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In This Issue:

MEDITATION

Rev. Rodney G. Miersma

The Blessed Pure in Heart 242

EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

A Temptation of the PRC 244

ALL AROUND US

Rev. Gise J. VanBaren

247

FEATURE ARTICLE

Mr. Deane Wassink

***A Child Grown:
Our Sister Church in Northern Ireland*** 250

MARKING THE BULWARKS OF ZION

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

Luther and the Right Wing of the Reformation (1) 251

DAY OF SHADOWS

George M. Ophoff

The Types of Scripture (7) 254

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

Issachar vs. the Scribes 256

GRACE LIFE

Rev. Mitchell C. Dick

***Dating and the Deep Blue Sea...
and the Way of Christ*** 259

REPORT OF CLASSIS EAST

261

BOOK REVIEWS

261

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

263

The Blessed Pure in Heart

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:8

We now come to the sixth beatitude which Christ spoke to His disciples in the sermon on the mount. As we have said before, each one of these beatitudes reveals a spiritual characteristic which can be seen only in the child of God. Outside of the church of Christ there may be those who put on these characteristics externally, but Christ is concerned with the heart, for He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart." One may seem very friendly, faithful, and diligent, but if the Spirit of Christ is not at work in him, he cannot possess the virtues which are and must be seen in the citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Only children of God are pure in heart. No one else is.

This beatitude speaks of a condition of the heart of a man. Even as it is true physically that the con-

dition of the heart is of central concern, so it is spiritually. The spiritual heart is the center of spiritual activity. As is the heart spiritually, so is the man. Out of the heart proceed all of the issues of life. In the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, whose heart is truly pure, there must be seen all of the other virtues Jesus mentions in the beatitudes. So the question is not out of order, "What is the condition of your heart? Do you have heart trouble, spiritually?"

To answer that question we must go to the Scriptures to see what is said about our heart. Before we get into the particulars, we must look at the comparison between the physical and the spiritual heart. The physical heart, which pumps our life's blood through our bodies, serves as a striking picture of one's spiritual, ethical center, which is termed in Scripture the heart. This spiritual heart is not something which can be detected or corrected with a surgeon's knife. It cannot be seen in the body or studied by the scientist. The heart is the very deepest part of a man. It determines his moral, spiritual position. It directs his thoughts and actions.

That spiritual heart is one of two things: either it is a bad heart or it is a good and pure heart.

Now for the particulars. That the heart is either good or bad, a heart of flesh or a heart of stone, is taught in Ezekiel 11:19, 20: "And I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them." Jesus Himself said in Matthew 15:18, 19, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies...."

The heart of man became bad, or stony, as Scripture puts it, after man's fall into sin. God declared concerning man in Genesis 8:21: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." And in Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jesus confirms this in Matthew 12:34: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

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From the above references it becomes immediately plain that the problem of man today is that he has heart trouble. How ironic it is that man does not see his problem as a heart problem, but instead tries to tackle all of the symptoms of his trouble. He does not get at the heart of the matter. The church today is no better, as she proceeds from this same wrong idea. She tackles man's problem as a social problem. So she would champion the cause of better education, the fight against the drug problem, the eradicating of poverty, and the fight against racial injustices. And it would seem that the answer to all of life's problems is to throw more money at it.

All of the above are symptoms of a far deeper problem. One must understand that the problem with man today is a heart problem. Unless that is taken care of, all man's attempts at changing symptoms will come to nought.

For the righteous, there is a changed heart, out of which proceeds the desire and longing to serve God. His heart determines the direction of his thoughts, of his words, and of his deeds.

It is the condition of the heart, too, that God will judge. He looks not at the outward, superficial appearance of a man. He judges the heart. In Proverbs 17:3 we read, "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts." And in Hebrews 4:12, we read, "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It ought to be evident, therefore, that God does not merely judge the outward acts of man. In the final instance, it is the heart that is judged. And God will judge all actions on the basis of the heart from which it proceeded. A deed is to be judged good or bad depending on whether it issues

from an evil or a good heart. And no man can hide his heart from God.

The heavenly citizens are pure in heart. Purity of heart suggests first a heart that is cleansed from all of its former corruption. It is a heart no longer defiled with sin. We read in Romans 2:29, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter...." In this sense, Scripture emphasizes a *new heart*, a *heart of flesh*, and a *new man*.

Furthermore, a pure heart is a single or undivided heart, a heart which is set on one thing alone. James 4:8 states, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." And Jesus insists in Matthew 6:24, "Ye can not serve God and mammon." A *double heart* is one in which a person seeks to set his heart on two different things. He seeks this world and cleaves to it, but also professes to desire the kingdom of heaven. But the *single heart* is one which seeks God and His righteousness. Scripture summarizes the law of God by stating, "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...." That is the glorious virtue to be seen in the citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Each child of God can confess: "I am pure in heart."

How does one attain to this purity of heart, in light of the fact that each man is born totally depraved. There is none born without sin — a fact which is true even of children of God. None is in the position of claiming for himself, as a result of his own effort, a pure heart. So the question remains, "Where does this pure heart come from?"

The answer that the Word of God gives us is that this comes from God through Jesus Christ alone. For purity of heart, there must be a new birth. The life which Christ merited for His people on the cross must be

planted in the heart. Jesus declares this to Nicodemus in John 3:3: "Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God." Regeneration is the taking out of the heart of stone and replacing it with the heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19, 20). After this takes place, apart from the will of man, God so opens that heart that there comes a consciousness of His glorious work and a desire to seek God. We read concerning one convert in the New Testament, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). God opened this woman's heart. That explains how she attended to the Word preached. The spiritual center of one's being is cleansed and purified by God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

One may not gather from this that the pure in heart on this earth are presently without sin. These have a pure heart, but they possess at the same time a sinful flesh. And these two, the new man and the old man, war one with the other. The old man of sin seeks control. Yet there is the principle of new obedience in this citizen of the kingdom of heaven. This explains also Paul's cry in Romans 7:19, 20: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." And Paul adds in verse 22, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

So then, the pure of heart do reveal in their conversation and walk that a change has indeed taken place within them. Out of that pure heart proceed the issues of life. Out of such a pure heart comes the consciousness of poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, spiritual hungering and thirsting, and mercy. The pure in heart clearly seek the kingdom which is

heavenly. This one does not set his heart on this earth with all of its corrupt pleasures. He is not double-minded; he seeks not to serve God and mammon. Such is the spiritual character of the citizen of the kingdom.

Blessed are ye! The pure in heart shall see God. Only the pure in heart could ever stand before the infinitely Holy One. But what a glorious, almost unbelievable, promise this is!

How shall we see God? Seeing refers, first of all, to a knowledge of God. We know Him already through His revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Hardly is it to be compared to our knowledge of Him in heaven. For now we see as through a glass darkly.

However, we shall see God in heaven through Jesus Christ. Christ will be with His people bodily in heaven. And Christ shall,

to all eternity, reveal the Father to us. He is Himself the second person of the Trinity in our flesh. He shall speak to us and teach us in the perfections of our God. Jesus Himself said in John 14:9, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father...."

Furthermore, in the new heavens and new earth we shall see the beauty and glory of God perfectly in all of His creation. Now our understanding is clouded because of sin, and creation itself is affected and altered by the curse of God upon it because of man's sin. But in the new creation, the child of God shall have a clear, sinless understanding of creation untouched anymore by the curse.

That is the future for the pure in heart. They look forward to the time that they shall see God as God has promised to them. They shall

see Him thus at the moment of their death, when their souls enter conscious glory in heaven. They shall see Him in the day of resurrection, when bodily they shall stand before Him.

Even now, in a sense, we see God — that is, the pure in heart do. These see Him in the reading and study of His Word. They see Him when they come under the faithful preaching of His Word. They see Him when they come before His throne of grace in prayer. The pure in heart see Him even now through Jesus Christ their Lord.

What an unbelievable promise this is! At present, as pilgrims, we face the scorn and mockery of sinners. We are persecuted and killed all the day long. But we shall see God! How wonderful and amazing is the sovereign grace of God.



Editorial

A Temptation of the PRC

A temptation of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) at the present hour is to suppose that the issues involved in the common grace controversy that begat them have somehow become minor.

Symptoms

It is a danger that the churches quietly yield to this subtle temptation. Then the ministers no longer expose and condemn common grace, by name, in their public preaching in connection with their bold, distinct proclamation of particular grace. They fall silent, not only because they like to show a friendly face toward other churches

but also because they doubt that common grace is one of the grave doctrinal and practical evils of our day.

Yielding to the temptation, the seminary will soft-pedal the controversy over common grace. The thinking of the professors will be that new issues confronting the Reformed church far outstrip common grace in importance: process theology, the openness of God, evolution, difficult decisions regarding medical ethics, sheer worldliness.

Missions too will be affected. The thinking of missionaries and mission committees will be: "How senseless to transport a parochial struggle of the PRC to peoples of

different backgrounds, cultures, and times." Especially on the foreign field, the question will be raised: "What purpose is there in making common grace an issue with people who must be converted from paganism, or who have just been converted from paganism?"

Yielded to, the temptation will powerfully affect the ecumenical activities of the PRC. The churches will then carry on discussions with other churches under the tacit, or even stated, assumption that the doctrine of particular, sovereign grace in the preaching, the related doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace with Christ and the

elect in Him, and the doctrine of radical, spiritual separation between the holy church and the unholy world of the ungodly are negotiable. They are mere “distinctives” of the PRC like total abstinence from liquor or women’s wearing of hats in worship in other churches. Since they are only secondary, they may, and should, be sacrificed for the greater good of the unity of the church. At the very least, these teachings permit of church union in which they will be opposed as well as affirmed (for a while).

Binding Documents and Vows

Yielding to the temptation to regard the issues involved in the controversy of the PRC with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) over common grace as minor would bring the PRC into conflict with their own binding documents. Officebearers, especially ministers and professors of theology, would break their solemn vows. In their adopted “Declaration of Principles,” the PRC set forth the related truths of particular grace and of an unconditional covenant of grace with the elect alone as the teachings of the “Three Forms of Unity.” This “Declaration” must be used “by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches on the basis of Scripture and the confessions as these have always been maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches and as these are now further explained in regard to certain principles” (“Preamble,” in “Church Order of the PRC,” p. 126). No church may be organized by the PRC, whether at home or abroad, that is opposed to, or even ignorant of, the truths defended in the “Declaration of Principles.” Missionaries and mission committees, therefore, must see to it that there is thorough instruction on the mission field in the truths at stake in the common grace controversy.

Ministers and professors may

not fall silent with regard especially to the false doctrine of the “well-meant offer of the gospel,” the main issue in the common grace controversy. For them to do so would be violation of the sacred vow they made by signing the “Formula of Subscription.” The “Formula” requires that they “refute and contradict” all errors that militate against the doctrine of the Reformed creeds, “particularly those which were condemned by [the synod of Dordt].” Dordt, of course, condemned the error of a general, conditional, ineffectual grace of God in the gospel, which is exactly the heresy of the “well-meant offer.”

Wickedness

With its pointed reference to the defense of the gospel of grace in the Canons of Dordt, the “Formula of Subscription” makes plain that it would be wicked for the PRC to yield to the temptation to regard the truth of particular grace as secondary, and what this wickedness would be. The doctrine that the grace of God in Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel and in the covenant is particular, not general, is fundamental to the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God alone. It is not a “distinctive” of the PRC. It is not a parochial teaching. It is not of merely historical interest. It is not Western. It is the gospel of Holy Scripture as confessed in the Canons of Dordt and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Insofar as a church abandons or attacks the truth that the grace of God in Jesus Christ in the gospel is particular — for the elect in Christ alone — that church abandons or attacks the gospel and the God of the gospel. “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:15, 16).

The teaching that grace deliv-

ers only those who believe in Christ from the slavery of sin, so that they alone can and do perform good works, whereas the unregenerated are totally — not partially — depraved, incapable of any good, is not a new, odd theory of the hyper-PRC. It is historic, creedal, Reformed Christianity. “Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God” (Heid. Cat., Q. & A. 8). This teaching is a significant aspect of the glorious gospel: only the grace of God in Jesus Christ operating by the Spirit of Christ *saves from sin*. Only the grace of God in Christ by the Spirit of Christ *saves from sin by purifying the sinner and producing in him or her works that please God*. The truth of the particularity of grace as regards freeing men and women from sin and producing good works in them is basic to the church’s life of spiritual separation from the wicked world. Insofar as a church teaches that unregenerated men and women share a grace of God that makes them somewhat good and enables them to do good works, that church dishonors the sanctifying grace of God in Jesus Christ. It also breaches the antithesis that God has put between the holy church and the ungodly world, destroying itself either by the inrushing flood of worldliness or by the outrushing stream of its members, especially the young people, into the world.

Folly

For the PRC to yield to the temptation to minimize the issues in the common grace controversy would not only be wicked. It would be foolish. To the present hour, God has kept the churches faithful to the gospel in every respect, from the gospel’s foundation in the truth of creation in six, real, historical days to the gospel’s goal in the truth of amillennial eschatology. The power of this preservation of

the churches in the truth of the gospel has been the preaching and teaching of sovereign, particular grace.

To the present hour, God works the assurance of their salvation in the hearts of the members, young and old. This assurance is ultimately assurance of their election (Canons of Dordt, I/12). The churches are not full of members forever doubting their salvation. The power of this assurance is the preaching and teaching of sovereign, particular grace.

To the present hour, despite the enormous and otherwise irresistible pressures of worldliness — pressures exerted upon the churches both from the depraved culture and from the examples of apostatizing, compromising, spineless churches — God has kept the PRC holy in the lives of the members. I am not ignoring that all of the members retain a nature that is still totally depraved, or that the best of them have only a small beginning of the new obedience, or that some of them show serious weakness regarding the Christian life (despite the admonition of the churches) and even fall deeply into gross, public sin (from which a number are rescued by a gracious God working through the discipline of a gracious congregation). All of this is cause for deep humiliation and sorrow. All of this is reason why the churches may never boast.

But I am acknowledging the presence of the almighty Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ in the preaching and discipline of the churches that sanctifies sinful people to live in obedience to the law of their covenant God. This obedience consists of bitter, daily struggle against indwelling sin; honoring marriage and the family (this is still found on earth today, not merely in cheap words but in costly deeds!); diligent church attendance, twice every Lord's Day; establishing, maintaining, and using good Christian schools; reverencing the authority

of Jesus Christ in the employer and in the official of the state; and avoiding corrupt entertainment (although in this area we are succumbing, I fear, to the allure of vile television programs, videos, and movies).

The power of these sanctified lives—lives of separation from an unholy world—is the preaching and teaching of particular, sovereign grace.

To the present hour, God saves the children of the churches. The godliness of the children, young people, and young married couples is one of the most wonderful, and heartening, of the blessings of God upon the PRC. Growing up in Christ, the children confess their faith. The young people embrace the Reformed faith, remain members of the churches, attend the worship services twice every Sunday, and strive to live godly lives. In concrete, remarkable ways, the young people and young married couples show interest in and zeal for sound doctrine. The power of this continuation of the covenant of God in our families is the preaching and teaching of particular, sovereign grace.

How foolish, that the churches at this hour would discount and dismiss the issues in the common grace controversy!

How foolish it would be for the PRC to yield to the temptation to mute their confession of particular grace when at the present time the main departures from Christ in theology and the churches are exactly due to rejection of the particular grace of God in the gospel. Denial of particular grace in Jesus Christ, the only "name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), is the reason why churches are accepting the pagan religions as alternative revelations of, and ways to, God. Denial of particular grace is the explanation of increasingly popular universalism. Since all are the objects of God's grace, in the end all will be saved.

Denial of particular grace is at the bottom of the contemporary theory of the "openness of God." Arminians, who reject sovereign, particular grace, now naturally and inevitably develop their doctrine of God's dependence upon the sinner's free and sovereign will in salvation into the full-blown teaching of God's utter dependence upon man in every respect. God cannot even know anything before men make their decisions. God's development unto perfect Deity depends upon man.

Denial of particular grace in the covenant of grace explains why Reformed and Presbyterian theologians in reputedly conservative churches are now advocating the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by faith and the works of faith. To avoid restricting grace in the covenant to the elect children of believers, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have adopted a covenant doctrine that conditions a general promise, universal grace, and a salvation intended for all the children without exception *upon the faith of the child*. Today, perceptive theologians are taking the doctrine of a conditional covenant to its logical end: justification and salvation in the covenant are by faith and faith's works. The error, it should be noted, is not only the addition of "faith's works." The error is also that faith itself is made an obtaining or meriting work of the sinner, rather than the mere instrument, given by God to His elect in Christ, through which the sinner receives, as pure gift, the righteousness of Christ.

How foolish it would be for the PRC to yield to the temptation to set the issues involved in the common grace controversy of 1924 aside as insignificant when they see where the doctrine of common grace has brought the CRC. With appeal to common grace, Prof. Harold Dekker publicly repudiated limited atonement. With appeal to common grace, Dr. James Daane and Dr. Harry Boer publicly re-

jected the doctrine of eternal, unconditional, double predestination as confessed by the Canons of Dordt. The Church exercised no discipline. The biblical, confessional doctrines of predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible grace are a dead letter in the CRC today, whether in the pulpits of the local congregations or on the mission fields.

Indicative of the success of common grace, particularly the "well-meant offer," in vanquishing the gospel of particular grace in the CRC was the recent feature article on election in the *Banner*, official publication of the CRC. The article scorned the very idea that election is an eternal decree of "a certain number of persons" (Canons of Dordt, I/7). It taught election as an act of God *in history*. Election is not God's ordination of some unto salvation, but only His appointment of them unto service. This service, the article suggested, is the salvation of the entire human race without exception (John Timmer, "Election Is a Story," the *Banner*, Dec. 31, 2001, pp. 17-19).

As for the effects of common grace upon the life of the CRC and its members, time and space fail me. The CRC and its spokesmen themselves readily, even proudly, acknowledge the massive influence of common grace upon the Church

and upon the lives of its members. Acceptance of evolution as the explanation of origins and the latter-day persuasion that women should be ordained to office in the church, with the accompanying recognition that married women are equally authorities in marriage with their husbands, were directly due to common grace. Evolution and feminism are the wisdom of the world. The CRC could learn these things from the unbelieving world, because the Church supposes that the world is full of divine wisdom by the presence and working of the Spirit through common grace.

Personal friendships with unbelievers and the cooperation of the Church with the world are defended, indeed demanded, by the entrenched theory of common grace.

Christian Reformed theologian Harry Boonstra freely identifies common grace as the cause of Calvin College's providing the foulest, most violent movies to its students for their amusement.

Whereas most theologians in the CRC stressed the antithesis in doctrine and life, the college often emphasized the doctrine of common grace, especially in the approach to culture and learning. If one could learn from Plato's *The Republic*, the college argued, then perhaps also from Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. And from *Oedipus Rex*,

it was only a few short steps to *On the Waterfront* and then to *A Clockwork Orange* (*Our School: Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church*, Eerdmans, 2001, p. 104).

"Yield Not to Temptation!"

To the PRC at the beginning of the new millennium comes the calling from Christ, "Yield not to temptation! Maintain, confess, preach, teach, defend, explain, develop, and live the truth of particular grace! Do so in the conviction that this truth is the gospel of God!"

Of some encouragement is the recent, open, honest acknowledgment by leading theologians in the CRC that the issues at stake in the common grace controversy between the CRC and the PRC are indeed major issues. The *Calvin Theological Journal* pointed out the significance of the common grace controversy in three articles in its issues of April and November 2000. A new book by Dr. Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001), does the same. To this book, its recognition of the theology of particular grace maintained by the PRC, and its arguments for common grace, I intend to give some attention in the editorials that follow.

— DJE 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ What's This About Harry?

Almost everyone knows about Harry—Harry Potter, that is. Most children and many adults read the books about his exploits in the realm of witchcraft. Now there is the movie that has been wildly successful.

Debates about the books (and now, movie) have continued since the appearance of the first book. Do these books promote witchcraft? Do they lead children into this evil that is so clearly forbidden in Scripture? Some schools have refused to place the books on their library shelves. Parents have sought to have Christian bookstores refuse to sell them. Some have advocated burning the books.

Others claim that the books have promoted in children and young people a love for reading that they earlier did not have. It is said that many children are so eager to read the books that they are willing to forgo their video games and even their television viewing! What could be so wrong about books that do such things?

If Protestant Reformed people were to condemn the books or

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question their proper place within the Christian home, many others would look askance and wonder about their ultra conservatism or their "anti-intellectualism." It was, therefore, with interest that I read a "Guest Commentary" in the *Grand Rapids Press* (Dec. 15, 2001). James A. Herrick wrote it. The *Press* notes: "(He) is chairman of the Department of Communication at Hope College, where he has taught for 18 years. Herrick, 47, has degrees from California State University-Fresno, the University of California at Davis and the University of Wisconsin. His fifth book, *The New Religious Synthesis: Inventing the Other Spirituality*, is due out this summer from InterVarsity Press. Herrick, his wife and four children live in Holland. He has read the first book of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, and has seen the movie." I quote his commentary in its entirety:

Harry Potter is the biggest event in popular culture since the Beatles. Harry is big, really big—and all indications are he's destined to get bigger.

The diminutive magician of Hogwarts has already sold 113 million books in 200 languages. The recently released Potter movie looms as among the biggest events in cinema history, with \$220 million in ticket sales in the first 17 days.

The Potter phenomenon also has raised controversy, with some religious groups condemning its focus on witchcraft and magic.

But a vast cohort of Potter defenders insists such criticism lacks merit. The Harry Potter books are no different from, say, C.S. Lewis' beloved "Chronicles of Narnia," another popular children's series that casts British children in supernatural scenarios.

Others say the Potter books are simply imaginative works in which the perennial struggle between good and evil is played out once more. Many argue Harry Potter's ability to draw the pre-pubescent crowd away from video

games and into literature is an accomplishment akin to converting America's college fraternities to vegetarianism.

Well, fun's fun, but a couple of characteristics of Potter's world make me hesitant to jump on the bandwagon to Hogwarts.

For the past several years I have been doing research on a wide range of spiritual movements that promote what I call "the magical world view." In the magical world view, spiritual elites in possession of cosmic secrets enjoy extraordinary insights and power, and human beings answer to no higher authority.

J.K. Rowling's wildly popular works return us to such a cosmology. And for those who contend these are "just stories," it is important to remember it is through stories that we propagate religious and cultural values.

I have two concerns about Harry Potter.

My first is that the Potter world view embraces spiritual elites—small groups claiming to possess secret knowledge and unusual personal capacities that bring them great power originating in an unseen realm.

Rowling's protagonist, Harry, belongs to a hereditary line of magicians, a caste of select individuals specially equipped to master deep secrets that control these unseen forces. Both the secrets and the power they unleash are inaccessible to the common run of humanity.

Ordinary folks are known in Potter's world by the suspiciously stupid-sounding label, Muggles. Spiritual movements embracing the magical world view often employ similarly derisive names for us mere mortals.

Potterism condemns most of us to the status of Muggles, magically challenged individuals incapable of mastering the great secrets of the craft. A few Muggles transcend Muggledom, and are hand-picked to join Hogwarts. But ordinary Muggles need not apply to this school for the magically gifted.

There is no way around it—Potterism incorporates spiritual elitism.

My second concern is more personal. Harry's charming universe lacks a loving God.

Sure, there are supernatural powers in the Potter cosmos, but there is no sovereign Lord, no forgiving God, no one to whom one may pray. There are, instead, lordly magicians seeking to control whatever hidden forces make the world go round.

This kind of universe is, to my way of thinking, spiritually empty and hopeless. What hath Hogwarts to do with Jerusalem?

Harry Potter is perhaps the greatest entertainment phenomenon of all time. But, it is important to ask what is occurring behind the scenes and between the lines of our sources of diversion. Stories are powerful persuaders in part because we don't suspect them of trying to persuade us at all.

C.S. Lewis, among our greatest storytellers, recognized this. Concerning the Christian world view implicit in his 1939 science fiction classic, "Out of the Silent Planet," he wrote, "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people's minds without their knowing it" when skillfully hidden in a good story. I'm not sure I'd call the Potter cosmology a theology, but Lewis' point is clear.

So, I am content to let Harry and his gifted friends explore the deeper reaches of the unseen world in search of whatever powers may lurk there. I prefer a cosmos in which I may pray to a loving God who makes no distinctions among people.

The comments are worth our careful consideration. These express in modest terms the serious nature of this series of books. There is reason for parents to consider well what our children are reading—and what effect this may have on their spiritual lives.

A word of caution is in order here, however. Over the Internet and by way of e-mail there are spread misleading statements, or, more correctly, lies, by "Christians" who seek to discredit individuals they dislike. These lies are difficult to disprove but are spread to

prove that an individual is a horrible person. These "Christians" often urge the reader to send this (false) message to all of their friends. In the past such "state-ments" by former attorney general Janet Reno were spread and quoted. These "quotes" often sound very authentic because they seem to reflect accurately what one thinks of the individual. Few seek to verify the quote—or even have the means to verify it. Yet it is spread far and wide. According to the *Grand Rapids Press*, the same has been done with J.K. Rowling. In the Nov. 24, 2001 *Press* there appeared the following:

There is nothing like a hot quote about Satan to grab a reader's attention.

"I think it's absolute rubbish to protest children's books on the grounds that they are luring children to Satan," said Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling, according to an e-mail message that keeps circling the globe.

"People should be praising them for that! These books guide children to an understanding that the weak, idiotic Son Of God is a living hoax who will be humiliated when the rain of fire comes...while we, his faithful servants, laugh and cavort in victory."

Truth is, Rowling never said that.

This e-mail alert – with its YOU MIGHT WANT TO SHARE THIS WITH YOUR FLOCK headline – claims that Rowling bared her soul in a *London Times* interview. Actually, this bogus quotation is from a satire published by the pranksters at *The Onion*.

One is reminded how careful the Christian ought to be when he "quotes" others. A false quotation is something which discredits the Christian's testimony. Whatever one might think of the writings of J. K. Rowling, he may not attribute false "quotes" to her in order further to discredit this individual. Really, that's a violation of the ninth commandment.

■ Weakening Evolution in Michigan?

It is, in the estimation of many, fine to teach children in the (public) schools that all things originated without God and by chance through the "scientific" fact of evolution. But it is unscientific to teach that all things could have come into being by "intelligent design." On the very face of it, this is an unreasonable, even unscientific, proposition. Still, the evolutionists appear to be fearful of any mention of "intelligent design" and certainly of any reference to the Creator. They consider this a "weakening of evolution" which "will attract ridicule."

The *Grand Rapids Press*, March 24, 2001, contains an article by the columnist Ed Golder. He shows scorn towards the creationist and mocks the very idea of "intelligent design."

Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

More like the land of Oz.

That's because Michigan is facing a battle that could reach the same surreal pitch as the one that engulfed Dorothy's home state two years ago. A bill that would weaken the teaching of evolution in public schools is sitting in the Michigan House Education Committee.

Will it languish there like some weak hatchling that won't survive the harsh winter of the House floor? Or will it thrive and get to Gov. Engler's desk?

I'm guessing the former. But it won't die without a fight. This is one of those issues, like school prayer and crèches on courthouse lawns, that calls out the culture warrior in all of us, especially in West Michigan.

In fact, four of the 10 legislators who put their names to the bill in question hail from this part of the state....

These four, along with the bill's key sponsor ... want the state's recommended core curriculum for middle and high school kids to state that evolution and natural selection are "unproven theories."

Further, they want these students to be able to describe "how life may be the result of the purposeful, intelligent design of a creator."

Sure smells like Kansas to me.

Two years ago, members of that state's Board of Education voted to remove the teaching of evolution from their nonbinding curriculum guidelines. The move subjected Kansas to international ridicule and scorn.

Michigan is in for a similar public stoning if this bill advances in the Legislature.

Sure, scientific theories are subject to revision with new discoveries. But they're not just made up by pointy headed people with pocket protectors. They explain the facts. Every time I pick up a *National Geographic* there's a new fossil discovery that adds further weight and texture to the well-founded theory of evolution. The recent unraveling of the human genome showed how closely we're allied genetically to other creatures.

Scientists around the world, whom we usually trust to tell us these things, consider evolution a bedrock defining principle of biology. What's more, federal courts and the U.S. Supreme Court have again and again affirmed evolution as sound science.

Yet there are some, almost exclusively biblical literalists, who believe that humans didn't evolve from lower forms and that the universe is thousands rather than billions of years old. Their numbers are strong in this area....

Interesting indeed!


This gentleman leaves the impression that real scientists all hold to evolution as a "well-founded theory." One might wonder why he speaks of a "theory" then, if it is indeed so "well-founded." This "well-founded theory" he treats as a positive fact or truth that only "Alice in Wonderland" might question. And surely, if he is that well acquainted with the scientists around the world, he must know that a host of them hold to at least the idea of "intelligent design" and

very many to the literal creation account. Why then point to the "biblical literalists" of western Michigan? And why should he find it so objectionable to tell pupils that some scientists hold to evolution but some hold to "intelligent design"?

But this man reads *National Geographic* and finds in each issue new evidence of the "well-founded theory" of evolution. Surely he

must be aware that *National Geographic* has been left with "egg on its face" more than once when its "proof" of evolution has been discredited as fake. Has *National Geographic* shown itself to be infallible?

Finally, his reference to the "human genome" is rather striking. Was it not Darwin who stated that if the "simple cell" were proven to be complex after all, that the theory of evolution would be discredited?

But the "human genome" has shown that the cell is so complex that even the human computer with its massive computing ability cannot rival the "human genome." And that can be attributed to chance or evolution? Who, in his most wild imagination, would attribute a computer of today to chance rather than intelligent design? One might ask: Who really is living in Alice's Wonderland? 

Feature Article

Mr. Deane Wassink

A Child Grown: Our Sister Church in Northern Ireland

Seventeen years ago my wife, Donna, and I, with our four oldest children, lived and worshiped with the saints in Northern Ireland who would eventually become part of our sister church there. Perhaps some of you remember that we taught in a small Christian school in the town of Ballyclare, where our friends sent their children. In the good providence of God my wife and I revisited Northern Ireland for two weeks in the middle of January 2002. We rejoiced at the growth we saw in the congregation and wish to communicate our thoughts to our fellow saints in the States and in the North of Ireland.

Though we were greatly blessed as a family to live and worship with the saints seventeen years ago, it was evident that they were then just at the beginning of their growth in the Reformed faith. There were many differences in the congregation over issues of bap-

tism, worship, and the confessions. There was even a healthy distrust of the relationship with this potentially dangerous "American church," our own PRC. There was also a fear, on the part of a few, that we would corrupt the church with the "American" morals that were observed on television shows like "Dallas."

Through many trials through the years and much teaching and study, our sister church has grown into a mature congregation in the Reformed faith. Members of the church know Reformed doctrine and church polity. This was clearly evident in conversations we had with them during our visit in January. Several members, in fact, write for the *British Reformed Journal*. The office-bearers are well grounded in the faith. Their focus and enthusiasm at times put us to shame.

Previously, some in the church only tolerated the Reformed faith because of their church leaders. Now it is evident that the membership is made up completely of those who love the Reformed faith and are willing to sacrifice for it even through the hard times.

The Lord has blessed the congregation also with increase in size. It has more than doubled. It can be very difficult for small groups to stay encouraged, as many of our own smaller churches know. But I saw many young people and young families. We rejoiced in the fellowship we had with the many young people and children in the church, covenant children who have the same love of the truth as their parents. Young adults, several of whom are single, have sacrificed much for the faith in their families, jobs, and personal life. We remember them especially in our prayers. We had the wonderful experience of visiting with two young women who were our friends in the States. They have both married men of the congregation. Even in that way the ties with our denomination have been strengthened.

Now they, and we with them, rejoice in the fact that, after all these years, God has given them their own pastor, out of their own congregation, in the person of Rev. Angus Stewart. God has used our own missionary and church visitors to help build the church through

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the years. However, the fact that they have their own pastor is wonderful evidence of God's care and perfect timing. Believe me, it takes an Ulsterman to know an Ulsterman!


No church is perfect. In a mature way and as sister churches, we understand that about each other. We have both faced difficult trials through the years. But God is faithful! We have every confidence that a strong consistory and solid preaching will keep the church faithful in the future.

We had the joy of seeing the piece of property that the church

has purchased — and paid for. They showed us a set of plans for the church building that they hope to build there. This too shows commitment and promise for the congregation. They are well aware of the fact that their own building gives a tremendous boost to their credibility as they witness throughout the land of Ireland.

We had the opportunity to visit Castlewellan Castle, the site of the 2002 BRF Family Conference. What a beautiful place! We highly recommend this conference to our churches. I am sure that it will be

a time of tremendous fellowship and growth as well as a chance to see the beautiful Irish countryside. Visitors from the States would be a great encouragement to the church as well as to the larger membership of the British Reformed Fellowship.

Thanks to our friends and brothers and sisters in Christ in Northern Ireland for their gracious hospitality to me and my family — a second time. We hope to visit you again, sooner than seventeen years. Meanwhile, we know the Lord will be faithful to us all till we meet again. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Luther and the Right Wing of the Reformation (1)

Introduction

The Reformation was, of course, a return to the doctrine, liturgy, and church government of Scripture over against the departures and apostasy of Roman Catholicism. But the reformers, as difficult a task as they had in their opposition to Rome, faced the additional problem of radicals in the Reformation movement. In some ways, this radical movement was a greater threat to the success of the Reformation than Rome itself. All the reformers, though they had their differences on some points of doc-

trine, were united in their opposition to these men. The reformers had to guide the ship of the Reformation between the dangers on the left in the Roman Catholic Church, and on the right in the influential radical movement — the left wing opposition and the right wing opposition; the Scylla of Rome and the Charybdis of the radicals.

The basic problem was relatively simple. The reformers were wise men, endowed by God with extraordinary gifts of discretion and moderation. They knew that the evils in the Romish Church were many and great: wealth of the clergy, fornication in the monasteries, concubinage among the priests, simony, bribery, political intrigue in every level of church life, and the evils of formalism, image worship, and the idolatry of the mass in the worship services. But they also knew that all these evils

were rooted in more fundamental doctrinal departures from the truth of Scripture, and that, if reform in morals, worship, and church government were to be brought about, this could take place only through doctrinal reform. If the church would, by the grace of Almighty God, be led back to the truth of Scripture, the rest of the reform would follow.

They also knew that the power of reform lay not in men's efforts, but in the power of God's grace revealed through His promise to preserve His church so that the gates of hell never would prevail against it. That is, they knew with total certainty that the power of reform was in the preaching and teaching of the pure gospel, and nothing else. God worked through the gospel by His Spirit. God alone could reform.

Translated into practice, this

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meant that reform, especially in the area of the church's liturgy and church government, had to be brought about slowly and carefully. The people had to be instructed and taught from the Scriptures. They had to have time to make what were, for the majority of the populace, momentous and earth-shaking changes. They had to learn to shift their blind trust in the institute of Rome and the pope to enlightened confidence in Christ alone as their Savior. They had to learn that the worship of God was not in liturgical functions, ceremonies, and rites, but that God is pleased with such worship as is in spirit and in truth. This took time, patience, and much, much instruction.

The radicals wanted everything changed at once. They wanted purity from the first moment of reform. They wanted to force change on the people, if not by the force of precept, then by the power of the sword. They believed the reformers were weak, lacking in courage, hesitant in the work, afraid of antagonizing the secular power, and, thus, unfit for the work that had to be done. This position, not at all uncommon in the church, led these radicals into excesses of every kind.

The radical reformation of which we speak is commonly called the Anabaptist Movement, and the radicals themselves, Anabaptists. This is due to the fact that nearly all of them repudiated infant baptism and insisted on "re-" or "ana-" baptism.

Nevertheless, the movement was by no means a unified one. One student of the Anabaptist movement divided it into three distinct branches: the Anabaptists, the Spiritualists, and the Rationalists. I am not sure that the names given to these three branches are particularly helpful, but, generally, the distinction is this. The Anabaptists were characterized especially by their desire to return the church to apostolic purity. They wanted to

help the church jump back a millennium and a half and become what, at least to their minds, was the character of the church during the time of the apostles. The Spiritualists were the wild radicals who gave Luther major problems in the reformatory work in Wittenberg and who were guilty of the worst sort of excesses. They took the position that all externals in worship were sinful and that the only true worship was the communion of the soul with God through visions, dreams, inner revelations, and private conversations between God and the human heart. The Rationalists were of a far more sober kind, but are probably designated as rationalists because they denied many cardinal doctrines of Scripture.

So the Anabaptist movement is a diverse one, difficult to describe, and yet, in all its many forms, a grave threat to the Reformation. We shall treat the movements separately, with special attention to the main characters in the drama as the movement played itself out in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

Carlstadt and the Zwickau Prophets

This radical branch of the Reformation was known by various names. Luther himself called them *Schwärmer*, a term which suggests the uncontrollable buzzing of bees around a hive and is an apt description of them. Carlstadt became one of them.

Carlstadt was the leader of the Reformation in Wittenberg and a close friend and colleague of Martin Luther himself. He was born Andrew Bodenstein, but took the name of his birthplace. His advanced education was acquired in Rome, where he studied theology and canon law. In 1504 he went to Wittenberg to study, for already at this early date Wittenberg had gained a reputation for scholarship. He was an able student and, upon the acquisition of his degree, was

hired to teach in the University of Wittenberg in the chair of theology. It is not surprising, therefore, that he came under the influence of Luther, was persuaded of Luther's teachings, and joined forces with Luther in the reformatory movement.

Carlstadt was such a trusted friend of Luther that he went with him to the Leipzig Disputation in 1519 and engaged in a debate with John Eck over the issues of human freedom and divine grace. Eck was perhaps Europe's most able debater, and Carlstadt was soon out of his depth. He had to be rescued by Luther's intervention, something which hurt Carlstadt's pride.

After the courageous stand of Luther at the Diet of Worms, Luther was whisked away in an apparent kidnapping by friends and hidden in the castle at Wartburg. This opened the door to Carlstadt to assume leadership of the Reformation in Wittenberg. That in itself would not have been all bad, but Carlstadt was becoming increasingly radical, and he seized the opportunity of Luther's absence to steer the Reformation in a different direction than Luther had intended.

As I said earlier, Luther himself was conservative. In the early part of the Reformation, he had no intention of leaving the church, and his idea of effecting changes in the church was to do so slowly and carefully, teaching and preaching the pure gospel. In fact, Luther's general position on change was to retain everything which Rome practiced except that which is explicitly contrary to Scripture.

But Carlstadt would have none of this. He began to attack every Romish practice that he could think of. First it was monasticism, then the mass, then the practice of administering the Lord's Supper with the bread only, then the use of Latin in the liturgy. In close conjunction with all of this, he attacked

the celibacy of the priests, and he himself married; he wrote an entirely new church constitution; and he stirred up the people to engage in wild and frenzied iconoclastic mob action in which crowds of people would enter churches, tear down images, smash painted glass windows, drag all the trappings of liturgy into the streets to be burned, and gut the inside of church buildings.

But even this was not the worst. Even before Worms, Carlstadt began to shift his thinking from the admittedly dry and sterile scholasticism of the Middle Ages to a blatant mysticism. He began to scoff at learning as being an impediment to knowing God. He spoke of the inner work of the Spirit as being sufficient for all knowledge necessary to salvation, and he began to repudiate infant baptism as a practice in the church.

The movement was given impetus by the visit of two Zwickau prophets, whose ideas we shall explain a little later. And even Thomas Münzer, that wild-eyed Anabaptist prophet, paid the city a brief visit. The city was ripe for anarchy.

It is not surprising that these matters should soon come to Luther's attention. He considered his isolation in Wartburg to be reprehensible to Christ and to himself while the village and his university were going up in the flames of Carlstadt's wild excesses. His Elector, Frederick the Wise, refused him permission to return, so fearful was he of the dangers which Luther faced from the Roman Catholics. But in a beautiful letter (quoted in part in my *Portraits of Faithful Saints*), Luther informed Frederick in no uncertain terms that he had to obey God rather than men.

He went in disguise and spent three days in the city without anyone knowing. He then came openly into the church where he had preached and worshiped, and

delivered a series of eight sermons, so utterly biblical and moving that by their power alone peace was restored and the Schwärmer were driven from the city. It was a remarkable performance and an act of courage probably as great as, if not greater than, Luther's stand at Worms. The sermons were delivered in a calm, almost matter-of-fact way, without histrionics, anger, condemnatory language, or abuse of those who were systematically wrecking the Reformation. They were quiet, but forceful expositions of the Word of God. Let preachers today, who so quickly are dissatisfied with the fruit of solid expository preaching, take note!

Of these sermons Schaff writes:

He preached eight sermons for eight days in succession, and carried the audience with him. They are models of effective popular eloquence, and among the best he ever preached. He handled the subject from the stand-point of a pastor, with fine tact and practical wisdom. He kept aloof from coarse personalities which disfigure so many of his polemical writings. Not one unkind word, not one unpleasant allusion, escaped his lips. In plain, clear, strong, scriptural language, he refuted the errors without naming the errorists....

The ruling ideas of these eight discourses are: Christian freedom and Christian charity; freedom from the tyranny of radicalism which would force the conscience against forms...; charity towards the weak....

It was an astonishing demonstration that Luther was right. Man cannot perform the work of reformation. Only God can do that. And God's instrument then and now is the preaching of the Word of God. These sermons may still be read today. They can be found in Luther's Works.

Luther's own evaluation of the power of the word was (quoted in Schaff):

I will preach, speak, write, but I will force no one; for faith must be voluntary. Take me as an example. I stood up against the Pope, indulgences, and all papists, but without violence or uproar. I only urged, preached, and declared God's Word, nothing else. And yet while I was asleep, or drinking Wittenberg beer with my Philip Melancthon and Amsdorf, the Word inflicted greater injury on popery than prince or emperor ever did. I did nothing, the Word did every thing. Had I appealed to force, all Germany might have been deluged with blood; yea, I might have kindled a conflict at Worms, so that the Emperor would not have been safe. But what would have been the result? Ruin and desolation of body and soul. I therefore kept quiet, and gave the Word free course through the world. Do you know what the Devil thinks when he sees men use violence to propagate the gospel? He sits with folded arms behind the fire of hell, and says with malignant looks and frightful grin: "Ah, how wise these madmen are to play my game! Let them go on; I shall reap the benefit. I delight in it." But when he sees the Word running and contending alone on the battle-field, then he shudders and shakes for fear. The Word is almighty, and takes captive the hearts.

Carlstadt lost his effectiveness as a reformer. For a time he submitted to Luther and Luther's policy for reformation, but he did so sullenly. For a brief time he continued to lecture in the University, but soon found this intolerable, for his heart was filled with revenge against Luther. After retiring, he lived simply and alone, but gave himself over to mystical inspirations and subjective revelations. He was in some contact with other radicals, but at last settled in Basel (1532), where he seemed to regain some spiritual balance. At least, he became pastor there and a professor in the university and died peaceably in 1541. ☸

The Types of Scripture (7)

We have seen that, already at the dawn of human history, the mother promise was a most remarkable revelation of the course of events determined upon by Jehovah God. Two seeds, there are — the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Between the two there will be, throughout all of history, perpetual strife — a strife set by none other than God Himself. And the outcome is sure, even declared in advance. The serpent's brood will be vanquished. The seed of the woman shall prevail. Genesis 3:15 marks the dawn of grace.

The question now arises, to what degree were our first parents made to feel the force of the divine announcement, and to what extent were they made to see its implications?

Expectation of Eve

At the birth of her firstborn Eve exclaimed, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." It is clear how Eve construed the words of God. The divine announcement had awakened in her understanding heart the hope of one empowered to triumph over and to vanquish the seducer. It is also plain that her expectations were centered upon a man — a man with Jehovah. She erred, however, in that she regarded her firstborn as the promised seed. That Eve soon saw her

mistake is evident from the fact that she named her second born *Abel*, meaning, *breath, vanity*.

Revelation to Abraham

Another important Scripture is Genesis 12:2, 3. Abraham is called and receives a revelation. God will make of him a great nation and bless him. "And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

Abraham is blessed. Man had heard God curse. The force and meaning of the divine curse was constantly being exhibited unto him. The essence of the curse, he saw, is a life lived apart from God. The one whom God curses is expelled from the presence of the Father of lights. Such a one is ordered to leave God's house and is assigned to a place upon which the Almighty, in holy indignation, frowns — a place of utter darkness, where men wail and gnash their teeth. The meaning of the curse, I repeat, was incessantly being demonstrated to man — in his expulsion from the garden of Eden, in the shame which he experienced upon the discovery of his nakedness, in the thorn and the thistle which grew, in the wanton ungodliness of the seed of the serpent.

However, God promised to set enmity. And so He did and continued to do. Abram is called and ordered to get him out of his country, and from his kindred, and from his father's house, unto a land that God will show him. Abraham is blessed. Again it becomes mani-

fest that the curse of God does not mean the eclipse of the entire human race. Abraham and his seed are blessed. The essence of the divine blessing is a life permeated with and enveloped by the light of God's countenance. Jehovah is the friend of him whom He blesses. And that one, being blessed, is made to love God. This one dwells in God's presence and is happy because he may know the Holy One.

Abraham is blessed and he *shall be a blessing*. Further, whether one is blessed or cursed depends upon one's attitude toward Abraham. Those cursing Abraham will be cursed, and those blessing Abraham will be blessed. And finally, in him will all the families of the earth be blessed. That is to say, the races of the earth are blessed because of their oneness with him. On the other hand, he who is not in Abraham, that is, not connected with and related to him, is cursed.

These statements are pregnant with meaning. We ask, how can these things be? The answer is ready: The seed of Abraham is Christ. These statements must be made to apply to an organism, to that organism of which Christ is the head. Of that body this patriarch is a member. He who curses him is cursing the body and its head — the Christ. He who is joined to him is a member of the organism. Such a one is at once in Christ and is blessed. Abraham was made a blessing in that he brought forth Christ. To this must be added that the life of Abraham was an exhibition of the Christ in him. He walked as a child of life, as one born of God, devoted to the

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cause of Jehovah. He who cursed Abraham cursed the Christ whom he displayed. But the matter which interests us now is that the church of the old covenant was made to see, from the very beginning, that the boundless ocean of God's grace was inseparably connected with a seed, with a man of Jehovah — an offspring of the holy race. What bearing this has on our subject will be made plain in the sequence.

Blessing of Judah

Let us pass on to Genesis 49:8-10. The passage reads, literally:

Judah thou! Thy brethren shall
praise thee!
Thy hand in the neck of thine enemies,
Thy father's sons shall bow down
before thee.
A lion's whelp is Judah;
From the prey, my son, thou art
gone up:
He stooped down, he crouches
like a lion,
And like a lioness — who shall
rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from
Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between
his feet,
Until Shiloh come,
And to Him willing obedience of
the nations!

This passage seems to have baffled many a commentator. Lengthy treatises have been written on the meaning of the term Shiloh. However, the very text in which the name appears indicates that the term signifies a person and not a place. The passage yields no difficulties if explained in the light of previous revelation and according to the spirit of prophecy as a whole. In that light, we see at once that the term Shiloh is a personal designation of Him in whom the church, even at this juncture, had been taught to center its hopes, viz., the man of Jehovah, who, in this particular outburst of prophetic vision, is named the Shiloh, i.e., the peacemaker, the prince of peace, unto whom the gathering of

the nations shall be. Thus it appears that the passage is permeated with prophetic allusions.

This particular reference to the Messiah was later taken up in the prophecy of Balaam. "Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey" (Num. 23:24). And again: "He crouched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.... I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city" (Num. 24:9-19).

Also this prophecy revolves around a person, namely, about Him who shall gain the ascendancy over the malice of the devil. Here, again, He is presented in the image of a lion. The church of the old covenant is made to see that the consolation of Israel is full of majesty and power, supremely strong, free, and unhampered in His movements, doing as He sees fit.

Prophecy of Isaiah

Finally, there is that matchless passage in Isaiah:

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Who hath believed our report?

and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Is. 52:13-53:12).


This seer, and he only, is transported to those sublime heights from which he can see in the distance the spectacle of the suffering Savior. Eve saw Him as the man of Jehovah who shall come to crush the serpent's head. To Abraham, Jehovah spoke of Him as the seed in whom the fullness of grace doth dwell. Jacob saw Him as the lion-hearted prince of peace. But to Isaiah He appeared as the suffering servant of Jehovah and as the anointed one who comes in power and in love. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He

shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his laws" (Is. 42:1-4).

It was revealed unto Isaiah not only that the man of Jehovah would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, but also that this suffering servant is God: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6).

The words of Isaiah are, to be sure, interspersed with more Messianic allusions. Their sum total clearly reveals that this seer saw more of the Christ than did any of the other prophets. All the Messianic revelations of the preceding epochs were incorporated in his prophecies, and to them is added

elements for which one looks in vain in the prophetic words of the others. The description of the suffering servant of Jehovah is peculiar to the utterances of Isaiah.

Thus it appears that the shadows of the old covenant were indeed accompanied by the spoken word describing the very objects and events prefigured by the shadows. It also appears that another rudiment of the Jehovah religion was (and is) that the coming deliverer is the man of Jehovah, the servant of Jehovah, whose task it shall be to gain the ascendancy over the forces of unrighteousness and to deliver the oppressed. It was also repeatedly stressed that the coming one is the *son of man*, an offspring of the holy seed, the rod out of the stem of Jesse, a branch growing out of his roots. In this one the expectations of the saints were centered. 

Issachar vs. the Scribes

"And of 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

Truth is dead! So say the postmodernists of today. For the postmodernist there is no possibility of objective truth; reality is only a construction of the mind. Truth is what each person or culture

wants it to be, and one person's or culture's idea of truth is of no more value than any other's. A classic example of this postmodern thinking in action is the case of a former president of the United States who claimed that he did not lie, based on his definition of the word "is." According to him there was no problem. His definition of "is" was just as good as that of anyone else. The obvious result of this postmodern way of thinking is chaos. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes, and if you don't like it, you are the problem. It's time for you to "lighten up a little."

One is *almost* inclined to agree with postmodernism, but for a different reason: not because there is no objective truth, but because the

lies of our mainstream media make it nearly impossible to ascertain the truth. Not only is this true because of current methods of deconstructing and rewriting history (cf. this rubric, *SB*, Dec. 15, 2000), but also because of lies and distortions by the national media in their reporting of, and commentary on, politically and morally sensitive issues involving the world in general and our western culture in particular. Our modern-day scribes, the media (generally speaking, at least), have a worldview they are promoting: a worldview which is antithetical to the truth. For them, their worldview comes first. Thus their presentation of the news, commentary on current happenings, and television programming

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will reflect their anti-Christian bias even if it means resorting to lies and distortions.

Modern-day children of Issachar, whose purpose it is to understand the times and teach them to their children, do well to heed the warning of the apostle Paul found in Colossians 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." This requires an awareness of media bias and misinformation, what those biases are, and the methods used by today's scribes to promote them. (Many books have been written about this. Read some! In this article we will but scratch the surface with a few examples.)

The Presence of Media Bias

That present-day scribes have a bias is not surprising or difficult to demonstrate.

Although most often they will deny *any* bias, on occasion it slips out; sometimes even from the mouths of their elite. For example, in a speech to the Radio and Television News Directors Association, CNN founder Ted Turner said, "You bet your bibby we take a position.... News is what you News directors interpret it as. News is what we at CNN interpret it as. The people of this country see the news we think they ought to see."¹ This speech of Mr. Turner reveals, straight from the horse's mouth, two astounding admissions: first, that the scribes interpret the news for us (apparently they believe we are too stupid to interpret it for ourselves), and second, that the scribes tell us *only* what they want us to know. For example, in his book *Our Nation Betrayed*, Garland Favorito illustrates time and again how media silence was used to protect their corrupt darling in the White House during the impeachment movement in this country. Favorito also suggests an explanation for the media's consistency in this endeavor:

Like many others, I believe that the major media organizations are able to distort political information consistently because they are controlled by members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). CFR members hold positions of power such as chairmen, presidents, managing editors, editorial page editors, network TV news anchors, magazine editors, political columnists and many other key positions in the media world. They control all the political news at major networks, the AP and UPI political news wires and editorial pages of many major newspapers around the country. This allows them to distort political news consistently to fulfill their political agenda.²

Another powerful exposure of blatant media bias and misinformation is found in the recently published book of Bernard Goldberg, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. In his book, Goldberg tells of his experiences working for CBS. His criticism of media bias was not well received, and eventually it cost him his job. CBS encouraged him to leave after he wrote in an editorial for *The Wall Street Journal*: "The old argument that the networks and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that its hardly worth discussing anymore."³ The fact that Goldberg ultimately lost his job for this makes it clear that challenges such as Goldberg's are not tolerated by the major media leadership.

The many responses from media representatives to Goldberg's book make it clear that not only will no change be forthcoming, but even the presence of media bias is denied — Ted Turner to the contrary notwithstanding. The response of NBC's Tom Brokaw is typical: "...the idea that we would set out, consciously or unconsciously, to put some kind of an ideological framework over what we are doing is nonsense."

The Content of Media Bias

The "ideological framework" of the scribes which Mr. Brokaw denies is no secret. In her analysis of Goldberg's book, syndicated columnist Linda Bowles captures the general areas of media bias when she writes in an editorial titled "From within CBS, a Straight Story of Tilted Handling of the News":

The way the news is selected and reported exposes media bias about race, homosexuality, politics, religion, immigration, abortion, education, the environment and gun ownership. Many liberal decision-makers in the media, whether consciously or unconsciously, are clearly in the business of censoring out news they do not want the people to see or hear, while amplifying news which advances their agendas.

When the liberal media want an opinion on women's issues, they rarely go to a conservative women's organization. They go to the National Organization for Women, a relatively small organization of females whose primary issues are lesbianism, liberalism, and abortion.⁴

The women's issue quoted above is but one example of how the major media of our day skew news pertaining to women's issues. Consider briefly some specifics in a few other areas which reflect a bias by the mainstream media:

— Peter LaBarbera writes in *Human Events* under the title, "Major

1. Olasky, Marvin. "Ted's the Man." *World*, Dec. 15, 1997:30.

2. Favorito, Garland. *Our Nation Betrayed*. San Diego, California: Black Forest Press, 2000.

3. Goldberg, Bernard. *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. Washington D.C.: Regenery Publishing, Inc. 2001:215.

4. Bowles, Linda. "From within CBS, a Straight Story of Tilted Handling of the News." *The Grand Rapids Press* Dec. 2001.

News Organizations Recruit Gay Journalists⁵:

More than 15 of the nation's most powerful and prestigious news organizations — from National Public Radio to the *Washington Post* — made history September 10 (1993) by recruiting openly gay journalists at a job fair here sponsored by the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA).⁵

The rest of LaBarbera's article tells how the media recruiters justify this activity as a means of building "diversity" in their newsrooms.

— G. Russell Evans writes in *The Washington Times* under the title "Time to Challenge Anti-Christian Bigotry":

Christians are routinely smeared and ridiculed by our media and entertainers: CBS newsmen Bob Schieffer on "Face the Nation" (July 9): "We've all noticed a link between crime and religion." AP reporter Sharon Cohen recently called Christians "prone to riots, terrorism and death." The *Washington Post* (sic) has called Christians "largely poor, uneducated and easy to command."⁶

Although many other examples of media bias could be cited, space constraints necessitate that the selections above suffice to establish the point.

Media's Unscrupulous Methods

The quote from Evans also illustrates that the mainstream media do not hesitate to lie if that's what it takes to promote their agenda. Along these same lines, in an article titled "Lie On!" Joel Belez writes:

We're not talking here, mind you, about mere bias—but about flat-out lying. The Media Research Center of Washington monitors both kinds of departure from the truth. I asked them for their favorite examples from the

"falsehood" variety, just to prove my point that such is commonplace. Here from recent years is MRC's list: NBC on its *Dateline* program, rigged crashes of GM pickup trucks to get an explosion on camera. ABC News used fake résumés to get jobs at Food Lion, and then attempted to make sure tainted or dated meat was available for sale. ABC also spiked a report that its parent company — Disney — carelessly employs Peeping Toms and child molesters for its amusement parks.

Even against that background, the big networks go right on posturing in public as if they owned the moral high ground, arrogantly scolding politicians, corporations, and others.⁷

Unjustly scolding others or ridiculing them and their beliefs is common practice for many in the media. Bernard Goldberg, mentioned earlier in this article, was castigated by one of his colleagues as a man who "didn't have many friends in this organization because he was a selfish, self-involved guy who was not a team player." Ted Turner has taken every opportunity to ridicule Christians and their beliefs. In addition to calling Christianity a religion "for losers," he has publicly proclaimed that Americans foolishly have been "acting in the Judeo-Christian society under a set of rules called the Ten Commandments," but America's problem is that "there is no amendment procedure to the Ten Commandments." Such mockery is acceptable "journalism" for today's anti-Christian scribes.

More dangerous, for covenant children at least, is the media's use of "appeal to pity," as presented in many of its dramas. The *AFA Journal* (American Family Association) regularly reports concerning the contents of TV programming. These reports make it very clear that the postmodern, anti-Christian agenda of the media is on the foreground. If Issachar wants her children to adopt the lies and vile corruption of the media agenda, she will let them feed on what televi-

sion — including the advertisements — has to offer. If she does, she should not be surprised when her children empathize with the "persecuted" homosexual, laugh at the grossest of sins, weep with the unwed mother who has no choice but to have an abortion, grow angry with those intolerant Christians, yearn for the "life" at the bar, and reject the authority which would deny them the pleasures of premarital sex.


Rather than subject her children to this, she does better to follow the example of Eliakim, Hezekiah's servant, who desired to keep the Jews on the wall from hearing the vile blasphemies of Rab-shakeh (II Kings 18).

In Conclusion

Confronted with this vile beast (the media with all of its anti-Christian methods and influence), present-day children of Issachar are unafraid. These things must come to pass! As the Lord has said, "And the Dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

This is war indeed! Children of Issachar must consider it a matter of life and death!

Though the present-day scribes seek to enslave the Israel of today with their lies, the children of Issachar must listen instead to the Lord who reassuringly tells her, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Children of Issachar, understand the times and live! 

5. LaBarbera, Peter. "Major News Organizations Recruit Gay Journalists." *Human Events*, Sept. 25, 1993:5.

6. Evans, Russel G. "Time to Challenge Anti-Christian Bigotry." *Washington Times*, Dec. 2001.

7. Belz, Joel. "Lie On!" *World*, Nov. 6, 1999:9.

Dating and the Deep Blue Sea ... and the Way of Christ

On December 15, 2001 yours truly punted Dating off a cliff and into the sea. Then, on that Date, I encouraged *you*, dear readers, to do the same.

Readers of "Grace Life" will be reminded that it is a specific kind of Dating which I believe must die. It is the Dating with the very poor figure, for it is Dating shaped by principles of the world. It is the Dating with disease on her breath, for all that is of the world is not of God, and therefore promotes death. It is the Dating which, like all heathen customs, creeps — and it has a way of creeping into Christian societies right up the drain pipes (the Latin name for which is TV, if I recall) and under the doors and into our homes. And, having crept in, it makes itself right at home, coming and going as it pleases, especially riding on the backs or lodging in the minds of the young people as they come and go and attempt to grow. She makes them love her. And the helpless parents then must tolerate her. She's the outlaw we all dread — the one who comes to have her way ... and to stay!

For more vitriol, but also a description of the Dating to which I refer, the reader is referred to my former article.

For positive instruction from God's Word concerning the marrying of God's people I ask that you read on in the several articles

to come on this subject. And may the Lord truly bless our consideration of this Dating and our marrying. May this be the good fruit: that our marrying and giving in marriage conform more and more to the Grace Life — the life of uncompromising holiness, Holy Ghost joy, and self-denying praise of our Maker and Redeemer.



The following articles set forth three "ways." The first is the way of a man with a maid. This is something we have all marveled at, but a way which needs, I submit, a closer, biblical examination, especially concerning this matter of dating. The second "way" is the way of the heathen. With regard to this, it is my contention that we have "learned" this way quite well when it comes to dating. The third "way" is the way Christ. We love this way! It is the way of *theology*. It is the way of Marriage, and Family, and Father. It is the way of the God-honoring marrying of God's people.

The way of a man with a maid

With the good and infallible combination of inspiration and wisdom, Agur writes in Proverbs 30:18, 19: "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

Now these three or four ways of which the Bible here speaks are

compared to the way of an adulterous woman (v. 20) who is astonishing for her wicked "eating" as well as for her denial of her debauchery. We want to reflect, in our consideration of the marrying of God's people, upon the one wonderful way, that of "a man with a maid," and to compare that to the very common way of our dating.

In Proverbs 30 Agur speaks of certain "ways" he cannot figure out. Proverbs being the proverbs of *God*, we understand that God through Agur is pronouncing here that there are certain ways, certain phenomena, which *no one* can figure out. Agur says of these ways, that they are "too wonderful" for him, and thus he knows them not. We must say that too. And so with regard to the way of a man with a maid, that way being mentioned as one of those wonderful ways — both Agur and we are amazed, and in awe. We all confess that we know it not.

If we have blood and faith and a little experience, we can truly appreciate the wonder of this way. Boys turn into men. Girls turn into maidens and young ladies. Young man meets young lady. Young lady meets young man. Young man *likes* young lady. Young lady is *flattered* young man likes young lady. Look out! Something there is or *might be* or *might come to be* stronger than steel, wiser than words, more beautiful than butterflies, and which makes men fly and women dye, and do all (strange and wonderful!) things along this way of two becoming one! Won-

der, and wonderful way ... of God who has created such men and maids, and such a way between the two!

Ah, yes! The way of a man with a maid. Who can know it? Too wonderful for us. For it is the divine mystery, in the hearts and lives of believers, of the creation of love and of the home, and of the church. It is God painting glorious, holy love-unions which will reflect the Gospel Masterpiece: The Christ and His Bride!



Now I would submit to you, "Grace Life" readers, that Proverbs 30:18, 19, light of Truth declaring the wonder of the way of a man with a maid, we have ridden, by a strange interpretation of it, thousands of miles and thousands of dates into the dark.

This is our first problem. This is why modern American Dating has come up the drains and under the doors and into our lives. Proverbs, and the whole Bible is light. But by one twist of a text, wittingly (and mostly unwittingly, I am sure), we have made it darkness.

I believe we have reasoned so: Proverbs tells us that the way of a man with a maid is too wonderful for us. We believe it.

And we experience this! Then we make what we think is a logical deduction, and say: because the way of a man with a maid is too wonderful, and we cannot know it, therefore, about the way people, even believers, are to get married we are clue-less (or very close to it!). Then we become what we think is reverent. We think the text teaches us that we *ought* to be clue-less about the way of a man with a maid. Any discussion of a *theology* or doctrine of that way, of certain vital principles which purport to shed light on the Wonder of this way, is deemed a proud probing into the secret things of God. Any suggestion that another rule besides or instead of "Johnny be in by midnight," another rule than the ones we have been making, smacks

of irreverent humanism (denial of the Wonder), self-righteous Phariseeism, and the queer way of cultists, gnostics, democrats, and all kinds of pests.

To be sure, we do know, and even *are convinced* of certain things about men with maids. We are convinced that the *beginning* of their way together ought to be such that only believers are allowed. We know II Corinthians 6:14, 15, and we defend the truth, and live by it, for the most part, and don't date pagans (not even ones who *like* us and who are willing to go to church with us!). We also know of the *end* of the way of a man with a maid, that it ought to be marriage. So the "A" and the "Z" of the marrying of believers we know in light of the Bible.

But for the rest, the B through Y of when and how two believers are to get married and to know whether they should, the real nuts and bolts and nitty gritty of how to get from A to Z ... well that, we have said, is a *matter of Christian liberty*, and *up to the discretion of our young people* and *guided by a few general rules of parents*, and *something we should pray about....* But basically, we are thinking, the way is too wonderful to know much, or anything about.

We therefore surmise that we have no guiding, unwavering light, no light reaching into the very marrow of "how to get married." And we fancy that all is well, at least as well as can be expected. The unrest and fretting this whole way of a man with a maid works in man-souls and maid-souls who Date and who Don't (but want to) is just part of growing up, the trials of teendom, part of the to-be-expected conflicts of single life. The turmoil Dating causes in our houses will pass. That my boy has gone through six girls in six years and still hasn't found the right one is better than if he'd never tried.... And soon we will be done with the troubles of the Dating and gone to the place where there is no more

wonderful way of a man with a maid. And none too soon.



The way of a man with a maid. Who can know it?

Well, beloved readers ... *we* can!

Not know *all* of it, to be sure. That — that complete knowledge is beyond us. There is something of the divine in it, and when we contemplate the wonder of this way, especially when we are *in* it, all we can think of are butterflies and the last words she said to me, and that look in his eye, and all we get are goose bumps. Goose bumps are the wonder of which the proverbialist speaks. No one can figure out goose bumps.

But there is *something*, there are *some things* which we can and ought to know for good and godly relationships of men and maids. Proverbs 30 sheds light on the *wonder* of that way. *Other* revelation sheds light on the way a man is to be *godly* with a maid, and the way a maid is to be *godly* with a man.

And I am not talking about general admonitions warning against lust. Those apply, to be sure. Parents are wise to remind their children, and those in the way of men and maids need to remind themselves of the dangers and pitfalls along the way. But God has given, I believe, certain other fundamental principles. These are given *especially* for the crucial times in the lives of parents and young adults when there is marrying and giving in marriage. These principles have to do with Marriage itself. With Fatherhood. With Family. And with Covenant responsibility. Recognition and consistent, thorough application of these will lead to certain practices which tend, much more and rather than Dating, to godly, honorable, peaceful marrying, and godly, joyous, and enduring marriages.


That is the solution first of all, Grace Life readers! *Know*, and *believe*, that God would *not* leave us

in the dark concerning our marrying, but would shine, as He has on the truth of marriage itself, also on the *entire* path that we are to take in our marrying. Yes, He shines on all ways of His men with maidens fair!

That is just like God, you know. He loves us so. Every step of the way He is with us. And His Word He gives to shed light upon our

path from birth to marrying age (from 18 to 80, I suppose) to death. All of it is given by His inspiration. Like Proverbs 30:18, 19. Ephesians 5. Song of Solomon. Genesis 24. I Corinthians 7. And II Timothy 3:16, 17. All is profitable for doctrine. For every good work. Including the mysterious way *and good work* of a man with a maid becoming one flesh, and their

parents, whose aim is first of all God and His glory.

That is God's Word. A wonder itself, but revealed. A Word for godly marrying. A Word which says nothing about modern American Dating. Except that it is an adulterous woman, who eats, and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no wickedness. Except to damn it. 

Report of Classis East

January 9, 2002
First PRC of Holland, Michigan

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2002 at the First PRC of Holland, Michigan. All the churches were represented by two delegates.

The January session of classis devotes much of its time to voting. Elected as delegates to synod are the following: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, B. Gritters, J. Slopsema, R. Van Overloop; *Secundi:* M. Dick, K. Koole, D.H. Kuiper, J. Laning, C. Terpstra; **ELDERS:** *Primi:* H. Boer, G. Kaptein, W. Koops, E. Ophoff, Sr., G. Terpstra; *Secundi:* T. Bodbyl, K. Feenstra, S. Miedema, T. Pipe, A. Rau. In other voting, Rev. C. Terpstra was elected to a three-year term as a *primus* delegate *ad examina* and Rev. R. Cammenga was elected to a three-year term as a *secundus* delegate *ad examina*.

Rev. R. VanOverloop was elected to a three-year term on the Classical Committee and Rev. K. Koole to a one-year term on this committee. Revs. J. Slopsema and K. Koole were elected as church visitors, with Rev. R. VanOverloop as alternate. J. Huiskens was elected to another three-year term as Stated Clerk; Rev. C. Terpstra was elected as Assistant Stated Clerk.


Classis granted the request of Hope PRC for the emeritation of Rev. J. Kortering effective August 1, 2002. Classis further decided that an overture to synod from a brother concerning the status of a previous decision was 1) misdirected (an explanation for a decision of classis should be directed to the classis itself) and 2) that the decision in question did in fact fall away. Classis also considered in closed session several questions raised by a consistory via Question

4 of Article 41 of the Church Order.

Classis heard the report of the church visitors and was grateful for their report that there was peace and harmony in the churches.

Subsidy requests for 2003 from Kalamazoo (\$20,500) and from Covenant (\$39,000 with a minister) were approved and forwarded to synod. Covenant also requested and was granted permission to contact the churches in Classis East for collections for their Building Fund. A request from Covenant for \$5,000 for their Evangelism Fund was not approved; Covenant was advised to contact the evangelism committees of our other congregations for help in this venture.

Expenses of classis amounted to \$503.64. Classis will meet next on May 8, 2002 at the Southeast PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

Book Reviews



Dictionary of the Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America, ed. D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999. Pp. vii + 286. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The editors of this new dictionary are right when they claim that it "fills a significant gap in historical and theological reference works." This dictionary concentrates on the many aspects of the development of the Reformed faith

in America. It pays special attention to prominent persons and to churches. The coverage is thorough. The explanations are succinct and usually accurate.

There are also longer essays on themes, doctrines, and movements

that are of importance to the Reformed tradition. The editors have an informative introduction, "The Presbyterians: A People, a History & an Identity." There are articles on covenant theology, predestination, Puritanism, and other subjects. The article on revivalism is rightly critical of the entire movement. In their introductory article, the editors also criticize revivalism. The revivalism of Whitefield and Edwards had a harmful effect upon virtually every aspect of the Reformed faith.

James Bratt writes the article on Herman Hoeksema. Herman Hanko has an article on the Protestant Reformed Churches. Hoeksema comes up for mention also in the article on the Canadian Reformed Churches and in the article on the Christian Reformed Church.

The treatment of Reformed worship is bland. There is no mention of the regulative principle as a fundamental principle of Reformed worship from Calvin on. Why the editors picked Baptist Norman Geisler to write the important article on the Reformed doctrine of predestination is a mystery. Geisler thinks that the predestination of Dordt is "extreme Calvinism." The author of the article on "Arminianism" is seriously confused about the infralapsarian view of predestination. He describes it as a view "which held that God's decrees were not eternal but were made after and in light of the Fall." The same author is correct, however, in his analysis of the "distinguishing feature" of Arminianism: "a conditional view of grace."

The dictionary will be useful for all who desire information about many aspects of Presbyterian and Reformed Christianity in America. ■

The Eschatology of the Old Testament, by Geerhardus Vos. Ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2001. Pp. ix + 176. \$11.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Geerhardus Vos is not the easiest going under normal publishing conditions. The difficulty of reading him is aggravated in *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* inasmuch as the book is a compilation of his writings on the subject from various of his course lectures and unfinished manuscripts. Nevertheless, this slim volume will handsomely repay the effort of the Reformed minister to work through it.

Vos traces the development of the doctrine of the last things in the Old Testament. In keeping with the method of biblical theology for which the Princeton Seminary professor is known, Vos considers the eschatology of several distinct periods and junctures in the history of revelation in the Old Testament, including the "pre-redemptive," the flood, Sinai, and the "Mosaic Theocracy."

He also explains outstanding eschatological prophecies and promises, including Genesis 3:15, the Shiloh prophecy in Genesis 49, the "oracles" of Balaam, and the Davidic promise of II Samuel 7.

Of great importance in view of the literalist interpretation of Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messianic kingdom both by fundamentalist premillennialism and by postmillennialism now making inroads into Reformed churches is the chapter on "The Mosaic Theocracy." Vos affirms the characteristic Reformed (and Christian!) understanding of the earthly form of Old Testament prophecy of the coming theocratic, Messianic kingdom. In the earthly form that was necessary for Israel at that time, the prophets foretold a spiritual reality. "In the New Testament it is spiritualized" (p. 118). As for the "hermeneutical principle" that decides the spiritual fulfillment and explains the fulfillment in detail, this hermeneutical principle is sim-

ply "the New Testament teaching in regard to that fulfillment" (p. 119).

In fragments from Vos' writings that make up an appendix to the book, Vos gives helpful exegesis of eschatology in the prophets, especially the visions of Zechariah.

Throughout, the believing Old Testament scholar interacts judiciously with leading liberal, higher-critical scholars, particularly Wellhausen and Gunkel.

Vos is to be faulted for his hesitancy to find Messianic prophecy where scholarship might have some doubt about it. He doubts that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is Jesus Christ. He rejects Shiloh in Genesis 49 as a proper name for the future 'Rest Giver.' According to Vos, there is no connection between Balaam's star and the star that heralded the birth of Jesus. Vos leaves undecided whether Psalm 72 is Messianic.

Vos is capable of expressing grand truth in a fetching manner. He expresses the contrasting effect of eschatology upon the life of the ungodly world and upon the life of the Christian this way.

The world throws itself headlong into all excesses of wickedness because it is obsessed by a desperate sense of the speedy approach and the inevitableness of its doom. The world makes all the use possible that this night of dissoluteness affords it; for it reasons, "Let us eat, drink, for tomorrow we die." The world lives, as it were, in kind of cosmical night-club, whereas the Christian should pursue the last things to be attended to before the break of morning... (p. 40).

Of the eschatology in the Psalter, Vos says, "The worshiping congregation of Israel sing 'a new song' because their hearts are full of the 'new things' that are on the wing with which the air is already vibrant" (p. 131). ☪

Mission Activities

Our churches' two missionaries to Ghana, Revs. Bekkering and Moore, have recently begun a study class for future officebearers. These classes were scheduled to continue from January until June, with instruction given by Rev. Moore. All men 18 and older were encouraged to attend. This class was viewed as a very important first step with respect to the future establishment of a congregation there in the future, the Lord willing.

Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, began a new series in February entitled, "Suffering the Afflictions of Christ." This series is being preached, first, in light of the many trials faced daily by members in Pittsburgh, but also in light of the evils that have come upon our nation in recent months.

Rev. M. Dick, who along with his family recently left his congregation in Standale, MI for six months in Fayetteville, NC on behalf of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, writes that the preaching on Sundays has been well received. He has also begun a Tuesday doctrine and Bible class for the adults, as well as two Wednesday catechism classes, one for Beginners and another for Seniors. The plan is to hold these classes each week and to have other meetings besides, in order to discuss other matters and to help their witness in the community. Rev. Dick and the Fellowship have, however, run into one "problem," which has resulted from the in-

crease in numbers attending each week: they need more room. A good problem to have. To address this problem they have asked a local realtor to assist them in their search. Presently they are looking for an existing church building, or office space that could be converted to a suitable meeting place, or land on which to build.

On January 18 Rev. A. Spriensma was installed as our denomination's foreign missionary to the Philippines. This worship service took place at the Doon, IA PRC, with their pastor, Rev. R. Smit, leading the gathering. Rev. D. Kleyn, president of the Foreign Mission Committee, read the installation form. The offering, appropriately enough, was for Foreign Missions, and a time of fellowship followed the service. Rev. Spriensma was able to stay in Doon that weekend and preach his inaugural sermon the following Lord's day as well. He chose for his theme, "Jesus' Other Sheep," based on John 10:16. We may also add here that between now and June, when the Spriensma family expects to move to the Philippines, Rev. Spriensma will be taking courses in cross-cultural missions, Philippine culture and history, and the Tagalog language. May the Lord bless the mission labors of Rev. Spriensma as our churches' missionary in the Philippines unto the gathering of Christ's chosen and redeemed sheep.

Congregation Activities

On Sunday, January 27, Rev. M. VanderWal was installed as the eleventh pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. Rev. B. Gritters, a son of Hope, led the installation service.

For additional support to those families who are in need in their congregation, the deacons of the

Byron Center, MI PRC held a grocery shower for the month of January.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI continues to sponsor Christianity on Campus at Grand Valley State University each week. In the absence of Rev. Dick for six months, Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, has agreed to lead the classes. This semester these classes plan, the Lord willing, to go through the Apostles' Creed, using as their main theme, "I Believe." If you are interested in attending, you should also know that they now meet on Thursday nights at 7:30 P.M. in the Kirkhof Center.

The Dordt Bible Study also continues to meet each week at Dordt College in Northwest Iowa. As in the past, this outreach is sponsored by the Reformed Witness Committee, made up of our churches in Doon and Hull, IA, along with the Edgerton, MN PRC. This year they are studying the book of Romans under the theme, "The Way to Salvation."

Responses to two advertisements placed in the *World Magazine* by the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC gave that committee opportunity to send out over 70 copies of Prof. D. Engelsma's pamphlet, "God's Hatred of Divorce" in October, and more than 100 copies of Rev. H. Hoeksema's book *The Mystery of Bethlehem* in November and December.

Minister Activities


January 22 Rev. and Mrs. A. denHartog, with their children Matthew and Laura, left from Los Angeles to Singapore to begin the work of minister-on-loan to our sis-

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

ter churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore.

The congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. C. Haak to serve as their next pastor. Since Rev. W. Bruinsma

declined the call he had received from the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ, their council formed a new trio from which they will call soon. That trio consisted of the Revs. M. DeVries, T. Miersma, and

R. VanOverloop. Rev. R. Cammenga declined the call he had received from the Lynden, WA PRC. The Grandville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma to serve as their next pastor. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 17, 2002, D.V., our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. GARRET FLIKKEMA,

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are deeply thankful to our covenant-keeping God for them. We are thankful for the covenant home in which we, their children were raised. We are thankful for the covenant education they sacrificed to provide for us. We are thankful for their commitment to the truth held by our Protestant Reformed Churches in which we were born and raised. We are thankful for their love for each other, rooted in their love for the Lord, which has been and continues to be the foundation of their marriage these 50 years; a love which has been their joy and preserved them and us through many trials.

May the Lord of their marriage and covenant home continue to preserve them in the days to come until we with them shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

- * Rich and Marcia Flikkema
Dan and Tammy McHugh,
Tricia, Heidi, (and Kyle in glory)
- * George and Denise DeJong
Matthew and Stacy DeJong
- * Bill and Pat DeJong
Brenda,
Paul and Erin DeJong,
Beth and Joanna
- * Jim

Lansing, Illinois

TEACHER NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications for a teacher for the 2002-2003 school year. Subject areas of need include English and vocal music (choir). Applicants should be certified for the secondary level. Applicants should contact either Mr. Rick Noorman (616) 453-5048, or Mr. John VanUffelen (616) 396-8498.

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address synod 2002, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

NOTICE

The RFPA is considering the publication of a book of the shorter works of Herman Hoeksema. Anyone who has relevant materials (speeches, old pamphlets, notes, etc.), is asked to contact

David Kregel
6244 Ivanrest SW
Byron Center, MI 49315
FAX (616) 531-9241
e-mail: dkregel@iserv.net
Phone: (616) 532-9076

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for March

Date	Topic	Text
March 3	"The Conversion of the Pagan Sailors"	Jonah 1:14-16
March 10	"The Second Time"	Jonah 3:1-4
March 17	"The Sufferings of the Cross"	Isaiah 53
March 24	"The Power of the Cross"	Romans 8:2
March 31	"The Power of Christ's Resurrection"	I Corinthians 15:3, 4