen in the land and the best contributor for social responsibility, for that is true. But when we speak of the goal of evangelism on such a human, horizontal plane, we never come to grips with God's intended purpose in the salvation of His people.

Hence, we should be clear on the following goals as they relate to personal evangelism.

First, we must emphasize that, since the salvation of the human soul is God's domain and only He is able to accomplish it, we must set forth from the very outset that the one great goal of all evangelism, including personal evangelism as it relates to the preaching of the gospel, is the glory of our sovereign God. This is important because if we consciously include this in our *goal*, we will also be careful to incorporate in our methodology God-honoring methods. Nothing may detract from God's honor, and everything must contribute to it. The glory of God is the purpose of our entire existence, "That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12). Paul expresses it so beautifully in Romans 11:36: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen." God has all the glory; we are called upon to acknowledge it by our praise.

Secondly, the Bible describes fallen man as being in a terrible condition of human depravity with its resultant state of guilt before God. As we begin to sow the seeds of the gospel in our personal evangelism, we do so with the humble prayer that God will begin to convict the sinner of his sins and of the need for forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. The darkness of human sin blinds the eyes and deceives the heart. Such sinners need to have the scales taken from their eyes and their hearts opened to the God of love. An honest dealing with sin is crucial for the appreciation of God's great gift in giving

us His Son to be our Savior. The goal of all evangelism is the tears of the repentant sinner dried at the foot of the cross.

Thirdly, regarding those who are already saved and searching for a deeper faith, the goal of personal evangelism is to minister to such people and to share with them the knowledge we have of the Bible as it relates to both doctrine and life. Edifying the saints is an important aspect of evangelism, and every believer has the qualifications to minister to such fellow saints. Some may not understand the teachings of the Bible, or they may have backslidden and made a mess out of their lives. Yet, if they see in us something they desire for themselves, they are responding as Peter teaches us in I Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Meeting such needs is a glorious opportunity to share the gospel.

Finally, we ought to include one more aspect, and that is that the goal of personal evangelism is to lead people into the local church. This is often neglected today because so many "Christians" have been hurt by someone in the church or have convinced themselves they can be Christians without being part of a local church. This is wrong, and we must correct such notions. Hurt people must be encouraged to find healing and forgiveness within the body of Christ but also to learn that their perception of the church may be so ideal that it is far from reality. There is no perfect church; in fact, every church is far from perfection. Fellow sinners must learn to interact with each other in the way of loving, forgiving, and seeking strength to bear with one another's faults and burdens. The church is necessary for spiritual life. The Reformers correctly insisted, and this is expressed in our Reformed confessions, e.g., Belgic Confession, Ar-

ticle 28, that there is no salvation apart from the church of Jesus Christ. The church is our spiritual mother. Converts mentioned in the Bible were always added to the church (Acts 2:47).

In light of the goals mentioned above, we want to draw three conclusions.

First, when we speak of the conversion of the sinner we include in that work of grace the conversion of the whole person. Salvation is the work of God that begins in the heart of man. Regeneration is the first work of God in the human heart, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The heart is the center of man's spirituality, for "out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:14). Jesus emphasized this as He taught, in distinction from the Pharisees, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matt. 15:19, 20). This is important. As we share the gospel with a non-Christian, we focus on his heart, and he must forsake all hatred and learn to love God and his neighbor.

It follows, then, that a changed heart will affect a man's entire nature. His mind will be affected, so that he thinks God's thoughts. His human will is also affected, so that his desires and affections are changed. He desires to please God and he enjoys God's fellowship more than the pleasures of sin. His emotions come under the power of God's transforming work. He learns to control his anger, he fears God rather than men, and such like. And, yes, even his body comes under the power of grace, for he knows that his body has now become the temple of God, which we have from God, and we are not our own but are bought with a price, in order that we may glorify God with our body and spirit which are God's (I Cor. 6:19, 20).

This change is not such that one no longer has to contend with sin in his nature. Rather, the work of salvation is God's work, which transcends the flesh. The old man of sin still remains, and the converted person has to learn to say yes to God and no to sin as he struggles to overcome the motions of sin in his flesh (Rom. 7:14ff.). The result of this spiritual tension is that his life is changed. Conversion results in a changed life. Almost all of Paul's epistles demonstrate this. The first part of each letter includes doctrinal teaching, which is followed by instruction on how a child of God serves God with his whole life.


Secondly, there is one important observation to be made in light of what we have just said. Such a conversion, which begins from the inside and affects the whole life of man, is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. No human being can convert a person from death to life. Ephesians 2, Ezekiel 37, as well as Acts 2 demonstrate that unsaved man is *dead* in sin. When we share the gospel in its early stages of personal evangelism, we know that there must be some powerful work of God if such a person is going to be saved. This is confirmed both by scriptural teaching and by personal experience. The dead sinner needs a work of grace administered

by the Holy Spirit if conversion is to be realized. We never know if it is God's will to perform such a work in the individual with whom we may be sharing the gospel. We do know that God promises to bless our witnessing and to work by His Spirit in every soul it pleases Him to save. This gives us confidence and strength to press on.

Thirdly, since the Holy Spirit always works through the Word of God, the Bible, we must make extensive use of our Bibles when we speak to others. Human reasoning, quoting of great men, emotional appeals will not convert. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. Reading the Bible, explaining Bible passages, holding personal Bible Studies — all are used by God to set His truth before men. Again, this is what God promises. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16). Did not our Lord use this method when He contended with the devil? How could He shut the devil's mouth from telling lies? He thundered at him over and over, "It is written!" For those readers who have some experience in personal evangelism, you can tes-

tify from your own experience as well. It is amazing how you can speak abstractly or try to convince by human reason, and nothing seems to get through. Simply take your Bible, open it up to a number of passages that say what you want to say, and the person responds, the light comes on, the Word convicts.

Finally, since the goal of evangelism is the conversion of the sinner, which only God is able to do, we must say in conclusion that such work requires diligent prayer. The New Testament is filled with references that emphasize the need to uphold preachers in prayer, e.g., Ephesians 6:18-20; Romans 15:30. Personal witnessing is not preaching, it is the preliminary work of God preparing one for preaching and therefore requires the same spiritual attention. Surely, in the work of ministering to the souls of lost people, the desire that God may do His work forces us to acknowledge how feeble and fallible are our efforts. At the same time, it is so assuring to look heavenward to behold by faith Jesus at the right hand of God, who sends His Spirit to accomplish what His soul desires to do.

As we recognize this, we confess that boasting about how many souls we saved is offensive both to God and to man. Rather, let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

The student body of Adams Christian School in Wyoming, MI presented a program entitled "Singing Christians Heavenward Bound" on Friday evening, March 17, at the Southwest PRC.

Supporters of Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to attend a meeting at their school sponsored by the

Eastside Promoters on March 16 featuring Dr. Randy Flood speaking on the topic, "Bullying and What to Do About It."

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Hull, IA PRC invited their congregation to the Hull Pizza Ranch for supper on Monday, March 20. The congregation could choose either to eat in, or to take out, or to have dinner delivered. In exchange for their support, the management of Pizza Ranch agreed

to give the young people a percentage of the restaurants entire sales between 5-8 P.M. The young people who volunteered to help during those three hours were kept busy bussing tables.

We also pass along kudos to the young people of the Randolph, WI PRC for the work they did at a recent soup supper they sponsored. Most soup suppers offer only a couple of choices of soup. However, on February 21, these young people provided a menu that included five different soups, plus

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

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salads, and French bread with three different toppings, in addition to a wide assortment of desserts. Who in Randolph could say no to that?

The young people of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada planned a midwinter outdoor ice-skating party for their congregation on February 20 at the Les Walker Park in Lacombe. Cold and hot drinks, as well as roasting marshmallows on the fire, were provided. Skaters could also bring hot dogs, buns, and condiments to the party if they so chose.

The young people of the Wingham, Ontario, PRC invited their congregation for a time of fellowship and skating at the Belgrade Arena on February 11. Refreshments were provided by the young people.

Mission Activities

Rev. T. Miersma, our western home missionary laboring in Spokane, WA with the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship, left Spokane on March 6 to visit with the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for our mission work there. After that visit he flew to Michigan to meet with the Mission Committee's sub-committee on the work in Spokane. While in Michigan, Rev. Miersma also gave a presentation at the Seminary on the subject of Mission Principles, attended a ministers' conference, and preached and gave a presentation at the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI on Sunday evening, March 12, on the work in Spokane, before returning home on Tuesday evening.

Rev. A. Stewart, missionary pastor of the Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland, spoke at Porthcawl, South Wales on March

3 on the subject, "Miracles and the End of the World." Rev. Stewart answered three questions. Are miracles a sign of Christ's return? What sort of miracles will be performed near the end? And who will be performing them?

Denomination Activities

The Annual PR Ministers' Retreat was held March 10 & 11 at Maranatha, a retreat center in Grand Haven, MI. Several of our ministers and their wives spent time together in fellowship and prayer.

The annual combined Men's Society meeting between the Men's Societies of the Hull and Doon, IA PRC, along with that of the Edgerton, MN PRC, was held March 13 at Hull. The men spent an hour studying from God's Word found in Judges 4 & 5. Hull was in charge of the after-recess program.

Congregation Activities

An invitation was extended to the congregation of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to gather together on February 25 for their annual Faith Fellowship Dinner. The dinner was open to family and friends of Faith. The evening included plenty of good food as well as an auction of items and services from the young people.

The Choral Society of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC presented a concert of sacred music on March 12 after their evening service.


Members of our churches in the Chicago, IL area were reminded to reserve the night of March 5 for a male chorus concert, entitled "Night of Song," at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN.

The Building Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC recently in-

stalled a mailbox system in the Fellowship Hall of their church. A letter explaining the benefits of such a system was placed appropriately in each mailbox.

The Trinity Men Singers from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI made an overnight trip to Wisconsin and the Randolph PRC on Friday and Saturday, March 17 & 18. The men, with some of the wives, traveled by rental bus, arriving in Randolph late in the afternoon on Friday. They were treated to a hostess dinner provided by the members of Randolph, before the men in turn presented a program of sacred music at the First Reformed Church of Randolph. An evening of Christian fellowship was enjoyed by all.

Minister Activities

Rev. M Dick, pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, received the call to serve as the next pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Hudsonville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Elder Gary Lanning and the entire Lanning family, for the Lord in His infinite wisdom has called

MR. KEN LANNING

unto his eternal home. We pray that they receive comfort in the words from Isaiah 43:1: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

Rev. Garry Eriks, President
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 10, 2006, at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, MI.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk