

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

*In every thing give thanks:
for this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus
concerning you.*

I Thessalonians 5:18

Vol. 68, No. 4
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CONTENTS:

Meditation — Rev. James D. Slopsema	
Rejoice in the Lord Always	75
Editorial — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
The Standard Bearer: Holding the Traditions (2)	77
Letters	78
Go Ye Into All the World — Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop	
Mission Principles (VII), The Methods	79
Contribution — Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma	
Anabaptism and the Means of Grace (2)	82
A Word Fitly Spoken — Rev. Dale H. Kuiper	
Laughter	86
Search the Scriptures — Rev. Carl J. Haak	
Malachi, Lesson I, Overview of Malachi	84
Day of Shadows — Rev. John A. Heys	
That Awesome and Important Calling	87
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — Rev. Charles J. Terpstra	
The Sovereignty of God (3)	89
Book Reviews	91
News From Our Churches — Mr. Benjamin Wigger	94
Report of Classis East — Mr. Jon J. Huiskens	95

In This Issue . . .

We would expect to see, in this issue, some reference to the calling of the child of God to thankfulness — with the national day of Thanksgiving just ahead in the United States, and just recently observed in Canada. Rev. Slopsema did not disappoint us in that regard, drawing our attention in his Meditation to the admonition of the apostle Paul that the child of God not only rejoice in the Lord, but rejoice in the Lord *always* — that is, in every circumstance of life. In other words, we never in this life find ourselves in such straits that thanksgiving must arise in our hearts *in spite of* circumstances, but always *because of* circumstances — whatever they are, for *all things* work together for an eternal welfare.

An unexpected treat is the poem entitled "Thanksgiving," written by Thelma Westra, a member of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Mrs. Westra emphasizes too, in that poem, the contentment of the child of God, "circumstances notwithstanding," and concludes with the proper acknowledgment that heartfelt thanksgiving to God is in reality *His* work, not *ours*.

In "Letters" a thoughtful question by a perceptive reader in New York gives our editor occasion to address, briefly, the distinction between, on the one hand, a fervent experiential spirituality, which is not only proper but necessary in the personal life of the child of God, and, on the other, an "experimental religion" which elevates *feeling* above *faith*. What place do emotions have in our life? For the Reformed perspective on this important question, read "Letters." Our hope, by the way, is that more of our readers will make active use of "Letters." This rubric will continue to have a lively place in our magazine only with your participation in it.

Elsewhere in this issue Rev. Bruinsma concludes his two-part series on Anabaptism and the Means of Grace, which, as you will recall, he started but could not finish in our special issue on the Reformed Conflict with Anabaptism. And Rev. Haak, in "Search the Scriptures," begins a series on the book of Malachi. As was true also of his studies in "Ruth," this new series consists of outlines which Rev. Haak prepared for use in a society in his congregation in Lynden, WA. They served well there. So, you might want to save them for possible use in your own.

D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

Philippians 4:4

Last month the saints in Canada observed a national day of Thanksgiving. This month we do the same in the States.

This national day of Thanksgiving is a day in which the leaders of our nations call us to give thanks to God for all the bounties He has given to us.

We understand that our thanksgiving is not to be limited to mere material things. As saints of God we are also to give thanks for spiritual blessings. Nor is our thanksgiving to be limited to one day of the year. We are to thank God every day for His blessings to us.

But to give thanks to God and be a thankful people we must be those who rejoice in the Lord always.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

* * * * *

In his letter to the Philippian church Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Earlier in this letter Paul has pointed out that on the basis of Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father, God has highly exalted Jesus, given Him a name above every name, and made Him Lord over all. God accomplished this through the ascension of Jesus into heaven (Phil. 2:6-11).

Now in this concluding chapter Paul speaks again of the same lordship of Jesus.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

In this connection we must distinguish between Jesus' lordship over the creation in general, including the ungodly, and His lordship over the church. Jesus rules absolutely and sovereignly as Lord over both the creation and the church. However, over the world God rules in His power, whereas over the church He rules in grace.

What concerns us here is the lordship of Jesus over the church and His gracious rule of her.

In the Bible times a lord was a slave owner.

Several things are noteworthy of the relation between a lord and his slaves. First, the lord owned his slaves. They were his personal property. For that reason the lord also had absolute control over the lives of his slaves. They lived and died by his word. But for that reason a lord also was responsible for the care of his slaves. It was his responsibility to feed and clothe his slaves, to care for their every need.

In much the same way Jesus is Lord in His church.

By nature we do not belong to Jesus but to another. Spiritually we are the slaves of the devil himself. This slavery is the result of our original sin in Adam. As punishment for this original sin in the garden God gave us all over to the spiritual control of the devil to be ruled by him as a lord rules his servants.

What a cruel bondage this is. For the devil leads us into the way of sin and every abomination before God.

This in turn brings upon us the misery of God's judgment. God judges our sin in this life with the misery of failed marriages, broken homes, strife, conflict, alcoholism, depression And after this life there is the agony of God's wrath in hell.

However, Jesus has redeemed us from all horrible slavery. He has bought us with a price, the supreme price of His own life on the cross. As a result the devil's ownership over us has been broken. Jesus is now our Lord and Master.

As our Lord, Jesus rules us absolutely and sovereignly. He sets before us the law of His heavenly Father and calls us to serve Him accordingly.

This rule over us is not grievous and harsh but glorious and beautiful. For by the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit Jesus so changes our hearts that we not only delight to do His will but also are able to do it. Through the power of grace we are so transformed that we find great joy in serving Jesus as Lord.

Besides this, Jesus as our Lord also provides us with all our needs. He provides us daily with food and drink, clothing and shelter. He also cares for our spiritual needs. From Him we receive grace to bear every burden, strength when we are weak, courage when we are afraid, peace in the most troubled times. Our every need He provides.

In fact, He makes all things work together for our eternal salvation and welfare.

This He is able to do because He is Lord over all.

* * * * *

In this Lord we are to rejoice.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

To rejoice in the Lord means that we find our joy in the fact that Jesus is our Lord.

What a great blessing to have Jesus as our Lord! What a privilege to be called into the service of His name! What a comfort to know that, as our Lord, Jesus provides for our every need!

We rejoice in the Lord when Jesus' lordship over us is the source of great joy in our lives. We rejoice in the Lord when Jesus' lordship over us is the joy of our life.

We are called not only to rejoice in the Lord but to do so always, i.e., in every circumstance of life.

We are to rejoice in the Lord, for example, when we prosper and the horn of plenty is full. Is there food and drink on our table? Do we have clothing and shelter? Are we healthy and well? Is there peace and prosperity in our homes? Rejoice in the Lord. For all these things are the blessing of the Lord Jesus to us, who daily provides for all our needs.

But we must also rejoice in the Lord when there is want. Sometimes the lot of the saints is that of sickness, death, poverty, hunger, discord. Even then we must rejoice in the Lord. For in the midst of all these sufferings Jesus is still Lord and He will certainly care for us. As Lord He will provide for our every need. In fact, as Lord He will make all these things work together for our good and salvation.

Rejoice in the Lord always!

And again I say, Rejoice.

The apostle Paul repeats the admonition to rejoice in the Lord because of our tendency not to rejoice in Him always.

We often lose sight of the fact that Jesus is our Lord.

We do this, for example, in the face of adversity and suffering. Very quickly we forget that Jesus is our Lord, who cares for us and will make our present sufferings work for our eternal welfare. When that happens, we quickly fall into despair and have no joy at all.

But perhaps more often we forget that Jesus is our Lord in the midst

of prosperity. In that case we rejoice in the plenty we have. But our rejoicing is not a rejoicing in the Lord. When this happens we inevitably use our plenty in a way that is different from what is the purpose of our Lord who gave it to us. Instead of using it in the service of His name, we use it sinfully, for the sake of our own pleasure and selfish ends.

And so it is that Paul repeats himself.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

If we will rejoice in the Lord always we must busy ourselves with the Word and by much prayer. For the Word of God speaks to us of our Lord, the great benefits we enjoy in His service and His wonderful care for us. Through prayer we learn to rely upon Jesus as our Lord and receive from Him all the riches of grace. Without this it is impossible to rejoice in the Lord.

* * * * *

If we will give thanks to God, we must know how to rejoice in the Lord always.

Even as we are called to rejoice in the Lord always, we are also called

to give thanks to God in everything (I Thess. 5:18).

This means that we are to give thanks to God whether we find ourselves in riches or poverty, health or sickness, war or peace, life or death. No matter what the circumstance, we are to give thanks to God.

Quite obviously this is possible only when we rejoice in the Lord always. For only those who have joy can be thankful. The despondent, who have no joy, have nothing for which they can be thankful.

But more importantly, only those who rejoice in the Lord can truly be thankful to God. They are thankful to God in the midst of prosperity, for they understand that all their abundance comes ultimately from the hand of God, their heavenly Father, and is designed as a blessing of His grace.

But they also have something to be thankful for in the midst of suffering and poverty. Jesus is their Lord. And as their Lord He will care for them, provide for their every need, and make all things work together for their good. For this they are very thankful to their God.

In everything give thanks.

To this end, rejoice in the Lord.

And again I say, Rejoice. □

THANKSGIVING

Thelma Westra

I thank the Lord for countless blessings daily sent;
For, circumstances notwithstanding, making me content.
For gifts of health, but also gifts of death and pain,
For pleasant sunny days, but also icy wind and rain.
For warmth and shelter, clothing, and for food in vast supply;
For mountain, lake, the flow'ring tree, the butterfly.
For loving family, with joyful celebrations
Who also share my griefs with me and tribulations.
For scores of friends, who in my need were glad to give;
For opportunities to serve when others too need help to live.
Yet most of all, I thank my Heav'nly Father for His love
In sending One, His own begotten Son, from heav'n above
To suffer and to die to make me free from every sin
And give me peace and joy, and knowledge that within
The trials sent, His love for me is ever shining through.
His everlasting arms around me strengthen and renew,
And when I give Him thanks, He shows to me by grace divine
That He has placed Thanksgiving in my heart -- 'tis His, not mine!

Editorial

The Standard Bearer: Holding the Traditions (2)

(The preceding editorial in this series noted that there is an illicit holding of tradition. One form is that of the Roman Catholic Church. Another form is that condemned by Jesus in the Pharisees. This article picks up the subject at this point. — Ed.)

Now the ministry of Paul, great apostle of freedom, was unrelenting warfare against this legalistic holding of the traditions, against what he calls, in Galatians 1:14, "the traditions of my fathers." This makes it all the more striking that he commands believers to "hold the traditions." This is what this most determined enemy of illegitimate tradition does in II Thessalonians 2:15: "hold the traditions which ye have been taught." He uses the same word as that used in Mark 7 for the vain doctrines of the Pharisees. He uses the same verb for honoring the traditions as that used in Mark 7 to describe the wicked observance of the Pharisees: "hold." Jesus condemned the Pharisees for holding their traditions. Paul commands Christians to hold the traditions.

There is a difference.

Paul refers to the gospel-truths taught by the apostles of Christ — doctrines that are to be believed and commandments that govern the Christian life. These are handed over to the saints by the Word of God. The church of Paul's day received them partly through the teaching of the apostles and partly through the Scriptures. We receive them through the Scriptures.

These truths about doctrines to be believed, about right worship, about church government, and about the Christian walk, we must hold. The exhortation is urgent. This is implied in the very nature of the traditions: they are the truth and will of God. This is their value. The urgency is expressed in the command in II Thessalonians 2:15. "Hold" is forceful: "hold on for dear life," or "hold with might and main." You think of the shipwrecked sailor holding on to the plank that saves him. Or, you think of a mother clasping her child against someone who threatens that child. Besides, the command is, "Stand fast, and hold." A church that stands in the love of God by the Spirit will hold the traditions. Abandonment, one by one, of the traditions shows that the church has already fallen.

The context lends urgency to the imperative. The summons to hold the traditions immediately follows the prophecy of the great falling away that precedes the coming of Christ and the prophecy of the coming of the man of sin who will delude still more churches and professing Christians. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions."

This is what we are doing when we maintain the creedal Reformed faith, worship, church government, and life — the Reformed tradition. For the Reformed tradition is, in its various aspects, the traditions handed down by the apostles in the Scriptures, as can readily be demonstrated by comparing this tradition with the Scriptures.

Our calling is to maintain the

Reformed tradition. It is not our calling to create a new theology, to invent a new form of worship, to hammer out a new church polity, and to shape a new Christian life. We have no business doing this. This would be the grossest disobedience to the command of the apostle, "hold the traditions." Precisely this is underway in Reformed churches today, as in many other churches. This is the falling away foretold in II Thessalonians 2:3.

There is a body of doctrine. There is a definite worship. There is a prescribed and time-tested government. There is a defined Christian life. Hold it!

*Church history proves
how difficult it is
for churches to hold
the traditions.*

This is not easy. Church history proves how difficult it is for churches to hold the traditions. It requires resolve. It demands effort. It calls for courage. Joshua's parting words to Israel apply: "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 23:6). Today, all the emphasis is on church growth and mission. Few acknowledge the tremendous struggle that is necessary just to maintain the fundamentals of the Christian faith. But this is the emphasis of

Christ in His charge to the seven churches of Asia Minor. He praises Pergamos and Philadelphia for holding fast His Name and keeping His Word (Rev. 2:13; 3:8). He calls Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia to hold fast that which they have (Rev. 2:25; 3:3; 3:11).

Although we may not boast, since our holding the traditions is due to the grace of God that chose us to salvation "through ... belief of the truth" and that called us by the gospel (II Thess. 2:13, 14), it is remarkable that the Protestant Reformed Churches are still doing this after 65 years. It is remarkable that the *Standard Bearer* is holding the traditions in its 65th year. No one on earth praises us for this, but the apostle of Christ does. In I Corinthians 11:2, he writes, "Now I praise you, brothers, that you keep the traditions, just as I handed them over to you."

This points out something about the way in which we are to hold the traditions. The manner of holding them is important. When the apostle says, "just as I delivered them," he makes plain that we must hold the traditions carefully. There must be doctrinal precision; pure worship; orderly church government; and a holiness in walk that pays attention to the details.

If the Bible teaches election and reprobation, we confess double predestination. If the Bible teaches that preaching is the heart of Christian worship, we allow nothing to detract

from the preaching at every service. If the Bible teaches church rule by a body of male elders, we disallow women elders. If the Bible teaches avoidance of whatever arouses unchaste thoughts, I shun movies, the dance, television programs, and whatever reading materials tend to estrange me in thought and desire, as well as in deed, from my holy Friend, Jesus.

But my main concern regarding the way in which we hold the traditions is especially that we do so in a biblical, spiritual, living, dynamic manner. There is also a way of holding the traditions—a way of holding the Reformed traditions—that is all too human, natural, dead, and impotent. In the church as in society there can be a petrified conservatism that simply dislikes change. This is "traditionalism." Tradition differs from traditionalism. The Lutheran theologian, Jaroslav Pelikan, described the difference this way, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

The apostle indicates the right way of holding the traditions in II Thessalonians 2:15 when he says, "which ye have been taught." Teaching is the way to hand the traditions down from one generation to the next. Teaching is also the way to hold the traditions. The Holy Spirit is the power of a living holding of the traditions, but He empowers such a holding by means of teaching. And this teaching is the teaching of the tradi-

tions as the very Word of God in the Scriptures.

*... if we are going
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Brothers of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, if we are going to hold the traditions, we must constantly be tracing the traditions back to the Bible. We must be deriving the traditions from the Scriptures afresh. We must always be seeing that the source and basis of the traditions is the inspired Word of God. We must ourselves be receiving the traditions as that which is taught by the apostles of Christ. This must be the case as regards "The Five Points of Calvinism"; the simplicity of worship; the principles of Presbyterian church government; Sabbath observance; or the bodily resurrection of Christ. We may not simply defend and repeat what our fathers have handed over, or what our churches have always stood for, or what the Canons of Dordt have taught for 370 years.

There must be constant interpretation of the Scriptures.

This interpretation of the Scriptures must be free. □

-- DJE

Letters

Experimental Religion

In a book review in the *Standard Bearer* (August 1, 1991), you wrote about the "second blessing" heresy, which "holds before the saint the real possibility of virtual perfection in this life." You placed this under the general heading of "experimental religion," which you said runs the danger of separating from "solidly doctrinal Christianity."

I understand the danger of "second blessing" as championed by certain Arminian denominations, but "experimental religion" is a term that has been used by (or about) some who are solidly in the Calvinistic tradition, such as M'Cheyne, Brainerd, Edwards, and Guthrie. They have spoken of individual experiences with the Lord which are at moments so overwhelmingly real and powerful to

them that such experience has had this twofold effect: 1) It increased their perception of indwelling sin and their unworthiness before a holy God, and 2) It convinced them of the all-consuming love and preciousness of the Savior such that all their doubts vanished and they knew themselves to be forgiven and secure in His hands.

Do the Protestant Reformed Churches take a stand regarding "ex-

perimental religion"? Is a subjective, internal witness to be actively sought after as "experimental" literature would imply is the right, and even duty, of the genuine Christian? Some writers give me the impression that such a practice is even necessary to "close with Christ" in conversion, and they make me feel guilty if I haven't had an experience similar to theirs.

In his essay "Returning," published in *The Mystery of Bethlehem*, Herman Hoeksema writes that moments of exultation may come upon us, but that we must also expect the return "to earthly things" in this world of sin. He says that we must then pursue our callings and struggles and await, "by faith," a heaven that is still future.

In approximately four years of reading the *SB* I have not seen this issue discussed and would appreciate knowing your views on it.

N.P. Jefferson
Mount Vernon, NY

RESPONSE:

What precisely is meant by "experimental religion"?

There is no such entry in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer); *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. J.D. Douglas); or *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone).

If, as I suppose, "experimental religion" describes Christianity as the faith that teaches that the Holy Spirit

so applies the doctrines of the Word to the elect sinner in saving him that these doctrines affect the sinner's experience, even strongly, the Protestant Reformed Churches confess, practice, and enjoy "experimental religion."

Biblical Christianity is a religion that is experienced: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). The Reformed faith insists upon the experience of salvation in its creeds: "...since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy ... (Heid. Cat., Q. 58); "...certainty of perseverance... is the real source... of solid rejoicing in God..." (Canons, 5/2).

If, however, men mean by "experimental religion" strange, wonderful, spiritual experiences quite divorced from the sound doctrines of Scripture, and from the preaching of these doctrines, the PRC reject these experiences as accursed mysticism. All the more do we abhor such an "experimental religion" when its mystical experiences are made the condition for one's assurance of conversion and for one's coming to the Lord's Table.

My warning was not that "experimental religion" runs the danger of separating itself from doctrinal Christianity (to use a redundancy), although this is indeed a danger. Rather I warned that all "experimental religion" that separates itself in the slightest from solidly doctrinal Christianity will run out in perfectionism,

as well as in other gross errors.

Although the PRC want to do full justice to the experience of salvation by the believer, we also are concerned to exert ourselves to keep experience, or feeling, in its place. As Martin Luther observed in the struggle of the Reformation with the "spirituals," the way of salvation is not feeling but faith. The just does not live by experience but by faith—faith only. This is fundamental to the comfort of the believer. There are times when the believer is deeply stirred emotionally by the gospel of the love of God for him a sinner. There are other times when he is dry as dust. But he is as surely saved at the one time as at the other. And he is certain of it. For he believes, emotions or no emotions.

There is a distinct stream in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition that makes experience the main thing. The primary spiritual activity is introspection, a spiritual "navel-gazing." This is a sickness unto death. In the judgment of God, there is in this stream either no assurance of salvation or an assurance that rests upon the dubious foundation of an extraordinary experience or a special revelation.

The gospel calls us to look away from ourselves to Jesus Christ crucified and risen as exhibited in the truths of the Reformed faith. Just in this way does the believer have comfort.

Experienced comfort. □

-- Ed.

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

MISSION PRINCIPLES (VII) THE METHODS

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

The consideration of the principles of missions legitimately includes a discussion of the methods of missions. The reason is simple. The

methods are to be determined from the principles.

The biblical basis for this relationship between principles and meth-

ods, between faith and practice, is easily shown. The Scriptures give us the contents of our faith — what we are to believe in order to be saved. They make one wise unto salvation (II Timothy 3:15), but they also thoroughly equip one unto every good work — how we are to live (II Timothy 3:17).

Every method of evangelism, therefore, is to be derived directly, or by clear implication, from exegesis of Scripture. Likewise, every method and practice of mission work which is *not* derived from Scripture is sure to be summoned before God's bar and to receive harsh judgment.

*Evangelists
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This must be emphasized. This close relationship between principles and methods is not always seen in practice. Man, throughout history, has always been pragmatic to some degree, but in today's world it seems that pragmatism determines everything. By pragmatic we mean: to use whatever works or works the best, without asking questions. This kind of thinking greatly influences the church world. Evangelists and mission boards may go to the Scriptures for their message, but they often go to the world of business or to the fastest growing churches for their methods. The church-growth movement, which has swept the churches in the Americas, is built on the foundation of pragmatic methods: grow, and grow as fast as possible. Yesterday's mail brought me a large flyer from the Church Growth Institute, which is presenting seminars on "How To Reach The Baby Boomer." At the

seminars one can learn "how to select the method of evangelism that Baby Boomers best respond to"; "how to incorporate the Boomer into the body of Christ" (I did not know man could do that); "how to recognize the Boomer lifestyle, the values they hold, and the impact they will have on the church"; and "how to increase your lay involvement by 46%" (how they get such exact percentages I do not know).

However, the question that should be asked is not what works, but what does the Bible say or imply about methods. We want our methods of missions and evangelism to be an extension of our theology, an extension of what we believe. The view which one has of God, of sin, and of grace, affects seriously how we do our work of missions. If a congregation believes that Jesus Christ is their sovereign and gracious Lord, then they will gratefully put forth every effort to be obedient to His every command and to please Him with their doctrine and practice.

Consider a few negative examples. The theological position according to which grace is in the sacramental water of baptism will produce a methodology for evangelism and missions which baptizes as many people as quickly as possible. If we believe that natural man's will is morally free, then regeneration will be defined as the individual's determination to believe; and our evangelism will consist of anything which will move the will of man, for example, moral persuasions, emotional beseechings, and slick sales pitches. If we believe that millions of men are just waiting for the right presentation of Christ in order to be saved, then we will be driven to selling Christ, begging for decisions, and constantly feeling guilty for not doing enough. It is easy to see why it is that the methods one uses in missions and evangelism is simply the extension of one's theology into life and practice.

* * * * *

The Reformed faith determines the methods used by Reformed mis-

sionaries and by the Evangelism Committees of local Reformed churches.

Reformed theology holds that the goal of all God's works is the glory of Himself (cf. Revelation 4:11; Romans 11:36) and that His glory must be the goal of all that man does. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Evangelistic methods issue forth from this doctrinal position. Because God cannot be glorified where He is not known, our evangelism literature and mission preaching has as a priority the desire to make God known to sinners. While preaching on the mission field at Athens, the apostle Paul did not speak first of Jesus, of the resurrection, and of the judgment day, but of God and His creation and His all-comprehensive providence (Acts 17). God and His glory are the reference point for a proper understanding of Jesus and salvation in Him. Therefore the sovereignty of God, His just wrath and His righteousness, are to be vigorously preached on the mission field, so that the doctrine of God might be the starting point for a proper understanding of one's real need and of the infinite gratitude one owes to God for salvation in Jesus Christ. Therefore the effort of missions and evangelism is to teach the sinner that his misery and sorrows arise from his failure to glorify God by walking in obedience to all of God's commandments. Therefore the repenting and believing sinner will be taught to glorify God in gratitude by observing all things whatsoever God has commanded us.

Because the Reformed faith maintains the glory of God as the goal of all our mission efforts, we must resist all means and methods which make man's good the chief end in evangelism. Not that we are uninterested in man's good. But when we make man's good the chief end of our mission and evangelism efforts, then there is a strong temptation to smooth over the offensive elements of the truth, in order to make it more appealing and more palatable to man. Not only our message, but also our methods will be affected.

Because in Reformed and biblical doctrine Jesus is the highest manifestation of the glory of God, we will not in our presenting the gospel treat Jesus like one would treat a piece of merchandize. Rather we will seek to be an instrument of God to bring the sinner out of the bondage of sin and into willing and humble obedience to His Savior and Lord.

And it goes without saying that such a theology will result in giving all the praise to God when there is success and fruit in one's labors.

One's methodology is then a reflection of one's theology that the glory of God is the goal of all God's works, and therefore also of all of our efforts and deeds.

* * * * *

Consider another example of how the Reformed faith determines practice, of how doctrine determines methods.

That our Reformed faith holds for truth the impossibility of natural man to do any saving good is reflected in our methods. We believe that the carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7) and cannot know spiritual things (I Corinthians 2:14), and we believe that the natural man cannot come to the Father unless he is drawn by Him (John 6:44). We believe that regeneration is absolutely necessary both for one's perception of and for one's entrance into the kingdom of God.

When these truths are kept clearly in mind, the methods of evangelism will manifest a consciousness that God alone causes the gospel to be externally preached to the elect, natural man, that He alone can soften his hard heart, powerfully enlighten his darkened mind, and infuse good qualities into his evil will. The chief method resulting from this necessity of God's omnipotence is that the missionary, all the members (and especially the officebearers) of the church which sends the missionary, and every evangelism committee will pray. They will spend much more time in prayer, pleading with God for the miraculous works necessary for any human to

receive the truth, than they will spend in planning clever ways to manipulate a response to the truth. They will spend more energy in proclamation than in promotion. In addition, while they will be clear in the presentation of the demand of the Gospel to repent and believe, they will at the same time make it equally clear that the human will is not autonomous and cannot repent and believe of itself. Their goal is that the sinners to whom the Gospel of Christ crucified is presented will plead for God to be merciful to them as sinners.

The total depravity of the sinner, and the good pleasure of the Almighty God to use the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to the human understanding as the means of conversion, results in a methodology which emphasizes the contents of the message. Paul expresses it well when he relates to King Agrippa the commission Jesus gave to him on the road to Damascus. One's methods of mission and evangelism will be "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith..." (Acts 26:18). Because the truth applied to the understanding by the Spirit is God's means of bringing one into saving relationship, then all our methods will emphasize what is the content of the message. Then our emphasis will not be on whether a method is successful. Instead of being concerned about swaying emotions or moving wills, we will be striving to enlighten their understanding.

Another aspect of our methodology which results from the Reformed position that the ultimate success of evangelism and missions rests upon the will of a sovereign God is patience. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be ... patient, ... instructing ...; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Timothy 2:24,25). We can afford to be patient because our Reformed theology tells us that the success is ulti-

mately in the hands of God. We go through the process of one planting, and another watering, for which we can patiently wait.

Reformed theology will also result in a methodology which keeps back not a single part of the counsel of God. The missionary will not hesitate to declare "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). There will be no need to water down God's demands so they might be more appealing to men. We can be unashamed when we preach that which is offensive to man (I Corinthians 1:23). Though we know that men will be completely turned off by our message, we persist in our efforts because if they are the elect of God, then God will spiritually shake them up just as He did the Philippian jailer with the earthquake. If God is calling them, then Christ will become the wisdom of God unto them.

* * * * *

*Those who are convinced
that God has ordained
the means
of the proclamation
of His Word
will not see music
as a means of evangelism.*

Another principle of Reformed theology is that the authoritative preaching of the Word of God is the primary means ordained of God for the calling of His elect. God has ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (I Corinthians 1:21). Also, God has ordained that by the means of the preaching of sent ones will men call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Romans 10: 13-15). If such is our theology, then our methodology will reflect this. Preaching, whether publicly on the Lord's day or from house to house (Acts 20:20), will be primary and central. Paul reasoned out of the Scriptures, opening them and alleging from them (Acts 17:2,3).

Those who are convinced that God has ordained the means of the proclamation of His Word will not see music as a means of evangelism. There may be a place for music, but music may not be considered as a means of evangelizing. Also, we will find no place for testimony-giving, experience-sharing, dramatic presentations, and dances in evangelism. Our theology of evangelism holds that God has ordained the means to be the authoritative and verbal proclamation of His message.

The Reformed faith emphasizes God's sovereignty, but it also maintains man's responsibility. Even while our theology confesses that God accomplishes His works by His appointed means, it also confesses that He uses the instrumentality of His church to preach, to send out preachers, to support the ministry of the Word in the local churches and in the mission field, to witness in the whole of our conduct, but especially to use the opportunities to speak a word in season. Then in our methodology we

will be a busy and active people, a responsible people. We will strive to use every God-given opportunity to present the message of sovereign grace to our neighbors and friends. We must use every occasion to bring those in need of the Holy Spirit's work to hear with us the preaching of God's Word.

* * * * *

There is another doctrine of the Reformed faith which has a direct effect on the methods of missions and evangelism. Reformed theology confesses the centrality of the church in the purpose of God. This centrality is manifest in that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:14,15) and is the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is known (Ephesians 3:10). Also it is into true churches that those saved are added (Acts 22:47). And Jesus spoke of church membership when in the "Great Commission" He commanded the disciples to baptize, for

baptism into fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was and is the mark of the visible community of the church. We will therefore not bypass the visible church in favor of para-church organizations or identity groups within a local church to the detriment of the whole. Also, we can no more think evangelism without the church than we can think evangelism without the Gospel.

* * * * *

Theology determines not only that we do the work of missions and evangelism, but also the methods with which we do it. All fit and lawful means are to be used to bring the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. What is fit and lawful is determined by the doctrines of the sovereignty and majesty of God, the irresistibility and necessity of the Holy Spirit, the power of grace, and the dignity and authority of the Word of God and of the preaching thereof. □

Anabaptism and the Means of Grace (2)

Contribution

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

In vain one searches for the treatment of or even a reference to the terminology "means of grace" in the writings of Anabaptist leaders. It is difficult to ascertain whether the absence of such reference is due to their loathing of systematized theology, or

whether they simply denied the existence of any means of grace. Both are probably true. But we are interested in pursuing the latter, namely, that the Anabaptists denied the existence and the necessity of means of grace.

This denial finds its source in the two fundamental errors of the Anabaptists which we examined in our last article. The first of these errors lay in the separation made between the Bible and the living, inner "Word of God." The Scripture, al-

though good and necessary, is but a "human treasure" (Hans Denck), and therefore a person ought not to "attribute to it more than it deserves or belongs to it" (Ulrich Stadler). On the other hand, the living "Word of God" was the true inner light of the soul. This the Holy Spirit worked directly in the heart only by means of much struggle and tribulation in the abyss of the soul. This inner light was truly the infallible guide in a person's life. That was the first error.

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The second error of the Anabaptists which we considered in our last article is linked to the first. When the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in a person's heart, then at that very moment not only is the guilt of sin removed, but the corruption of the flesh is also washed entirely away. Such an individual, though perhaps still capable of errors in judgment, has nevertheless reached a state of perfection in his life. There is therefore no more room for continued growth in sanctification. The moment one is saved he has attained.

These errors of the Anabaptists inevitably led them to deny the means of grace.

The Reformed believer, upon the testimony of Scripture itself, has always maintained that God has ordained certain objective means through which the Spirit works and confirms faith in the hearts of God's people. These means in the church are the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Likewise, the Reformed believer is adamant in his insistence that these means are absolutely necessary for spiritual life. Just as food and drink are necessary means to keep our bodies alive and well, so also are the preaching and sacraments means by which our souls are nourished and strengthened unto life eternal. For that reason we cannot do without them lest spiritually we wither away.

But we must bear in mind that in this Reformed position concerning the means of grace is assumed two important truths.

In the first place, we believe that the Holy Spirit never works apart from objective means. Although we certainly would not deny that the Spirit is capable of regenerating a person *immediately* (without means), nevertheless He always uses objective means to *work* conscious faith (knowledge and assurance of salvation) within us, as well as to *confirm* and *strengthen* our faith. (See the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, Q. & A. 65, and its Scriptural references.)

Also assumed in the position of

the Reformed believer is what we learn in the "Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper," that, although sanctified in the blood of Christ, yet, "we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves, as namely, that we have not perfect faith, and that we do not give ourselves to serve God as we are bound, but have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith, and the evil lusts of our flesh...." We know that we are far from perfect (Rom. 7 and I John 1:8-10). We need therefore to be fed and nourished in our faith through objective means — means through which the Spirit works within our hungry and thirsty souls.

The Anabaptist denies both these fundamental, biblical assumptions.

This he denies, first of all, as far as the preaching is concerned. Hans Denck in his writing, "Recantation," asserts: "Thus, a person who has been chosen by God, may be saved without preaching and Scriptures, but that if salvation were tied to preaching and Scripture all those who are unlearned would not be able to attain salvation" He goes on to say that the preaching improves that heart in which there is a spark of godly zeal no differently than does anything else in this world. There is no work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the hearers through the preaching. But, then, neither did the Anabaptist feel there had to be. The Spirit was already working within them through the living "Word of God," and there was no need for an external work of the Spirit. There was no need to be replenished in the faith by the external words of a man. The Spirit was doing that automatically from within. The preaching, therefore, to the Anabaptist was *not* a savor of life unto life in them that are saved; neither was it a savor of death unto death in them that perish. It was not a means of grace!

But though not perhaps a means of *grace*, it was yet, in the mind of the Anabaptist, a means! It was a means of making known (prophesying) to others the true, inner Word of God. As Ulrich Stadler writes in "The Living and Written Word," it is "the witness or sign of the true Word."

Think once of the horrible error involved in this claim! The preaching is a means by which a person, apart from the objective testimony of the Scriptures, can give voice to the true Word of God which the Spirit speaks subjectively in the heart and soul! This heresy became the springboard from which the more fanatical branches of Anabaptism vaulted into spiritualism and mysticism. Of these Calvin wrote, "In their pride therefore they despise the ministry of men and even Scripture itself in order to attain the Spirit. They then try to peddle all the delusions that Satan suggests to them as secret revelations of the Spirit" (Commentary on I Thessalonians 5:20). Even the more moderate Anabaptists believed that this "extra-ordinary" work of the Spirit fully compensated for lack of education. This resulted in, at times, the wildest of biblical interpretation.

This same line of thought, that the Spirit does not work through objective means, was also maintained with regards to the sacraments. We do not wish, of course, to deal with the Anabaptist errors which concern the meaning of the sacraments and to whom they must be administered. We simply wish to consider whether or not the Anabaptists viewed the sacraments as a means through which the Spirit was present and working in the church. It becomes strikingly clear when one reads the writings of the Anabaptists that they simply were not interested in this subject. They saw no need to discuss the presence of the Spirit at the time the sacraments were administered because of their basic premise: the Spirit did not work through objective means. John Calvin in his *Institutes*, uses Christian Kohler to point out this error, "We either know ... or do not know that God's word preceding the sacrament is His true will. If we know it, we learn nothing new from the sacrament, which follows. If we do not know it, the sacrament ... also will not teach it." In the thinking of the Anabaptist, the sacraments do nothing for the child of God. The Spirit does not work through them con-

firming God's people who witness them in the knowledge and assurance of faith.

The sacrament of Baptism was nothing more to them than an act of confession which enrolled one into the body of the church. It served no spiritual purpose for those who witnessed it. The Lord's Supper was viewed in the same way. Although this sacrament included actual participation by the members of the church, it, likewise, did not serve to confirm faith. To the Anabaptist the Lord's Supper served on the one hand as a memorial feast which only reminded one of Christ's death. On the other hand, it was a love-gathering which promoted harmony and fellowship among brethren. Neither of these functions, however, required the presence of the Spirit.

By maintaining only the subjective work of the Spirit in the heart, and by divorcing it from all objective means, the Anabaptists, in effect, undermined the very ministry of the

church. In this way it paved the way for the pietistic movement in Europe, the Revivals of the late 1700s in America, and later the Holiness and Pentecostal movements. The subjectivism and mysticism of Anabaptism lie at the very center of all the charismatic movements. Their charge against the churches of the Reformation are the same: the church which develops systematic theology and which maintains the preaching and sacraments as necessary for salvation are cold and dead! Their assertion is the same: only they emphasize the true work of the Spirit, they truly let Him speak through them, and therefore they are characterized by the true life of the Spirit! All those who emphasize the work of the Spirit through objective means coupled with His internal work in the heart deny the true work of the Spirit!

But what the Anabaptists claim, together with their modern-day counterparts, is actually what they deny!

They deny the true work of the Spirit in the church! They allow their own subjective opinions and feelings to become the voice of the Spirit rather than listening to what the Spirit truly says to the churches. Contrary to the error of the Anabaptists and all who follow in their error, the Spirit is alive and working every Sunday in that church which purely preaches the Gospel and administers the sacraments. And He is working *through these means*! He is present in God's house and He uses the means of grace as a savor of life unto life to them that are saved. And that selfsame Spirit uses these same means as a savor of death unto death to them that perish (II Cor. 2:12-17). We believe that the Spirit is alive and working *powerfully* in the hearts of God's people through the objective means of grace God has ordained in the church! It is sad to say, but the Anabaptist in this way denied the very Spirit they claimed to worship! □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

Malachi

Lesson I

Overview of Malachi

The book of Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophecies written before the birth of Jesus Christ. Approximately 400 years of silence would follow the words of this prophecy, until the time when Gabriel would be sent to godly Zacharias and Elisabeth to announce the birth of the forerunner or our Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5, 6; Luke 1:1-20).

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The importance of this book of the Bible cannot be overstated. The times in which Malachi prophesied correspond exactly to our own; the sins current among God's people and the temptations to which they were exposed correspond to our day as well. Therefore the "burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi" comes to us with the same urgency as it did to them. Let us pay good heed to the sobering words of this book.

Malachi belongs to the Post-captivity period, the time after the remnant of Judah had returned from the Babylonian Exile. The people had

been back in Canaan for about 100 years when God sent Malachi to them. The exact date of Malachi's prophecy cannot be determined. Best estimates place it between Nehemiah's two visits to Jerusalem.

Of the man Malachi we know very little, and nothing is revealed about him in the book itself, other than that his name fittingly means "my messenger." He appears on the scene much the way Elijah did (I Kings 17:1), and with a very similar message and ministry.

We know more about the times in which he prophesied and the evils

present. The people had completed the temple, but its worship and priesthood had become corrupt (ch. 1:6-2:8). A new generation had risen which was characterized by cold formalism and spiritual indifference. They no longer held much hope for the coming of the Messiah (ch. 3:1ff.). There was an unwillingness to part with money and possessions for the kingdom of God (ch. 3:8). Marriages were based on lust and not the love of God. Ungodly divorce was openly practiced (ch. 2:10-17). All of it was really nothing less than spiritual insensitivity to the love of God (ch. 1:2ff.).

How applicable to us today! How much of the church of Jesus Christ, regardless now of the denomination, is tempted with the same sickly indifference and spiritual laxity; with the attitude that it does not make any difference if we serve God or not! The burden of Malachi is the burden to us, namely that we turn to the Lord God in love and true worship and eagerly await the promise of His Son!

In addition to the relevance of Malachi to our day, we will be blessed in the study of this book for these reasons as well:

1. Malachi emphasizes the covenant of God and its implications for our lives.

2. Malachi calls us to look for the coming of the "Sun of Righteousness."

To place Malachi's prophecy clearly in our minds, we should remember the following main events of the post-captivity period:

606-586 B.C.—Judah is taken captive and Jerusalem destroyed (II Kings 25).

606-536 B.C.—The 70 years captivity (Jer. 29:10).

536 B.C.—Zerubbabel leads 50,000 Jews back to Judah (II Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Isa. 45:1-4).

535 B.C.—Rebuilding of the temple begun, but soon halted (Ezra 4:23, 24).

520 B.C.—Darius orders the temple to be completed. Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people (Haggai 1:1-15; 2:1-9; Ezra 6:15).

516 B.C.—Temple completed.

478 B.C.—Esther becomes Queen of Persia.

457 B.C.—Ezra's journey to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7-9).

444 B.C.—Nehemiah sent to Jerusalem. The walls rebuilt (Neh. 1, 2).

*The time of Malachi.

432 B.C.—Nehemiah returns the second time to Judah (Neh. 13:7).

Memory Work:

Malachi 1:1, 2

The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob.

Revelation 2:4, 5

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Questions for Study:

1. Be sure to begin by reading through the book in one sitting. Jot down your first impressions.

2. Read through the prophecy again, this time take notes on any references to...

a. The *time* in which Malachi wrote (setting, historical background).

b. The *people* to whom he wrote.

c. The *basic message* he brings to them.

3. Make a list of the *evils* present in God's people and what God's Word says to them about these evils.

4. Make a list of the prophecies of the birth or coming of Jesus Christ given in this book.

5. Prepare an outline of Malachi, giving the major divisions and what you feel is the unifying theme.

6. Using a Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia, do some research on the historical setting of this book.

a. How many returns from Babylon were there? Who led them? What was the purpose of each return?

b. What was life like for the Jews at this time?

c. Who are the Samaritans? References to them in the Bible?

7. Why should we study the book of Malachi? What should be our goals?

8. Can you write from memory Malachi 1:1, 2 and Revelation 2:4, 5?

Recommended Resources:

Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Malachi*.

T.V. Moore, *Haggai and Malachi*, published by Banner of Truth.

John Calvin, *Commentary on Malachi*.

Davies, *Bible Dictionary*.

The International Bible Encyclopedia. □

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A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Laughter

Not many times do the words laugh and laughter occur in the Scriptures. We read of the laughter of the wicked, the laughter of the righteous, and, most striking of all, the laughter of God. As we consider this subject we ought to be reminded that we live in a world where comedy is king and where the insanity of unbelief is punctuated by forced humor, jokes, blasphemies, frivolousness, and inanities. How much the world is with us so that these things enter into the conversations of believers. And how we need to hear the Word of God that foolish talking and jesting ought not to be named among us as becometh saints (Eph. 5:4).

Wicked laughter is the bursting forth of hatred that natural man harbors in his heart for all that is holy, lofty, and exalted. Then the lip is curled in scorn, mockery, and derision; the entire face reveals the desperate wickedness of the heart. The unbeliever laughs at the trial of the innocent (Job 9:23), the upright man (Job 12:4), the rebuilt temple and those that built it (Neh. 2:19), the miracles of Jesus (Matt. 9:24), the divinity of Christ (Luke 23:25), and the promise of His return (II Pet. 3:3, 4). In all this he very really laughs at the living God who is revealed in Christ and in the salvation and life of His saints.

There are times when the laughter of the child of God partakes of this same unbelief, times when we think some things to be too hard for God. This was Sarah in her tent (Gen. 18:10). God heard and God rebuked. He will not have His promise in Christ scoffed at by anyone, under any circumstances. Faithful to His covenant, God changes Sarah's laughter in its character and tone so that the aged mother sings, "God hath made me to laugh, all that hear will laugh with me" (Gen. 21:6). Abraham and Sarah saw the promise of God in Christ being fulfilled, and they called the son Laughter (Isaac); what a joyful feast that must have been the day Isaac was weaned! There is a time to laugh, and the righteous do laugh, because they know themselves to be blessed (happy). This laughter is the spontaneous and melodious breaking forth of the new heart of the child of God because he delights in God, because he has found God to be the rock of his heart, and because he has found God's promise true. We ministers ought to smile more as we preach the gospel.

God is the God of laughter, although we do not often think of Him that way. The laughter of God is an aspect of His eternal good pleasure. When the heathen rage, when people imagine a vain thing, when the rulers of the earth unite in counsel against God and His anointed Son, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:1-4; see also Ps. 37:13; 59:8). God regards it an amusing thing that puny man should dare to oppose Him, try to frustrate His will as it centers in Jesus Christ, or do His people any spiritual harm. He dashes the wicked in pieces as a potter's vessel, and He knows that their day is coming. Divine laughter is not an imperfection in the Godhead; it is not cruel, but an aspect of His justice, goodness, and sovereignty. God also laughs over His people. He smiles on them with delight! What else can the lifting up of His countenance mean, but that all the lines of His face are turned upward in benevolence and pleasure?

Laughter is not the outstanding feature of our present life. Now we mourn; and "sorrow is laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Eccles. 7:3). But God has a way of turning things about so that the crooked is made straight and the last are made first. Hear Luke 6: "Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh Woe to ye that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." God has the last laugh, and His people shall rejoice in Him, world without end! □

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The Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

That Awesome and Important Calling

Our covenant God, sovereignly but also graciously, brought Abraham into a land where the descendants of Ham dwelt, and where they owned every inch of the land of Canaan.

Thus, when Abraham's wife, Sarah — who had in her 90th year brought forth for Abraham his son Isaac — died when she was 127 years old, Abraham had not one square inch of land wherein to bury her. Therefore Abraham had to contact the descendants of Ham, in order to be able to buy a place where he could bury Sarah.

In order to appreciate this act of Abraham, we do well to keep in mind the fact that our God saved Noah and his family, namely, a wife and three sons with their wives, in an ark, while He sent a terrible flood that killed all the unbelievers. These three sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Keep also in mind that, before God called Abraham and brought him to the land of Canaan, the unbelieving world began to build the Tower of Babel, and Abraham was not yet born. When he was born, there were different nations, tongues, and tribes. For God confounded speech and scattered these descendants of Noah. And when God called Abraham, of the descendants of Shem, to go to the land which He would show him, Abraham was sent to where the descendants of Ham had settled. And Abraham had to approach these descendants of Ham, which were called the children of

Heth, in order to buy a place where he could bury Sarah.

By God's providence and grace Abraham was able to buy a small section of land where he could bury Sarah, and where he could also be buried 28 years later. Abraham must wait for God to give him the land which He promised him. But it was not sinful on his part to buy this small section for a burial place. Abraham was patiently waiting for God to give him and his seed that land. It is true that the world must serve God's church. The unbelieving sons of Ham had been given this land by our God in His providence; and Abraham must not ignore this fact. He must wait for God to fulfill all His promises. So must the church always wait for God's fulfillment of His promises. We, most assuredly, are going to get the promised land which Christ will realize when He returns; and we should look for that blessed inheritance as an absolutely free gift from our God. We earn nothing by our obedience; and, surely, because of our disobedience, even if it is only one sin committed in a moment of time, we may not have anything but punishment. Adam and Eve sinned very briefly, and quite harmlessly as far as mankind was concerned. It was no breaking of the second table of the law. But one sin calls for everlasting punishment, because it is an act of hatred against our God who created all things, possesses them, and has the absolute right to determine what His creatures must do.

In obedience to our God who was pleased, not in His grace, but in His sovereignty, to give this land to the descendants of Ham, Abraham must buy a small piece of land for the

burying of Sarah, and for the burial of his own body when it pleases God to take earthly life away from him.

Although for many, many years Sarah brought forth no seed for Abraham, and although this was a disappointment to him, a disappointment that even caused him to commit the sin of taking Sarah's maid to be his wife, Abraham's love for Sarah did not wane, and did by no means disappear. He loved her even though God did not enable her to bring forth a son for Abraham. And when God gave her Isaac, after she was 90 years old, that love of Abraham was very strong and evident. It is true that he asked the children of Heth for a burying place "that I may bury my dead wife out of my sight." But that was not due to hatred in his soul against Sarah. We read that he came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

In fact, that Abraham wanted Sarah buried there in that promised land was an act of faith, rooted in his firm conviction that God would give this land to him and his seed. Turning to Genesis 50:24 we read that Joseph, one of the seed of Abraham, wanted to be buried in the land of Canaan, even while the descendants of Abraham through Isaac were in the land of Egypt. Joseph said to his brothers, "I die; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." He also assured them that they would be able to carry his bones back to Canaan because God would visit them and bring them back to that promised land. He assured them of that which God had told Abraham, namely, that they would become a great nation in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1, 2).

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Now Abraham, having no place to bury Sarah unless he could buy a piece of land, wanted a place very badly, because he loved her. She had to be buried, and Abraham had no choice in this matter, no matter how much he loved her. Her dead body must be hidden not only from the eyes of all those Hamites, but also from his own eyes—and surely from their nostrils. That body would soon decay and bring forth a very foul smell. That is also why we bury the dead, not because we do not love them, but because our God's work calls for that.

It is true that funeral directors today will temporarily hide this corruption and smell, and make it so that relatives and friends can come once more and see the body of that loved one. But a dead body must be buried, as became plain also when our Savior died, and they buried Him in a tomb.

Death is a terrible thing. It is the wages of sin. We must not hide that body to get the idea of sin out of our minds. We must bury it in the conviction that by God's grace it will be raised and glorified when Christ returns with His glorified body. Believers must bury the dead believer's body in the confidence that there will be a resurrection because of Christ's death and resurrection.

Before Abraham himself died 38 years after Sarah's burial, he had yet to attend to the matter of securing a wife for Isaac, who had developed by then into a young man. Abraham knew very well that his son should have a believing wife and not a Canaanite idol worshiper. Although this does not mean that parents today must pick out wives for their sons, and husbands for their daughters, it does point out that their call is to instruct their children, both young men and young women, to seek and receive only a child of God who will help them spiritually, not only as husband and wife, but by all means as those who will bring up children in the fear of our God.

Abraham's securing a wife for Isaac, in the day of shadows, reveals what we must do in these days in

which we live. Our God did not move Moses to write this act of Abraham merely in order that we may know who it was that his son married. It was not merely to reveal Abraham's desire, and surely not as a desire of his flesh. We have instruction here. We have an evidence in that day of shadows of what we must do today in the day Christ is gathering His church, and preparing the way for His return to glorify His church.

We today are surrounded by idol worshipers, probably in some regions not as numerous as in the days of Abraham, but under more subtle power of Satan in his attempt to destroy the church of Christ. In that day, in the land of Canaan, the seed of the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15 were surrounded by gross idolaters in very great number. And though we may be living in areas where there are churches full of believers, we are surrounded not only by very crafty and enticing unbelievers, but also by churches wherein Satan has the victory in his attempt to get church members to be members of his godless kingdom.

We today are overwhelmingly surrounded by enticements, which not only turn us away from the truth of God's Word, but also deter us from walking in the love of God. Our young people are attacked far more subtly than in years gone by. What are called Christian churches very definitely are in many instances antichristian churches. And this is because these churches have been moved by Satan to consider salvation as nothing more than deliverance from the punishment we deserve, and the obtaining of pleasures and joy for the flesh.

There is an awesome and extremely important truth to be learned from the day of shadows, the Old Testament dispensation, a truth that is ignored and pushed aside by Satan's craftiness today. Salvation is presented merely as deliverance from the punishment of sin which man deserves. And the glory of the kingdom of heaven is presented merely as enjoyment of bodily pleasures, with

full escape from aches and pains. But the awesome truth which we must take hold of and maintain, as well as preach more often and more emphatically, is that salvation is deliverance from the love of sin and bestowal upon us of love for our God.

Did our God not begin the gospel by stating and promising in Genesis 3:15, which is called the Mother Promise, that He is saving us from the victory which Satan got us to want and seek? God said it to Satan; but He promised us enmity against the devil and his kingdom of sin. The seed of the woman will be caused to hate Satan and to love God. He promised deliverance from the curse, but first of all from spiritual death. He would put enmity in us against Satan, which means that He would work in us love for Himself.

How many churches preach that today? So much is called evangelism and the gospel. But this is Satan's method of getting our flesh to enjoy carnal pleasures. The word gospel means good news, and the word evangelism means good tidings. But what is THE good news and gospel is that we are made capable of walking, and willing to walk, in love toward God.

Indeed, we need bodies delivered from aches and pains, and we need to be placed in a glorious kingdom. But all this is given us so that we can walk fully in love to God. We ought to learn from this work of Abraham in the day of shadows. May God cause us by His grace to be concerned first of all to serve Him in love, and to teach our children to seek wives or husbands who will help, not make more difficult, their walking in love toward God. Because of Satan's victory in much of the church world today, we have a very serious calling to do what Abraham did: Do all we can to get our seed to seek the seed of the woman, the believers, for their wives or husbands.

We have that awesome and important calling of striving to keep our children in the truth, and to be those who want a salvation that means that they are made able to live in love for God fully and everlastingly. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Charles Terpstra

The Sovereignty of God (3)

Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: ... thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all Thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

I Chronicles 29:11, 12

In this prayer of humble thanksgiving to Jehovah for the willing and generous offerings which the children of Israel gave for the building of the temple, David confesses and celebrates the absolute sovereignty of God. This is the second truth concerning the nature of God which we want to consider and contemplate. In our last study we pondered the supreme majesty of God, that the true and living God is the God of infinite greatness, being transcendent, incomparable, and glorious in His Being and in His works. This truth concerning God includes and implies His sovereignty as well. Because Jehovah is the great God He is also the sovereign God. You will note that David brings these two qualities of God together in his prayer recorded in I Chronicles 29:11, 12: "...Thine is the majesty; ...thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all."

The terms "sovereign" and "sovereignty" do not appear in the Scriptures, but this does not mean that the

truth of God's sovereignty is not taught in them. The Word of God is filled with testimonies to and examples of God's sovereignty. One of His names is Adonai, "Lord," which reveals that He is the absolute Master and Sovereign of the universe. Another name is El Shaddai, "God Almighty," stressing that His is supreme power to accomplish all that He wills to do.

Hence Psalm 135:5, 6 declares, "For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." And so too in Daniel 4:35: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" The God revealed in the Bible is the sovereign God. And therefore you and I are obliged to know and confess and worship Him as such.

A Position of Supreme Rule

When we speak of the sovereignty of God, we have reference first of all to the *position* He possesses and occupies of Himself as the only God. That is the position of supreme Ruler with absolute authority. Earthly rulers are sometimes called "sovereigns" because they have a domain over which they rule and exercise authority. These earthly kings are only relative sovereigns however; for their rule is limited by the particular realm over which they rule, and their authority is derived — from Jehovah. But God alone is the absolute Sovereign, for His dominion is unlimited and His

authority is independent of any other person.

The Scriptures refer to this supreme position of God repeatedly. He is spoken of as the great King above all gods, indeed as the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose throne is established in the heavens and who rules over all (Ps. 95:3; I Tim. 6:15; Ps. 103:19; Rev. 19:6). To Him is ascribed the supreme right to plan whatever He pleases to do in His eternal counsel and to carry that out (Isa. 46:10, 11); to Him is attributed the paramount power to command what He wills with regard to men and angels, so that His Word and law must be submitted to and obeyed by all creatures (Isa. 45:23), and so that He can execute His judgment on them according to whether they do good or evil (Ps. 97:1, 2).

It is important to stress in this connection that God's sovereignty is *absolute*. By this is meant first of all that God has the right in Himself to sit on the throne of this world and rule. His authority is not derived, but He possesses His position as King independently, i.e., of no man but of Himself, by virtue of the fact that He is God alone. Herman Hoeksema explains it thus in his *Reformed Dogmatics*:

Only He that is Self-existent and absolutely independent is at the same time absolute Lord. For Absolute sovereignty is not merely supreme, or highest, lordship; it is that virtue according to which God is sovereign in Himself. His is the only sovereignty His is the sole prerogative to establish the law for all the universe, to judge the creature, and to execute His will. There is no criterion above or next to God, whereby He can be measured or judged, to

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which He must conform Himself. There is no law to which He is subject, no tribunal to which He is responsible. He alone is the sole standard for all law and righteousness. He is the sole High One (p. 69).

Secondly, by absolute sovereignty is meant that God possesses the right to rule and He does rule over *everything* and *everyone*. His rule is not limited to a certain realm and excluded from others. Rather is His dominion universal. God sits as King of all the earth and heaven and of every creature in them, so that His kingdom truly rules over all (Ps. 47:2; 103:19). He is sovereign over the brute creation and the animal kingdom; He has authority over nations and every man, wicked or righteous; He has rights over the angelic realm, ruling over Satan and his hosts of demons as well as over the elect angels; He is sovereign in all His purposes and workings.

*When some ascribe
God's wonder-work
of salvation
to man's free will
or to his meritorious works,
they not only
throw God off the throne
of His sovereignty,
but by that very fact
they also rob God
of His Deity!*

This truth of God's sovereign position as supreme Ruler is no minor one; it has to do with the very Godhead of God. This is what so many professed Christians fail to consider in our day. When some ascribe God's wonder-work of creation in the beginning to evolutionary processes and mere natural causes, they not only deny God to be sovereign; but by that very fact they also deny His Godhead! When some ascribe God's wonder-work of salvation to man's free will or to his meritorious works, they not only throw God off the throne

of His sovereignty, but by that very fact they also rob God of His Deity! It is vital that we who profess faith in God keep Him where He indeed is and where Scripture places Him — on the throne of absolute sovereignty. God is the Lord and the Lord is God!

A Power of Unsurpassed Working

When the Scriptures speak of the sovereignty of God, they have reference not only to God's supreme position but also to His great power. His sovereignty is not merely a matter of having the right to rule over all things but also the *ability* to rule; it is not only His prerogative to determine all things with regard to all creatures but also His *capacity* to carry out whatever He has willed. Psalm 115:3 puts it this way: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

For this reason God's omnipotence is and must be included in His sovereignty. David acknowledged this in I Chronicles 29:12: "... And in thine hand is power and might." Psalm 93:1 connects these two ideas as well: "The LORD reigneth ...: the LORD is clothed with strength, where-with he hath girded himself." God is able to exercise His supreme authority and carry out the counsels of His will because He is almighty in power. He works effectively in His universal kingdom because He is of boundless might. His hand is not shortened that it cannot do all which He has determined to do.

It is for this reason too that the Word of God stresses that God's sovereign workings are never hindered or frustrated or overthrown. Nothing or no one ever stands in the way of the accomplishing of His sovereign will and rule. This is the truth which king Jehoshaphat confessed according to II Chronicles 20:6: "O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?" This is what God Himself declares through Isaiah: "Yea, before the day was I am he; and there

is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" (Cf. also Isa 45:10, 11; Dan. 4:35; Job 23:13.)

This power of God's sovereignty to accomplish all that He wills is a power manifested not abstractly but concretely in the works of His hands. It is manifested in *creation*, such that what God purposed to create in the beginning He sovereignly finished in six days of powerful working: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9). This sovereign power of God is displayed in His acts of *providence*, such that all that God has determined for His creatures — animate or inanimate, angelic, demonic, or human — He fully performs: "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures" (Ps. 135:6, 7). "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). "And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings..." (Dan. 2:21). "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

This sovereign power of God displayed in His providential workings extends to and includes also the Fall and sin, the evil deeds of men, and all the "evils" which befall mankind. This is often denied in our day, but the Scriptures are abundantly plain on this point: "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). Concerning the ungodly Pharaoh, his hardening, and the judgments brought on Egypt, God said: "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power ..." (Ex. 9:16). Concerning things light and dark the Lord says through Isaiah: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and

create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (45:7). Concerning the issues of life and death, health and sickness, riches and poverty the Bible speaks thus of the sovereign God: "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich..." (I Sam. 2:6, 7). Absolutely everything and everyone, therefore, are under the sovereign control and direction of the omnipotent God.

*It is the divine Potter's right
to have some men
be "vessels of mercy
afore prepared unto glory"
and others be
"vessels of wrath
fitted to destruction"
(Rom. 9:21-23).*

Finally, this power of God's sovereignty is revealed in His mighty workings in the salvation of His people. God's sovereignty is already manifested in the fact that God has determined in His all-just and all-good counsel of predestination that not all men but some only should be saved out of sin and death by His grace. It is the divine Potter's right to have some men be "vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory" and others be "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:21-23). And it lies within the sovereign rights of God that the death of His Son should not atone for

the sins of all men but for the sins of His elect people only, which in fact it did.

But especially do we have in mind the workings of God's grace in the hearts of the elect, that efficacious work of God in actually taking them out of the miry pit of sin and setting their feet upon the rock Jesus Christ. It is also at this point that so many cave in to the pride and pressure of making man the Lord of salvation. Arthur W. Pink describes these as follows:

They openly declare that whatever power He (i.e., God — CJT) possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduce him to a "machine." ... They enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please (*The Attributes of God*, p. 28).

The Word of God, however, sets forth the God who is absolutely sovereign in the work of saving elect sinners. By His almighty power He saves — without the will and work of man. God causes His elect to be born again (Jn. 1:12, 13); He works faith in their hearts (Eph. 2:8); He draws them irresistibly to His Son through the call of the gospel (Jn. 6:44); He sanctifies them, working in them both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13); and He preserves them in grace and glorifies them in the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6). Indeed, salvation is of the Lord! God alone is the Savior! This is what must be maintained by all who believe in Him.

A Truth of Great Practical Significance

The doctrine that God is absolutely sovereign in Himself and in all His works is a doctrine of great practical significance to Reformed believers. As Pink has written:

A due apprehension of God's Sovereignty promotes the spirit of worship, provides an incentive to practical godliness, and inspires zeal in service. It is deeply humbling to the human heart, but in proportion to the degree that it brings man into the dust before his Maker, to that extent is God glorified (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 22).

Does this truth have this effect upon you? Does your life and mine reflect our firm belief in this glorious doctrine?

Further, the truth of God's sovereignty is a constant source of comfort to the people of God. When their way is made dark and difficult, they are able to fall back upon the hands of their sovereign God and trust Him with the events of their lives, believing that He is working all things for good. Charles Spurgeon put it well when he said, "Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all" (quoted in Pink's *Attributes*, p. 32).

May the Lord increase our knowledge and understanding of His sovereignty and cause it to be a great blessing to our hearts and lives. □

Book Reviews

D. Martyn Lloyd - Jones: *The Fight of Faith 1939-1981*, by Iain H. Murray. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990. pp. xxiv-831. \$36.95, cloth. [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This massive work is volume two of a biography of the late great preacher of Westminster Chapel in London. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The*

First Forty Years 1899-1939, the first volume of the biography, was published in 1982, about a year after Lloyd-Jones' death. The doctor himself authorized his long-time friend and former assistant pastor at the Chapel (1956-1959), Iain H. Murray, to write the biography.

The two volumes present a detailed account of the life of this great

preacher. Both are enhanced by a number of photographs. The reader will find fascinating accounts of details in the life of the doctor. For example, one finds the story of how the doctor first met his predecessor, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, at the Chapel. Fascinating too is the story of how Morgan picked Lloyd-Jones as his successor. The two preachers

were quite different doctrinally. Morgan was Arminian in his theology, while Lloyd-Jones was a Calvinist. If one wonders how the one could succeed the other in the same pulpit, he learns that after the War an entirely different congregation emerged at Westminster.

These books, especially volume two, are more than a biography of the doctor. One gains insights into the ecumenical movement and its impact on the church in Great Britain. One also learns of the influences of Crusade Evangelism, which Lloyd-Jones steadfastly opposed, and of the influences of the charismatic movement.

While the cost of the two volumes is rather high, the books are worth having to anyone interested in the evangelical church in England during the first half of the twentieth century. Lloyd-Jones was a great preacher whose influence carried far beyond the large Westminster Chapel, through his travels, itinerant preaching, and publications. ■

The Epistle of James, by Joseph B. Mayor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990. pp.1-621. \$18.95, paper; \$24.95, cloth. [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This is a reprint of the third edition of Mayor's commentary on James which was published in 1913. Joseph Mayor (1828-1916), a theologian of the Church of England, taught at King's College in London. Mayor was a careful Bible scholar. His work is detailed.

The Introduction alone consists of 309 pages of fine print divided into twelve chapters. In the Introduction, Mayor deals with such subjects as the author, the authenticity, the date, the addressees of *The Epistle of James*. New Testament Greek scholars will appreciate chapters 9 and 10 in which Mayor deals with the grammar and style of *James*. Chapter 12 contains a detailed discussion of the "Critical Apparatus." The Introduction clearly indicates that Mayor was thoroughly familiar with the critical scholarship extant in his day.

The heart of the Commentary is found in the section entitled, "Notes" (pp. 339-497). In this section Mayor offers detailed exposition of the Greek text, proceeding almost word by word. This section would be of little use to one not thoroughly acquainted with New Testament Greek. In this section too Mayor quotes other commentators and scholars in the original languages in which they wrote. Thus one finds Calvin quoted in Latin, German scholars in the German language, etc. For one able to use these languages this is a fine commentary.

The last main part of the book is called "Commentary." Here Mayor gives his own paraphrase of each section of the *Epistle of James*, and then in paragraph form discusses the main concepts found in the passage. For example, in the first section (Chapter 1:1-15) there is a lengthy and helpful discussion of the difference between "trials" and "temptations." This section of the Commentary could be used with profit by lay people.

Recommended for ministers, professors of theology, and seminary students, and those who are able to read both Greek and Latin. ■

Thoughts on Family Worship, by J. W. Alexander. Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990. 260 pages. \$16.95, hardcover. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

This is a classic on family worship in the covenant by the 19th century Presbyterian pastor J. W. Alexander. Published in 1981 by Sprinkle Publications as part of the larger work, *The Family*, it is now made available as a separate volume by Soli Deo Gloria Publications. Not only does Alexander give detailed instruction as to what family worship should consist of and how it ought to be conducted, but he also urges covenant parents to this vital duty with powerful appeals to the glory of God, the well-being of the home, and the salvation of the children. Every newly married couple should have the book. Parents especially should read it yearly. This is not to suggest that

family worship loses its importance where children are not present. Alexander tells the story, which rings perfectly true to life among us, of the old Scottish couple who continued their daily worship after the many olive plants that had grown up about their table had gone:

... til he and his old partner found themselves, just as at their outset in life, alone. But their family-worship continued as of old. At last his fellow-traveller left him. Still he carried on the worship by himself. So sweet was the memory of it in his father's house, and so pleasant had he found it in his own, that he could not give it up. But as he sat in his silent habitation, morning and evening, his quivering voice was overheard singing the old psalm-tune, reading aloud the chapter, and praying as if others still worshipped by his side (p. 112).

The faithful, lively practice of family worship is a necessity. Alexander is right in regarding "the neglect of Family-Worship as springing from luke-warmness and worldliness in religion, and as a portentous evil of our day." ■

God's Wedding Band: Reflections on the Creation-Evolution Controversy, by Norman De Jong. Winamac, IN: Redeemer Books, 1990. 102 pages, \$7.95, paper. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

This is a disappointing treatment of the controversy between creation and theistic evolution that is being fought in Reformed and evangelical churches at the present time. In the conflict, the professor at Trinity Christian College is on the side of the angels alright, not on the side of the monkeys. He identifies the real war as Satan's attack on God's Word in Genesis 1 and 2, rather than a conflict between genuine science and the doctrine of creation. He pleads for a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-11, with one notable exception.

But the book fails to take hold of the issues in the present controversy in any serious, thorough way. It as-

serts but does not demonstrate theistic evolution's contradiction of basic biblical doctrine. It does not try to show how the apparent testimony of science might be harmonized with the contrary testimony of the Bible. It does not take up the arguments of Howard Van Till (to whom the book repeatedly refers) one by one, in order to expose and refute them. Even the reference to the crucially important scientific assumption of uniformitarianism is hardly more than that — a reference. Although De Jong correctly states that this assumption is contradicted by the Flood of Genesis 7 and 8, he does not show how this is so, nor how the Flood might account for some of the apparent findings of science that the earth is very old. Similarly, although there is quotation of Scripture, there is virtually no interpretation.

One critically important weakness in De Jong's defense of creation against theistic evolution is his position, or lack thereof, regarding the days of Genesis 1. First, he informs us that he is determined not "to get involved in a debate with anyone about the meaning of the word 'day' in Genesis" (p. 39). But then he goes on to assert that the matter of the days of Genesis 1, whether regular, twenty-four hour days or long periods, is "either problematic or inconsequential" (p. 41). In the meantime, he ridicules those who "insist that the days of creation, described for us in Genesis 1 and 2, are the twenty-four hour periods *as we know them* (emphasis his — DJE)" (pp. 39,40).

The days of Genesis 1 are by no means "inconsequential" to the defense of the faith against theistic evolution. First, history has shown that the day-age theory taught in Reformed churches forty years ago softened up those churches for theistic evolution today. Second, how one explains the days of Genesis 1, each one of which is expressly limited by an evening and a morning, has a great deal to do with one's literal or figurative interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 in their entirety. If the days are figurative, or symbolic, why not all the rest of Gen-

esis 1 and 2? If De Jong may decide to take the days non-literally, why may not N.H. Ridderbos adopt the framework-hypothesis concerning the days? Why may Howard Van Till not take Adam and Eve non-literally? And third, one cannot make the days of Genesis long periods without coming into conflict with such truths as the entrance of death into the creation only after the disobedience of Adam; the reproduction of the species after their "kind"; and even the reality of Adam, made directly by the hand of God from the dust.

This is not a very helpful contribution to the struggle being waged for the doctrine of (biblical) creation in the Reformed community today. ■

Seven Men Who Rule the World From the Grave, by Dave Breese. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990. 235 pages, \$14.95, hardcover. (Reviewed by the Editor)

The seven men are Charles Darwin; Karl Marx; Julius Wellhausen; Sigmund Freud; John Dewey; John Maynard Keynes; and Soren Kierkegaard. These men rule the modern world by their ideas. The areas of human life controlled by their ideas are biology (Darwin); economics, politics, and history (Marx); biblical studies (Wellhausen); psychology and psychiatry (Freud); education (Dewey); economics and government (Keynes); and theology and philosophy (Kierkegaard).

There is also a chapter on Albert Einstein. The author contends that Einstein's theory of relativity concerning the physical universe has been taken over by the popular mind as a theory of *relativism*, particularly in the area of morals.

Breese gives a brief, simplified explanation of the world-shaking and world-dominating theories of these men in language that the layman with a high school education can grasp. The book serves a valuable purpose: It helps to make the world of the late

20th century understandable to the Christian. Since the thought of each of the seven men is hostile to the thought of Christ in Holy Scripture, the book arms the Christian for his, and the church's, great struggle at the end of the ages. A first principle of all war is, "Know the enemy."

The author is right, that "the essential battle of the world is exactly ... a battle for the minds of men. The struggles that matter today and tomorrow are not fought with submarines, bombers, missiles, and moving armies" (p. 155). How a man's thinking influences human life on the broad scale and results in trouble for Christ's church is evident in John Maynard Keynes. Keynes advocated government intervention in a country's economy, and deficit spending. The result is that

Keynes has succeeded in putting the nations of the world in the position where they must come together under a new form of international control. The final, stark necessity toward which all of the world is heading is an international economic community, an international management committee — yes, a world government (p. 201).

A lively young adult, or adult, Bible-study class could very profitably use the book for its program. Discussion at one meeting would be devoted to the thought of each of the seven men in succession. This would be followed the next week by a critique of each thinker in light of the teaching of Scripture.

The title may be misleading. The seven do control the ungodly world. This, of course, is the author's meaning. But, in fact, seven men do not rule the world from the grave. There is One who rules the world. He rules from His seat on the right hand of God where He has gone in His resurrection from the grave. Through the preaching of the gospel by a faithful church, He is presently busy pulling down the strongholds of the theories of Darwin, Freud, Marx, and the others and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Himself (cf. II Cor. 10:4, 5). □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

EVANGELISM HIGHLIGHTS

In an effort to focus on a more effective local witness, using the means of personal evangelism, the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC proposed a three-part plan to their fellow congregation members. The first part of this plan was an Evangelism Emphasis Week which ran from September 22 to October 1. The purpose of this week was to call the attention of South Holland's members to their calling in personal evangelism and to give them practical instruction in how to carry this out. To start this Emphasis Week there was a special message on Sunday evening, September 22, entitled "Sounding Out the Word of the Lord," based on I Thessalonians 1:5-8. This was followed by a special presentation at South Holland's first Adult Bible Society meeting on September 24, in which Rev. Terpstra, their pastor, laid out in more specific fashion the biblical calling in personal evangelism.

The Emphasis Week was concluded by a special workshop on October 1. Pastor Ronald VanOverloop, of Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL, gave an introductory presentation on the specifics of personal evangelism.

The second part of this plan called for a special Reformed Doctrine Class. The content of this class was to be a summary of the Reformed Doctrine presented in the Belgic Confession. This class was intended to give South Holland's members, as well as friends from the community, an opportunity to put into practice the principles of personal evangelism which they learned during the Evangelism Emphasis Week.

The third part of the plan was a public lecture held in their church on

October 25, in commemoration of Reformation Day 1991. Rev. Terpstra was scheduled to give an address entitled, "The Beauty and Benefits of Our Reformed Confessional Heritage."

Before another issue slips by, let me add here that this past summer the Evangelism Committee of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada arranged a lecture program with their pastor, Rev. D. Kuiper, speaking on the subject, "The Biblical Doctrine of Creation."

Rev. C. Terpstra also was the guest speaker at the Reformation Day lecture sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL. He spoke on October 22 on the theme "Solo Christo — Christ Alone."

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The congregation in Lacombe, AB, Canada was not only busy with a lecture this summer. Their Consistory was also busily investigating different proposals to purchase land for a future church building site. One proposal to purchase four acres was to be voted on, but before the congregation could meet to vote, it was determined that development cost for that property would push the price out of sight. So the search for a suitable building site goes on.

The Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI recently approved two proposals from their Consistory. First, they approved the purchase of a lot that borders their church property on the north; and second, they approved a proposal to construct a brick sign in front of their church building.

The congregation in the Kalamazoo, MI PRC approved a proposal from their Consistory to build a canopy over the walkway leading to their church. And they voted no on a proposal to air-condition their auditorium.

DENOMINATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The annual meeting of the R.F.P.A. was held in the Grandville, MI PRC on October 3. This year Rev. K. Koole was the speaker. He addressed the group on "The *Standard Bearer*: Committed to Exposing Old Wolves in New Wool."

This year's Mr. and Mrs. and Adult Bible Societies' Fall Mass Meeting was held at the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on October 8. Prof. H. Hanks spoke on "Drama, Film, and TV. What the Bible Says."

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

We extend our congratulations to the Northwest Iowa PR Christian School in Doon, IA, which recently commemorated 25 years of covenant education. On October 2 all supporters, friends, students, former students, and teachers were invited to attend a program held in the auditorium of the Doon PRC.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

Rev. R. Cammenga asked for and received an extension regarding his call to serve as missionary to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ireland. By God's will, Rev. and Mrs. Cammenga will be in Northern Ireland, on behalf of our churches, for three weeks in November; and Rev. Cammenga asked if he could give his decision regarding this call after he returned in early December.

Rev. W. Bekkering declined the call to serve as missionary to Venice, FL.

Rev. R. VanOverloop has declined the call he was considering to serve as pastor to the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. From a new trio, consisting of Rev. C. Haak, Rev. D. Kuiper, and Candidate M. Dick, Southeast has extended a call to Rev. Haak. □

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

Report of Classis East

September 8 and October 16, 1991
First Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on September 8th and in continued session on October 16th.

The main item of business for these sessions was the consideration of protests from two consistories in regard to decisions taken at the May meeting of classis. At the May meeting, classis had decided to uphold the appeals of two brothers relative to the transfer of their membership papers to churches which did not display a large cross. Classis had decided that their consistory had erred in not declaring these brothers to be weaker brothers in accordance with Romans 14; and, further, that the consistory had violated Article 31 of the Church Order by requiring that these brothers remain silent about their position in the churches. The consistory was advised to send the membership papers as these brothers requested. The consistories of Southwest and Grandville, however, protested this decision of the May classis.

Southwest contended that the decisions of classis 1) violated Article 31 of the Church Order by improperly excluding from the settled and binding character of the ecclesiastical decisions matters of *adiaphora* found in connection with the corporate worship of the church, 2) erred in appealing to Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 in regard to the weaker brother (Southwest has tried to receive the brothers, but they refuse; Classis has given them this label, not Southwest; the concept of weaker brother does not fit the facts) and 3) violated Article 36 of the Church Order since classis' decisions overthrew the synodical decision of 1990; 4) contradicted classis' decision re Norristown; 5) condoned individualism in corporate worship. Southwest further informed the classis that membership papers will be transferred if the following are retracted:

1) their insistence on teaching their children their convictions re the cross issue, 2) their insistence on not worshipping or receiving sacraments in churches with large crosses.

Classis decided to reject the protest of Southwest on the following grounds (summarized): 1) The decision of the May classis did not exclude matters of *adiaphora* found in connection with corporate worship. Since these brothers have withdrawn all charges of sin and have promised not to militate against the decision of synod, Article 31 of the Church Order has not been violated and the papers should be transferred. 2) The decision of the May classis properly appealed to Romans 14 since it is apparent that these brothers, although in weak faith they consider a matter of *adiaphora* to be unlawful, fall into the same category as those in Rome who considered *adiaphora* (the eating of meats) unlawful as well. 3) The decision in May does not overthrow the decision of Synod 1990 re the cross issue. The Synod did not say that these brothers may not be regarded as weaker brothers but only that they might not appeal to Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 as grounds for their protest. 4) The decision of the May classis does not contradict the Norristown decision since classis decided there that a consistory may not be regarded as a weaker brother. 5) The decision of the May classis does not condone individualism in corporate worship. Members, for conscience' sake, may transfer to churches without crosses in their sanctuaries.

Grandville consistory protested this same decision of the May classis. With regard to placing these brothers in the category of weaker brother, Grandville gave the following grounds for protest: 1) These brothers do not fit the category of the weaker brother. Rather than considering these brothers to be weaker, they should be considered to be erring brothers. This

is plain from the teachings of Romans 14, I Corinthians 8, and other passages of Scripture dealing with *adiaphora* and Christian liberty. These brothers have erred in regard to the doctrine of Christian liberty and need to be instructed in this area of doctrine. 2) These brothers may not be placed in the category of weaker brothers since the Synod of 1990 expressly forbade this (Article 57, *Acts of Synod*). Synod further expressed itself that the possibility of offense (causing the brother to stumble) is essential for placing someone in the category of weaker brother, but offense was not possible with these brothers. With regard to Article 31 and its interpretation by Southwest, the following were the grounds for protest: 1) The error of these brothers in that they have a wrong understanding of the doctrine of Christian liberty and they need to conform themselves to the teaching of the church on this doctrine. 2) The primary purpose of Article 31 is to promote unity and harmony in the churches; classis' decision, however, leads to division and polarization.

Classis rejected this protest of Grandville on the following grounds: 1) Romans 14 applies to these brothers. There were those in Rome who also considered the eating of meats unlawful, but Paul instructed the Roman church to receive these brothers. 2) Our churches have never required conformity with regard to non-creedal doctrinal issues. 3) The May decision is not a violation of the Synod of 1990's decision regarding the cross. Synod's decision does not permit these brothers to appeal to these passages as a basis for protest. Synod, further, did not express itself on the question of weaker brothers, nor did it state that the possibility of offense was essential to placing someone in the category of weaker brother. 4) The decision of the May classis re weaker brothers will not divide and polarize the church as long as the injunctions

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of Romans 14 are followed, namely, that the strong not despise the weak and that the weak not judge the strong.

In other business, Classis again dealt with a request from Norristown to use their extract of *The Psalter*. This request was declared to be illegally before the classis.

The following classical appointment schedule was adopted for Southeast, Larne, and Venice: **SOUTHEAST** (PM only): October 6 — Koole, October 13 — Gritters, October 20 — VanBaren, November 3 — Joostens, November 10 — Slopesma, November 17 — Bruinsma, November 24 — Kamps, December 8 — Slopesma, December 15 — Woudenberg, December 22 — VanBaren, December 29 — Gritters, January 12 — Slopesma, January 19 — Bruinsma, January 26 — Koole. **VENICE**: October 6, 13 — Bruinsma, October 27, November 3 — K. Hanko, November 17, 24 — Gritters, December 8, 15 — Flikkema, January 5, 12 — Kamps, January 26, February 2 — Joostens. **LARNE**: December 1, 8, 15 — Koole, January 5, 12, 19 — VanBaren.

The expenses of classis for both sessions amounted to \$4,271.55. Classis will meet next on January 8, 1992 at Hope Church. □

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere sympathy to its fellow member, Mr. Donald Knoper, in the death of his wife,

KATHERINE.

May he and his family be comforted with God's Word. "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be for ever" (Psalm 37:18).

Henry Boer, President
Gerrit Holstege, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincerest sympathy to our members, Mr. and Mrs. Kurt VanOverloop, in the loss of Mrs. VanOverloop's mother,

MRS. K. KNOPER.

May our gracious God comfort them by His Word. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Mr. Jon Huiskens, Vice-President

Mr. David Harbach, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church express their sympathy to its fellow member Gordon VanOverloop in the death of his mother,

MRS. ANN (VanOverloop) SCHUT, on October 3, 1991. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all them that call upon him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Psalm 145:18, 19).

Henry Boer, President
Gerrit Holstege, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to our fellow officebearer, Jack DeVries, and family in the passing of their mother and grandmother,

MARGARET DEVRIES.

May we be comforted in the certitude that "the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Rev. M. Joostens, President

R. VanPutten, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we announce the 30th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents

GARRITT and DIANE PIKKERT (nee Flikkema)

on November 10, 1991. We thank the Lord for blessing us with parents and grandparents who have led us in truth to lead godly lives. May God preserve them in their marriage, and may He continue to bless us with their guidance.

"...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15b).

Jack and Mary Jean Mulder

Jonathan, Kevin, Christopher,
Stuart, Geoffrey

Allister and Kim Piers

Benjamin

Tim and Nancy Anderson

James, Katelyn

Linda

Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church, Lacombe, AB

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 7, 1991, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. RICHARD POORTINGA,

celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the love, guidance, and instruction which they have provided for us. It is our prayer that God will bless them with many more years of happiness together.

"Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (II Corinthians 13:11b).

Bob and Jean Poortinga

Carl, Steve, Jared, Karyn, Chad,
and Jeff

Randy and Deb Poortinga

Michael, Jenny, Becky, Richard,
Lisa, and Amy

Pete and Julie Zandstra

Brenda, Laura, Sandra, Dale, Pam,
Joanna, and Brett

Ken Poortinga

Daryl and Sue Poortinga

Erika

Lansing, IL