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In This Issue:

- ◆ *The Coming of the Wise Men* 122
- ◆ *Movies — Not a Question* 124
- ◆ *All Around Us* 126
- ◆ *The Types of Scripture (12)* 128
- ◆ *Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (12)* 131
- ◆ *Cocceius and Historical Theology (2)* 133
- ◆ *The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (6)* 135
- ◆ *The Joy of Motherhood!* 138
- ◆ *Islam (2)* 140
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 143

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The Coming of the Wise Men

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:1

Jesus Christ, born King of the Jews, far transcends the limits of the Jewish nation. While the carnal Jews do not receive Him, the called of God come from afar, from the Gentiles, and acknowledge Him as their God and King. Of this coming of the Gentiles we have the firstfruits and prophecy in the incident of the wise men coming to visit the Babe of Bethlehem.

According to tradition the wise men were three in number and were kings. It is even pointed out from what land they came, the Orient. However, this is all a matter of conjecture. The fact of the matter is that we do not know their number and they were not kings. The Scriptures call them wise men, who in the east were quite distinct from the rulers of the Gentiles.

Several things we can deter-

mine. They were Gentiles who came to Jerusalem from a heathen country. They were magi who occupied their time by studying the book of creation, paying special attention to the starry heavens. Somehow they had come into contact with the revelation that God had given to Israel, for they knew of the expectation of the Jews with respect to the Messiah. Their definite language reveals this when they ask, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Such knowledge cannot be learned from the revelation of God in creation. The magi must have come into contact with the Old Testament Scriptures. This is possible, for Jews had not only been carried away into captivity in Babylon, but were dispersed over the whole world. In addition, the Old Testament had been translated into the Greek language, which was the universal language at the time.

Quite some time must have elapsed before they made their visit, for immediately after they left Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary, with the Babe, fled to Egypt. That implies that the presentation at the temple after the forty days of puri-

fication had already taken place. Simeon and Anna in their old age had seen their Savior. Joseph and Mary were now living in a house. That some time had elapsed we also gather from the fact that when Herod realized that he was mocked of the wise men, he set the age limit of those to be killed at two years. This lapse of time is all proper, for salvation begins with Israel, with the church, in order then to include the Gentiles also.

They had seen His star. This is the reason why they made the long journey to Jerusalem. Although many ideas have been set forth to explain the star, none of them fit our text. The magi had seen this star in its rising in the east where they lived. This induced them to go to Jerusalem in quest of the born King of the Jews. While on their journey they did not see the star, but it reappeared when they left Jerusalem for Bethlehem. Verse 9 reads, "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

Indeed, unique and miraculous! Unique in that it occurred only once,

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at our Savior's birth. It had followed a special course in the heavens for the purpose of being a sign of the birth of Christ. It had been predestined for this special purpose.

Miraculous! It served the purpose of grace in a special manner, and was a special symbol of the bright and morning star. It is evident that the wise men beheld in this star a sign of the coming of the King of the Jews. No doubt this revelation came to them through the Old Testament Scriptures, which speak of Israel as the stars in multitude, and of the star that would arise in Jacob, and of the expectation of the Jews that a special star would announce His coming. The wise men must also have received special assurance from God that they would see His star, and a special revelation through the Spirit that this was the star.

To Jerusalem therefore they go. Surely He that is born King of the Jews will be found in the city of the kings. Disappointed they must have been when they arrived, for the city showed no interest in their King, or knowledge that such a birth had taken place.

Even though it was natural for the wise men to go to Jerusalem, God had a deeper reason for leading them to Jerusalem rather than to Bethlehem. This reason is threefold. First, the visit to Jerusalem had to impress upon their minds that Jesus was no king of the world. That is why He was not born in a palace, but in a stable, and now lived in a lowly dwelling in Bethlehem. Secondly, it was God's purpose that they visit Herod, who was now king. The visit would induce the occupant of the throne of David to try to kill the born King of the Jews. Already Christ was being persecuted by the power of the world. Thirdly, it was the divine purpose to reveal that Christ came to His own, but His own received Him not. Scribes and Pharisees hardened their hearts. Seeing they see not; hearing they hear not.

Israel is ripe for being rejected and cast out by God.

The arrival of the magi had a profound effect on Herod. We read in verse 3 that he was troubled. "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Herod could only look upon the Christ child as a rival to him for the throne. He therefore attempted to find Him and kill Him, as he had done before to many others who he thought posed a threat to his kingship.

However, this is not simply history; this is also biblical prophecy. Herod's hatred and his attempt to kill the Lord is prophetic of the opposition of the world power against Christ and His people. This opposition and persecution shall culminate in the Antichrist. The reason is that the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. He will not antagonize the kingdoms of this world by an arm of flesh, as Herod suspected. To the contrary, the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom. He will overcome the kingdoms of this world by a spiritual power. He will be King of kings, and Lord of lords! He will condemn the world and the ideals of world power and establish His eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The arrival of the wise men also had its effect on all Jerusalem. They too were troubled. We are not talking now about the spiritual babes such as Simeon, Anna, the shepherds, and the many others who believed, but of carnal Jerusalem as represented in the Scribes and Pharisees. They had heard many rumors about His birth in Bethlehem, which was now announced to them through the mouths of these Gentiles from afar. When asked by Herod where the Christ would be born, they were able to give it. They knew the Scriptures. "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land

of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel" (vv. 5, 6).

Thus, they serve to bring the Word to the Gentiles, but they themselves perish. Knowing the Scriptures and proclaiming them to others, they are not interested and do not go to Bethlehem, nor even ask the wise men to report to them what they had seen. There is in their heart no seeking after the righteousness of the kingdom of God. The coming of the Messiah can bring for them nothing but trouble and judgment.

The reaction of Herod and the Scribes and Pharisees had its effect on the wise men. No doubt at first they were disappointed. They had come to see and to worship the hope of Israel, expecting to see Jerusalem rejoicing because the King was born. Instead they find troubled hearts and ignorance of what had happened; knowledge of Scripture, but lack of spiritual interest.

However, they also had joy in their hearts. Undoubtedly the hope of Israel had been born. Therefore they did not leave for their own country but followed the directions and started for Bethlehem. And the Lord comforted them. The star that they had seen in the east appeared again and led them to Bethlehem, even to the very house. We read that they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

A strong and profound faith they expressed. They had faith, the evidence of things not seen. The Christ child was indeed Immanuel, God with us, born King of Israel, destined to rule over all things. But none of this could they see with the natural eye. All they could see was a lowly babe, weak and helpless, like all other babes. Yet, they fell down and worshiped and gave Him their gifts as an expression of their adoration.


Thus, in these Gentiles the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2, 3 was realized. "And it shall come to pass in

the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

To these Gentiles we also belong. Even with the first weak beginnings of our Savior's earthly life, there is a foretokening of the

wide embrace of that kingdom He came to establish. Here we have the first fulfilling of the ancient prophecies that had foretold that the Gentiles should come to this light, and kings to the brightness of its rising; that all they from Sheba should come, bringing gold and incense. These wise men were the earliest ambassadors from heathen lands, the first shadowy precursors of that great company to be gathered in from the east and west, north and south, to sit down with Abraham in the kingdom of the just. In these persons, and in their act, the Gentile world gave

an early welcome to the Redeemer, and hastened to lay its tribute at His feet.

In fact, they were our representatives at Bethlehem, making for us the first expression of our faith, the first offer of our allegiance. In our name they worshiped and gave the best and richest things they had. Let us also go to Bethlehem and worship our King. Let us not come with idle or empty hand, nor grudge the richest thing that it can hold, nor the best service it can render. This is true thankfulness for the great salvation that He has wrought. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Movies – Not a Question

The spring edition of the bi-annual magazine *Origins* has an article about movies entitled, "To Go or Not To Go (To The Movies)." *Origins* is the historical magazine of the archives of Calvin College and Seminary. It is a fascinating magazine for those who enjoy reading about the "olden days" – lives and institutions in the Reformed churches in general, and more specifically in the Christian Reformed Church. Most of the articles consist of well-researched and well-written historical material.

Of late, *Origins* has been printing articles that include an editorial element. Such is the case in the article on movies by Rev. Harry Boonstra, minister emeritus in the CRC.

Rev. Boonstra recounts the varying reactions to movies over the years in the Reformed church world. He traces this history in the Reformed Church of America (RCA), the Christian Reformed Church (CR), and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). A brief synopsis follows.

In the RCA, while the church paper (*The Church Herald*) condemned Hollywood's moving pictures, the RCA did not do so officially. Synods warned, but did not forbid. Boonstra's assessment is that the RCA was already adapted to the American culture. Thus, acceptance of movies came relatively early in the RCA, so long as one watched them "with discrimination, with Christian sensitivity and judgment."

The Christian Reformed Church started out condemning movies in no uncertain terms. Already in 1913, an editorial in the *Banner* observed that members of the CRC were allowing their children to attend the nickel theater, and expressed the belief "that it is more than time to open the eyes of our people...for the very pernicious character of most of the scenes thrown on the screen." By and large, the *Banner* would continue to hold this anti-movie stance for some fifty years.

The Christian Reformed Church condemned movie atten-

dance at the synodical level in 1928 and 1951, even adding the sobering warning that persistence in this activity should result, ultimately, in discipline. This stand was reversed in the CRC in 1966 with the adoption of the report "The Film Arts and the Church." While acknowledging that movies contained much that is false, immoral, and perverse, the report pointed out that the same is true of current magazines, literature, and the radio. The church was exhorted to claim and restore movies as part of the cultural mandate.

The *Banner* began publishing movie reviews in 1975. Any objections raised were rebutted with arguments that boiled down to the two words, *common grace*. Herman Hoeksema's "prophecy" with regard to movies in the CRC was fulfilled.

Boonstra then turns to the last holdout – the PRC. He documents the fact that movies have been condemned in the PRC from its earliest history, citing the *Standard Bearer*, pamphlets, and speeches. Boonstra notes, too, that the PRC's

condemnation of movies has an additional element not found in either the RCA or the CRC, namely, that drama itself is to be condemned, regardless of the content of the particular movie or play.

Boonstra focuses on what he calls the widening “gap between preaching and practice” in the PRC. He observes that the PRC have preached against common grace for over 75 years and still “the lure of the film continues and watching movies increases.”

The purpose of this editorial is not to answer Rev. Boonstra. Whatever his motives may be for writing his article, that is not our concern.

Nonetheless, the article is a sobering reminder to the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as to the broader church world, of the pervasive character of common grace. Common grace is the ground that allows the “discriminating” Christian to view all sorts of filth, to soak up the blasphemy, to drink up the hedonism, and vicariously to experience fornication, stealing, murder — wanton or vengeful, lying, Sabbath desecration, and rebellion. Common grace opened the floodgates of the CRC to what the *Banner* editor H. J. Kuyper in 1947 recognized as “the open sewer in the city of Amusement from which men and women of perverted tastes seek to satisfy their thirst for pleasure.”

Recognizing what horrible evils common grace spawns, our prayer is that God will grant the *Standard Bearer*, as well as faithful preachers everywhere, the strength to repudiate, and boldly to condemn the pernicious false doctrine of common grace.

The article also serves as a notice to Reformed churches of the pervasive evil of drama in the lives of altogether too many of God’s people. That includes members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

I could wish that Boonstra’s portrayal of the use of drama in

the PRC could be rejected out of hand. I fear that it cannot be. Drama is a serious problem. He cites evidence from articles and pamphlets published within the PRC, and his own personal experience. It grieves me that I could add to the evidence from what I have heard.

However, the problem must not be overstated. Drama is not a problem in every Protestant Reformed home. There are homes where the evils and temptations of drama are so clearly recognized that no television set is allowed, nor even desired. There are homes, many homes, where the television is strictly controlled and drama is not viewed on the screen. There are VCRs (and DVDs) that have never run a drama, but rather films displaying the glories of God’s creation, as well as informative or edifying speeches. There are covenant young people in the Protestant Reformed Churches who by God’s grace resist successfully the pressure to visit a theater or attend a video party.

But on the whole, it must be admitted, Boonstra is correct. Attending/renting movies and watching televised drama are altogether too commonplace in many Protestant Reformed families.

If Boonstra’s description is accurate, his solution is unacceptable. Though not specifically stated, the thrust of the article is that the PRC ought to stop condemning common grace and end the blanket condemnation of the world’s movies and of drama itself. This is the only way that the PRC can avoid being hypocritical, since Protestant Reformed people are watching television, renting movies, and going to theaters.

His solution is that the church’s *teaching* be determined by the *practice* of the members. The *Origins* article demonstrates that the CRC’s movie policy changed in exactly that way. A survey of the members of the CRC revealed that many members, especially of the youth, were

attending movies. However, the official stand of the denomination prohibited movie attendance. Synod resolved the conflict by voting to abolish the condemnation of movies.

I have a contrary solution, which I will set forth at a later time. But let it be firmly established that the church’s teaching and preaching may be governed only by the Bible, not by common practice. It is an established Reformed conviction that Scripture is the only rule for faith and life, that is, what one believes, and how he lives. Admittedly, those two things (belief and practice) ought not be in conflict. Obviously, believers sin. They fall short of the life that they confess God’s Word requires of them. However, if the church teaches the Word of God faithfully, and that teaching is simply ignored in practice, this is a dangerous situation. It cannot last.

It is my settled conviction that to go or not to go to the movies is not a question which a believer need deliberate. Scripture’s teaching on sanctification alone proves that drama ought to have no place in the life of a follower of Christ. The sins portrayed in movies rule out the world’s drama for the Christian. That aspect will be discussed, the Lord willing, in a subsequent issue.

The other point we hope to demonstrate is that drama per se is wrong. This idea may be new for those who are unfamiliar with the PRC. It is not, however, anything new in the PRC. In the third volume of the *Standard Bearer*, Herman Hoeksema insists that “the movie and the theater are to be condemned principally. There is no good movie. A Christian theater and a Christian movie are a contradiction in terms.”

Before going any further, it is necessary to say what we mean by drama. Drama is the acting out of a story by means of dialogue and action as in real life. One sees immediately that there is an aspect of this discussion that involves

Christian liberty. To be clear, it is not a matter of Christian liberty as to whether or not the Christian may enjoy sin. That should be obvious. Rather the question that involves Christian liberty is this — When does mimicking become drama? When a little boy begins to hammer some nails into a board, thus imitating his dad — is that drama? When two men get up at a wedding reception and tell jokes together as they pretend to be a baseball player and a news reporter — is that drama? When a group plans a three-minute skit, practices it twice, and gives it at a dinner party — is that drama? So one can talk about a first grade play, and a high school play, and so on, all the way to the Broadway plays and the Hollywood movies. There are different levels of impersonation in these activities. Somewhere in that spectrum, one draws a line and says: As far as I am concerned, drama begins *here*.


I contend that the heart of drama is that the actor endeavors to suppress his own God-given personality in order to assume that of another. There are those who argue that drama does not necessarily require such an activity. However, it is clear that a good actor seeks to think, feel, act, and speak like his assumed character. The more successful the effort, the more convincing the result, and the more certainty of great public acclaim for the performance.

The better actors will go to great lengths to accomplish this. I read some time ago of an acclaimed actor who put on forty pounds in order to act out the part of a boxer, because, said he, he wanted to feel like a boxer. It is lately reported that an actress added thirty pounds to her weight in order to play the part of a clumsy character in a movie. Rave reviews of a recently released movie about a blind singer declare that the actor does more than mimic his character, “he becomes” the legendary musician. To prepare for his role, the actor wore prosthetics over his eyes for entire days to understand how it feels not to have sight.

Years ago (March 3, 1980), *Time* magazine did an extensive report on a notable movie star named Peter Sellers. The article demonstrates that his stellar acting was due to his ability to assume the personality of his assigned character. For him, it all revolved around the voice. Said Sellers, “Once I had the voice, I suddenly found that I was doing what the character would do, so I did not have to think about it. The character did it for me.” The report revealed the dreadful truth about the man — after so many different acting rolls, his own personality was virtually obliterated. The interview revealed, wrote the reporter, “his (Seller’s) profound fear that the real Peter Sellers, at 54, is virtually a cipher, and that he has no personality.” This report is more than

a profoundly sad account. On the one hand, it demonstrates that the actor’s goal is to adopt the personality of his character. The successful actor can do it. On the other hand, it demonstrates the destructive power of this sinful activity.

The personality of a man is what makes him unique. It is God’s stamp on the individual that makes him different from every other human being on the earth — right down to the print of his fingers. There are not two persons identical in all the world. Deliberately to override one’s personality, and adopt another, I consider to be rebellion against the Creator. *I am fearfully and wonderfully made*, we confess with the psalmist. Part of that wonder of our creation is that God unites body and soul, perfectly fit together, and then presses upon that living being the one personality that is perfectly made for it. Overriding that personality in superb acting results in the devastation apparent in the mind of a Peter Sellers.

There are those who cannot agree that the essence of good acting is suppressing one’s own personality in order to assume another. I will freely admit that I was not always so convinced, as I now am. Yet, there is another dimension to drama, namely, that drama always includes acting out sin. That should seal the question for the believer. More on this next time. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ Persecution is a Reality

“...all that live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution” (II Tim. 3:12).

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

In our intercessory prayers we often remember before God Christians being persecuted. In these prayers we are not, I hope, just praying for ourselves and those we know who must endure scorn for their faith, but we are praying especially for those suffering physical persecution — imprisonment, hunger, torture, beatings, death, etc. Usually, we are not aware per-

sonally of such saints, and so we are praying with a certain lack of understanding.

In my recent reading in a variety of religious periodicals, I have been struck by the reality and severity of the persecution of Christians in some parts of the world. The persecution comes from oppressive governments and other non-Christian religious groups who

through violence seek to destroy Christianity.

China is an example of the first form of persecution – an oppressive government. In a recent *Christian Renewal* article (October 6, 2004), the following item of News appeared under the heading “Chinese Torture Continues.”

Allie Martin, Agape Press – The head of the U.S. Department of State’s Office of International Religious Freedom says China continues to oppress Christians and other religious groups, and that is why the Communist nation remains on the department’s list of “countries of particular concern.” The release of the sixth annual State Department Report to Congress on International Religious Freedom cited a number of repeat offenders on its list of governments that violate citizens’ basic human right to religious liberty. China is one of five nations that have been among those offending nations for quite some time. John Hanford, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, notes that the conditions reported in China warrant that regime’s inclusion on the list of countries of particular concern. For years the Communist government in China has continuously engaged in the repressive treatment of Christians and other religious groups, Hanford explains. “Protestants are forced to belong to the government-sanctioned church,” he says, “and if they don’t and they try to meet in house churches, then they risk arrest and, in some severe cases, beatings and torture.”

Of course, we don’t ever hear about these “severe cases” from our media, unless an American is the object of the persecutions. But I have another periodical that fills in some of these details. In the November 2004 issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs*, under the title “Martyred in China,” one reads of two women who “went to the market place of Pusdu Town, Tongzi County” and were arrested by the

local PSB “while they were distributing Bibles and other gospel tracts.” In the official arrest document, both were accused of “suspected spreading of rumor and disturbing the social order.” After their arrest “they were interrogated through the night of June 17th and morning of June 18th. Then during the evening of June 18th, Sister Jiang’s village chief told her relatives she was declared dead at the PSB office of Tongzi County, around 2:00 p.m., that day.” Villagers affirm she was “a strong, healthy lady, without any medical problems.” Pictures show she was beaten and had her hair torn out. Her fellow prisoner says she was “kicked a lot, her shoes were torn off, and her hair was pulled out.” Family members who saw her at the funeral home said that “they saw much blood on her body and scars from beatings on her legs and her neck.” The PSB would not return her personal belongings, including the clothes she was wearing during the interrogation.

This, I have to believe, is just one instance among many. In fact, Presbyter Ji Jianhong, chairman of the national committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant churches in China (a government sanctioned organization), admits as much. When asked by Mark Galli of *Christianity Today* (November 2004), about the persecution of Christians in China, he says on the one hand, “There is no persecution of Christians in China,” and on the other hand, “Yes, some Christians get arrested, but not for their faith. They get arrested because they have broken some law. It is not against the law to be a Christian or to practice your faith.”

No, Christianity is not against the law when you do it as the Communist Regime stipulates. But you can be arrested for any individual expressions of your faith, and the results of the arrests are persecution and death for the faith.

Indonesia, and other countries

with a large Muslim population, are increasingly becoming difficult places for Christians to live and work in missions. In these countries Muslims target Christians by destroying churches and going on killing rampages. Because the population in Indonesia is 80% Muslim, and because the government is mostly Muslim, these things are overlooked unless they cause some massive civil turmoil.

Reverend Yonson Dethan, a graduate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches and a minister in the Calvinistic Reformed Churches in West Timor, in a lengthy article in *The Reformed Perspective* (October 2004) explains some of the persecution going on in Indonesia. He writes,

If you go on the Internet and type in “Poso persecution” or “Ambon persecution” (Poso and Ambon are provinces of Indonesia, RK), then you can see and read how terrible the persecution is. We get some information in the newspapers here about it, but seeing it on the Internet was quite something; people were being slaughtered and pregnant women were being cut open and also a baby was, in front of her father, burned up by fire.

There is much more in the article: rape, mass murders, church bombings, and more. All this persecution comes for one thing; confessing Christ and gathering to worship Him. Would we be ready to suffer like this for our faith?

Rev. Dethan nicely concludes his article this way,

We believe that through this persecution comes blessing from the Lord, and even a double blessing. For through it we believers are being tested or purified so that we may be built up for the glorification of God’s name. Persecution reminds us of the Word of God in Philippians 1:29, that we are granted not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him.... Thus we conclude that persecution is good for testing our

faith, for purification, for building us up and for the glorification of God's name.

And that is our prayer for the persecuted.

■ "Judging the Judgment"

On the home front there is a buildup towards a different kind of persecution. The media, Hollywood, politicians, and other public figures are bending the mind of society into thinking that traditional Christian values and teachings are of the same ilk as the Taliban mentality. The build-up, of course, is towards laws that criminalize Christian values and teachings.

In the August 14, 2004 issue of *World* we read about some of this education of the American mind. *World* editor, Gene Edward Veith, reports on an unbelieving reporter's surprise at the Christian teaching concerning the last judgment.

When Nicholas Kristoff of *The New York Times* read the finale in the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, he was shocked to see what Christians believe about the last judgment.

In *Glorious Appearing*, Jesus returns and unbelievers are judged. Mr. LaHaye and Mr. Jenkins present their punishment in gruesome detail: Flesh dissolves, eyeballs melt, a fiery fissure opens up in the earth and swallows up the ungodly.

Mr. Kristoff reads all of this as violence against non-Christians, as monumental intolerance that is no different than the mindset of Islamic terrorists. The view of "Jesus returning to Earth to wipe all non-Christians from the planet," Mr. Kristoff observes, is believed by millions of Christians. "It's disconcerting to find ethnic cleansing celebrated as the height of piety."

Veith continues,

The *Left Behind* series is not the best representation of Christian theology (an understatement, RK). But Christians who disagree with Mr. LaHaye and Mr. Jenkins on eschatology and writing style are subject to the same criticism.... In the current cultural climate, the belief that there is no salvation apart from Christ will be anathema.

Veith is correct. The media makes no bones about labeling Christian teaching and lumping it with the terrorist mindset. Why? The explanation is their own fear of the judgment. As Paul reasoned with Felix of judgment, "he trembled" (Acts 24:25). The judgment is "the terror of the Lord" (II Cor. 5:10-11). And so it is labeled "ethnic cleansing celebrated as the height of piety."

Veith goes on to show that the biblical teaching on the judgment has nothing to do with ethnicity, but with sin, and particularly the sin of rejecting the gospel of Christ.

Christianity, he points out, is not primarily about punishment, but is a message of deliverance from punishment. "This message," he says, "will not be popular, since the proclamation of forgiveness through Christ implies a sin that needs to be atoned for. 'I don't need forgiveness,' many will say, 'I haven't done anything wrong.'"

Because they do not want to hear about sin, they label and lump Christianity with the terrorists.


■ A Surprise

And briefly — something the politicians and media missed in the pre-election campaigning and reporting.

Pollsters had focused on terrorism, Iraq and the economy as key issues in the run-up to Tuesday's election.... But "moral values" was the single top issue cited by voters, and social and religious issues such as gay marriage, gun ownership, and abortion loomed large.... CNN's analysis of the exit data showed that morality was cited as the number one concern by 22 percent of voters (Reuters, Nov. 3, 2004).

A surprise for the pollsters, the media, and the politicians!

A surprise for us? Or, an answer to prayer?

"...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2). 

Day of Shadows

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture (12)

George Ophoff was Professor of Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in its early days. Reprinted here, in edited form, are articles that Ophoff wrote at that time for the *Standard Bearer*.

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2004, p. 106.

128/Standard Bearer/December 15, 2004

Second principle of interpretation

Let us now consider another important principle of interpretation. Reflecting again on the examples of typi-

cal materials that we considered last time, we discover that not one of the events, transactions, or persons used by the inspired writers as figures of the *good things* under the gospel is of a sinful nature.

Hence, we conclude that events or persons of a sinful nature may not be regarded as figures of things sacred and holy. This is never done — neither by Christ, nor by the inspired writers in general. Nevertheless, it is maintained by some that this rule has its exceptions. It is claimed that no one less than Christ can be said to have violated it, when He uttered the parable of the unrighteous judge (Luke 18). Let us see. “There was in a city,” so spake Christ,

...a judge which feared not God, nor regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

It is held by some that in this parable the unrighteous judge is represented as a figure or image of God. Nothing, however, is farther from the truth. The unrighteous judge is, in a spiritual-ethical sense, the very opposite of God and may not, for that reason, be regarded as God’s image or figure. This unlikeness is one of the elements constituting the message of the parable. The ungodly judge hearkens unto the pleadings of the widow. In doing so, he is being impelled by selfish motives. Since God is righteous, and since those who turn to Him are the elect, the beloved of God, we may be sure that they do not turn unto God in vain. “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.”

Another parable to which the

critics of the rule under consideration might turn for support is the parable of the crafty steward (Luke 16).

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him of wasting his goods. And he called him and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my lord taketh away from me my stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are wiser in their generations than the children of light.

Christ now gives the application,

And I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.

Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Now it is held by some that the unjust steward, the representative of the children of the world, is in this particular parable set forth as an image or type of that child of the light who is wise and who is therefore engaged in making to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. But, again, nothing is farther from the truth. Before explaining the matter, it is best that we first attend to the rather obscure injunction of our Lord, “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.” The meaning is that the children of the light should make their worldly goods bear them interest in heaven. This is done when these riches are placed in the service of heaven instead of in the service of self. Our possessions become our friends when we lay them at the feet of Christ, whose property they are.

The unjust steward is the ungodly one who is very clever when it comes to safeguarding his own interests with God’s riches. Hence, we may not regard this one as an image or figure of the child of light. He is not, for he is darkness, and the children of the light *are light*. And what concord hath darkness with light? None whatsoever. There are, therefore, no points of convergence between the two. The unjust steward is not a type, nor may he be taken as an example. Harken then unto the message of the parable: The ungodly one as a man of affairs is very wise. He knows how to make God’s riches serve him to the very best advantage. Be ye wise as children of the light and see to it that your riches bear you interest in heaven.

Third principle of interpretation

Another leading principle of interpretation is that the type can have but one basic meaning. A self-evident truth, we would say.

For the sum total of the typical events, transactions, and persons in sacred history constitute a language that God was pleased to use to convey information from His own consciousness into the consciousness of man. Now, every one is quite ready to admit that a language consisting of words with divers meaning would occasion unheard of confusion in that circle where the language was being spoken. The word tree, let us say, would soon become obsolete if it were being used as a symbol of three or four dissimilar things. The type, then, as the word, can have but one meaning. In other words, a type cannot possibly be a figure of two or more dissimilar events, transactions, or persons.

Fairbairn reflects on this principle in his evaluation of the typical exegesis of Classius and Taylor:

Classius makes the deluge to typify both the preservation of the faithful through baptism, and the destruction of the wicked in the day of the judgment; and the rule under which he adduces this example is that "a type may be a figure of two, or even contrary things, though in different respects." In like manner, Taylor, taking the full liberty of such a canon, when interpreting the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea as a type of baptism, sees in that event, first the offering of Jesus Christ to their faith, through the sure and safe way to the celestial Canaan; and then this other truth, that by His merit and mediation He would carry them through all difficulties and dangers as deep as the bottom of the sea, unto eternal rest. In this specimen the Red Sea is viewed as representing at the same time, and in relation to the same persons, both the atoning blood of Christ and the outward trials of life. The other example is not so palpably incorrect, nor does it in fact go to the entire length which the rule it is designed to

illustrate properly warrants; for the action of the waters in the deluge is considered by it in reference to different persons as well as in different respects. It is at fault, however, in making one event typical of two diverse and unconnected results.

In spite of the above criticism of Fairbairn, however, the typical exegesis of Classius and Taylor is basically correct. It has the sanction of Scripture. According to the testimony of Holy Writ, the Red Sea is at once a type of the atoning blood of Christ and of the trials of life. But to this must be added "in different respects." And the above authors did not fail to make this addition. There is that familiar passage in the first epistle to the Corinthians:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.


In this Scripture the waters of the Red Sea are represented as a symbol of the blood of Christ. The other Scripture is found in Isaiah 11:

And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

There is a plain allusion in this Scripture to the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea. Rivers and seas are here represented as types of difficulties which stand between the elect sinner and salvation — difficulties insurmountable by man, yet overcome by Jehovah. Of such distressing ob-

stacles the Red Sea was also a type.

Classius erred, however, in maintaining that a *single type* may be a figure of two, or even contrary things, though in different respects. It is certainly true that any *thing* or *person* in sacred history *may prefigure*, in different respects, two dissimilar events under the gospel. The Red Sea, from the point of view of the cleansing properties of its waters, is a symbol of the atoning blood of Christ. The event of the waters of the Red Sea engulfing the obstinate Pharaoh and his hosts is a figure of the Christ vanquishing the foes of His kingdom. But the Red Sea would also have effectively obstructed Israel's path had not Jehovah intervened. As such, this sea is also a type of the difficulties encountered by the pilgrim journeying to the celestial city — difficulties which are overcome in that the Almighty God takes a hand. God makes a path for His people. The Red Sea, in these three respects, does serve as a figure of three distinct events or series of events. But it is not the case that the one type or figure has three meanings. Rather, we are confronted here with three types: (1) The baptizing of Israel by the waters of the sea; (2) the drowning of Pharaoh by these same waters; (3) the passage of the Israelites through this sea. On this one body of water has been engraved, as it were, the images of three distinct yet related events or series of events. The waters of the sea are indispensable to the three pictures.

There is yet one rule remaining to which we shall attend in a following article. 

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (12)

The Third Prophecy (cont.)

2:11. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts; ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,*

Haggai is commanded to go to the priests with a question concerning several points of law, the law of Moses. He asks the priests these questions because they were the official interpreters and teachers of the law. This is especially clear from Malachi 2:6, 7. There we read:

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

This particular question is not specifically answered in the law of Moses. There is, in other words, no specific verse or verses in which the questions of Haggai are dealt with, but the answer could easily be deduced from the teaching of the law regarding cleanness and uncleanness, especially in personal matters, and the priests to whom Haggai brought his questions apparently had no difficulty finding answers.

They answer these questions, however, not only as a matter of

personal interest for Haggai, or even for themselves, though the matter certainly concerned them also, but for the benefit of the people who were doing the work. That is clear from verse 14, where the lesson from the law is applied to the people in the form of a rather sharp word of God that concerns the personal holiness of the people in the work they were doing.

That Haggai addresses this matter of holiness does not mean that people had turned away from God once again and were living very sinfully. Of that there is no evidence in the text or in the other accounts of the work. In fact, the blessing that God promises in verses 15-19 is proof that God was pleased with them and with the work they were doing. Nevertheless, the matter of their holiness was so important that it had to be addressed at the very beginning of the work.

12. If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine of oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.

The two questions are very similar. The first concerns the meat of the sacrifices, especially of the sin offerings (Lev. 6:25, 26) that were offered in the temple. That meat is called "holy flesh" by Haggai. That meat was apparently carried at times by the priests in the skirts of their robes, perhaps to the altar to be burned there, or from the altar to be eaten by the priests or the people. In instances where they were carrying the meat, Haggai asks if contact with the robe

in which they carried the meat would make other things holy. He mentions other food especially. In other words, if the robe brushed against other food, would the holiness of the sacrificial meat be transferred to the items that were touched by it or by the robe in which it was carried?

The priests were able to answer that question correctly with the simple answer, "No." Leviticus 6:27 indicates that the garment itself or any other vessel in which the meat was carried would be holy. The rest of the priests' answer is not specifically given in the law, that the holiness would not be transferred from garment or vessel to other things. They must have deduced their answer from those passages in the law that indicated that the people, who often ate the meat of the sacrifices, were not themselves necessarily made holy by the holy food they ate. It was possible for them to eat and to remain unholy.

Haggai is talking about ceremonial holiness, the "holiness" of things that were set apart and kept separate for the worship of God. That ceremonial holiness, however, is a picture of true spiritual holiness, for true holiness also means to be set apart for and dedicated to the service and worship of God. Haggai, then, is pointing out through this question and its answer that holiness is not transferred by mere external contact with holy things.

The Jews often fell into that way of thinking. They thought that because they had the temple and the sacrifices and the worship of God there, and because they at-

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tended faithfully on those things, that they were different and better than the nations around them. Nor were the Jews unlike Christians today.

That is also a very important principle in the New Testament. It is a principle that applies to the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and to the water of baptism. It also applies, however, to any circumstances in which we have external contact with holy things, worship, the reading and study of the Scriptures, prayer, church membership, the hearing of the preaching. In all of these circumstances we come into very close contact with holy things, but the holiness of those things, which is the holiness of God Himself, is not transferred by mere contact.

We must think of the holy flesh in terms of the sacrifice of Christ, which alone redeems and sanctifies, of the Spirit of the living God, and of His own divine saving power. These things are carried to us in the preaching of the gospel, the sacraments, prayer, church membership, and all of the other means that God uses to give His saving grace to His people, just as the holy flesh was carried in the priest's garments. The holy things of God are wrapped in these things, and we come into contact with them only through these "wrappings."

The holiness of the things of God, their separateness, lends a certain holiness and separateness to the external forms in which they are wrapped, but the holiness is not further transferred by mere contact with those forms and wrappings. Hearing the preaching, attending on the worship of God, being a member of the church, does not make someone holy. This first question and its answer, therefore, add up to a warning against formalism and dead orthodoxy in worship and church membership first of all.

The principle that is illustrated by this first question and answer ap-

plies in other everyday circumstances and relationships of life. In marriage between a believer and unbeliever, for example, the believer may have no expectation that his own holiness will be transferred to the unbeliever simply by virtue of the fact that they marry. Those who sin by marrying unbelievers often justify what they do on the ground that their marrying the unbeliever will have a good influence on the unbeliever, but that is a vain hope in light of this Word of God. Holiness is not transferred in that way.

We learn that same principle in the rearing of our children. Our own personal holiness and the holiness of godly and pious family life are not automatically transferred to every child who is born in a covenant home. Holiness does not come in that way, no more than it did in the case that Haggai cites to the priests.

Holiness comes only as a gift of God purchased by the blood of Christ and given through the Holy Spirit. The Lord hints at that in verse 14 when He points out that the people of Judah were in themselves and in all the works of their hands unholy. Even their sacrifices were not holy, without the work of God's Spirit and the blood of Jesus that was symbolized by those sacrifices. Church membership, faithfully hearing the preaching, being baptized, praying, do not in themselves make anyone holy.

13. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.

The second question Haggai asks of the priests is really the opposite of the first. He asks concerning ceremonial uncleanness. There

were many ways in which a Jew could become ceremonially unclean, all of which made it impossible for him to enter the temple or present his sacrifices. One way a person could become unclean was through contact with a dead body (Lev. 22:4). In that case a person had to wash himself and was unclean for the rest of the day (Lev. 22:6, 7).

Haggai's question concerns contact of someone with something that had become unclean. Would the uncleanness be further transferred by contact with something or someone who had become unclean? The answer of the priests, the opposite of the previous answer, taken from Leviticus 22:4, 5, was that the uncleanness would be transferred. The person who had become unclean would make everything he touched unclean, even the food he ate.

To understand the point of the answer, we must see that the ceremonial uncleanness of which the law spoke was a picture of the defilement of sin. Those laws certainly were used by God to protect the physical health of His people, but the main reason for them was to teach spiritual truths, in this case to teach them about the pollution of sin. Contact with death made a person unclean because death is the punish-

ment of sin.


The point of the question and its answer, then, is that while holiness is not transferred by external contact with holy things, there is the real danger that the pollution and defilement of sin is so transferred. To use a similar example, one drop of filth will pollute much water, but many added drops of clean water will not make the container of filthy water clean.

The application of this is best seen in the commands in Scripture to God's people to keep themselves

...while holiness is not transferred by external contact with holy things, there is the real danger that the pollution and defilement of sin is so transferred.

separate from the ungodly (II Cor. 6:14-18). The danger is always that they will become polluted and unholy. They must, therefore, maintain what is sometimes called the antithesis, their spiritual separation from the ungodly and from their ways.

This separation means they may not marry the ungodly (I Cor. 7:39), may not be joined to them in any unequal union (II Cor. 6:14), ought not have fellowship with them (Eph. 5:7-12). They need not go out of the world altogether, as Rome teaches (I Cor. 5:10), but

there must be a clear separation between them, and that especially of a spiritual character. If that separation is not maintained, it is not the unholy that will be made holy, but the holy that will be profaned and made unclean. 

Cocceius and Historical Theology (2)

In our previous article we discussed Cocceius' historical approach to the study of theology. We began to show the error of his "historical (or biblical) theology," as that is compared to what is known as "systematic theology." We continue, now, our treatment of that comparison.

The Importance of Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is important and crucial for the life of the church. The reasons are not difficult to understand.

God is Truth. God is all truth. He is the embodiment of truth, and all truth is in Him. He is one God and, because He is all truth, the truth is one.

God's revelation of His truth is one in Jesus Christ, for all revelation is in and through Christ and His work.

The record of that revelation in Holy Scripture is one. Even though Moses wrote a part, Isaiah another part, and Jude yet another part, the one Author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit. Scripture's unity lies in in-

fallible inspiration. Frequently the plea for biblical theology arises from those who make light of divine inspiration.

Thus Scripture teaches one doctrine of God, with all other doctrines as sub-headings, in such a way that the whole teaches the same truth, and never can there be found any contradiction. The Spirit does not contradict Himself. Job 19:25-27 agrees perfectly with I Corinthians 15:42-53, for the Spirit wrote them both. And Genesis 1 and 2 agree completely with the fourth commandment and Romans 4:17b, because the Holy Spirit was the divine Author of both passages.

It is this unity of Scripture that biblical theology denies. The principle of interpretation "Scripture interprets Scripture" is minimized or lost completely. With the loss of this principle, the *regula fidei* (rule of faith) is ignored.

This latter is especially important. The whole of the truth that the church has confessed in the past and confesses today is a truth based upon the whole of Scripture. When we seek to know what God has said about a given truth, then we search the whole of Scripture to find this out. If we want to know whether the will of God revealed in Scripture requires that infants be baptized, we go to both the New Testament and the Old to

learn concerning this doctrine. We hold steadfastly to the dictum: "The New is in the Old contained; the Old is in the New explained." Scripture does not give us an exhaustive treatment of one doctrine in one given text. We must search all the Bible.

Our confessions contain this *regula fidei*. Our confessions bring together what all God's Word says about a given doctrine. That is their beauty, their power, their importance in the church. No wonder that Baptists do not like confessions. They prefer to prove their points by jumping about from text to text and refusing to interpret any given text in the light of the whole of Scripture. Arminians are cut from the same cloth. They will always appeal to John 3:16, but they refuse to interpret John 3:16 in the light of Romans 9. Well-meant offer defenders jump on II Peter 3:9 or Ezekiel 33:11. And when it is shown that their interpretation of these verses contradicts John 12:37-41, they weakly fall back on paradox, and refuse to acknowledge that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Systematic theology is nothing else but taking the whole of Scripture as one's textbook, discovering what the whole Word of God teaches about a given doctrine, and relating all the doctrines to each other so that they form one whole.

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In this way we come to know the living God in all His glory and perfection.

If, for example, one possesses a beautiful portrait of one he loves, he does not study each small part of the portrait by itself. He would never, thus, come to see the portrait as a whole. Each section, taken by itself, gives no information. Only when each small bit is studied in relation to the whole can one see the portrait in all its beauty. Biblical theology thinks that by studying Genesis 17:4 in separation from Luke 2:7 one can come to a knowledge of the portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ, which portrait is in the Holy Scriptures. This is obviously nonsense.

Taking the whole of Scripture as one's textbook does not preclude the historical-grammatical method of interpretation; indeed, following this method enriches one's understanding of systematic theology and gives one a full and broad view of the one truth of God in Jesus Christ.

The Dangers of Biblical Theology

Biblical theology, in distinction from systematic theology, leads to many dangers. Some of these dangers appeared in the thinking of Cocceius. He became somewhat dispensational in his thinking, because he considered the Old Testament by itself and not in its relationship to the New Testament. This, in turn, led him to a wrong view of the Sabbath.

Biblical theology has had its proponents over the years. A new chair in biblical theology was established in Princeton Seminary for the express purpose of giving the renowned Gerhardus Vos a professorship in the seminary. Many seminaries have followed the practice by abandoning systemic theology and have taught only biblical theology. This has led to strange positions.

One devastating result of this approach to Scripture has been an emphasis on the human authorship of various books. While proponents of biblical theology have refused to go so far as to deny (in whole or in part) the divine authorship of Scripture, it is not difficult to see how the jump from biblical theology to higher criticism can be made. The Scriptures are one because they have one Author, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, through infallible inspiration, painted the portrait of our Lord

Jesus Christ. Every part must be explained in the light of every other part. The unity of Scripture leads to an understanding of the one portrait of

Christ, through whom we know the one true God. It makes no difference that the Holy Spirit painted this portrait of Christ over a period of more than a thousand years. He alone is the divine Artist, and He never changes.

But when one breaks Scripture into parts and studies each part in relative isolation from the whole, one must concentrate in some measure on the human instrument, the men God used to write the Scriptures: Amos, Jude, Obadiah, Matthew, Paul, and all the rest. One must determine how the writings of each one differs from the writings of the others. Then one must determine how the theology of one differs from the theology of another. The result is

that one gets (I use familiar clichés found in most seminaries) "a corpus of Johanine literature," that is, the writings of the apostle John; "Pauline eschatology" — frequently in distinction from and perhaps somewhat different from the eschatology of Isaiah. I recall

vividly a discussion in a class I was taking in which the professor insisted that any passage in Paul was irrelevant to a discussion of the meaning of a similar passage in John, because we are, after all, dealing with a "pericope in Johanine literature."

I am fundamentally uninterested in anything Pauline or Petrine in eschatology. I am deeply interested, when I come to Scripture, to learn the Holy Spirit's eschatology. If this is not true, then all I can do is read Scripture as I would read a *Festschrift*, in which many authors write glowing essays in praise of some renowned theologian.

If one's interest is solely in what the Holy Spirit writes, then he must study the whole of Scripture and each part in relation to all the rest, for the Holy Spirit is the Author of it all. One must follow the principle of "Scripture interprets Scripture" because the Holy Spirit, who wrote it all, alone can interpret His own book, something He does by means of His own book.

Biblical theology can be deadly. The method has recently been employed by the so-called "Auburn Four" in defense of the heresy of justification by faith and works.¹ In the first chapter of the book, Doug Wilson argues strenuously against confessions. It is understandable that he does, for our confessions give

to us what the church of the past, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, found in Scripture

concerning any one doctrine. The church brought the teaching of the whole of Scripture together concerning each doctrine of Holy Writ. The confessions are what Luther called the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith.

Steve Schlissel argues against

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knowledge through propositions. He claims that faith is in a person, not a proposition (p. 24). Strangely, he writes:

If Truth is raw rationality, then one must tidy up all one's propositions. But if Truth is *personal*, then one must get to know the Person better. And you get to know a person better by knowing his character. His character is revealed in the degree of correspondence between his words and deeds. That is why the Bible is given in the form of a story rather than a systematic theology (p. 25).


It is hard to understand what Schlissel means, but it is clear that he employs the biblical theology method to destroy knowledge through propositions. But how, apart from propositions, can we know anything? By inner feeling? By mystical contact? By an intuit-

tive sixth or seventh sense? The fact is that all our knowledge is through propositions, even our knowledge of things earthly, and including our acquaintance with people.

Scripture speaks of a personal, experiential knowledge of God that is the knowledge of faith. But the knowledge of faith that is personal and experiential consists of "a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed in His Word."²

But to such strange ideas, set forth with the express purpose of denying the truth of Scripture, does biblical theology lead.

Herman Ridderbos wrote a book, the English translation of the title of which is *The Theology of Paul*. It is a popular book and widely read. It proceeds from the perspective of biblical theology. It seeks to understand, as the title in-

dicates, what Paul believed concerning the truth of God. Frequently, what Paul believed is quite different from what John believed or Peter believed. What then? What saint of God cares what Paul believed? His interest (and everlasting salvation) is in what the Holy Spirit taught — be it through the instrumentality of Paul or Peter or Moses. The search of what the Holy Spirit teaches leads us to the whole of Scripture. That way is the way of systematic theology, not the wandering heretical paths of biblical theology. 

1. *The Auburn Avenue Theology: Pros & Cons. Debating the Federal Vision*. Edited by Calvin Beisner. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision. Published by Knox Theological Seminary, 2004.

2. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7.

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (6) Looking for Those in Need

In the last few articles we have examined the duties of deacons in relieving the needs of the poor. Having first collected the alms, deacons in Reformed churches are required to determine the need of those who request benevolence help, distribute the alms according to their need, and visit and comfort the poor with the Word of God.

If any have inferred, at this

point, that the work of relieving the needs of the poor begins only when the poor come asking, this article should dispel that notion.

Relief programs run by the government and other social agencies necessarily require the poor to ask for such help. Such programs advertise that money is available, and teach the public how to go about asking or applying for that money. The right forms must be filled out; the forms must be sent to the right person or address, etc. But such programs do not have the resources to come looking for the poor.

However, deacons in the church of Jesus Christ are not do-

ing enough if they wait for the poor to come asking. They must also *look* for those in need of benevolent help.



That the deacons must actively look for those in need of benevolent help is not stated in so many words in the Church Order of Reformed Churches, or in the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons, as these were adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. And no passage of Scripture can be found that states this duty in so many words.

Nevertheless, various principles set forth in Scripture and in

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Previous article in this series, November 1, 2004, p. 63.

the Reformed confessions lead us to say that the deacons must be looking for the poor.

I John 3:17 teaches that our care for the poor manifests God's love in us. We read: "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Clearly, the text refers to a situation in which a brother in Christ has a bodily, material need, which need could be supplied by giving him the goods of this world. In other words, the text speaks of the very kind of situation that deacons are authorized to address. Furthermore, it is clear from the text that the need is observed by others: "whoso ... *seeth* his brother have need" (*italics mine, DJK*). This is not a case of a person making request for assistance; it is a case of a need being observed. In such a case, the Word of God says, we are to meet the brother's need! The text speaks of the duty, not of deacons only, but of all Christians. Every child of God is required to render aid to fellow saints whose needs are apparent. But if every Christian is required to do this, certainly the deacons are also required to do it. By implication, this means they must be looking to see who has need.

In two places, the Heidelberg Catechism stresses the importance of "going the extra mile" with regard to our neighbor. In Lord's Day 40, explaining the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," the catechism teaches that it is the duty of the child of God toward his neighbor "to prevent his hurt as much as in us lies." In other words, we must look for ways to prevent the neighbor's hurt, even before he finds himself in a situation in which he might possibly get hurt. And in Lord's Day 42, explaining the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," the catechism not only teaches that it is our duty to labor faithfully, in order to be able to relieve the needy,

but also requires us to "promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may." This requires us to be aware of ways in which we can help our neighbor, specifically with regard to our stewardship of goods.

I understand both statements to mean that the child of God must not only take heed to fulfill the letter of the law, avoiding murder and theft, and being sure to love the neighbor's person and respect his possessions, but also that the child of God must look for ways in which he can be of a help to his neighbor, possibly before his neighbor even realized the need for help. And this principle I now apply to the work of the deacons — let them look for those in need.

Furthermore, the example of our Lord Jesus Christ shows that this is the duty of deacons. By His grace and Spirit, Christ supplies the needs of all His brothers and sisters. He does so when we cry for help to God in Christ's name. But His supply of our need in answer to our cry is not the *first* instance of His help. Even before we were aware of our sin and misery, Christ saw us in the misery of sin, humbled Himself in our flesh to atone for our sins, and rose again the third day with power to work His new, heavenly life in us. Before we knew our misery and need, He worked His life in us, to meet that need! He saw our poverty, before we were aware of it; and He acted to make us rich, before we desired these spiritual riches (II Cor. 8:9)!

Deacons are to manifest the compassion of Jesus Christ. They also, therefore, are not only to wait to be asked for help, but must be looking in the congregation to see who needs their help.



To this duty of the deacons other Reformed writers have referred by using the term "preventing poverty."¹ By this term, they do not mean that the goal of dea-

cons must be the eradication of all poverty in the church of Jesus Christ. These writers have not lost sight of the blessedness of having the poor, and of the fact that Jesus said that the church would always have the poor with us (Matt. 26:11). Rather, they mean that the deacons must work to prevent individual instances of poverty, by looking for those who are in danger of poverty. Prof. Heyns writes,

It is in the nature of the case that real care for the poor will first of all put forth earnest endeavors to prevent poverty where it is threatening.... When the danger of falling into poverty is warded off, it is a greater benefit to a person or family than relief can be when poverty has befallen them. Here, too, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.²

And DeJong says:

Just when must the deacons step in and offer assistance? Must this be done only when an individual or a family has become so economically impoverished that they can no longer provide even the barest necessities? This position has been advocated in some diaconates. Yet such a conception is fallacious....³

The idea that the prevention of poverty is the work of the deacons is not new or recent, according to DeJong. He asserts that

the duty of preventing poverty in specific cases has been recognized as part of the diaconal calling for many years by the Reformed churches. Already Voetius argued in favor of this attempt in his day. He based his position largely on Leviticus 25:35.... From this he concluded that to fulfil the law of brotherly love the prevention of poverty in concrete cases was preferable to waiting with assistance until extreme need had arisen, using as an example that the prevention of disease in the body is always to be preferred to a cure.⁴

Nor has the idea that the deacons are required to prevent concrete instances of poverty been limited to individuals. At least one Reformed denomination has required her deacons to prevent poverty. The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons as found in the CRC Psalter Hymnal, 1959 edition, reads:

The work of the deacons consists in the faithful and diligent ingathering of the offerings which God's people in gratitude make to their Lord, *in the prevention of poverty* (italics mine, DJK), in the humble and cheerful distribution of gifts according to the need, and in the relief of the distressed both with kindly deeds and words of consolation and cheer from Scripture.⁵

The phrase regarding the prevention of poverty was not in the form as it was written by Peter Datheen, approved by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619, and used in the churches in the Netherlands. According to an introductory note in the Psalter Hymnal, a committee of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church revised and rewrote the form, and this revised edition was adopted by the CRC Synod in 1934.⁶ In 1982 this revised form was replaced with an entirely new form, in which is made no mention of the duty of deacons to prevent poverty.⁷

We can appreciate this point that the deacons must work to prevent poverty, especially when we know that the term is not used to refer to the impossible task of eradicating all poverty, but to the prevention of specific cases of poverty. We mean the same thing, substantially, when we say that the deacons should be looking for those in need. Not only should they look for those who are greatly impoverished and destitute, but they should also look out for others who, though not destitute, still have needs that the deacons might be able to supply.



The reasons why deacons must be sure to *look* for those in need are several.

First, some who have a pressing and immediate need are reluctant, for one reason or another, to come to the deacons in their need. The deacons must therefore be observant of the members of the congregation, and be ready to go to those whom they suspect have need of benevolent help.

Second, some might be blind to their own needs. Not infrequently elders and pastors might find that people either do not see their spiritual needs, or refuse to admit their needs. Likewise it is possible that some will be blind to their material needs, or not admit that they have such needs. So the deacons must be looking.

Third, in some instances the saints of God face the real threat of poverty, even though they have not actually fallen into poverty. Perhaps such do not actually need benevolent help at the moment — but it is appropriate that already the deacons convey to such people their willingness to help. All of this requires the deacons to be observant regarding the earthly condition of the people of God.



How, practically, might the deacons implement this aspect of their work?

First, by working hard to get to know the people of God better. The deacons must *know* the congregation. They must take seriously their calling as individuals to fellowship with all in the congregation, and not only with their favorite group of friends. In this way they will more quickly become aware of the needs of the people.

Second, when the deacons hear of a family in which the head of household has lost his job, or in which a member has been recently hospitalized, the deacons would do

well to send a committee to visit this family. Not only would the committee have the mandate of asking whether the family's situation has resulted in benevolent need, but the committee could also bring from Scripture words of comfort and encouragement that God will care for the material needs of the family in their affliction.

Third, the deacons show they are looking for the poor when they bring a word of admonition and caution to a family that appears not to exercise good stewardship of its resources. Before the family's poor stewardship results in poverty, the deacons may encourage the family in the right use of the gifts God has given them.

Fourth, when the deacons are aware of approximately how much a family is contributing to the general fund budget, the deacons may contact those whose giving is not in accord with the budgeted amount, with a view to finding out whether the family needs benevolent help. This does not mean that our deacons must be "budget police" — rather, I have simply given one example of what might indi-

1. Cf. Prof. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1928), pages 324ff., and Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 137ff.

2. Heyns, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-325.

3. DeJong, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

4. DeJong, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

5. *Psalter Hymnal Centennial Edition: Doctrinal Standards and Liturgy of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, Inc., 1959), p. 123 of the section on doctrinal standards and liturgy.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 74.


7. The interested reader can find the current form on the internet, at www.crcna.org/whatweoffer/resources/synodical/liturgy/deacons82.asp.

cate to the deacons that a family has need.

At least one of our diaconates makes provision for paying a portion of the Christian school tuition bill for families whose tuition obligation exceeds a certain percentage of its income. Significantly, this

diaconate considers such help to be a matter of benevolence. This seems to me to be another way in which deacons can be looking for those in need.

I have given ideas as to how deacons will implement this aspect of their work, but I can do no more than that. The "how" might be dif-

ferent for every diaconate and congregation. But regarding the need to look for the poor, let godly, Reformed deacons face this question at their next meeting: have they been content merely to lend aid when asked for help? Or are they also looking for those in need? 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Joy of Motherhood!

The largest share of the body of this article is made up of a personal letter I received from a Protestant Reformed sister in our church in Edmonton, Canada. I am grateful that she has allowed me to print this letter because I believe it reveals what must be in the heart of every godly mother of Zion. Not only must there be peace and contentment in a mother's labors in the home, but she must see this task as challenging, exciting, and rewarding. All these are revealed in this letter. It is for that reason we print it.

I am going to give an answer to this letter in the next article I write because this letter raises questions that are worthwhile answering. In this article I would only ask the reader to take note of the following in the letter published. First, the emphasis on safety found within the circle of the home and family. This emphasis is all but lost in our modern society. I agree wholeheartedly that too much time is spent outside of the home by parents and children alike. Mothers who are in the

home spending profitable time with their children, and fathers who likewise are able to do the same inasmuch as they are able, make for a happy and godly home. Children too, when they are little but also when they become teens, must be shown that life and joy is found, not always on the go with friends, but in the quietness of home and family. Mothers go a long way in establishing this godly atmosphere in the family.

In the second place, I appreciate the emphasis on willingness to sacrifice of self for others. Career mothers are often times heard saying, "I just am not fulfilled in my work in the home. I need more!" That reasoning is self-seeking: I need fulfillment. What about the need of the children to have a mother in the home to field questions and to teach them by example what it means to live in communion with our heavenly Father? Motherhood is a time of self-sacrifice and giving of oneself to children. But the rewards are great!

Finally, take note, in this letter, of the desire to serve God in the calling of a mother in the home. That is above all our chief calling in this life: serve God! God gives us our covenant children for a short time in order that He might use a godly father and mother as means

in His hand to nurture the children of His family and covenant. A mother in the home who is busy doing this is humbly – but cheerfully too – walking as a servant of God in her life. That makes for the best of mothers!

Keeping these thoughts in mind, read the letter.

Dear Rev. Bruinsma,

I am writing to you regarding two *Standard Bearer* articles you wrote. The first one, titled "God's Command to Mothers," I found very encouraging and clear in setting forth the principles of Scripture concerning this calling. I hope that you will be willing to expand on a couple of points in a subsequent article entitled "Working Mothers."

I pray that I am not being touchy at the thought of being placed in a category named Extreme, but I did struggle with a feeling that enough had not been said. Will not there be mothers who now feel they have just cause to pursue work outside the home since Rev. Bruinsma has given his ok? This I try to see from God's perspective, in my very finite way, as to what He would have me do. I was very pleased that you brought up the phariseism that is prevalent in this area. This truly

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must be seen as a matter of the heart.

"There is the eleventh commandment...." This statement came off sounding rather sarcastic, leaving me with the impression you were about to embark in a whole different direction than your previous article. Away from living the antithetical walk, though it be difficult, to something fraught with indecision and no clear direction from God: "There are conceivably times when a mother will work outside the home and family." Certainly, if God places work in the church for her to do, I can agree. This is a part of her calling within a place of safety. But that statement was followed by sets of circumstances with which I have difficulty. It would seem necessary to ask the question, Where is God? Is He not sovereign over all, even difficult circumstances in our lives? He has commanded us to live in obedience to Him in all things, and promises to make a way out. Where, then, do we place the church in this? Is it not an organic, living part of our daily lives and circumstances? The office of deacon is beautiful and must be protected at all costs as God's providential way out of the cares of this world. Our dependence on God comes at great cost to our pride but affords much wealth to our souls.

It was clear that you said that full-time work was impossible for mothers, but was the door left open to other perilous alternatives? Why do I see peril? This goes back to a sermon you preached in Spokane, WA at their conference. Biblical child-rearing, where we as parents are to train our children in a life of obedience, was the subject. I remember, because it forever altered my perspective. God's Word led me to understand that I must properly deny myself and live in my calling as mother as an ambassador of Him. There is a circle of safety in which children can live. And in that circle there is a command to parents to train their children within

it, living out of faith in God's promises, spanking because God chooses it as a means to train our children. In this way we use that circle of safety as a means, not questioning it but loving it and seeing its blessings, trusting that He who sovereignly decrees knows best. There is then a circle of safety for fathers and husbands, as well as for mothers and wives. This is ordained by God and laid out in Scripture, as you well pointed out. For wives, it is to live in subjection. This too, you aptly showed us, was God's ordained chain of authority.

Now for those wives whom God has called to be mothers, it is perilous to try to live outside of their circle of safety. Who sets the boundaries? God, who is all wise. He has chosen with great care the vocation perfectly fit for her. She will be saved in childbearing, on her knees, soul baring, cross bearing, and in sacrificing service morning, noon, and night. To walk away from that submission to Him, and the subjection He places as boundaries on her, is to choose peril. Satan did that to Eve when he came to her and twisted the words of God and presented to her the lie as truth. She left obedience, and in so doing fell.

The lie appeals to our enemy within. Satan wants us outside the home. He knows that God places mothers in safety in the home in subjection, in humility serving while relying on Christ. It is subtle deception to think to myself that I would be a good helpmeet to my husband by lifting some of his burden of making ends meet. I must remember that burden was not given to me. It was given to the man, and God is the one who can make that burden light. Then I must find contentment in my station, within my God-chosen boundary, and not seek any merit or fulfillment outside of that.

It is appealing to find fulfillment outside the home. Why? It is heady, intoxicating stuff, this theology of self-love. The god of individualism, look out for yourself, decide for yourself, puts me in the driver's seat, determining for myself how I will find self-worth. Just a 50-cent raise will put a lift to my stride, and a co-worker's praise will bring a glow. But it is self-glory, for a fleeting moment that is of this earth earthy. Yes, just a couple of hours a night sell Tupperware. "Help us out. We really need only a small commitment of your time!" Is there peril? Indeed! The woman was made with her weaknesses, and this will lead her to slip off her submission, leave her subjection behind, and suffer a rift in that sweet fellowship with God. It takes great soul searching, brutally honest spiritual inventory, to examine why I will choose to work outside of the home as well as to do anything that would interfere with living out of obedience to God in His command to be a mother. Other temptations too will come, where she will be asked to think for herself. Who is

the Sovereign of her womb? For one, her strength is nothing in herself, so she must find her strength in God's Word. Sabbath day to Sabbath day she will come with her family to hear, "Thus saith God," and it will rule her walk.

The last question then is: do you place this in the realm of Christian liberty because it is a thing indifferent? Or is it commanded?

I love the calling of motherhood! God does flood the soul with peace, whether our husbands and children notice that loving service or not. God brings contentment and great joy inside the circle or station mapped out for me. Living in the realization that He has mapped out for them what is best, and leaving Him to direct all

It is subtle deception to think to myself that I would be a good helpmeet to my husband by lifting some of his burden of making ends meet.

things, liberates mothers so they can ponder over His mercy and governing care of His church. I would jealously guard the self-denying, God-ordained vocation of motherhood. It is here I am humbled and privileged to witness the wonder of a child stirred by the spirit within grabbing hold of the


truths of God's Word and appropriating Christ, living in gratitude. It is a miracle to behold, that through weakest means, God will be MAGNIFIED! Is the cost then too high???

I hope this is an encouragement, for I am thrilled that we speak about these issues. Although

difficult, we must do our battles against the world, and on the battleground of God's Word.

Lee Ann Ferguson.



Amen! God bless the mothers of Zion, whom God uses to build His church! 

Understanding the Times

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

Islam (2)

A Little Theology: Righteous by Works Alone

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

I Chronicles 12:32

In 1938, when Islam was weaker than ever before, the Catholic writer Hillaire Belloc predicted it would rise again to threaten the West. At the time, the state of Israel did not exist. What Belloc understood is that Muslims need no provocation to wage jihad against non-Muslims. Injustices on the part of the West may have added fuel to the fire, but the flame was lit by Muhammad and his Qu'ran.

For the Muslim, jihad (religious fighting) is very important, but even more important is believing in Allah and his prophet. Proverbs 4:23 informs us that out of the heart "are the issues of life." Thus, for modern-day Issachar to understand these perilous times and the

role of Islam in them, we must examine a little bit of the heart, the belief system, of Islam.

The Basis

The basis of Islam is its "Scripture," the Qu'ran. In the Qu'ran a good Muslim will find all that he needs to know to please Allah, and Allah will be pleased with those who follow to the letter the Qu'ran's teachings.

But before we delve into some of those teachings, we ought briefly to consider the origin of the Qu'ran. What we find in the Qu'ran are the words that the Angel Gabriel is supposed to have spoken to Muhammad over a period of some twenty-three years. Since Muhammad was illiterate, these revelations of the Angel Gabriel had to be written down by others. This was done by Muhammad's scribes as he would recite what Gabriel had said to him. Shortly after Muhammad's death these writings were collected and put together in a book about the size of the New Testament.

It should be understood that, while the Angel Gabriel was the means by which the Qu'ran was given to Muhammad, the Qu'ran itself is, to a Muslim, the Word of

Allah. By making that claim, Muslims do not

mean the same thing that Christians and Jews mean when they say the Bible is the Word of God. The traditional (and still nearly universal) Muslim understanding of the Qu'ran is far beyond the Biblical idea that God inspired human authors. Allah dictated every word of the Qu'ran to the prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. Allah Himself is the only speaker throughout the Qu'ran, and most often he addresses Muhammad, frequently telling him what to say to various adversaries.¹

The arrangement of these writings is a bit unusual. "Those who assembled the Qu'ran did not know the chronological order in which the suras (chapters, ck) came down. They opted for the format found in current interpretations: The 114 chapters begin with the longest and end with the shortest."² Understandably, this arrangement results in a rather disorganized set of writings, with little if any continuity whatsoever.

Consequently, reading the Qu'ran is often like walking in on the conversation between two people

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Previous article in this series: November 15, p. 85.

with whom one is only slightly acquainted. Frequently they make reference to people and events without bothering to explain what is going on. In other words the context is often not supplied. Wishing, perhaps, to fill this gap, early in Islamic history Muslims elaborated two principal sources for that context: *tafsir* (commentary on the Qu'ran) and *hadith*, traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.³

It should be noted further that the Qu'ran and the Bible have much in common. In fact, much of the Qu'ran is dependent upon the Bible.

With the exception of a few narratives purely Arabian in origin, all Qu'ranic stories have their biblical parallel. The many discrepancies between biblical and Qu'ranic accounts indicate that Muhammad was less concerned with the details of the event and more concerned with the moral underlying them. He cited such narratives not to preserve them in the Qu'ran for their own sake, but rather to support a point he wished to emphasize.⁴

Nevertheless, the Muslim attitude toward the Bible is one of reverence. Sura 3:84 of the Qu'ran states: "Say, We believe in Allah and that which hath been sent down to us, and that which was sent down to Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which was delivered to Moses, and Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them; and to him we are resigned."⁵ Where discrepancies between the Bible and the Qu'ran occur, Muhammad concluded that in those instances the Bible must have been altered. Clearly Muhammad plagiarized and manipulated the teachings of the Bible to serve his purposes.

Qu'ranic Inconsistencies

While Muhammad found fault

with the Scriptures, the Qu'ran has its own problems, one of which is that contradictions occur. These discrepancies most often are found when comparing Muhammad's early revelations (Meccan suras) with his later ones (Medinan Suras). Robert Spencer explains the difference as follows:

The Meccan suras date from the early period of the Prophet's career, when he concentrated on calling people to accept his new faith. In the year 622, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina to escape the growing hostility of the pagans in his native city; this was the *Hegira*, the event that marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. In Medina, he became a head of state and a military leader for the first time.⁶

Obviously Muhammad's attitude toward those who rejected his new religion changed. During the Meccan period, he appeared to be conciliatory in order to gain converts from Judaism and the pagans that worshiped in Mecca. However, once he became the dominating force in the area, his attitude toward "unbelievers" changed significantly, as the Medinan suras reveal.

This distinction between Meccan and Medinan suras becomes important because of the Muslim doctrine of abrogation. "Abrogation is the Islamic doctrine that Allah modifies and even cancels certain directives, replacing them with others."⁷ This doctrine is to be taken very seriously because it is grounded in the Qu'ran: "None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?" (Sura 2:106). While Muslim theologians disagree concerning which verses have been abrogated and which others have replaced them, they generally agree that when inconsistencies occur between Meccan and Medinan suras,

the Meccan has been abrogated and replaced by the Medinan one.

This is especially important when one considers Muhammad's teachings about jihad. Muslims will often point to the Meccan suras to demonstrate that Islam is a peaceful and tolerant religion. The problem is that the Qu'ran's last word on jihad, which is of Medinan origin, is very intolerant. Therefore, according to Islamic exegesis, the tolerant verses must be read in light of the intolerant ones.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The teachings of the Qu'ran also include the five demands made upon the believers in Islam. They are known as The Five Pillars of Islam. These works of righteousness are critical for Muslims. None of their other works will be acceptable to Allah if these are not first satisfied. Further, these five pillars are the main unifying force of Islam. They are:

1. The Creed. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." It is mandatory that during his lifetime each Muslim must say this creed at least once correctly and with heartfelt conviction. In practice, however, the devout Muslim speaks it many times a day. In this creed the Muslim not only states his belief, but he sounds forth his evangelistic call to Jew and Christian to turn away from the "near-idolatry" of the Torah and the "idolatry" of Christ.

1. Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003) p. 127.

2. Thomas C. Pfotenhauer, "Brother Richard Challenges A Great Law/Gospel Debacle: The Quran," *Christian News* 8 December, 2003: 7.

3. Spencer, p. 127.

4. Philip H. Lochhaas, "The Foundation of Islam," *Christian News* 15 October, 2001:16.

5. Lochhaas, p. 16.

6. Spencer, p. 134.

7. Spencer, p. 135.

2. The Ritual Prayer. Prayers are to be said five times daily, upon rising, at noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset, and before retiring. The prayers consist of set formulas with prescribed bowings and prostration. In addition to the primary purposes of praise and supplication, the prayers serve two other purposes in the faith of the Muslim. According to the Qu'ran, the most difficult lesson for man to learn is that he is not God; the prayers keep man humble before Allah. Secondly, the set times for prayer create for the Muslim a sense of participation in a worldwide fellowship, even if he is isolated from other Muslims.

3. Almsgiving. The required almsgiving is separate and distinct from voluntary alms, and is set at 1/40 (2 ½ %) of all that a man possesses, that is, his holdings rather than just his income. The Muslim distributes his alms where he sees the most direct need—to debtors unable to meet their obligations, to slaves who are buying their freedom, to transients, and to the desperately needy.

4. Fasting. Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink and sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan. Since Islam employs a lunar calendar, the month rotates through all seasons. When Ramadan falls in the scorching days of summer, the longer days without a drop of water can become an ordeal. Such fasting, the Muslim believes, teaches self-discipline and aids in the curbing of appetites also at other times.

5. The Pilgrimage to Mecca. It is obligatory for every Muslim during his lifetime to make a pilgrimage to Mecca if he can possibly do so. The pilgrimage is a scheduled event each year and includes special ceremonies en route and a visit to Muhammad's tomb at Medina. The purpose of the pilgrimage is said to be a reminder of the equality of all men and the devotion that all owe to Allah.⁸

Other Significant Teachings

In addition to its "Five Pillars," the Qu'ran teaches that in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve sinned, then repented and were forgiven.

However, their sin bore no consequences. In fact, it almost seems that Adam's sin is rewarded, because, following Adam's sin, Allah makes him his deputy (caliph) and the first of the prophets. Clearly, Islam does not acknowledge original sin.

Also, "Muslims have a tendency to revere strong leaders who put forth an image of perfection."⁹ Muslims believe that people with a strong character can live sinless lives by following their plethora of rules. And do they ever have rules! They have rules to cover everything, from where you can go to the bathroom to how you may kill insects. There is even a rule that forbids reading the "Qu'ran in a house where there is a dog, unless the dog is used for hunting, farming, or herding livestock."¹⁰

And what does the Qu'ran do with Christ? Islam respects Christ as one of about 124,000 messengers of Allah. In fact, He is

one of the 25 listed in the Qu'ran. Jesus is right there in the list with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah, John, three others not cited in the Bible, and Muhammad. But Muslims do not believe Jesus died when crucified. They do not believe he was resurrected. They do not see him as God.¹¹

Since man has no original sin and is basically good, he is able sincerely to repent when he makes a mistake. Allah will then return him to a state of sinlessness, with no outside help needed. As expressed in the Qu'ran, "for him whose measure (of good deeds) is heavy, those are they who shall be successful (Sura 7:8-9)."

These beliefs and their consequences are succinctly expressed as follows:

The Muslim's watered-down understanding of sin makes the Islamic belief in salvation by works plausible. People do not have

original sin, especially no inherited guilt. Morally, a person is born as a blank book, more good than evil. What people need to be saved is moral guidance not re-birth. Sin is forgiven when evil is balanced by enough good. To help us achieve the correct balance God may even charge us less than our sins deserve and he may give us extra credit for our good.... On the one hand, this makes it possible for the Muslim to say, "It feels good to know you are accomplishing your salvation." On the other hand, a Muslim can never feel sure of his salvation; because he can never be sure that he has been credited with more good than evil.¹²

Interestingly, there is one exception to this teaching that one cannot be assured of salvation:


Those who die as martyrs, those who die while waging jihad against enemies of God, will enter paradise instantly, all their sins washed away by their own blood and the blood of the infidels they have shed."¹³

Righteous by Works Alone

All things considered, in the end Islam has adopted (either intentionally or unintentionally) the Adam of Pelagius and the Christ of Arius. Their theology of man (free from original sin) and Jesus (only a good man) leaves the Muslim to fend for himself when it comes to salvation. How hopeless! Yet, apostatizing Christianity finds in Islam just another way to the same God.

How can this be? It would appear that Islam and Christianity have little (theologically speaking) in common. Closer examination, however, indicates that apostatizing Christianity appears to be gravitating in the direction of Islamic theology. Note the movement, even in evangelical and Reformed circles, to attribute man's salvation to a combined effort of God and man: faith *and* works is the cry today. The result is a powerless Christ, or at best a Christ with limited power.

Issachar beware, "...for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a *complete* (emphasis, ck) Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find *all* (emphasis, ck) things in Him nec-

essary to their salvation" (Heidelberg Catechism, question 30). 

8. Lochhaas, p. 16.

9. Marvin Olasky, "A Cold War for the 21st century," *World* Nov./ Dec. 2001:14.

10. Olasky, p. 16.

11. Olasky, p. 16.

12. John Brug, "The Menace of Islam," *Christian News* 6 September, 2004:9.

13. Gene Edward Veith, "Lethal 'gospel,'" *World* 22 February, 2003: 13.

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

Thursday evening, November 18, was "Light Up Night" in Forest Hills, a suburb of Pittsburgh, PA, and the location of our denomination's Mission Office and work in Pittsburgh. The Fellowship there decided to mark the event with an open house at the Mission Office, with lights, banner, reception table, coffee, lemonade, homemade cookies, and free tapes and pamphlets for all their visitors. Plans also called for a brief Bible Study and devotions, and a time of singing. Depending on the turnout, Pittsburgh also hoped to spend time showing visitors the Mission Office.

Also present that night in Pittsburgh were Rev. W. Bruinsma and Elder Gary Boverhof, as representatives of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, making their annual visit on November 18-22. On this visit these representatives were accompanied by their wives. They planned to join the Fellowship for the Bible Study/Open House on Thursday evening, visit with Missionary Rev. J. Mahtani and his family on Friday, and meet with the Steering Committee on Saturday afternoon. The Steering Committee was also encouraged by the visiting DMC delegates, who spoke on the trials and joys of holding office in Christ's church.

We express our thanks to Justin and Cathie Koole, who left our churches' mission work in Ghana in

mid-November, after having served faithfully there for one year as assistants to our missionaries. As replacements for Justin and Cathie, the Hull, Iowa PRC and the Foreign Mission Committee sent John and Judy Bouma. You may remember that they were in Ghana at the beginning of the work there and were looking forward eagerly to seeing the members of the Fellowship once again. They were scheduled to arrive on November 26, D.V.

Mr. Alvin Bylsma and Mr. Gerald Brummel, delegates from Hull PRC and the FMC, were scheduled to visit Ghana from November 24 through December 6.

The next British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference will be held August 5-12, 2006, the Lord willing, at the Cloverley Hull Conference Center, Whit Church, Shropshire, England (near Wales). The speakers will be Prof. H. Hanko and Prof. D. Engelsma. The subject treated will be: "The Five Points of Calvinism." For information on the Conference Center check: www.cloverleyhall.com, and for those interested in seeing highlights of the last conference, there is available a DVD of approximately 50 minutes in length for a cost of \$15.00 (US). For a copy write Rev. G. VanBaren, 4683 Crescent Dr., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

The Council of the Doon, Iowa PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in the Philippines, was pleased to inform their congregation and the denomination that the mission work in Manila continues to progress. With the FMC's concurrence, Rev. A. Spriensma was granted permis-

sion to give the votum and salutation to the saints of the Berean Church (Reformed). This decision is grounded in our denomination's position as it can be found in Article 29 of the 2001 Acts of Synod.

Rev. A. Stewart, missionary pastor of Covenant PR Fellowship in Northern Ireland, gave a lecture in mid-November on the topic "1000 Years of Revelation 20" in Limerick. The lecture was well attended and well received and a good time of questions followed the meeting. Rev. Stewart also had an excellent opportunity earlier in November when he spoke for the first time at a primary/grade school assembly. Rev. Stewart spoke to the 10-12 year old students on Adam and Eve, the fall, and God's sovereignty over the fall, etc.

On November 5 Rev. T. Miersma, our denomination's missionary to Spokane, WA and the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship there, gave a lecture and spoke on "The Protestant Reformation: A Return to the Truth of Sin and Grace."

Evangelism Activities

Friday, November 5, the Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC hosted a Fall Lecture given by Prof. H. Hanko entitled, "Luther and Erasmus: Free Will or Sovereign Grace?" Prof. H. Hanko also gave a lecture the following Friday, November 12, at Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. In that lecture, Prof. Hanko spoke on "Is the King James Still the Best Translation Available?" A collection was taken for the evangelism fund of Covenant PRC in New Jersey.

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

School Activities

The senior class of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a fund-raising breakfast on Saturday, November 13, from 7-10:30 a.m. at their high school.

The Earthquake Committee of Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA asked their supporters to consider donating old blankets and small pillows for their school's earthquake preparedness supplies.

Supporters of Eastside Chris-


tian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to attend a meeting on November 18 at Eastside. Mr. Greg Yoder, from the Christian Learning Center, spoke to the Eastside Promoters on how the CLC is helping teachers meet the needs of gifted students, as well as those students who struggle in some areas.

Minister Activities

The congregation of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL called Rev. W.

Bruinsma to become their next pastor. With him on that duo was Rev. J. Mahtani. Rev. R. Cammenga was initially included as well, but became ineligible when he accepted the call to Faith PRC.

The Doon, Iowa PRC extended a call to Rev. A. Brummel to serve as their next pastor.

The Hudsonville, MI PRC called Rev. Bruinsma to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2005, at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mr. and Mrs. Society and the Adult Bible Study of Southwest PRC express their sympathy to Rev. Ron Cammenga, Rhonda, and their family in the death of their son and brother,

DANIEL CAMMENGA,

who was taken to glory on November 2, 2004. May God be their comfort and strength in their sorrow. "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him" (Lord's Day 1).

Kathy Looyenga, Secretary
Janna Huiskens, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Cornerstone PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to William and Anita (Clason) Lenting and family in the death of their father, father-in-law, and grandfather,

MR. WILLIAM CLASON.

May they find comfort in the words of the Lord in Isaiah 43:2-4, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: for I am the Lord thy God; thou wast precious in my sight."

Rev. Nathan Brummel, Pres.
Mr. Dave Dekker, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 27, 2004

JOHN A. and SHARON KEIZER

will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are grateful to God for the years He has blessed them with. We are also grateful for the love and instruction they continue to give us. We pray that God will continue to bless them in their marriage and in the years to come. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Mike and Kim DeJager
- * Kerri Keizer
- * Michelle Keizer

Hull, Iowa

CORRECTION!!

The cover of the November 15, 2004 issue of the *SB* incorrectly identified it as Volume 80, Number 3. Readers who save their issues for future reference may want to correct that. It's Volume 81, Number 4.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland extends its sympathy to Ed and Barb Cammenga in the sudden passing of their grandson,

DANIEL CAMMENGA.

O God, give Thou ear to my plea,
And hide not Thyself from my cry:
O hearken and answer thou me,
As restless and weary I sigh.

Nay, soul, call on God all the day;
The Lord for thy help will appear;
At eve, morn, and noon humbly pray,
And He thy petition will hear.

Thy burden now cast on the Lord,
And He shall thy weakness sustain;
The righteous who trust in His Word
Unmoved shall forever remain.

(From the Psalter, on Psalm 55)

Rich Moore, Pres.
Fran Leep, Sec'y

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Cornerstone PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to James and Janice Lanting and family, and Thomas and Jeanne (Lanting) Venhuizen and family in the death of their father, father-in-law, and grandfather,

REV. GEORGE LANTING.

May they know the truth of John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

Rev. Nathan Brummel, Pres.
Mr. Dave Dekker, Clerk