

THE *September 15, 2005* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 81 ◆ Number 21

Beholding God's Face in Righteousness

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

Psalm 17:15

When David wrote this Psalm he was surrounded by enemies, as can be seen from verse 9: "From the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about." But as a child of God, he loves God and is sure that the Lord is the God of his salvation. He is confident that he represents the cause of God and of His righteousness in the midst of the world, and that the wicked oppress him because he is of the party of the living God. Therefore he beseeches the Lord to give ear to his prayer. David desires to be vindicated because he is afflicted for righteousness' sake. This is evident from verse 13: "Arise, O LORD, disap-

point him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword."

The Lord will hear this prayer! How terrible is the lot of the wicked. "From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes" (v. 14). They are men of this world who have their portion in this life. They seek and crave the world. And God satisfies that craving by filling their bellies with His treasures, thus causing them to be carnally satisfied. Their abundance flows over to their children, who continue in the same carnal enjoyment. In this way their measure of iniquity is filled.

However, with the righteous it is different. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." We have in our text an example of Hebrew parallelism, when two parts of the text

complement and explain each other. "Thy face" is the same as "Thy likeness," and "we shall be satisfied" as "beholding thy face in righteousness."

Now we know that essentially we are not able to see God's face, for He is spiritual and we are earthly. That will also be true when we arrive in heavenly glory. To see God would imply that we are essentially like Him. This is impossible, for He is Creator, we are creature; He is eternal, we are temporal; He is infinite, we are finite. Thus, there is between us an infinite gulf that can never be spanned.

The desire to see God and to be essentially like Him was the sin of Adam. Satan whispered in his ear, "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Adam, and we in him, listened and opened our hearts to this deadly poison, which brought us death and destruction. We became slaves of the devil, enemies of God and children of wrath.

From that dreadful state we have been redeemed. In principle, the desire to be like God will never

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arise in our hearts again. Forever God remains God. Our desire is that He be God forever. He sits on the throne, and we worship Him. He commands, and we obey. The believer loves the Lord, wants God to be God, and does not aspire to His greatness. The believer experiences life and joy exactly in proclaiming the virtues and greatness of the Lord, who called him out of darkness into His marvelous light. Therefore, to see God's face does not mean and cannot mean that we see God essentially.

So what does the text mean? We must be reminded that God's face is God revealed. The revelation of God is in our Lord Jesus Christ. Here on earth we see God's face in a mirror, the mirror of God's Word. Jesus stands, as it were, behind us, and we see Him as He is reflected in the mirror of the Scriptures. Those Scriptures speak of Him, revealing Him to us in all His wondrous love and mercy. We see Him as He entered into our flesh and blood, taking upon Himself all our sins and trespasses. We see Him as He suffered and died for us upon the cross of Calvary, and as risen again in all glory as the God of our salvation.

However, when we awake in heavenly glory we shall see the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the face of God, the eternal image of the Godhead. Christ is the revelation of all of God's attributes. The matchless goodness of God will be seen in the new heavens and the new earth where there shall be no night, sin, or death. That goodness will radiate from Christ as merited by Him and as shining forth from Him unto the glory of the Father. He is the Sun that shall enlighten all and who Himself receives His light from the living God.

Thus, in Christ, the face of God, we see the likeness of God. This same word "likeness" appears also in Genesis 1:26, where we read,

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This refers to the form, the likeness, the concrete revelation of the living God. This concrete revelation of the living God is His face, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This heavenly expectation of things was clearly understood in the old dispensation. Asaph in Psalm 73:24, 25 confesses, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Job, in all his difficulties, expresses in chapter 19:25-27, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

The awakening in our text is the awakening out of the sleep of death. Then we shall see God's face with eyes that have been made spiritual and heavenly. We shall see it in righteousness. The wicked shall see His face too, but for them that glory will be most terrible. But we shall see it in righteousness and perfection. We shall rejoice and then we shall be satisfied.

God alone satisfies. Even as a fish is at home in the water and a bird in the air, so man is really happy only when he may enjoy the fellowship of the living God. For even as the fish has been fashioned for the water, so man is fashioned for the service and fellowship of the Lord. The Lord maintains Himself and will not permit any enjoyment of life outside of Himself. Adam was happy in the garden, but this was destroyed by

sin. Man, today, by nature has a pseudo-happiness consisting of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. He would enjoy the pleasures of sin and enrich himself with the treasures of this life. These are mere husks, which leave his soul empty and destitute. He will awake in hell and will never forget his misery, for he will be forsaken by God.

How different it is with the child of God. The love of God has been shed abroad in his heart. The goodness and glory of God he has learned to crave and cherish. The words of Psalm 42:1, 2 have become a reality in his life. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" The blotting out of all his guilt he experiences through the wonderful blood of the cross. The service of Jehovah is his delight.

Thus we are satisfied by beholding the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord in the Scriptures. We love that revelation and satisfy our souls with it. It speaks to us of our state and condition by nature, but also proclaims to us the love of God. That love finds its source in the eternal counsel of God. It revealed itself as so completely divine upon the cross of Calvary while we were yet sinners. It is a love that defies all human understanding, lifts us out of the miry clay of sin and death, and translates us into a glory so wonderful that it could never enter into the heart of man.

Now we see it only in principle. We behold the face of Jesus Christ only in a mirror. We also have to

contend with our sin and imperfection. Our eye of faith is often dim and our longing for God's communion so sadly lacking. Sin does not cause us to long for eternal glory, and we are attracted to


Jesus stands, as it were, behind us, and we see Him as He is reflected in the mirror of the Scriptures.

... when we shall awake with His likeness we shall be perfectly satisfied.

the things that are below. We are therefore satisfied only in principle while in the earthly house of our tabernacle.

However, when we shall awake with His likeness we shall be perfectly satisfied. We shall see God face to face in Christ and feast

ourselves as we look upon Him. Then we ourselves shall be perfect, beholding Him in righteousness. Then we shall be like Him in the measure of the creature. Eternally we shall see God in the highest revelation of Himself.

Then we shall be satisfied. Completely filled we shall be, never to weary of His likeness. Even as the love of God is inexhaustible, so will our souls be forever satisfied. Indeed, most blessed is the expectation of the church of the living God. 

Editor's Note

In this issue, Rev. Ron Hanko begins a series of articles on Malachi for the rubric "Search the Scriptures." The observant reader will notice that the last issue of the *Standard Bearer* carried the first installment of Prof. Herman Hanko's exposition of Galatians. A word of explanation is in order. Rev. R. Hanko has been the regular contributor for this rubric and had already submitted his work on Malachi. The material by Rev.

Hanko is exactly what we desire for the SB – brief expositions of Bible passages. Prof. H. Hanko, who is drawing his series "Mark the Bulwarks" to a close, expressed an interest in writing on the Epistle to the Galatians. Such a series is indeed timely, since a proper understanding of the doctrine in Galatians is crucial in the battle over justification currently raging in Reformed and Presbyterian

churches. Convinced that an exposition of this book is of vital importance for believers today, we seized the opportunity to have a seasoned exegete expound Galatians, and decided to begin his series now, rather than to wait until the exposition of Malachi is finished. The plan is, then, that "Search the Scriptures" will appear (D.V.) in virtually every issue, alternating between the two writers.

– RJD 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

On Site Reflections on Hyper-Calvinism and the Free Offer of the Gospel

It is a most interesting site. It is a most informative site. It is even dangerous, in its own way. At least if you are interested in Reformed theology past and present. Once you enter it, it is hard to extract yourself and get back to real time and to things that need more immediate attention. It is easy to 'get lost,' as they say, and let more pressing matters 'go begging' for a time.

I am talking about an online website that was recently brought to my attention by a colleague – [www.monergism.com].

If you wonder about the word

"monergism," it is of Greek derivation, meaning "one only power (or energy)." It was coined to stand in contrast to the error of synergism, that hydra-headed error that through the ages has posited salvation as a cooperative venture between the divine will and the human ability to respond appropriately.

In the site's own words, "Monergism: The view that the Holy Spirit is the only agent who effects regeneration in Christians. It is in contrast with synergism, the view that there is a cooperation between the divine and the human in the regeneration process.

Monergism is a redemption which was purchased by Christ for those the Father has given Him (I Pet. 1:3; John 3:5). This grace works independently of any human cooperation and conveys that grace to the fallen soul whereby the person who is to be saved is effectually enabled to respond to the gospel call (John 1:13; Acts 2:39, 13:48; Rom. 9:16). It is that supernatural work of God alone whereby we are granted the spiritual ability to comply with the conditions of the covenant of grace; that is, to apprehend the Redeemer by a living faith, to accept the terms of salva-

tion, to repent of idols and to love God and Mediator supremely.”

Whoever is (or are) responsible for putting this site together and maintaining it ought to be commended. It is quite a site. The site describes itself as being dedicated to “Classic Articles and Resources of the Historic Christian Faith.” Its real focus is Reformed, Calvinistic theology – focusing on the stalwarts of the past, but including writers of recent vintage as well (R. C. Sproul and James Montgomery Boice come to mind, along with men of lesser name-recognition). It includes writings on topics ranging from Atonement to Worship, from Antinomianism to Justification, as well as large sections lifted from classic books and commentaries of the main Calvinistic theologians and preachers of the past. And you can add to that a great variety of sermons from the past and the present printed out in full. It is like having a good seminary library at your finger tips. What is in its ‘stacks’ goes on and on. It ties into other sites of theological interest as well. Let the browser who has other, more pressing, responsibilities beware.

Too bad the whole internet isn’t like this. One would not have such misgivings about use of the internet and going on-line.

Be that as it may, we bring this site to your attention not only in the hopes that the interested reader will put the site to good use, but because there are certain sections that are of special interest to us as Protestant Reformed. For instance, what caught our eye browsing through some of the site’s many ‘offerings’ was the topic of hyper-Calvinism. This for a Protestant Reformed preacher is always a matter of interest, if for no other reason than that we know that in ecclesiastical circles we are commonly labeled as the foremost remaining specimen of this error. One always wonders how the error will be represented and described, whose names and writ-

ings will appear for and against it, and whether names familiar to us will appear (be they friend or critic).

Well they do, and we are. That is, names familiar to us appear, and our own name as denomination comes up as well.

By and large the articles and writers listed for your reading pleasure under this section deal with the free offer of the gospel, and in a favorable light, as one might suspect (and fear).

But not all. A certain Steve Hays, while critical of Hoeksema’s stand against common grace, indicates he is convinced Hoeksema’s criticism of the free offer was valid and ought to be considered more seriously than it has been. One might wonder how one can approve of common grace while opposing the free offer of the gospel, since they have become so absolutely intertwined, but there it is. In one of his “blog responses” Hays makes some useful distinctions in the use of the word “offer,” pointing out that those who used it early on in various Reformed documents and confessions had something else in mind than those who now want to affix the adjectives “free” and “well-meant” to the word “offer.”

But read it for yourselves (under Triablogue). You might not agree with Hays’ appraisal that John Murray was a more careful and thorough exegete than Hoeksema (nor with a few other caveats as well), but then, he does go on record as recommending the much maligned Hoeksema as a theologian worth reading, with things of value to say. As they say, “We will take what we can get”; and “You can’t win them all.”

For one to go on record these days suggesting that he finds

things in Hoeksema worth reading, recommending him for his “logical” thought, and then expect to be taken seriously in Reformed theological circles, takes a rare courage. These days you will be taken far more seriously if you go on record claiming to be a Calvinist, but then maintain that you cannot find any place really to fit eternal election (predestination) into one’s system of thought in any meaningful way, deny that election has any real bearing on the various other doctrines (e.g., the covenant of grace, the call of the gospel, or even justification these days), and insist you cannot see how it has much bearing on preaching and its content either.

It is strange. Every anti-Calvinist sees predestination as standing at the very center of Calvinistic theology and thought, part of the very texture and design of the Calvinistic fabric (and, for that very reason, wants no part either of it or of Him, that Master Weaver, the predestinating God); and yet it seems that just about every self-professed Calvinistic theologian of the past century or so has gone out

of his way to demonstrate that really predestination is not all that central to the Calvinistic, Reformed way of looking at things. The grace of election and the truth of predestination is treated like a price tag affixed to the Calvinistic garment, to take note of, but having precious

little to do with the texture and design of its fabric at all.

How strange. Is it any wonder why Calvinists and Arminians find themselves shopping at the same theological store these days?

Indeed, things do not quite add up. It is as if the opponents of Calvinism realize much more clearly what is at stake in confessing God

The grace of election and the truth of predestination is treated like a price tag affixed to the Calvinistic garment, to take note of, but having precious little to do with the texture and design of its fabric at all.

to be a sovereign, predestinating God than its professed promoters. I find it utterly baffling at times. You would think that instead of seeing how adroitly they can extract the truth and reality of election (which makes salvation all of grace indeed — Eph. 1:4, 5 and Eph. 2:1-5) from key doctrines, the Calvinistic theologians would be striving instead to understand how this deeper wisdom of God (with the Christ of the covenant at its heart) has bearing on all the doctrines of grace.

What could be plainer in this connection than Paul's book of Romans, written as the apostle struggled to come to grips with the mystery of God's dealing with Israel, setting the nation of his ancestry aside, and sending the gospel with its promises to the Gentile nations instead. Has the Word of God (which is to say, the very truthfulness of God in keeping His word of promise) failed? How can that be! Ahhh, the answer. It has to do with election, the sovereign, predestinating purpose of God with a true Israel to be drawn from all humanity as known by God and given to Christ from the very beginning. And the lights went on. Now it can be explained. Deep is the wisdom of God. If you do not see that as you read Romans and get to the heart of Paul's argument in chapters 9-11, all I can say is that you aren't trying to understand Romans, you are looking for ways to get around the apostle's plain case and argument.

But I digress — because I cannot understand why professing Calvinistic theologians are always trying to see how little bearing particular, personal election has on various doctrines, rather than striving to see the revealed predestinating purpose of God for His own woven into the whole.

Unless it embarrasses them somehow? But why?

All that being said, I must get back to the real reason for this article and the one that will follow,

namely, the free offer of the gospel. This is my concern in the matter of hyper-Calvinism and its charge. That we are called names by some in this or that circle is not all that important to me. But the question in this instance is why? What is it that in the estimation of most of the Calvinistic church world renders us worthy of being dismissed as hyper-Calvinists?

The answer is not so difficult to ascertain. It has to do with our denial of the free offer of the gospel. And that is a matter of

concern. What is at stake is nothing less than the gospel, the content of the preaching, yes its very marrow, how the precious name of Jesus will be offered (set before) all. And that is a matter of importance, supreme importance. For that reason, what I read in an article or two on the site warrants some response.

What is of interest, and even ironic, is that this section on (and against) hyper-Calvinism opens with a quote from Rev. Ron Hanks, and with approval. The quote is worth quoting in full because it exposes the true error of the true 'hypers.'

The hyper-Calvinist, then, makes the same mistake as the Arminians and free-willists, only he draws a different conclusion. Both think that to command or demand repentance and faith of dead sinners must imply that such sinners are not dead and have in themselves the ability to repent and believe. The free-willist says, then: "To command must imply ability, therefore, men must have the ability." The hyper-Calvinist says: "To command must imply ability, therefore we will not command any but the elect" (emphasis mine — kk).

Adding to the irony of it all is

that the site concludes with the written transcript of the debate between Richard Mouw and Prof. David Engelsma on "Common Grace: Is It Reformed?"

So in a section warning against the danger of hyper-Calvinism, most of the articles of which are in favor of the free-offer, the first and last words are by two PR ministers.


Surely, that is how it should be!

Maybe the creator of the site does not know Rev. Ron Hanks's affiliation. I have an idea, however, that he does, and perhaps has a

sense humor as well. Cannot criticize a man for that.

On a more serious note is the opening article that is listed in the section of hyper-Calvinism. It is an article by a certain Phil Johnson. It is lifted from Mr. Johnson's own personal site, under a section he labels "Bad Theology." There he warns against the evils of hyper-Calvinism, spells out what he considers to be the chief earmarks of this dangerous heresy, and lists the Protestant Reformed churches as the prime representative of this deadly species still at large today. He has read Prof. David Engelsma's book dealing with the free offer of the gospel, and he did not much like what he read. (The Professor is aware of the criticism and is well able to defend himself.)

Our concern is with what Mr. Johnson and others have decided defines hyper-Calvinism. What it amounts to is a redefinition. If such is allowed, no one is safe from being labeled with any heresy.

Next time we will have some quotes from Mr. Johnson, listing what he considers to be the earmarks of hyper-Calvinism, and considering the error of the free offer a bit more in depth. 

What is it that in the estimation of most of the Calvinistic church world renders us worthy of being dismissed as hyper-Calvinists?

Evangelism in the Established Church (3)

Hindrances to This Work (concl.)

The fourth hindrance is as follows:

4. One might say that the critical need we face as churches is to preserve our strength and build one another up spiritually rather than reaching out and trying to bring new converts into the church. Their presence will not make us stronger but weaker. Look at the churches around us that have emphasized evangelism. See how weak they have become. Their evangelism is a contributing factor.

We have to address two aspects of this question: First, if a member of the church practices personal evangelism, this activity will not weaken his spiritual life but strengthen it; and second, if our churches handle properly the increase of membership that results from conversion, it will not weaken our congregations but strengthen them. Let's see how this is true.

We face real spiritual dangers if we maintain a life of isolation, that is, if we literally separate ourselves from the world around us and have little or nothing to do with our neighbors. These dangers are threefold: first, the danger of self-righteousness. This evil is always associated with self-centeredness. I will then look at myself as the standard of all good,

both as pertains to faith and life. Everyone who does not measure up to me must be rejected, and everyone who agrees with me is my friend. Second, isolation produces ignorance of the real world around us and allows us to function in a make-believe world. Our effectiveness as Christians in dealing with our neighbors, so that we can let our light shine to them, is dependent on whether or not we understand their world. The spirit of isolation prevents us from doing this. Finally, isolation produces a spirit of combativeness in us that hinders rather than helps us in our calling to witness to the non-Christian neighbor. Our view of spiritual warfare becomes a barrage of name-calling and judgmental verdicts, which erect barriers impossible to overcome. We hardly ever ask ourselves if our conduct hinders our opportunity to interact with the neighbor and, if God be willing, to lead him to Christ.

If we engage in personal evangelism, we will develop spiritual strengths that overcome these weaknesses. We can list four of them. First, we will develop our ability really to love our neighbor as God commands us to do. In love we will actually look upon a non-Christian neighbor with sadness of heart. We will feel a burden for the children that are raised in that non-Christian home. It is good for us to sit down and ask ourselves, as a family, how we can reach out to them. Yes, we can easily judge them, for they have all sorts of wrongs in their life. Rather, we will set that aside for the time be-

ing in order that we may introduce them to something far better. Most of the members of the congregation already have this love for other members. They must learn to show love also to those outside the church. Second, we rejoice in God's sovereignty over all of life, including salvation. Personal evangelism gives us the opportunity to experience God's sovereignty as He works through us in a non-Christian. We learn to focus on the most important message, repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ as the way to the Father. No one can keep the law unless he or she comes to know the Lawgiver. God alone is able to bring about that change. When you do personal evangelism, you see little glimmers of that divine work, and your appreciation for and dependency on God skyrockets. Third, your personal faith will grow as you share the gospel with someone who knows not God. This applies to all aspects of truth, both doctrinal and practical. Does personal evangelism weaken the membership? That charge can only be raised out of ignorance. Finally, our devotional life will come alive because our personal and family prayer life will also focus on the spiritual progress of a neighbor or relative who is important to us and we desire his salvation. Only God can do that, and we learn to wait upon Him. That is wonderful spiritual maturity.

The second aspect of this hindrance is the fear that if God blesses the efforts of personal evangelism it will weaken our churches because these people will not be re-

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Previous article in this series: September 1, 2005, p. 471.

ally Protestant Reformed and they will bring into our midst all sorts of issues of doctrines and lifestyles, and that will not be good.

This is a legitimate concern, because, as the proposed hindrance states, many churches have been weakened, and apostasy prevails, because of such evangelism. You must realize, however, that wrongful dealing with converts must not deter us from doing it properly, and we must not use improper evangelism by others as a scare-tactic to prevent our members from doing what God commands them to do. Humanly speaking, there is always a measure of "risk" in evangelism because we can never be sure what God is going to do in the life of non-Christians or what impact their presence might have upon us or the membership. But fear of wrongful influence from their presence must not deter us from doing the work God commands us to do. Rather we must take an honest look at ourselves if we are afraid of such influence. Are we so weak or so vulnerable to wrongful influence that we conclude that we will succumb to temptation because God places immature or inquiring sinners in our midst? Perhaps we should look at it from a different point of view and ask ourselves, could some of our members be an offense to them, because what we teach newcomers is not always what our members practice. You see, wrongful influence goes both ways. That would be sad indeed if our spirituality has come to such a low.


We must ask the question, is the congregation weakened by the presence of a person or family who is showing interest in the gospel and seeks to worship God and fellowship with His people? Obviously, our answer will be determined by our judgment of these people. If we are so naïve spiritually that we will not tolerate in our midst anyone who is not Protestant Reformed in confession and life (on the level of our own spiritual maturity), then of course their mere presence is threatening and we would judge that our congregation is at risk just because they are there. If we have developed a proper tolerance for people who are inquiring and seeking after God, but have not yet attained and are willing to learn about the Christian faith and life, our perspective is not that of weakness due to their presence but opportunity to serve and glorify God through them.

A number of things must be said to safeguard faithfulness to God in the process of evangelism.

We must encourage one another that befriending non-Christians does not mean that we allow them to influence us in a sinful way. If we do this, then the devil has the last laugh after all. Spiritual separation means that we develop a careful balance between befriending them as a way to share the gospel with them and being careful not to compromise our own faith. The individual members of the congregation must be challenged to evangelize, that is, to

bring these strangers and foreigners into the household of faith so they believe and live as we do. The task of members does not end when one member brings into the fellowship of the church an inquirer. No, it is then that the entire congregation has to reach out to such a one. Each member now has the opportunity to use his own gifts to make this person or family feel at home, to enjoy contact with covenant homes and schools, and to see Christian life from the inside. I do not say that everyone must rush out to do this all at once, for then the inquirer may very well be scared off. Rather this is a process of time, and every member must know it his duty eventually to be involved in this activity.

We must also put in place a method of instruction, so that such inquirers can be thoroughly trained in the truth of the Reformed faith and holy living. Such careful instruction takes time and effort and must not be neglected, for therein lies the answer to the threat of the weakening of the church. We have a thorough program of instruction for covenant children, for young adults and families. It may be that new converts do not fit into this structure at all and that it is time we set in place individual classes for such people. This is less intimidating, more personal, and can be better adapted to their needs.

Personal evangelism is our calling, and we must prayerfully seek not only to do it, but also to put into place the follow-up that is necessary for a strong church. 

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

■ The Religion of Youth — and Many More??

This is scary — a book by Christian Smith and Melinda

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

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Lundquist Denton, researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), entitled, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press). Cultural Editor of World Magazine, Gene Edward Veith, explains

in the June 25, 2005 issue of *World*:

After interviewing over 3,000 teenagers, the social scientists summed up their beliefs: (1) "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth." (2) "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the

Bible and by most world religions." (3) "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself." (4) "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem." (5) "Good people go to heaven when they die."

Even these secular researchers recognized that this creed is a far cry from Christianity, with no place for sin, judgment, salvation, or Christ. Instead, most teenagers believe in a combination of works righteousness, religion as psychological well-being, and a distant non-interfering god. Or, to use a technical term, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."

Ironically, many of these young deists are active in their churches. "Most religious teenagers either do not really comprehend what their own religious traditions say they are supposed to believe," conclude Mr. Smith and Ms. Denton, "or they do understand it and simply do not care to believe it."

Another possibility is that they have learned what their churches are teaching all too well. It is not just teenagers who are moralistic therapeutic deists. This describes the beliefs of many adults too, and even what is taught in many supposedly evangelical churches.

Mr. Smith and Ms. Denton recognize this. MTD has become the "dominant civil religion." And it is "colonizing" American Christianity. To the point, these secular scholars conclude, "a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition, but is rather substantially morphed into Christianity's misbegotten step-cousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."

Consider how many Christian publications, sermons, and teachings are nothing but moralism. Sometimes morality is reduced to the simplistic MTD commandment

"be nice," though often real morals are inculcated. But the common assumption is that being good is easy, just a matter of knowing what one should do and trying harder. The biblical truth that bad behavior is a manifestation of sin, a depravity that inheres in our fallen nature, is skimmed over. And so is the solution to sin: a life-changing faith in Jesus Christ.

Consider how many Christian publications, sermons, and teachings are primarily therapeutic. It

is true that Christ can solve many of our problems. But much that passes for Christian teaching says nothing about Christ. Instead, it consists of pop psychology, self-help platitudes, and the power of positive thinking.

Consider how many Christian publications, sermons, and teachings talk about God in a generic way,

but say nothing about the Father, who created and still sustains the world; the Son, who became incarnate in this world to win our salvation; and the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word of God to bring us to faith.

Christianity is about grace, not moralism; changing lives, not making people feel better about themselves; the God made flesh, not an uninvolved deity. And that is better news than Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

What a simple, convenient religion! Be nice! Feel good! And God is there to help out in a pinch. No wonder it is so popular, not just with the youth, but with much of the modern day church. But as Veith correctly points out, this is a far cry from Christianity. And it is scary, from a spiritual point of view, that, as co-author Christian Smith asserts, even a good proportion of Protestant teens articulated their faith in these terms.

God forbid that it become so with us and our young people!

May the chief mark of the faithful church, the pure preaching of the gospel, be manifest in our churches. May we be diligent in the catechizing of our youth. May the systematic, thorough program of catechism be maintained in our Protestant Reformed Churches. And may God's grace sustain our religion, in young and old alike, that it be characterized by true faith that is "not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 21).

■ Canadian Same-sex Marriage Law Passes

Canada has become the fourth country in the world officially to sanction same-sex marriage. The Liberal government's controversial same-sex marriage legislation (Bill C-38) passed final reading in the House of Commons, sailing through in a 158-133 vote in late June. The Senate proceeded on July 19 to vote 47-21 in favor of the bill. The bill became law when it received royal assent on July 20, 2005.

This historic, we should say *infamous*, legislation comes after gay and lesbian couples launched lawsuits in different provinces demanding the right to marry. Courts in seven provinces agreed that the traditional definition of marriage violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

What about the fallout? Bob Ripley, minister in the United Church of Canada, writes in his Saturday *London Free Press* column on July 30, 2005:

They were right. The sky didn't

fall when Canada's Senate gave final approval to Bill C-38.

But the fallout continues.

The Supreme Court of Canada made it clear that it is solely a provincial jurisdiction to protect religious freedom when it comes to the solemnization of marriage. However, marriage commissioners are being told by their provincial government to resign if they cannot, for reasons of conscience or religion, solemnize a same-sex marriage.

Some have done so. But not all.

Orville Nichols, a 69-year-old marriage commissioner from Saskatchewan who has participated in thousands of weddings, is likely to be the first marriage commissioner to be fired for refusing to marry a same-sex couple. Saskatchewan Justice Minister Frank Quennell has indicated that all civic officials in the province will be required to perform same-sex marriages, in spite of their religious beliefs.

In early May, Nichols was asked to perform a ceremony for a gay couple. He refused. Rather than simply finding another commissioner, the couple in question chose to file a complaint with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. Nichols responded with a complaint against the province, objecting to the violation of his charter rights and the province's human rights code by discriminating against him on the basis of his conscience and religious freedom.

The war of rights gets worse. The Knights of Columbus, a Roman Catholic men's organization, is facing a human rights complaint in British Columbia after refusing to rent their hall, located on church property, to a lesbian couple for their wedding celebration. The courts may rule that charter protection for religious freedom applies here.

But it is unlikely that those in the wedding industry, florists, photographers, musicians and caterers, have any protection for their freedom of conscience or religion. If approached by a gay or lesbian couple to provide services for their wedding, business owners cannot claim religious objec-

tions that would prevent them from providing their service. Refusal will undoubtedly provoke complaint under provincial human rights legislation.

Ted Byfield speaks of ominous possible effects of this legislation in his column in the August 8, 2005 issue of *Western Standard* magazine:

The effect of the bill will be to destroy the law's traditional view of marriage and family, and replace it with the New Canada view. Whether churches can refuse to conduct gay marriages will, of course, be decided by the Supreme Court, which the New Canada has packed with judges who are ideologically pro-gay rights. Whether a teacher in a Christian school will be allowed to criticize homosexual practice, whether it will still be legal to read, in a church, biblical passages denouncing it, all these things will be decided by the court.

It's remarkable, said Conservative leadership candidate Ted Morton last week, that a new drug is subjected to exhaustive tests to assess its effects. A proposed dam is studied for months, even years, to determine its environmental consequences. But Canada radically changes the legal definition of marriage and the family, the most central institution in any society, with no studies, no assessment of consequences, nothing.

Contemplating the "big picture" is Western Standard columnist, David Warren, a Toronto-based writer. In the May 2, 2005 issue he writes:

For their [the homosexual activists, MDV] aim goes beyond winning the right for gay couples to be married in civil courts. That might be a key battle, but the war is for bigger stakes.

It is for bigger stakes even than "gay rights." The real war, invisible to mainstream media blindly

engaged on one side of a movable front line, is between those defending the unambiguously Christian principles that underlay the society we inherited, and those seeking their destruction.

The usurping power is a negative; I think the purest negative yet encountered in the history of the West. Even Communism maintained a few, tawdry, positive ideals. There are no ideals in its successor ideology. In the name of undefined "human rights," a campaign of destruction is being waged against faith, family and freedom. In the name of "multiculturalism," the moral basis not only of the native Christian, but of every immigrant culture, is being eviscerated.


It is no accident that it is impossible to put a name to this usurping power: for it represents nihilism. Its motive force is unidentifiable, because this is the purest narcissism. Its ambition is a universal tyranny of some kind of "human rights Gestapo." And it works towards this ambition through the very collapse of the Christian order it seeks to replace with an anti-order.

One might debate Warren's assertion that unambiguously Christian principles underlay Canadian society, but historically those principles

were largely moral and in harmony with Scripture. But Warren is, I believe, wrong when he contends "that it is impossible to put a name to this usurping power...."

For us the name ought to be clear. It is not

merely a matter of being "anti-order" but ANTI-CHRISTIAN! This is an aspect of the development of the anti-christian kingdom that we know is coming (Matt. 24; II Thess. 2; Rev. 13).

"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred three-score and six" (Rev. 13:18). 

In the name of undefined "human rights," a campaign of destruction is being waged against faith, family and freedom.

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (1)

Introduction

The prophecy of Malachi, the last voice of the Old Testament, has special significance for those who live at the end of the New Testament era. As a book that describes end times and looks forward to better things, it retains its importance for those who live at the end of all ages and who are waiting for the better things of the everlasting and heavenly kingdom of Christ.

The book tells of covenant unfaithfulness — the unfaithfulness of God’s church and of His people in the last days of the Old Testament. The Jews had been cured of the sin of idolatry by the long years of the captivity in Babylon, but they had fallen into other sins and become unfaithful. This unfaithfulness was seen especially in “a spirit of proud, bigoted self-righteousness that claimed the favour of God with insolent haughtiness, at the very moment that this favour was forfeited by unbelief and neglect of duty.”* Their neglect of duty involved especially the mere external performance of religious duties, the despising of God’s ordinances in worship, and unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant.

Not only does that unfaithfulness match exactly the unfaithfulness of the church in these last days, but, as in Israel, the unfaithfulness of the church is not recog-

nized and all attempts to point it out are met with scorn and disbelief. Indeed, the Jews of Malachi’s day, like the church today, charged God with unfaithfulness, instead of turning from their own wickedness, when they did not receive the blessings He had promised. What Malachi describes, therefore, is so very much like the unfaithfulness of the church today that the book can only have been inspired by the Spirit of God.

The unfaithfulness of the church as described by Malachi is the dark background against which God reveals His unchangeable faithfulness and grace. He revealed His faithfulness then in continuing to preserve His church and in promising the coming of Christ as the one who would purge the church of its sins and bring it blessing and glory. Christ’s coming was seen by Malachi as the only cure for sin, and the promise of His coming as the Purifier of the church was the central message of the book for Judah. That promise of Christ’s coming and of cleansing, given through Malachi, looked forward not only to the first coming of Christ but also to the second, so that the book of Malachi retains its significance and relevance and is a revelation of God’s faithfulness today and of hope for the church’s final purification and salvation.

Because of its relevance, the book of Malachi is quoted or alluded to seven times in the New Testament. It is quoted in Romans 9:13; Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2, 3; and Luke 7:27 and alluded to in Matthew 3:3 and Luke 1:17 and 76.

In these references the New Testament echoes some of the main themes of Malachi, the coming of Jehovah’s messenger and the eternal purpose of God that lies behind all His dealings with His church.

The prophecies of Malachi, then, are words from God that the church very much needs to hear and heed. As much as Israel needed to hear them then, so much more does the church need to hear and heed them now. May it be so, through the work of the Lord as He comes to His temple.

The Author

Malachi is one of the three prophets of the restoration, that is, of the years following the return of Judah from captivity in Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, and the reestablishment of the Jews in their own land. Malachi, however, is later than the other two prophets, as we shall see.

We know next to nothing about him except his name, if indeed Malachi was his name. As in the case of Haggai, no information about his family or history is given. This shows us that the message he brings is not really his but God’s and that he is only God’s instrument or messenger in bringing God’s Word to God’s people. Who the man was did not matter then, and really does not matter now. We, like the Jews, must hear his prophecies as the inspired and infallible Word of God.

* T. V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, p. 104.

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As suggested, there is some dispute about the name "Malachi." Some believe that "Malachi" is the personal name of the author. Others believe that "Malachi" is not a personal name, but a title or description of the author's place in the kingdom of God and of the work that God had given him to do. They believe that Malachi is not a proper name because it means literally "my messenger," is similar to the description of Haggai in Haggai 1:13, and is the same word used in Malachi 3:1 and translated there "my messenger."

Those who believe that the name Malachi is only a description of the office of the book's author have made numerous guesses about his actual identity. Some, because Haggai is called the LORD's messenger in Haggai 1:13 (literally *malach*), believe that Haggai is the author of this book also. Calvin believed that the book's author was Ezra. But such attempts to name the author, if Malachi was not his name, are pure speculation. We believe that Malachi is the name of the book's author, especially because all the other Old Testament prophecies that begin with a superscription of this sort actually record the name of the author, i.e., Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, Haggai and Zechariah.

Even if Malachi is his proper name, the meaning of his name, "my messenger," is important. As a messenger of Jehovah, he prophesies of another messenger, John the Baptist, who would do the same work as himself but at the very beginning of the New Testament era. More importantly, he prophesies and pictures the great Messenger of Jehovah, the Messenger of the covenant who purifies the sons of Levi.

It should be noted, in connection with his name, that "messenger" and "angel" are the same word in Hebrew, the word *malach*. This is of special significance in chapter 3:1, which speaks of the messenger or angel of the covenant and of His coming. Not only does

3:1 show us that the messenger is Christ, but because messenger and angel are the same word in Hebrew we know that this messenger is also the *angel* of the covenant or the angel of Jehovah who appears throughout the Old Testament. This messenger or angel of the covenant is the main character in Malachi's prophecy.

The Date

There can be little doubt that the book of Malachi, as its position in the Old Testament suggests, is the last of all the books of the Old Testament. The book itself indicates in 1:6 and 3:1 that the temple had been rebuilt, making it later than Haggai's and Zechariah's prophecies, and there are other indications that date it to the time of Nehemiah, though no date is given in the book.

The primary evidence for Malachi's being a contemporary of Nehemiah is found in a comparison of the two books, which shows that Nehemiah and Malachi were dealing with the same sins, the sins of mixed marriages, formalism in worship, and neglect of tithes (compare Mal. 1:6-2:9 with Neh. 13:4-9, 29-30; Mal. 2:11-12 with Neh. 13:1-3, 23-27; and Mal. 3:8-12 with Neh. 10:3-39 and 13:10-13). Both Malachi and Nehemiah also mention the covenant with Levi (Mal. 2:4 and Neh. 13:29).

We should remember that Nehemiah spent two terms in Judah as governor, the two terms separated by ten to twelve years. He had first come during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes, identified in history as Artaxerxes Longimanus, to help the Jews rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (approximately 444 BC; Neh. 1:1). He remained in Jerusalem about 12 years (Neh. 4:14). At that time he had already opposed and corrected some of the evils into which Judah had fallen. He then returned to Babylon for a time (Neh. 13:6).

When he returned the second time to Jerusalem around 424 BC, near the end of the reign of Artaxerxes, he found many new evils in Judah, and it was during this time especially that he was forced to deal with the same sins against which Malachi prophesies. Malachi is almost certainly, therefore, a contemporary of Nehemiah and so also of Ezra (Ezra had come to Jerusalem with a second group of returned captives about 13 years before Nehemiah came, Ezra 7:8, and was still living when Nehemiah arrived; Neh. 8:9). Malachi must have prophesied, therefore, about ninety years after Haggai and Zechariah, a little over four hundred years before Christ.

In that context his prophecy shows the need for Christ's coming and looks forward to His coming as the next great event in the history of redemption.


The Divisions

The book of Malachi is divided into six disputations, introduced by a superscription (1:1) and ending with a brief summary (4:4-6). In the first disputation (1:2-5) Malachi speaks in general terms of the unfaithfulness of the people and rebukes them for refusing to love and honor God. In the second (1:6-2:9) he begins to point out specific sins of the people, speaking especially of the sins of the priests. In the third disputation he deals with the sins of mixed marriages and of divorce (2:10-16). In the fourth he prophesies the coming of Christ and of His forerunner (2:17-3:6), and in the fifth returns again to the sins of the people, this time rebuking them for their neglect of tithes and offerings (3:7-12). The sixth and last section (3:13-4:3) brings more general reproofs and warnings, as well as the promise of better things to come. The book then concludes with an exhortation to remember the law of Moses, enforced by a reference to the coming day of the Lord (4:4-6).

The English chapter divisions,

therefore, do not follow the actual divisions of the book and are at times misleading. Chapter 2:1, for example, divides God's word to the priests into two parts and might leave the impression that there are

two different messages for them. Also, the fact that chapter 3 begins as it does, leads to our overlooking the fact that the promise of the coming of the messenger of the covenant is an answer to the question of unfaithful Judah, "Where is

the God of judgment?" in chapter 2:17. It would probably be better, therefore, to read the book following its actual divisions, than by following the English chapter divisions. 

The Power & Government of the Church (concl.) The Calling of Churches to Federate (2)

Two fundamental principles of Reformed church government are the autonomy of the local instituted church and the fact that a true church is called to unite with other faithful churches in a federation of churches, often referred to as a denomination. The calling of churches to federate was set forth in the previous article, over against the error of Independentism. This article continues this same subject, first considering the error of Congregationalism, since it is closely related to Independentism, and concluding by setting forth some of the benefits of being a member of a Reformed federation of churches.

Independentism and Congregationalism

Different types of church government have names that indicate who it is that is ruling in the church. A presbyterian type of church government is a rule by elders. The term *presbyterian* comes from one of the Greek words for the office of elder and literally means "elder." An episcopal type

of church government is a rule by bishops. The term *episcopal* comes from the other Greek word for elder and means "overseer." As was discussed previously, those with an episcopal type of church government deny that this term and the term that literally means "elder" are two terms for one and the same office. They insist that a bishop (or overseer) is one exalted above all the churches in a certain geographical area. This error has already been refuted. A third type is called a *congregational* type of church government. Churches with this type of government effectively deny that God has appointed a special ruling office in the church, and insist that only the decisions of congregational meetings are settled and binding. Historically, the errors of Independentism and Congregationalism have often gone together.

Many churches today opt for the congregational type of church government. If they have a body of elders, those elders do not actually rule in the congregation. They may propose matters to the congregation for their approval, and they are called to ensure that decisions taken at congregational meetings are carried out, but they have no authority to make settled and binding decisions. In other words, they do not really have any author-

ity to rule in the church.

Scripture, however, clearly teaches to the contrary. Authority is the right to rule, and the elders as a body have been given the right to rule in the congregation. As has been stated, one of the terms for the office of elder literally means "overseer." God says to the elders, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (I Pet. 5:2). Elsewhere He says that the elders that *rule* well shall be counted worthy of double honor (I Tim. 5:17). Elders, therefore, have authority to rule, authority that has been given to them by God. This means that a consistory has the right, and the duty, to make judgments based on God's Word, and that their decisions are settled and binding upon the members of the congregation.

Elders, of course, must not abuse their authority. They must remember that those who rule are called to *serve* those over whom they have oversight, and that they can be said to be doing this only when the decisions they make are based squarely upon the Word of God. They have no right to make up rules at their own pleasure. Nor do they have the right to demand to know all the private details of the lives of the members. Their authority is limited to overseeing the spiritual welfare of the congregation, ensuring that the

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preaching of the Word of God is sound, and that the members are upright in their faith and walk.

It should be added at this point that the members of the congregation have the right to protest decisions of the consistory, and if their protest is not upheld, they have the right to appeal to classis and eventually to synod. The point here is that the elders do have real authority to make binding decisions. Christ gave them this authority to represent Him and to serve under Him. Those who hold to a congregational form of church government are in effect denying that Christ rules as King in the church, and that He does so through those whom He has chosen and qualified to represent Him.

Congregational Independentism and the Cambridge Platform

As has already been stated, there are those who adopt the principle of Independentism while remaining part of a denomination of churches. Such instituted churches insist that decisions made at broader gatherings of their denomination are not binding upon them unless they ratify the decisions themselves. And if the denomination as a whole makes a decision with which they do not agree, then they feel that they can remain in the denomination while not abiding by the decision.

This idea is very common and has a long history. A document known as the *Cambridge Platform* (hereafter CP) set forth this position in 1648. It is the book of church order drawn up in New England by the leaders of the Congregational churches. The Congregationalists rejected the presbyterian form of church government that at that time had recently been adopted at the Westminster Assembly, which formed the Presbyterian Creeds in 1647. The CP states in no uncertain terms that synods have no right to exercise any authority whatsoever:

It belongs unto Synods and councils ... not to exercise church censures in way of discipline, nor any other act of church authority or jurisdiction... (16.4).

The CP allows for churches without elders:

In such churches where there are no elders, imposition of hands may be performed by some of the brethren orderly chosen by the church thereunto (9.4).

It permits the congregation to hold a congregational meeting and depose their elders:

And if the church [i.e. the members meeting together at a congregational meeting – JAL] have power to choose their officers and ministers, then, in case of manifest unworthiness and delinquency, they have power also to depose them... (8.7).

In other words, they insist that a group of believers who have willingly joined themselves together are a church, even without special officebearers.

A company of professed believers, ecclesiastically confederate ... are a church before they have officers, and without them... (10.2).

These quotes illustrate the connection between Independentism (the denial that a broader ecclesiastical assembly has real authority) and Congregationalism (the denial that elders have real authority). It is not surprising, therefore, that some churches who have fallen into the error of Independentism have moved also in the direction of Congregationalism. Both errors involve a denial that Christ, the King of the church, governs the church through those whom He has chosen to represent Him.

Some Benefits of Being Part of a Federation

Churches that have gone the route of Independentism have often

soon found themselves having many difficulties. Where will they find a pastor, once their present pastor leaves, retires, or dies? Who will train the pastors? To whom will they turn when there is strife in the congregation, or between the consistory and the members? Many and serious are the problems associated with Independentism, problems for which there is a good solution in a federation of like-minded churches.

A federation of churches helps to provide the churches with the pastors they need. The churches work together to support a seminary that trains the pastors, and a church without a pastor knows the men who are qualified and eligible to be called to be their pastor. When a church for a time is without a pastor, the other ministers within the denomination can help them by providing them with pulpit supply.


The broader assemblies of the denomination are there to appeal to during times of controversy and strife. A member who feels he has been wronged by a decision of his consistory has somewhere to go. And a consistory that feels they need some advice on how to deal with a difficult matter have a body to which they can turn.

The broader assemblies also help to ensure uniformity of doctrine and discipline. Historically, churches that have loosely joined themselves together, while adopting the principle of Independentism, have soon differed widely from one another in doctrine and practice. This is very much the case today. There are many denominations in which a unity in doctrine and practice simply is not found.

There are also financial benefits to joining a federation of churches. Small congregations often have difficulties from a financial point of view. If they are independent, they have to bear this burden alone. But in a federation of churches, the larger churches are able to give a considerable amount of help to these smaller churches. In addition, the deacons in one church may need

help to provide for all those in their congregation who need benevolence. Then, just as the saints in Macedonia and Achaia helped out the saints in Jerusalem during a time of famine (Rom. 15:26), the churches work together to help the saints in other churches, and in this way also promote the covenant fellowship of like-minded believers.

In these and other ways, such as performing the work of missions, the churches in a federation promote and reflect the unity of the body of Christ. We live toward the end of the last days, and there are relatively few who still hold to the truths of Scripture in the areas of doctrine, worship, and church government. Nevertheless, we must

continue to strive to manifest the unity of the church as much as possible. This is what our Savior commanded us to do. And, in the way of submitting to the authority of our King, we will experience blessings and communion with Him and one another, while we wait for the glorious day when He returns for us on the clouds of glory. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

Can a Woman Forget Her Sucking Child?

The Mother

With a beauty that never pales, the prince of poets celebrated in song the tie that binds the mother to her child, which she bore in sorrow, fed with milk at her breast, and had carried for so long under her heart, as that which “unites *the blood.*”

The estimate was correct. The love of mother for the child she bore does not spring from a tendency of soul, but from the blood, and therefore love in wedlock stands higher, because “stronger is the tie of the couple that, hand in hand, joined not to separate,” for they love each other from inclination.

You need but to compare the world of our human life with the world of animals, to see at once the truth of this antithesis.

If the love of mother for her child were indeed the outflow of a higher inclination of soul and of self-denial, you would have to find this beautiful trait among people, but not among animals.

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Yet the *opposite* is the case.

You find this love of her who was permitted to give life for what came to life frequently more strong with animals than with human beings.

Birds and domestic animals vie with one another to make exhibition of this, and already in early youth we read all sorts of interesting stories of little animal mothers that sacrificed themselves for their young.

Yea, more still, even Holy Scripture has so high an estimate of this animal love that in terms of it our Savior expresses His own love for His people, as when He compares this His love with that of a mother-hen that covers her chickens with her wings, while on the other hand in Isaiah 49:15, our God assumes at least the possibility of the human mother that can forget her sucking child.

For it reads: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she would not have compassion on the son of her womb?” And then there follows: “Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee.”

Somber prophecy of what did happen, when it came to the destruction of Jerusalem. For then, according to the dreadful historic narrative, in the insanity of hunger, mothers in Jerusalem killed

their own sucklings, to feed themselves with their flesh.



Would you therefore count mother-love for her child a small matter, and as something of minor importance?

You know that in more than one land, such as in France and elsewhere, especially among upper classes, this love is ever more lightly counted. She who became mother soon abandons her child to the care of nurse and wet-nurse, and with many a mother all the concern with such a young child consists in this, that mornings and evenings she makes a short call at the nursery, or at times receives the beautifully dressed infant and makes a show of it in her luxurious drawing-room.

Even this some mothers deem too much. In France already two or three months after the birth there are many who send the little one far from home with a nurse to the country, that nothing may interfere with their pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment.

So in Paris, little mothers among animals do not act, but so frequently do they who become mothers among women.

Yea, there are those who pur-

posely allow the milk in their breast which God gave them for their child, to dry up and disappear.

Thus in every sense there is reason, not to undervalue the love of mother for her child, but rather to hold it high among us, lest with us also the practice gains foothold that elsewhere is established to the shame of the name of mankind.



For the love of mother for her child is very like the love of an animal for her young, but it is also different.

With an animal, love operates *exclusively* by instinct, is nothing but an impulse of nature, and shows itself therefore always in the same form and in the same way.

But so it is not with human mothers.

With our mothers this love for the child is a mixed phenomenon. It certainly springs from the blood. For no small part is instinct also common to her. But yet with the mother it is bound and subjected to the control of her moral life.

Not the animal, but she, can abandon her child to others or neglect it. And also, not the animal, but she, can carry that love up higher, ennoble and sanctify it.

Here applies therefore the gift of distinction.

As regards the love of such a mother for her child, you have to distinguish between two component parts, on one side what God instilled into her mother-nature, and on the other side what she did with this.

For what is instilled in her by God, the honor is not hers, but His. This is the nature of all mothers, and common to all including domestic animals and birds.

By itself there is nothing noble in this, bears no moral character, and is absolutely no evidence of self-denial.

A young woman who thus far lived exclusively for herself and vanity, and now having become mother at once forgets her vanity,

is interested in and by her child, and for months together nurses her child, lives for her child, plays with the child and enjoys herself, may thereby become accustomed to self-denial and weaned from vanity; but by all this strong mother-love she offers no proof yet in the least of moral devotion.

What she does, the mother-hen in her way does too.

In this therefore God is great, not she, and He alone is glorified, who increased this beautiful trait in the mother as in the animal – a trait that commonly is even more strongly evident among primitive peoples than among civilized nations, in the country more mightily than in our refined cities.



But what the animal lacks, the human mother possesses, namely: by reason of her moral nature, she can either direct this love and sanctify it, or go contrary to it and sin it away.

The latter she can do in either one of two ways: She can silence the voice of nature and commit her child to the care of nurse or governess; or she can let her love for her child degenerate into infatuation for her child, misuse her child as a doll, and by her passionate attachment to the fruit of her womb already from the first beginning spoil her child.

It can also be otherwise, and, God be praised, among those who confess the Lord it frequently is otherwise.

A mother can also elevate and ennoble what in her nature is common with the animal. With moral insight and tact she can take this trait of nature as starting point to love her child *in the faith*. For God's sake and from an inner sense of duty she can devote herself to her children. And, putting aside all maternal vanity and passion, she can so direct and train her child already in those first beginnings of life, as bears evidence of the rule of higher aim.

Then the mother sees in her infant not merely the fruit of her womb, but far more a little creature who by His wondrous power has been called into being, and by Him, the Father of spirits, has wondrously been embroidered in her womb.

Then in that young infant she sees not merely a bundle of soft and tender flesh, but a little human being in which hides a *soul*, perchance one of God's elect, and therefore loved of God as the apple of His eye.

Then there is prayer for that infant before she sees it with her eye. Already during her carriage she avoids everything that can be of injury to her child. She struggles through her birth throes holding herself fast to the God of her life, that if possible she might bring forth her little one. After the birth there is thanksgiving and making great God's glorious name. As soon as circumstances permit, she seeks baptism for her darling. The urge of her soul and the desire of her hearts is that her child may bear the seal of the covenant. And she prays, not merely that God will spare her darling, but rather, that He may impart wisdom unto her to show her child that real, that substantial, that glorious love whereby from the very beginning she may convey not merely impressions, but *good* impressions to her little one.

And so real mother-love far excels the love of the mother-hen for her chickens.

There is indeed a common point of departure, but what the mother-hen lacks, the human mother shows that she possesses, even a higher, a nobler, a holier love, which what nature merely began, in and through grace makes perfect.



And when finally it is asked whether in Christian circles this higher, this nobler, this sanctified love bears rule, then there is truly

cause for thanksgiving, but no less for complaint, and the reason of this backwardness for no small part is found with the mother of years, who gives her daughters in marriage without having prepared them sufficiently for their task of life to come.

This is mostly left to take care of itself. It is thought that after marriage, with the child, true mother-love will come of itself. Training, direction, warning is here at least thought superfluous.

And then this very thing avenges itself.


The young mother is then presently so altogether infatuated and charmed by her first mother-wealth, that she can think of nothing else, and almost will-less abandons herself to the impulse and passion of mother-love, and excludes from this her faith and her high calling.

This, too, will become different and better.

When presently holy baptism will resume its place of honor in

our midst, from this holy sacrament the spiritual call will go forth that will impart to mother-love in our midst another, a higher, a holier character.

Not to say: "My child that I have borne," but the testimony: "A little creature of God, which I have received from Him, and which must be consecrated to Him," shall obtain the higher keynote.

And God, whose is the blessing of children, shall become great again in the mother-heart. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

In a letter to their congregation the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC reminded their fellow church members that if they needed a good book to take on their summer vacation, they could possibly find a title that sounded interesting in the bookshelf the Evangelism Committee maintains in their church basement. In fact, one of their older correspondents related to them that he helped his grandchildren with their school tuition by paying them to read material from the bookshelf. We wonder if that offer included reading this magazine?

We take this opportunity to remind our readers in the Chicago, IL area that the Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts can now be heard on WYLL 1160 on Sunday mornings at 8 A.M. These broadcasts are supported through the evangelism efforts of all our Chicago-land churches.

The Evangelism Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI makes and distributes audiotapes of the *Beacon Lights*, a magazine for our denomination's young people, for the blind or visually impaired. These tapes are free for the asking.

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

If you or anyone you know could benefit from receiving these audio copies of the *Beacon Lights*, you may contact Bill Leep at 616-990-5944 or Bill Leep@innotecgroup.com.

Mission Activities

Mr. & Mrs. David Moelker were in Fayetteville, NC Sunday, July 31. Mr. Moelker was there as representative of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee. While there Mr. Moelker was able to lead a Bible study and to help the group with local contacts. The DMC is planning once-a-month visits to help further the cause of missions and to help encourage the saints there.

The weekend of July 22-24, Rev. A. denHartog, along with Elders Jim Kuiper and Darrel Huisken, from the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for the Pittsburgh Mission, visited the field for their biannual visit. The delegation met with Pittsburgh's Steering Committee, as well as personally with others in the group. Rev. denHartog also preached both services on Sunday.

Missionary pastor Rev. Angus Stewart, with Mary his wife, returned to the United States July 25 for about a month's worth of vacation. Vacation may not be the best word to use, since plans called for Rev. Stewart to preach every Sun-

day in August, as well as give at least two presentations on his labors in Ballymena, Northern Ireland and spend time with various committees and consistories reviewing the work.

While Rev. Stewart was away from his pulpit in Ballymena and the saints of the Covenant PR Fellowship there, Rev. Jai Mahtani, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, went to Northern Ireland, with his wife Esther, to preach for the group for three Lord's Days. From accounts provided by Rev. Mahtani to Bethel it sounds as if the three weeks spent there were very pleasant, active, fruitful, and blessed.

Congregation Activities

In early July, the congregation of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI met after their evening service for a light lunch and a short program to welcome their seminary intern, Mr. Andy Lanning, his wife Stephanie, and their two children into their fellowship.

Sunday evening, August 7, Rev. Garrett Eriks was installed as the ninth pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Rev. Ron VanOverloop, pastor of the Byron Center PRC and a son of Hudsonville, preached for Hudsonville, choosing as his text Acts 14:26, under the theme "Committed unto the Grace of God." Prof. Barry Gritters con-

ducted the installation. The following Lord's Day, August 14, Rev. Eriks preached his inaugural sermon based on the Word found in II Corinthians 5:18-20 under the theme "The Ministry of Reconciliation." In between these two Sundays, Hudsonville also came together on August 10 for a welcome evening for Rev. Eriks and Rev. Stewart. The evening consisted of a short program, dinner, and then some volleyball, beanbag games, roller blade hockey, or for those less active older members, just good Christian fellowship.

A special 10-year anniversary program was held Sunday evening, July 31, for members of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI. The congregation joined together for an uplifting evening of song and fellowship in thanksgiving to God.

At a congregational meeting held July 18, the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI voted to redo the flooring and carpeting in their sanctuary, as well as to purchase new pew Bibles.

In early August each family and individual confessing member of the Hull, IA PRC was encour-

aged to read an informational sheet and complete a questionnaire-survey regarding the possible organization of a new daughter congregation.

Minister Activities

The Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI has extended a call to Rev. Daniel Kleyn to serve as Eastern Home Missionary for our churches.

The congregation of First PRC in Holland, MI has extended a call to Rev. D. Kleyn to serve as their next pastor. 

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Announcements

NOTICE

Changed e-mail addresses:
Clerk of Grandville PRC Consistory —
dmkey@verizon.net

Bulletin Clerk of Cornerstone PRC —
donjannb@comcast.net

Please make the changes in your
2005 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook*.

REMINDER

This is the last issue of the volume year. If you desire to have your copies bound, please bring the entire set (October 1, 2004 — September 15, 2005) to the seminary by October 15. The cost of having your own *SBs* bound is still \$13.00.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to David and Susan King and children, and Michael King in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. ROGER KING.

May they find their comfort in the Word of God in II Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 26, 2005, we will rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

RICHARD and JANICE REGNERUS, as they celebrate their 25th anniversary, the Lord willing.

With praise and thanks we glorify our heavenly Father for sustaining and blessing them with these years together. We thank God, also, for guiding them as parents as they labor to train us up in the fear of His name through love and covenantal instruction. We pray the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in their marriage, according to His will. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ✿ Jon & Kathie Regnerus
Jaeden, Kasia
- ✿ Jackie, Dan, & Joe

Randolph, Wisconsin

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. C. Jonker, Mr. and Mrs. C. Kregel, and Mr. and Mrs. S. Hoeksema in the death of their sister, sister-in-law, and grandmother,

MRS. GERTRUDE HOEKSEMA.

May they be comforted by God's word, "For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:17, 18).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Jack Brands, Vice-president

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 15, 2005, our parents and grandparents,

PETE and PHYLLIS MIEDEMA, will celebrate 45 years of marriage. We are so thankful to our heavenly Father for the many years with which He has blessed them. Their godly example and instruction in God's covenant truths have been a constant and great blessing to us. We are so thankful for the years of love, devotion, and sacrifices they have made. Our prayer is that our Lord will continue to bless and keep them in His sovereign love and care.

"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

- ✿ Rick Miedema (in glory)
- ✿ Joy DeGroot
Jeffry, Cassandra
- ✿ Brad and Ruth Brower
Austin, Brendan, Alexandria,
Colton, Danielle, Sammantha
- ✿ David and Julie Miedema
Richard, Mitchell, Trenton

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 21, 2005, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, **MR. and MRS. WILBUR BRUINSMA**, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. There is no greater blessing for covenant children than to have parents who love, instruct, and admonish them in the fear of God's name. We are grateful that God has given such parents to us, and has spared them for us these many years. They have been an example of faithful perseverance in the truth to their children and grandchildren. May God bless and keep them in the time He yet gives them together.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

- ✿ John and Judy Kalsbeek
- ✿ Lewis and Donna Bruinsma
- ✿ Rev. Wilbur and Mary Bruinsma
- ✿ Keith and Wanda Bruinsma
29 grandchildren
32 great grandchildren

Lansing, Illinois

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 20, 2005 our parents,

REV. and MRS. DALE KUIPER,

celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We, their children, praise and thank God for allowing them these years together. We are so thankful for the many years of covenant instruction that we received in their home, and the many sacrifices that they made to give us a Christian upbringing. May God bless them in their marriage and care for them in the years to come. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

- ✿ David and Michelle Kuiper
Morgan, Jordan, Lauren,
Addison, & Mason
- ✿ Brad and Lynn Kuiper
Mackenzie, Lindsey, & Taylor
- ✿ Chris and Tanya Kuiper
- ✿ Calvin and Bethany DenHartog
John
- ✿ Philip and Laura Kuiper
Braden, Andrew, & Jacob
- ✿ Victor and Lisa Kuiper
Nicholas & Ethan
- ✿ Dwight and Leshia Kuiper
Cameron & Courtney
- ✿ Jason and Lois Engelsma
Evan
- ✿ Dana Kuiper

Jenison, Michigan