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Rest for the Weary

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

The words of the above text are among the most striking and moving words of Christ. I do not think that we will ever be able to calculate how often these words have reached out to call and comfort the discouraged, the disillusioned, and the disappointed. These are words that are more than the mere utterances of men, or the empty promises of politicians.

These words are words of power, which reach out to snatch the heavy laden from their positions of despair and bring them to promised rest. These words are reliable and trustworthy. All of this is in the way of coming to Christ, who has the power and ability to give rest in all of its beauty and glory.

Christ here issues a call. In it He does not address every man or woman who lives or has lived on

earth. Christ is often presented as calling everyone, as if all are weary and heavy laden. His glorious words of power are turned into some sort of an appeal, which pleads for everyone to come to Him, to seek His face, to admit Him into their hearts. In responding to the appeal, Christ will give rest.

However, Christ does not speak to everyone, but to a specific group, namely, those who are heavy laden. These know and recognize themselves to be the very ones whom Christ addresses.

Concerning the laboring ones, Christ does not address a work force or people engaged in physical labor. The laboring ones of the text have a spiritual problem, which can be seen in the word labor. It speaks of effort or toil that has no end, work without any hope of rest.

Imagine the utter frustration and hopelessness of trying to empty the ocean with a teacup. Such is the situation of man as he lives and works in the world. One wants riches, another power and glory. Each labors toward the goal he seeks. Yet in all this seeking he

finds no rest. He is neither happy nor content with that which he seeks. Ever he strives, but never does he really attain true rest. The difficulty is that man, with all his labor, cannot obtain a right relationship with God. He can perform no works that earn righteousness or please God. All of man's labors are of the wrong sort, directed to the wrong goal, and end in his damnation. All is labor without rest.

The sad part of all this is that man by nature does not recognize this fact. Though all labor without rest, only some recognize the futility of man's efforts and the inability of man to obtain proper rest. One must be born again to understand how completely hopeless is the lot of man. These are the ones whom Jesus addresses, those who know themselves to be laborers, who know that their efforts cannot attain unto deliverance or salvation.

Such a one is heavy laden. Picture a beast of burden that has kneeled down so that the owner can place a large burden upon his back. In this instance the burden is too great, the poor beast cannot get up. So also is one who is made conscious of his own sins and misery.

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Our sins had their beginning in the garden, when Adam sinned. Already then it was a burden that no man can bear, the weight of which will drag man to the depths of hell. Man has no love for God or the neighbor and does not want to believe that he is heavy laden with sin and guilt. If addressed as such, he would simply ignore such address. Such a one Christ does not address.

Christ speaks to those who recognize their terrible burden of sin and guilt. One who is born again and called to repentance begins to see himself and his evil nature. No longer can he deny his guilt. He begins to tremble before the justice of God, who must punish the sinner for his sins. He knows that he cannot lift this weight of sin off from himself. Yet it must be taken away if he is to escape the torments of hell.

The question then is: how do you see yourself? Do you admit that by nature you have a burden? Do you feel its weight pressing upon you? Do you tremble before the majesty of the Most High? Do you believe that there is no hope unless that burden is taken away? Do you cry out for deliverance? If your answer is yes, then Christ is speaking to you, and His message is simple and beautiful.

Rest. Just what is it to which Christ is calling us? It is not unto retirement or cessation from physical labor. As the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, so is the rest unto which He calls us. There is both a negative and a positive aspect to it. Negatively, there must be the removal of the burden of sin and guilt. If this does not take place, then no rest is possible. The same thing is true in daily life. One who carries a heavy load cannot rest until he has set aside the burden. In order for our burden of sin to be removed, there must be payment to God, a satisfaction of His justice.

Positively, rest involves praise directed to God and fellowship with Him. One who rests can see

the wonder of God's works and find joy in all of them. It is the contemplation and enjoyment of the revelation of God. One who is in the state of impenitence has no right to such rest. Only one who is reconciled to God through the blood of Christ can have true rest.

When can I experience this rest? There are various spheres in which this rest is enjoyed. One can experience it already here on earth. When one is brought to repentance, he is given peace with God. On Sunday, the day of rest, one receives a foretaste. There in the house of God you gather with God's people to worship the Lord, sing His praises, pray to Him, and rejoice in hearing His Word preached. You find pleasure in reading and studying God's Word. In all of your labors you know the joy of rest.

This rest is also experienced at the time of death. The wicked fear death, for it is their entrance into everlasting damnation. From this hell there is no escape. There he realizes that all his labors on earth were to no avail. For the child of God, death is the doorway into heavenly glory and everlasting rest. The soul enters immediately into a conscious state of glory. In his rest in heaven he fellowships with Christ and praises God perfectly. There is no more burden of sin, no more weary labors, only the enjoyment of the blessedness of perfection.

Finally, rest is experienced and enjoyed at the second coming of Christ. At that time the bodies of the saints shall be raised and united with their souls and brought into the new heavens and the new earth. Forevermore the saints will enjoy the wonder and blessedness of the glory of God. They will perform labor, but it will no more be tedious or wearisome. No more will there be the burden of sin and guilt. The saints will receive what Christ promises them here on earth.

To this rest each child of God

is called. It is the most blessed call that one can imagine. As one contemplates the burden of sin and the unending, wearisome labor, one might conclude that there is no hope of rest for him. True, through one's own efforts there is no hope, for man of himself cannot attain unto the rest of God. In fact, he can only add to the burden.

All this makes the call of Christ so very wonderful. Listen to it: *Come unto Me*. Think of what that means. Christ has already paid for all of the sins of all of His elect people who were chosen in Him even before the foundations of the earth were ever laid. On Calvary Jesus met the requirements of the justice of God. God said that every sin must be justly and rightly paid for. Jesus did exactly that. Perfect and full payment has been made. He obtained what was necessary in order to give rest to His people.

Having done that, He now calls to the weary and heavy laden. He calls in order to bring to the consciousness of His elect the fact that spiritual rest is theirs. He calls powerfully and effectively. He does not beg or plead, nor does He have to await the favorable reaction of the sinner. His call is a command: COME unto Me! A picture of this is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Christ called him from the dead. Jesus did not seek the cooperation of dead Lazarus. No, He simply commanded the dead man to come forth; and he did. The Word of Christ compelled him to come out of the tomb. Such is Christ's power of command to the weary and heavy laden. He works in the hearts that which He commands to do. His Word and Spirit bring the weary ones to the foot of the cross. He makes sinners aware of their awful burden and brings them to the only place where they may obtain relief from this burden — the cross of Calvary. In this way He brings to those who come to Him rest and peace which pass understanding.

Do you hear these words of Christ? Are you one of these burdened ones, feeling the weight of your sin and guilt? Are you aware of the hopelessness of standing before God in your own strength? If so, hear the word of Christ: *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

When the Holy Spirit has worked that in your heart, when this command of Christ is applied to your heart, then you surely will

come to Christ. You will run to His cross, fall on your knees, and cry out for mercy and for forgiveness. You will confess that all of your deliverance must come from that Lamb of God.

So doing you will receive rest and peace. That which presently separates you from the face of God will be removed. No longer will you be troubled because of the burden of your sins. Jesus will give you the assurance that your sins

also were removed through His shed blood on the cross. Then you will be able to come before the face of our heavenly Father with all your supplications. You can pray to Him with the confident assurance that He hears and answers. You will be assured that after this life is over there is a place prepared for you, eternal in the heavens.

Weary ones, come to Him and receive of Him that glorious rest!



Editorial

The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate—and the Protestant Reformed Seminary* (4)

Those developing the doctrine of a conditional covenant in reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches today are not content to attack only the truth of justification. This would be impossible. Justification by faith alone is the heart of the gospel of salvation by the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ. Destruction of the heart is the death of the whole body of the

truth. Justification by faith alone is the central element of the Reformed system of theology as expressed in the "Three Forms of Unity" and in the Westminster Standards. Denial of justification by faith alone is necessarily rejection of the entire system of salvation by grace. This becomes evident in the contemporary development of a conditional covenant that denies justification by faith alone. Young as the movement is, it already lays unholy hands on every one of the confessional doctrines of sovereign grace.

Atonement

The doctrine of the atonement of Christ is corrupted. Such is the relation of justification and the cross that if justification is not God's saving act imputing to the

believer the obedience of Christ, neither was the cross God's imputation to Christ of the disobedience of the elect. Those who are attacking the confessional teaching of justification by faith alone are also denying that the death of Christ was satisfaction by the substitute to the justice of God. N. T. Wright, who, although not himself Reformed, is extremely influential with those in the reputedly conservative Reformed churches attacking justification by faith alone, has stated his opposition to the creedal doctrine of the death of Christ as satisfaction. To teach that God punished Jesus Christ in the place of His guilty people is a "crude theory."

It is therefore true to Paul to speak of the punishment which all have deserved being enacted, instead,

* This is the speech given at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary on September 4, 2002. The first three installments appeared in the January 1, January 15, and February 1, 2003 issues of the *Standard Bearer*. The speech has been revised and expanded for publication by naming theologians, books, and articles and by giving full citations.

on the cross. But Paul has here nuanced this view in two ways which distance it from the cruder theories made familiar in some branches of theology. First, he is careful to say that on the cross God punished (not Jesus, but) "sin." ...Second, his argument functions within the whole matrix of thought according to which the death of Jesus can be interpreted in this way because he represents Israel and Israel represents humankind as a whole (N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, Fortress Press, 1991, p. 213).

There is a second way in which the movement within the Reformed churches attacking justification by faith alone corrupts the creedal doctrine of the atonement. The movement is teaching universal atonement. The reader will have noted in the citation from N. T. Wright that the Anglican theologian, in addition to rejecting the doctrine of satisfaction, teaches that Christ died for all "humankind." Earlier, Wright was even clearer in his advocacy of Christ's death for all without exception:

God has deliberately given the Torah [Law] to be the means of concentrating the sin of humankind in one place, namely, in his people, Israel—in order that it might then be concentrated yet further, drawn together on to Israel's representative, the Messiah—in order that it might there be dealt with once and for all.

This doctrine of the death of Christ somehow dealing with the sin of all men is, says Wright, "one of Paul's central themes" and "the most significant point to be made about Paul and the law in current debate" (*The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 196).

The Reformed theologians who are calling the doctrine of justification by faith alone into question likewise proclaim universal atonement. Having criticized the "Calvinist" interpretation of John 3:16 that insists the "saving love of God

revealed in the atonement is only for the elect," Shepherd boldly declares, "The Reformed evangelist can and must preach to everyone on the basis of John 3:16, 'Christ died to save you'" (Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*, P&R, 2000, pp. 84, 85).

Presbyterian theologian John M. Frame confirms this analysis of Shepherd's teaching. In his recent book, *The Doctrine of God*, Frame criticizes "some Calvinists" who hesitate to say to all unbelievers "God loves you, for they think that God loves only the elect." (These Calvinists are so very few in number that I am surprised Frame takes up space in criticizing them. No doubt their error is grievous, a radical departure from the Reformed standards. Nevertheless, I notice Frame does not so much as refer to a single article in the creeds that these erring Calvinists violate. Surely the offense of this handful of Calvinists is not that they stray from the canons of Frame rather than from the Canons of Dordt?)

Frame announces that the reprobates "experience the love of God—real love." "On the basis of John 3:16 [and here we move in the sphere of the doctrine of the atonement of Christ: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son'—DJE], we can also say, 'God loves you'" to unbelieving reprobates. Especially did God love all without distinction in Old Testament Israel. By implication, especially does God love all without distinction in the visible church of the New Testament.

In Deuteronomy 7, Moses tells the people of Israel that God "set his affection on" them (v. 7) and "loved" them (v. 8; cf. 4:37; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3; Ps. 44:3; Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:1; Mal. 1:2), even though there have been, are, and will be unbelievers within Israel. His covenant with them is a "covenant of love" (v. 12). The prophets tell the people about God's love in order to motivate their faithfulness.

The force of Frame's doctrine of the covenant love of God for all without exception in Israel and in the visible church can be appreciated only by reading all of the texts he adduces and applying them to every single Israelite and to every single member of the visible church. God loved, elected, kept His covenant oath to, redeemed, blessed, saved, showed His favor to, drew to Himself in lovingkindness, and called out of Egypt all Israelites without exception. All of this rich, saving covenant love, God now lavishes on every member of the visible church without exception. But on Frame's own admission some perish, God's love and Christ's death notwithstanding.

We cannot refrain: What does this teaching do to the doctrines of grace? What is left of a certain election unto glory; of an effectual redemption; of an irresistible, effectual grace; of the perseverance of saints? What of Paul's ringing affirmation in Romans 9:6 precisely with regard to the perishing of many Israelites: "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect"?

But where did Frame learn this universal covenant love of God with its death of Christ for all who are born in the sphere of the covenant? He tells us in a footnote: "Thanks to Norman Shepherd for suggesting this point to me" (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R, pp. 418, 419).

The reason for universal atonement in the case of Shepherd and his supporters is their doctrine of a conditional covenant. According to them, God makes the covenant with many more than those who are finally saved in and by it. It may even prove to be their doctrine that God has established His covenant, conditionally, with all men without exception. We shall see. The movement is disclosing itself and developing as we write and read. But the covenant is grounded in and confirmed by the death of Christ. As the Canons of

Dordt teach, "Christ by the blood of the cross ... confirmed the new covenant" (II/8). If now, as Shepherd and those who share his doctrine of the covenant hold, God makes His covenant of grace with many more than only the elect, Christ must have died for many more than only the elect. And this is what they are openly teaching.

There is a special instance of the necessary connection between a universal, conditional covenant and the teaching of universal atonement in the case of the baptized children of believing parents. Both the Heidelberg Catechism, in Question and Answer 74, and the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism" affirm that God's making of the covenant of grace with someone, and thus his inclusion in this covenant, which is the meaning of baptism, is based on the redemption of the cross. If at baptism the covenant is established with all the children of believers alike, conditionally of course, Christ must have died for all the physical children alike, those who eventually perish as well as those who are finally saved. And this is what the conditional covenant people are openly teaching.

Election

The enemies of justification by faith alone in reputedly Reformed churches assail election. Especially do they assail election. The intimate relation between justification by faith alone and election is evident in Romans 8:33: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." God's justifying of a sinner by faith alone, which faith is God's gift to the sinner, is purely gracious salvation. It has, and can only have, its source and explanation in God's election of that sinner. The justified sinner may and must know himself, not only forgiven and saved, but also elected in eternity.

But if, on the contrary, justification depends squarely upon the sinner's own work of faith, as a

condition he must fulfill, and upon the good works the sinner performs by his faith, election—*biblical, creedal* election—is an embarrassment.

The teaching about election that prevails among those presently attacking justification by faith alone is that election must be buried in oblivion. Election is the great irrelevancy. It is irrelevant to the covenant. It is irrelevant to evangelism (that is, the preaching of the gospel). It is irrelevant to the Christian life (regeneration). It is the main purpose of Norman Shepherd's *The Call of Grace* to cut the covenant, evangelism, and regeneration loose from election. For all practical purposes, there is no eternal, sovereign election. Election is buried in the tomb of the first head of the Canons of Dordt. Not only is election useless, it is highly dangerous and detrimental. Among other problems it has caused for the Reformed over the past four hundred years, according to Shepherd, the doctrine of election is the cause of the failure of Reformed missions to gather multitudes into the church.

As though election accompanied by an equally eternal, sovereign reprobation is not the apostle's explanation in Romans 9-11 of the saving of only the remnant in Old Testament Israel!

As though Christ's evangelistic message in John 6 is not "oriented" to election (see vv. 37, 39)!

As though the Canons of Dordt in heads three and four do not relate regeneration to election!

At the same time that the doctrine of a sovereign decree cutting through the sphere of the covenant and controlling evangelism is consigned to oblivion, the advocates of a conditional covenant are explaining the outstanding texts on election, for example, Ephesians 1:4, as teaching a choice of God *that depends on the sacrament of baptism, on men's faith, and on men's obedience and that includes both those who are finally saved and those who will*

eventually perish. This is the meaning of their urgent admonition that the Reformed henceforth view election in the light of the covenant.

Perseverance

This view of election points to yet another assault on the doctrines of sovereign grace by those advocating a conditional covenant and denying justification by faith alone. They reject the doctrine of the perseverance of saints. One can lose his justification. One can lose his election. One can go lost even though he has been incorporated into Christ. At the public Auburn Avenue Pastors' Conference in Louisiana last year, John Barach, minister in the United Reformed Churches, said:

God gave them [those in the sphere of the covenant who fall away and perish everlastingly—reprobates] genuine promises that are just as real, just as dependable, and just as trustworthy as the promises He gave to people who do persevere to the end. He gave them real promises of salvation. He united them to Christ in whom alone there is salvation, and they themselves really rejected it because they didn't receive the promises mixed with faith.

Total Depravity

Implied in the teaching of justification by faith and works is the rejection of the Reformed doctrines of sin and total depravity. If our good works are part of our righteousness with God, they cannot be defiled with sin, as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches they are, in Question and Answer 62: "Our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." In the words of the Catechism, "The righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect and in all respects conformable to the divine law." We can expect that the contemporary defenders of justification by faith and works will deny that the good works of Chris-

tians are "defiled with sin." The alternative is to deny the perfection of God.

But total depravity itself must go by the board. Making justification dependent on faith and faith's works as conditions requires that the sinner produce faith of himself, by his own free will. The sinner must do something of himself, not only to earn in the theology of Rome, but also to make the general promise effectual, keep himself in the universal covenant, and obtain for himself the offered salvation in the theology of a conditional covenant. What the sinner must do of himself is believe, and he must believe with a faith that works. Norman Shepherd states, with perfect clarity, that this monstrous error is the heart of his covenant doctrine: "These are the two parts of the covenant: grace and faith, promise and obligation" (*The Call of Grace*, p. 63). Faith lines up with obligation; grace lines up with promise. Faith is not of grace: "grace and faith." Faith is man's work—"obligation," a condition. And God's gracious promise depends squarely upon the sinner's work of faith.

"Vilifying the Doctrine of the Reformed Churches"

So far has the opposition to the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace alone gone in reputedly Reformed circles that Steven M. Schlissel, for many years a favorite of the United Reformed men, long-time columnist for *Christian Renewal*, and prominent representative of the contemporary movement attacking justification by faith alone, rails against the Reformed confession of the five great truths that constitute the essence of the gospel of grace, that is, the Christian religion: Scripture alone; Christ alone; grace alone; faith alone; the glory of God alone. *Christian Renewal* reported that Schlissel told a large audience commemorating Reformation Day at Redeemer College, "Christ is the issue in the New Testament, not some abstract doctrine, or abstract solas [Latin for "only" as in "by faith only"—DJE], but Christ Himself" (Nov. 12, 2001, p. 9).

Defending his railing against the doctrines of the gospel of grace, Schlissel savaged the Reformed confession and demeaned the grand doctrines (for which scores

of thousands of my Dutch ancestors gave their life's blood): "'Does the LORD delight in the solas as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the systems of men [sic!].' 'Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "The solas of the Reformation, The solas of the Reformation, The solas of the Reformation.'" Rather, God says, 'Change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly' (cf. Jeremiah 7)" (*Christian Renewal*, Jan. 28, 2002, pp. 4-6).


Schlissel is guilty of what the "Conclusion" of the Canons of Dordt calls "violently assailing, or even vilifying, the doctrine of the Reformed churches."

This wholesale assault on the doctrines of sovereign grace presents itself as a development of covenant doctrine. The men responsible like to call their movement one of "covenant consciousness."

And this is what it is.

The consciousness and development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

— DJE

(to be continued) 

Letters

■ The God of Dave Hunt

Thank you for the review in the December 15, 2002 issue of the SB of Dave Hunt's book, *What Love Is This?* I think this is a particularly significant book in a number of ways.

First, the author, in other books, has done acceptable work exposing various cults. He therefore has established a positive reputation in the broader church world. His name on the cover (along with many other current luminaries), and seeing 400+ pages of seemingly scholarly work, will suffice for many to seal the deal

against Calvinism. It will have great influence.

Secondly, Hunt has at least struck at the heart of the matter. The subtitle of the book — *Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* says it all. For how we understand and confess the nature of salvation affects how we understand and confess who God is! Soteriology is Theology! Calvinism or Arminianism is not just a matter of opinion among Christian brethren, but if one is true the other is indeed idol worship. May the Lord use this book to awaken His people to the gravity of these issues.

In light of the previous points, I wonder if it isn't a sign of the times that those who maintain the sovereignty of God in salvation are being marginalized to the fringe and even considered outside Christendom.

Lastly, speaking as one who is also meditating his way through the newly published commentary on Romans by Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone* (RFP, 2002), the contrast between Scripture in context and what Hunt puts forth is startling. (How dare he write that the apostle Paul could and did say to everyone he met

"Christ died for you"?! p. 30) It is overwhelming at times to contemplate the power and the rightful authority sin has over us (Rom. 3:9) and the necessity therefore for the true gospel to be a power of God unto salvation, a power that must shatter our hearts and wills of stone. In Hunt's version of things, we are not really so badly off, sin isn't so serious, and, therefore, his gospel and god aren't so serious either.

Pete Adams
Grand Rapids, MI

■ Learning from the Godly Wife

This regards Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma's article, "God's Command to Fathers," in the *Standard Bearer*, January 1, 2003.

Let me express my appreciation for the general tone of the article, especially in a 21st century infected with radical feminism. The Scriptures are clear on the role of a godly covenant father. That being said, I must question many of the practical applications of Rev. Bruinsma regarding a husband's authority.

Too often in today's world, we see divided homes. In other words, one spouse is a believer, unequally yoked with an unbeliever. In the vast majority of such homes, the believer is the wife, while the unbeliever is the husband. In such instances, the mother must not always submit to her husband. Perhaps he does not "like" prayers with dinner, or would rather take the children fishing on the Lord's Day instead of to church. Must the wife agree? Of course not, because her authority is God.

Additionally, the article fails to address another frequent situation where both may be believers, but are at different maturity levels in their Christian walk. She is the Christian backbone of the family, while he is tagging along. His goals, although well-intentioned, may lead the children astray, while

her goals are formed by the Rock of the Scriptures. Must such a father learn from Rev. Bruinsma's article? Yes; however, I would argue that he also may learn from his godly wife, gradually moving into the role of covenant father.

To conclude, I do realize that this article is an exhortation to men, to husbands, to fathers. It is my opinion that this article fails to address the majority of homes in the Reformed Christian community in the United States, while at the same time minimizing the role of a godly mother and wife.

Steve Cross
Lincoln, NE

Response:

First, the article was written to address the rule rather than the exception. Within a covenant home the believing father has a high and lofty calling to rule his home, leading and instructing his wife and children in the fear of the Lord. That is the rule (see the biblical references in the article). There are homes, however, even within the sphere of the church and covenant, where unbelief enters in and one spouse or the other refuses to live properly and biblically within his or her place in the family. These are the exception. If it is indeed true, as Brother Cross states, that my article "fails to address the majority of homes in the Reformed Christian community in the United States," then there is certainly something wrong in Zion! If it is true, as he implies, that most families in the Reformed Christian community have fathers in them who do not live as the proper head of the family, then the Reformed community is doomed. Maybe what he says is true — we do live in the last days, after all. But this does not lessen the demand that God places on fathers in the home.

Second, if the father does lag behind spiritually, and the wife is the one who is forced to lead her family from a spiritual point of view, then all the more reason

there is for that man to read the article. Let these spiritually weak fathers beware! Someday they will stand before God in judgment (as the article states) and will have to give answer to the question: Did you govern your family according to God's Word and precepts? Well-intentioned goals not based on the Scriptures are not the sign of a believing husband. Let such a husband be the more diligent in the study of God's Word!


Third, sometimes it is true that the wife is more spiritual than her husband. Sometimes she is brought to faith while her husband remains in unbelief. Sometimes the maturity level of a husband is not on a par with that of the wife. She then must labor the more diligently to be an example to her husband of godliness (I Pet. 3:1-7). She also must be the spiritual leader of her children. But it becomes very plain in Scripture that she must do this always *within her role as a wife and mother*. The Scripture plainly points out in I Peter 3 that unbelieving husbands (spiritually weak ones too, for that matter) are won by the conduct of the wife who is adorned with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. In other words, the godly wife does not properly teach either her husband or her children to base their goals on the Rock of the Scriptures by usurping the rule of her husband over her and her children. The wife is always in subjection to her husband, even to that husband who "obeys not the word." In the case of an unbelieving husband, she perhaps cannot always obey his sinful demands on her and the children, but she must always recognize and submit to his rule as the God-ordained head of the home. In this way she is a witness to him and her children. That certainly does not minimize her role as a godly mother and wife.

Finally, this article speaks of the role of a covenant father in his home and family. God has given to him his proper place. God uses

the means of the father to preserve His covenant in the line of generations. When he abuses that place,

it threatens the future of his family: God will cut his children out of the line of the covenant. Now, as to the role of the godly mother

in Zion, we will address this in future articles.

— (Rev.) Wilbur Bruinsma 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ The Ideology of "Inclusion"

One is no longer surprised at the growing apostasy in the churches of the land. One is not even surprised at the evidence of this in Reformed churches. Yet when articles appear indicating the extent of this within our "mother" denomination, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), one cannot help but be discouraged and disappointed. The issue this time (not unexpectedly) is homosexuality.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), sister church of the Christian Reformed Church, has accepted practicing homosexuals not only as members within the congregations, but also in the offices of the church.

Now one congregation of the CRC has officially done this as well. In a report by John Van Dyke in *Christian Renewal*, December 16, 2002, the following was written:

It was at one time a Dutch immigrant-based congregation under a confessionally Reformed minister Rev. Louis Praamsma (late father of Christine Farenhorst who writes for this magazine). Rev. Praamsma served in Toronto from 1958-1962. Things, however, changed. As ministers came and went, the church became more firmly entrenched in a rapidly changing urban, metropolitan city. And over the years First CRC of Toronto has become something of an advance weather vane in the Christian Reformed Church. It was a leader for the inclusion of

women into the offices of elder and deacon. It was the first congregation in the CRC to call a woman minister, Ms. Ruth Hofman. It has now become the first church in the denomination to open its ecclesiastical offices to practicing homosexual members. It's been a long road from the 1950s to 2002.

During and since the departure of Ruth Hofman who accepted a call to a Grand Rapids CRC in 1999, First Toronto has struggled with the "full inclusion" of homosexuals in its midst. Last year the congregation considered calling an openly homosexual minister. The votes fell short, but not by much.

In October the council of the church sent out a letter to the churches of Classis Toronto and to the denomination's synodical officers informing them of First Toronto's decision "to become an inclusive congregation." By "inclusion" the council means allowing full participation in the life of the church, ecclesiastical offices included, to practicing homosexuals "in committed relationships" according to an editorial in the *Christian Courier* (Dec. 2).

In its open letter signed by council chair, Henry Hofstra, the council states that "our congregation's identity and future was on the line," over the issue of whether to be "an inclusive congregation, or not."

The letter, written as an "Open Pastoral Letter to Our Brothers and Sisters in Classis Toronto," makes no attempt to justify the decision on biblical grounds. Its appeal is on what could be considered pastoral grounds — short on detail, but high on emotion-laden words. "We are ... asking for grace and understanding for our small congregation." "We have a

beautiful and cherished history here in urban Toronto...." "Not being courageous enough to make a decision ... could have easily led to the spiritual death of our congregation."

The council has also effectively closed the door to debate on the issue. "We are actually not very interested in debating the subject any longer or delving into it on some repeated basis," the letter states. "For us we are actually past that point.... We are a church, not an issue-resolving club. We want to worship God. That has always been our deepest desire."

It goes on to express a hope that the church can remain in the CRC despite breaking a denominational position on homosexuality, by becoming "a safe congregation." "A safe congregation is one which is accepted within the broader fellowship as a parish that is admittedly somewhat out of sync because it has become completely inclusive."

It further holds out the hope that "we as a congregation might actually be a helpful resource to the classis and denomination as it eventually, perhaps inevitably, moves into a deeper grappling with the issue of homosexuality."

The final plea of the letter is to be allowed to remain in the CRC. "We have no desire whatsoever to leave the CRC. We are not a schismatic people. Many of us serve on boards of various Christian organizations filled with CRC members.... We have no desire to go casting about looking for some other ecclesiastical tradition within which to set up our tent. We are sincerely Reformed in our outlook and theology, and we feel badly that some will take our recent decision on inclusivity as a painful betrayal."

The first test of the CRC's will-

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ingness to either look the other way or to take action in response to the Toronto church council's decision will come at the upcoming meeting of classis in January. Already area churches in and outside of the classis are urging action on the matter; and there are a number of individuals within the First CRC congregation who are troubled enough by what is taking place in their church to ask for help from neighbouring CRC councils.

For his own part the church's pastor, Nick Overduin, has decided not to comment on the matter, at least publicly.

In an interview with *Christianity Today*, the CRC's general secretary David Engelhard said the decision of the Toronto council "seems to go contrary to the Christian Reformed Church's established position, and contrary to biblical teaching." And in response to CT's probe regarding possible consequences, he agreed that the removal of the congregation from the denomination was a possibility. But he also suggested that the process of dealing with First CRC could be a lengthy one.

By the time this report appears in the *Standard Bearer*, the Classis in which First Toronto CRC resides will have taken action. It will be interesting to see what that response will be.

There are, however, several things in the report above that indicate the sad decay in the spiritual life of that church.

1. It is more than passing strange that a council should claim to be "not a schismatic people," and "sincerely Reformed," while taking this sort of action. Is it not schism to make a decision that is obviously, deliberately, knowingly contrary to the synodical decision of the CRC—and that, too, without appealing to synod to show the error of their decision? And how can one claim to be "sincerely Reformed" when making a decision obviously contrary to what Reformed churches (until recently) have always taught?

2. How can officebearers who have signed the Formula of Subscription (as, I assume, they still do at First CRC in Toronto) make a decision that violates one's promise in signing this?

3. How can such a momentous decision be made without one iota of proof from Scripture or from our confessions? They write: "We are a church, not an issue-resolving club. We want to worship God. That has always been our deepest desire." And: "We are actually not very interested in debating the subject any longer or delving into it on some repeated basis." The concern seems rather to maintain the congregation at all cost: "Not being courageous enough to make a decision ... could have easily led to the spiritual death of our congregation."

4. At the same time, they believe they can be a kind of bellwether congregation for the denomination: it further holds out the hope that "we as a congregation might actually be a helpful resource to the classis and denomination as it eventually, perhaps inevitably, moves into a deeper grappling with the issue of homosexuality." It was the first CRC congregation to call and install a woman as minister. Now the council states that it can serve in the same way to lead the CRC as a denomination to full acceptance (also in the offices) of practicing (but committed) homosexuals.

5. General secretary Engelhard's response to the questions from *Christianity Today*, if he is correctly quoted, is very strange as well. He says that the decision "seems to go contrary to the Christian Reformed Church's established position, and contrary to biblical teaching." *Seems??* The decision is so obviously contrary to both, that Engelhard need not mince words. And "the removal of the congregation is a possibility??"

6. Perhaps (I say with "tongue-in-cheek") the CRC Synod can make a decision like this: "We

maintain our position against accepting practicing homosexuals as church members and officebearers; however, we give permission to local Classes to suspend this decision where they consider it warranted for such congregations to survive under such circumstances as those faced by First Toronto CRC." This would prevent lengthy debate and many protests — and hopefully satisfy those on both sides of the issue.

Indeed, all of this is a sad commentary on the state of the church today.

■ Federal Funds for Religious Charities

Many have applauded the proposal of government funding to religious charities. The reasoning seems correct: government is very inefficient in distributing assistance to the needy. Religious organizations with low or no overhead can do so much more efficiently. Not all agree. Cal Thomas, in a column in the *Grand Rapids Press*, October 10, 2002 states his disagreement clearly and correctly. He mentions Pat Robertson, well-known TV evangelist, who had insisted that to receive such government grants would open a Pandora's box. But Robertson changed his view after receiving \$500,000 of this government aid for his "Operation Blessing." Cal Thomas explains:

While the intent of this program is noble, the idea of government aiding charity (which used to begin at home, but will now apparently begin in Washington) is fraught with problems. First is the purpose of charity. The Scriptures in which Robertson and other conservative Christians say they believe teach that charity is a means of demonstrating God's love to needy people so they might seek Him. Many liberals view charity as a type of religious welfare and "salvation by works."

There is also a political dimension. The Bush administration is

smiling favorably on a small percentage of applicants for federal largess (there were 500 grant applications, but only 25 received the government's blessing, though more awards are likely). A future Democratic administration might deny grants to organizations that lean Republican and shift the money to those with leanings more to that administration's liking. Charities will then become another special interest, selling their political allegiance to the higher bidder.


...The purpose of charity is to not only benefit the recipient but to bless the giver. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). If givers, or people who might give, see gov-

ernment supplanting their calling, the human tendency will be to give less, or not at all. If government wishes to bless charities, it should either cut taxes — enabling individuals to give more money to the charity of *their* choice — or provide other tax incentives, such as allowing double deductions for charitable giving.

Government should not decide who deserves funding and who does not. That is an endorsement of one religion or religions over others. The day will come when religious groups will be required to remain silent about their beliefs if they want to continue receiving government checks.

...Robertson was right to warn of a "Pandora's box." But he has now opened that box and is tak-

ing the money. It doesn't take a prophet to see trouble ahead.

Government is increasingly involving itself in tasks that, strictly speaking, do not belong to government. We must recognize that when government gives money to support religious "charities" (and also when it gives monies to support Christian schools), it will also and inevitably insist on governmental controls. When it comes to money offered by government (which isn't even theirs to begin with), an individual easily and eagerly can accept that—and end up as the fish that grasps the bait offered by the fisherman. May we not be so foolish. 

Decency And Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Reporting Sins to the Consistory

"If any one, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory."

Church Order, Article 74.

Article 74 of the Church Order concerns reporting sins to the consistory. The article deals with such questions as: What sins must be reported to the consistory? Who must make these reports? What reports must a consistory receive? And how must a consistory act on reports it receives?

The article speaks of reports made to the "consistory." "Consistory" here is elders. The Dutch word is *kerkeraad*, which throughout the Church Order refers to the elders, as in Articles 22 and 37.

Secret Sins to Be Reported to the Consistory

Article 74 specifies two types of sins that are to be reported to the consistory. First, it mentions secret sins that have been dealt with by members of the church according to Matthew 18. Although

the procedure of Matthew 18 has been followed, the erring brother persists in his impenitence. "If any one, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed ... the matter shall be reported to the consistory." It is clear that our Church Order interprets Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:17, "tell it unto the church," to mean "tell it to the consistory." This is consistent with our "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons," which says concerning Jesus' word,

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"... which can in no wise be understood of all and every member of the church in particular, but very properly of those who govern the church out of which they are chosen."

After receiving such reports, the consistory must first ascertain that the procedure of Matthew 18 has been properly followed. If it has not been followed, or has not been followed completely, the person making the report to the consistory must be admonished to carry out the will of Christ, and the consistory must not receive his report concerning the sin of his brother. If, however, the consistory is satisfied that the way of Matthew 18 has been properly carried out, it must receive the report and begin official labors with the brother concerning whom the report is made.

It is important to note that a member who follows the way of Matthew 18 with another member of the congregation is obligated to report the matter to the consistory if the brother with whom he is laboring continues impenitent in sin. If the erring brother continues in his impenitence, the church member who is laboring with him is not faced with the decision whether or not to report the matter to the consistory. He may be faced with the question of *when* exactly he ought to go to the consistory. But the way of Matthew 18 requires church members to report to the consistory if, after they have followed the way of Matthew 18, the brother does not repent of his sin. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, *tell it unto the church*" (Matt. 18:17). This obligation is recognized in Article 74: "... the matter *shall be reported* to the consistory."

Having received a proper report of impenitence on the part of a member of the congregation, the consistory ought to begin its labors either by summoning the member to a consistory meeting, or by sending a committee of elders to meet with the brother. The consistory

must begin by investigating and substantiating the report it has received. The brother who is accused of impenitence in a secret sin must have the opportunity to defend himself against the accusation. No consistory may proceed on the basis of a report of impenitence in secret sin to charge a member with sin and immediately place him under formal church discipline. Any charge must first be investigated and a determination made by the elders that the report is an accurate report. Only after the charge has been substantiated ought the consistory to proceed to formal discipline, the steps of which are outlined in the next articles of the Church Order.

Public Sins to Be Reported to the Consistory

Public sins are to be reported to the consistory immediately. The reason for this is not that the members themselves have no obligation towards a member who has fallen into public sin. Although the process of Matthew 18 does not apply, the members still have a calling to exhort the erring brother. The duty of the consistory does not in this case eliminate any responsibility on the part of those who stand in the office of all believers. Nevertheless, because of the public offense and because public offense can be removed only by the consistory, public sins must be reported immediately to the elders. The blot on God's name and the reproach cast on the church require the involvement of the consistory.

Although the members have the duty to report public sins to the consistory, a consistory need not wait until a member of the congregation makes such a report before it acts. The sin may be so commonly known, known also by the members of the consistory, that a report of the sin by the members is unnecessary. In this case, the elders ought to take action on the basis of their own knowledge of the facts. The members may be con-

vinced that the sin is so widely known that it is not necessary for them to report the matter to the consistory. Nevertheless, the members ought not to be too quick to take this for granted. Concerned members ought to confirm with the elders that the consistory is aware of the public sin into which a fellow member has fallen.

It is also possible that the sinner himself comes to the consistory to report the sin into which he has fallen. He comes of his own accord to confess his sin to the elders, knowing that sooner or later the sin is going to become public, either through the public media or because of the public consequences of the sin. Young people, for example, who have fallen into the sin against the seventh commandment, ought to come themselves to the consistory to confess their sin and be reconciled to the church even before the sin becomes widely known.

If one who is guilty of a public sin is repentant, his reconciliation to the congregation can follow. The manner of this reconciliation is addressed in Article 75. If, however, he has fallen into sin repeatedly, the consistory may place him on probation. During the period of probation the member is not permitted the use of the sacraments, and the other rights and privileges of church membership may also be held in abeyance. This is exceptional, and consistories ought to resort to probation only rarely. But in the case of repeated falls into the same sin, for example drunkenness or fornication, probation may be warranted. The purpose of the period of probation is that the sinner may prove the sincerity of his repentance, prove that he has broken with the sin, and demonstrate the fruits of repentance in a godly walk. Ordinarily the sinner's repentance and reconciliation ought to be announced to the congregation, along with the consistory's decision to place him on probation. How long the pe-

riod of probation should last is up to the judgment of the consistory. The probation should not last longer than is absolutely necessary.

The Nature of Reports

Consistories must exercise great care in receiving reports of sin. Reports to the consistory ought to be made in person. This allows the consistory the opportunity to question the one making the report. This is necessary and helpful. No one ought to be permitted to make a report of sin by a fellow member merely by sending a letter or informing one of the elders. He may very well address a letter to the consistory. He may very well inform an elder or the pastor that he is coming to the consistory and the reason on account of which he is coming. But he ought to make his report to the consistory in person.

A number of questions often arise regarding who may make reports of sin to the consistory. May one who is not a member of the congregation of the accused bring such a report? The answer here is: Yes. The office of all believers extends beyond the membership of one particular congregation. May one who is not a member of a congregation within the same denomination bring a report? Again, the answer is yes, and for the same reason. May an unbeliever bring a report to a consistory? In this case, a consistory must be very cautious. But even in this instance, it is possible for a consistory to receive such a report and take appropriate action. Whether or not one has committed sin is not to be determined on the basis of the faith or lack of faith on the part of the one who may have been sinned against. It is very well possible that a member of the church has sinned against someone who is not a believer, who nevertheless is convinced that he has been wronged.

As a rule, unsigned letters containing charges of sin against a member should not be received by

a consistory. No member has the right to make unsigned charges against another member. However, even in this case, if a consistory fears that the charges in such a letter are well founded, it may deem it advisable to investigate the charges. In its investigation, the consistory ought to make plain to the member that it has received an anonymous letter with certain charges of sin against him and out of concern for the brother makes him aware of this and gives him the opportunity to respond to the charges.

Persistent and general rumors may also require investigation by the consistory. The motivation is to clear the name of the brother, if he is innocent, or remove the offense, if it becomes plain that he is guilty of the sin that he has been rumored to have committed. If it can be ascertained who is spreading the rumors, whether they are true or whether they are false, the consistory must also deal with them. They must be admonished for their sin against the ninth commandment, be instructed to make confession to those against whom they have sinned by their slander, and if necessary be disciplined.

The Proper Motivation for Reports


The Synod of the Hague, 1587, made a significant insertion into Article 74. Without changing the body of the article as it had been adopted by previous Dutch Reformed synods, it added the words "in love." "If any one, having been admonished *in love* ... does not give heed ... the matter shall be reported to the consistory." The significance of this insertion ought not to be lost on us. Once again the Church Order reminds us of the proper motivation for Christian discipline, the proper motivation for discipline at every level and with each step. Love must moti-

vate a brother to go to a brother who has sinned against him. Love must motivate him to persist in admonishing him, taking with him witnesses if the sinner does not repent. Love must motivate him to report the matter to the consistory. And love must motivate the consistory to become involved in the discipline of the members of the church.

If you do not have love in your heart for the brother, don't go and confront him with his sin. If you do not love the brother, don't report the matter to the consistory. If consistories are not motivated by love, don't take up the discipline of the erring brother. As much as it is Christ's command that the church exercise Christian discipline, so is it the will of Christ that discipline be motivated

by love. Let the members of the congregation and the members of the consistory search their souls!

Love for the brother will not allow him to go on impenitently in his sin. Love will motivate the individual to go to the brother, as difficult and distasteful as that may be. Love will motivate the consistory to carry out the discipline, as painful — and it ought to be painful — as that may be. Love will aim at and pray earnestly for the brother's repentance, always regarding him as a brother, albeit an erring brother. Love will have regard for his well-being, temporal and eternal.

Discipline carried out with that motivation, God will bless. Discipline merely formally carried out, God will not bless. That is hypocrisy, and God hates hypocrisy. Here church members and elders must be motivated by the same love that the Great Good Shepherd has shown to them. That love they must reflect in dealing with fellow church members who have fallen into sin. 

Church members and elders must be motivated by the same love that the Great Good Shepherd has shown to them.

Both Coins (1)

Both coins fell from a poor widow's hand into the treasury of the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus observed this action because, according to Mark 12:41, "Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how people cast money into the treasury...." Jesus saw the offerings of all the rich who cast in much, but He also saw the offering of a poor widow, who had come to worship Jehovah in His temple in true thanksgiving. Jesus took special note of the widow and her two mites (Mark 12:42). He sovereignly controlled and used this incident for the instruction of His disciples and us about spiritually abundant giving unto Him and into His treasury.

Faced with that duty and demand from the Lord Himself according to the example of the poor widow, will you give both coins?



According to Bible scholars, the Lord was sitting near the Beautiful Gate at the temple. From this vantage point, Jesus saw the trumpet-shaped chests of the temple treasury. Apparently, each of these receptacles was marked for a specific purpose or cause with respect to the temple. Some were for temple maintenance, others for sacrifices, and even some were for the support of the Levites according to the law of Moses. All who came to worship Jehovah in the temple had

to walk past these offering chests and give their offerings unto Jehovah.

In Luke 21, these offering chests were called "the treasury of God." The saints understood that when giving to these offering chests, they were giving to the Lord's treasury. They viewed their offerings, not as their money on loan to God, but as, now, the Lord's money for the maintenance of His temple and for the true worship of His holy name.

In Mark 12, we are told that Jesus purposely watched "how the people cast money into the treasury." Jesus was interested in the manner in which the people gave. He was not so much interested in how much money they gave. Jesus was watching for two things. First, Jesus was observing whether the people actually gave as they were required by God according to His Word. Secondly, and more importantly, Jesus was observing the *manner* in which they gave. Jesus was seeking to find the answer to the question: "What was their attitude in their giving?" To answer that question, Jesus observed all the parts that made up that offering. He saw the monetary amount. He saw how the money was cast into the treasury boxes. Jesus also saw what no mere man could see — He saw into the hearts of men, and He observed how the hearts of those people gave their offerings into the treasury of God.

What did Jesus see? First, He saw the rich entering into the temple. He saw how the coins were dropped into the offering receptacles. He noticed what the hearts

of those rich people were like when they finally let go of their coins. Then Jesus told His disciples what He saw. He noticed that they had given large sums of money out of the abundance of their earthly riches. When the rich gave their large sums, they did not alter their circumstance and comfortable lifestyle. In fact, from a financial viewpoint, their offerings were hardly noticed. Their abundance was still the same as before the offering. Nothing changed in their life or, sadly, in their hearts.

Secondly, there came the poor widow. Would she put anything in the treasury of God? She was poor. What could one expect of her? We could even perhaps understand if she did not give anything after she saw what the rich people put in the offering boxes. Yet, she would not use her poverty as an excuse to neglect her duty to give into the treasury of God. Rather, she reached down and found one little coin, a mite, and then found the other little coin, and cast them both into the treasury of God. Her offering hardly changed the amount of money in the treasury of God. In today's terms, she cast in two coins worth only 1¢. This is the kind of coin you find abandoned in parking lots and on sidewalks. Even for most of us, it is too much of a bother to stoop and pick up a penny from the shopping center parking lot. Yet, this is what the poor widow gave to the Lord. She cast in her two mites: her two little, worthless coins.

Jesus said, "She of her want (i.e., her lack) did cast in all that

she had, even all her living" (Mark 12:44). She came to the temple with only two pennies in her hand. In that poverty, she cast in both coins. As a result, she had nothing. Not one coin for her daily bread of the day, nor a coin to save for tomorrow's bread. She had out of her necessity given all to the Lord. Jesus taught that her 1¢ offering was an abundance!

What Jesus teaches in Mark 12:41-44 applies to our giving in God's fear. How does the Judge evaluate you at the offering plate? The Judge from heaven still watches today what is given by you and me into the treasury of God. He sees the total offering that you give. He sees how much you give in relationship to how much you have. He sees how your hand and heart give into the treasury of God. The Lord watches both the rich and the poor, and all those in between. What is of utmost importance to Him is how your heart gives when you give out of your abundance or necessity into the treasury of God.

How do you give? Do you give the puny sum of the large offering of the Pharisee? Or do you give the abundant gift of the 1¢ offering of the poor widow?



It is rather startling that the Lord teaches that the poor widow had given the most that day with her 1¢ offering. From a natural viewpoint, we would argue that the Lord's mathematics was seriously flawed. Nevertheless, the Lord's mathematics is perfectly wise, because the Lord calculated the entire offering and its entire worth. Jesus calculated the poor widow's 1¢ offering as more than the other offerings for several reasons.

First, the poor widow gave in the fear of the Lord. It is evident that she gave in true love to Jehovah. It is obvious that her love was not conditional. She did not say in her heart, "I will love Jehovah in His temple only if He loves me the

way I want Him to love me. I will love Jehovah only when things go well for me, and when I am rich." Even in her poverty, she loved Jehovah. In that love, she refused to rob the treasury of God and refused to rob God of a thankful heart in her giving. In true love and thanks, she gave both coins!

Secondly, the poor widow gave freely. Her giving was not of the Pharisaic sort. Nor was she giving as a last resort, to get the praise of men, or to have her name etched on a stone in the temple somewhere as a memorial to her gift. She did not give because she was being forced to do so by the oppressive Pharisees. She did not give the first coin, and then debate in her heart about giving the second. Nobody had to pry the first or the second coin from her hand. Rather, she freely and willingly gave both coins.

Thirdly, she gave as the Lord had prospered her. What? Had the Lord prospered her? The answer to that question depends, of course, on one's definition of prosperity. The fact of the matter is that the Lord *had* prospered her. The Lord had given her two coins, health, strength to walk to God's temple, the privilege to worship Him, the company of the saints in His house, and His Word and promises. Out of that prosperity, she gave all of her prosperity in thanksgiving.

Finally, she gave all. The rich had given only some. Doing the spiritual math, we find that they had given large sums of money, but from the perspective of their hearts they had given nothing. As a result, the equation of their giving was: something times nothing, which equals nothing. There was no true offering before the Lord. It amounted to "0." In contrast, the widow had given all. Doing the spiritual math again, we find that the equation of her giving was: a penny's worth of coins to the Lord times a thankful heart to the Lord. That minuscule offering

times that thankful heart equalled "all." That was the abundant offering!

How do we measure up to that example before the treasury of God each Lord's Day? Are you willing to give to the extent that you must give from the savings of tomorrow *and* from the necessity of today for the sake of the Lord's treasury? Would you be willing to part with both coins? Or do you keep back in your heart the other coin?

The Lord demands *both coins*: the abundant gift and the heart that gives thankfully and cheerfully in His fear.




As we fulfil that duty, we must always remember two fundamental principles of true giving. First, we must remember in our giving that what we put into the treasury of God is already owned by God. The Lord entrusts to us many earthly things, including our money, time, possessions, health, strength, and various abilities. Though we may properly say that we own a house, a car, or a retirement fund, yet God is still the owner of it all. In relationship to others, we have our individual possessions. In relationship to God, however, you and I have no possession which is not His. The car you own is really His. The house you own is really His. He owns the entire earth and all the creatures He has created. Therefore, when you stand before the treasury of God with coin and bills in hand, you cannot say before the Lord concerning that money that it is not His, but yours. That offering is always the Lord's! Even that which remains in your wallet belongs to the Lord.

Because it is His, He has the right to tell you what to do with His money. By nature, we hate having the Lord tell us what to do with our money. But, since it is His, He can and does tell us what to do with it. He has the right to demand of us, whether rich, poor,

or in the middle, to give to Him. God allows no exceptions to His rule. God has the right to tell us that we must give to His treasury in support of the preaching of the gospel and the poor, which both summarize succinctly all the offer-

ings on our annual collection schedules. God also has the right to tell us *how* to give what is already His. When we understand that principle, then it is no longer a question of whether I will give to the Lord what is His or not, it is a question of how will I as His ser-

vant give properly what rightfully belongs to Him already.

In the next article, the Lord willing, we will consider the second principle of true giving, as well as some problems that hinder proper giving. 

Eastern Ideas (1)

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

The chants rise and fall in pulsating rhythm. They seem to keep time with the multicolored halo spinning hypnotically behind Buddha's head. A drum thumps insistently, a bell resonates softly. And still the chant continues, like the unceasing murmur of a rushing river.

Twenty men, women and children sit or kneel before the Buddha, saying prayers at the Linh Son Buddhist Temple in Belmont. Outside, the quiet morning countryside glitters with crystalline snow. In here, the air is thick with incense, and the senses are mesmerized by the droning of worshippers.... The prayer is a plea to recognize one's mistakes and correct them with Buddhist teachings....

Next to Nguyen, another man simply sits with closed eyes, apparently meditating. Next to him,

Barry Boogaard silently mouths words he doesn't understand, soaking in the calming peace this worship brings him.

In this small gathering of Asian Buddhists just north of Grand Rapids, Boogaard stands out as the only white American. But like other converts to this intriguing Eastern religion, Boogaard finds practical wisdom and inner serenity here.¹

Can this really be happening? Pagan worship right here in our very own Grand Rapids? But surely it is not a threat to modern-day Issachar as the pagan Canaanites and surrounding nations were to Old Testament Israel, is it? It is striking that various religious leaders over the past century have warned the church of exactly that. Consider some of their reactions:

...Pat Robertson stood before 1,500 leaders of the Christian Right, looked into the 1990's and issued a dark prophecy.

"There is something coming from the East," said Robertson, lowering his voice to a whispering warning. "It's a modified version of Hinduism. It's called the New Age."²

the perfect atmosphere for what we now recognize as the New Age movement or the New Age Cult. The neoorthodox theologian Nels Ferre correctly predicted the influx of Eastern and Indian philosophy and theology that characterized that decade, and concluded that the imported ideas would be a major challenge to historic Christianity.

The great English apologist C. S. Lewis saw the battle lines clearly drawn. He noted that in the final conflict between religions, Hinduism and Christianity would offer the only viable options because Hinduism absorbs all religious systems, and Christianity excludes all others, maintaining the supremacy of the claims of Jesus Christ.³

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And Bavinck was not alone in explaining to us the character of the conflict that would be fought in the twentieth century. In his famous *Stone Lectures* of 1898, Abraham Kuyper observed that Protestant nations were becoming pantheistic. This he attributed to the "German Philosophy," but he saw its concrete form coming from Darwin. This view "claims for itself more and more the supremacy in every sphere of life, even in that of theology, and under all sorts of names tries to overthrow our Christian traditions." A victory

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The turbulent sixties provided

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

of pantheistic Darwinism would result in "exchanging the heritage of our fathers for a hopeless modern Buddhism."⁴

Those warnings suggest that modern-day Issachar ought to examine this spirit of the age in order to be able to recognize it for what it is and defend herself and her offspring from its dastardly influence. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

What Exactly Is the New Age Movement?

Defining the New Age Movement (NAM) is not a simple assignment. This will become obvious from the following attempt of Elliot Miller in his book, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement*, to answer the question above:

Please note that definitively answering this seemingly direct and simple question is actually so complicated and involved that I devoted all of chapter 1 to doing it. But to be as concise as possible: The New Age movement, properly defined, is an extremely large metanetwork ("network of networks") composed of people and groups who share common values and a common vision. These values are based in Eastern/occult mysticism and pantheistic monism (the world view that all is One, and this One is God), and the vision is of a coming era of peace and enlightenment, the "Age of Aquarius."

New Agers come from a wide variety of independent traditions and persuasions, and may differ on a number of more peripheral matters. But their agreement as to their basic values and vision is sufficient for them to "network" (cooperate) with one another to help influence society in the direction of their values and vision.

The fact that New Agers are actively seeking to shape our cul-

tural future suggests a second, more loosely defined way in which people think of the NAM: It has become a *third major social force* vying with traditional Judeo-Christian religion and secular humanism for cultural dominance. But this would make the NAM more than *just* a network or movement: it is also a *major cultural trend*. It represents a *historical movement* that can be traced over a period of more than two centuries in the West *from* orthodox Christianity *back* to paganism.

In this perspective secularism can be viewed as little more than a "bridge" that has made this cultural return to our pre-Christian roots intellectually and psychologically possible. And so, finally and most significantly, the New Age movement is a *resurgence of paganism*. It is the *occult going public* or "*coming out of the closet*" after centuries of hiding itself (in fact, "occult" means "that which is hidden") at the cultural periphery because of the dominance of Judeo-Christian beliefs and values.⁵

In this definition of the New Age Movement, Miller identifies it as "an extremely large metanetwork composed of people and groups that share common values and a common vision." This "metanetwork" is known by various names: the Age of Aquarius, the New Consciousness, the New Orientalism, Cosmic Humanism, the New World Order, the New Esotericism, and the New Globalism.

Further, Issachar should recognize some of the symbols that represent the New Age Movement. Some of those symbols include: the rainbow, pyramids, concentric circles, rays of light, crystals, and the unicorn. Although we may not assume a New Age conspiracy every time we see one or more of these symbols, we ought to think twice about them when they do appear and consider what, if any, influence they may be having on us and our children.

Some Common Beliefs of the New Age Movement

Although members of the groups mentioned above do not have *identical* beliefs, they do share some common ones. Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries identify some of these common beliefs as "four spiritual flaws," in their book *Satan's "Evangelistic" Strategy For This New Age*. As those who are to be "understanding of the times" we should be aware of them:

Pantheism: the First Spiritual Flaw

Pantheism is a conception of God that pervades the New Age Movement. It is most easily defined as the belief that "God is all and all is God." The word *pan* means "all" and as such refers to the idea that all that exists is God; there are merely different levels of existence that correspond to different levels of divinity. The lowest level is matter, then comes the vegetable kingdom, followed by the animal kingdom, and finally, mankind. But everything is God. Nature is God; you are God; I am God. God is all there is.

For the pantheist, the final reality in the universe is spiritual. In fact, matter is really an illusion. Borrowing from the Eastern religion of Hinduism, New Agers believe that we must deny the existence of the material universe to

1. Charles Honey, "Seeking Peace," *The Grand Rapids Press*, 25 Jan. 1997: B3.

2. Don Lattin, "Christian leaders are worried over New Age religions," *The Grand Rapids Press*, 28 April, 1990: B3.

3. Walter Martin, *The New Age Cult* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989) 13.

4. Steve M. Schlissel, "How the West Was Lost," *Biblical Worldview* March, 2000: 6.

5. Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989) 183-184.

escape into the world of the mind, which is in touch with the spiritual universe that is truly real.

God is an impersonal force; God is energy, and energy is God. This redefinition of God, we are told, is supported by the scientific studies in quantum mechanics.

...(T)he Eastern idea of God as an impersonal force was introduced to millions of Americans in the *Star Wars* trilogy. George Lucas, who produced these movies, admits that they convey a religious message. "There is a God and there is both a good side and a bad side. You have a choice between them, but the world works better if you're on the good side." By falling in love with the characters in these movies many Americans were being introduced to a concept of God that will eventually ruin our society.⁶

Lutzer and DeVries go on to explain that a belief in pantheism has significant practical implications. For one thing, if everything is God, man is God. Thus man is both creator and creation, and as such he must save himself. In addition, pantheism devalues human life. If everything is God, man is placed on a par with plants and animals. The results of this belief can be plainly seen by comparing the healthy cows and hungry people in India. By the way, this way of thinking is also promoted by the radical environmental movement in the United States. Consider, for example, "The Great Ape Legal Project," which is being pushed by Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, and a dozen other law schools to secure for animals the right to life, the right not to be imprisoned and the right not to be tortured. In order to secure these rights, they say, animals must have the legal status of persons.

Reincarnation: the Second Spiritual Flaw

Reincarnation, according to the New Agers, has several advantages over Christianity. For one thing, it eliminates the fear of death; what we call death is nothing

more than a transition to a new existence where nothing fundamental has changed. Second, it gives a rationale for the problem of evil. At last we find out why tragedy happens to some and not to others. While Christianity teaches that this world is filled with injustice, reincarnation teaches that all things operate according to the law of karma. There is an identifiable reason for evil in the world. Amid all the pain and trauma we endure, we can take heart....

The doctrine of karma refers to an irrevocable law that everyone gets what he or she deserves. There is an impersonal force in the world that causes us to build future debits and credits based on our behavior. The quality of life experienced in the next life depends on our present actions and behavior. Evil is always punished in the life to come; good is always rewarded.

This means that all people begin life at different levels. No one can claim equal rights. Some, because of sin, have forfeited all privileges, while others, because of good works, have been born into high positions and are well on their way to the escape of nirvana, the destination for the privileged few (though eventually all will probably make it).⁷

Eastern reincarnation theology also has some significant practical implications. These can be seen most clearly in India, where these ideas are at present believed and exercised. The caste system is a classic example. India has four castes (hereditary social classes), and those who are on the lowest end of the scale are so wretched that they cannot even belong to one of the four castes. They are called "untouchables." The principle is that the lowest exist to serve the rich, and the rich have no responsibility whatsoever to the poor because the poor are simply receiving what they have coming to them due to bad karma from an earlier existence. Also, almost every form of abuse can be justified, since the

law of karma is that you get exactly what you deserve. Ultimately, Karma teaches that there is no injustice in the world. And what possible reason could there be for acts of kindness or mercy?

Moral Relativism: the Third Spiritual Flaw

Remember that for the pantheist, the final reality of the universe is spiritual, not material. In fact, the material world is a hindrance to our becoming one with the infinite force, the cosmic energy called God. Strictly speaking, matter is an illusion, and so is the supposed conflict between right and wrong. Only the uninformed make such distinctions.

The goal of the pantheist is for the individual to lose himself or herself in the "eternal nothingness of God." Life is a dream and someday we will awake to realize that we were dreaming. That awakening will be a loss of consciousness as we are united with the eternal, unknowable force. To speak of good and evil as opposites is to betray the fact that we are still tied to the elementary distinctions of physical existence. In self-realization, claim New Agers, we get beyond such distinctions.⁸

The belief in moral relativism is a logical consequence of New Age thinking. In a universe where God is all and all is God, everything is moral because everything is God. Thus man's only problem, if he has one, is ignorance, not sin. And by the means of meditation, man is able to escape his false illusions of right and wrong.

What is striking is that Western Christianity is more and more heading in the same direction. Consider how many *sins* have been redefined as diseases? For example, the sin of drunkenness is now the disease of alcoholism, and the sin of gambling is now just an addiction, and so it goes. As "Christianity" forsakes its biblical roots and its insistence on a Bible that is infallible, she opens herself up to the same relativistic think-

ing. Consider for example the wide acceptance of women in ecclesiastical office, practicing homosexuals as members in good standing (also as ministers), and the current embracing of "process theology." It doesn't seem to concern modern "Christianity" that the Scriptures speak clearly against these errors.

Esotericism: the Fourth Spiritual Flaw

(T)he New Age turns out to be a revival of the Old Age, for the teaching of the "mystery religions" during the pagan days of Greece and Rome was based on the idea that there was secret knowledge that could be obtained by searching the depths of one's own soul. Through mystical encounters with cosmic powers, enlightenment was possible.

Marilyn Ferguson (apologist for the NAM, CK) says that if we want to have a new perception of reality, "the first step is an entry


point ... a mystical psychic experience."

Let's pause here for a moment of analysis. The entry point is a spiritual experience, but what is a spiritual experience? Though Ferguson does not define it, of necessity it must be *an encounter with another spiritual being*. But there is more than one spiritual being in the universe. God, angels, demons, and humans all have spiritual capacities. How can one know which spirit has been contacted? Since a person cannot have a spiritual experience with himself, it follows that the New Agers must be making contact with some other spiritual beings....

So either the New Agers are making contact with the true God or wicked spirits who are available for communication. God must be ruled out, since the New Agers (1) deny that He has an existence independent of the universe, and (2) reject the belief that Christ is the only way to God the Father. That leaves demonic spir-

its who are only too glad to make contact with humans and give them a genuine "spiritual experience." 9

From the preceding brief description of the New Age Movement it should be clear that for them "self," "feelings," and "experiences" rule. Sounds like an echo of current Western thinking, does it not? But that must wait for future installments concerning *how* these Eastern ideas are infiltrating the West and what impact they are having on Christianity in general and Issachar in particular.

Sons of Issachar, let us continue to grow in our understanding of the times and live! 

6. Erwin W. Lutzer and John F. DeVries, *Satan's "Evangelistic" Strategy For This New Age* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1989) 60-62.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 74-76.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 90-91.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 101-102.

That They May Teach Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

The Christian Story and the Christian School (3) A Defense of the Narrative Approach in Reformed Christian Education

Two previous articles have traced the argument of Dr. John Bolt in the book *The Christian Story and the Christian School*, respecting the crisis in public education and the attempted educational reforms in public education since the 1930s. Included were descriptions of the symptoms

and the proposed solutions during the 1990s, plus a section devoted to an answer to the question, what is really wrong with public education?

It is imperative for Christian educators, supporters, and parents to understand the developments in public education as directly and indirectly they influence Christian education. Although Christian schools among Reformed churches have existed for more than a century, during the past twenty-five years many evangelistic Christian

schools have come into existence because of a "knee-jerk" reaction to the failures, the behavioral problems, and the controversial and sinful developments in the public schools. Although many Christian schools were established to escape the failures and blatantly evil developments in the public schools, these schools are not isolated from the issues in the public schools. Christian schools frequently employ textbooks that are prepared by textbook companies to be used in the public schools to indoctrinate

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students in secular ideologies. Scores of teachers in the Christian schools attend colleges that indoctrinate them in the ideology and the educational practices used in the public schools. In this connection, it ought to be observed that discernment by Christian school administrators and teachers is crucial if one is to be properly selective in the use of textbooks that were prepared for use in the public schools.

The current article continues the review of the critical questions respecting the contemporary educational scene by surveying the culture wars that have influenced public education.

Culture Wars

The section entitled culture wars in *The Christian Story and the Christian School* by Dr. Bolt refers to an analysis of American culture by James Davison Hunter in *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, New York, Basic Books, 1991. Hunter defines cultural conflict as "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding." Hunter identifies one system as an "impulse toward orthodoxy" and the other system as an "impulse toward progressivism."

Hunter states that the system representing the impulse toward orthodoxy involves the commitment on the part of the adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority. He says that the system representing the impulse toward cultural progressivism is the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism — a system with no commitment to a definable transcendent authority. Progressive worldview adherents restate the historic faith according to the prevailing assumptions and practices of contemporary life.

The conflict between the impulse toward orthodoxy and the impulse toward cultural progressivism affects all aspects of soci-

ety: the family, education, law, media, and political movements. It is essential to understand that in the educational arena the battle between "progressives" and "orthodox" is especially fierce in regards to the control of the pedagogical practices in public education. Progressives and orthodox have declared an all-out war and have determined that the battle over public education is the eye of the storm. Progressives and orthodox in collaboration with the mass media see education as the means to win the battle for control in the family, law, politics, and every area of life.

Hunter quotes an opponent of censorship, a progressive, who says,

This country is experiencing a religious crusade as fierce as any out of the Middle Ages.... Our children are being sacrificed because of fanatical zeal of our fundamentalist brothers who claim to be hearing the voice of God.... In this religious war spiced with overtones of race and class, the books are an accessible target (Bolt, p. 41).

Hunter quotes a spokesman from the National Association of Christian Education, a leader of the orthodox movement, who claims that the war being waged in America is a struggle for control of the heart, the mind, and the soul of every man, woman, and especially child in America. This advocate for the orthodox movement identifies the contestants as secular humanism and Christianity.

Bolt explains that the cultural legacy that fed the public school system in the past included explicitly Christian themes. The public schools were intended to be nominally and functionally Protestant in their instruction and value systems. For this reason Roman Catholics and Jews were encouraged to set up their own parochial schools. Concerning this solution to a fundamental problem, Bolt asserts that

the legitimacy of a monopolistic "Protestant Christian" public school system is questionable from a judicial point of view. He also notes that the Protestantism that existed in the public school was of dubious quality and veracity.

It should be observed that those who are committed to the cause of distinctively Reformed Christian schools must go further and affirm that God does not give to the State the responsibility to establish educational systems and that the State is not responsible for the education of the child. Although many children would not receive an education if the State did not establish schools, the education and training of the child is the responsibility that God assigns to each parent. For this reason committed Reformed parents, in their concern to live as responsible citizens of the kingdom of Christ, establish and maintain parental Christian Schools. These schools employ Christian teachers who have the same beliefs as the parents and the children that are taught in the schools.

Charles L. Glenn writes a chapter entitled "Molding Citizens" in *Democracy and the Renewal of Public Education*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987, p. 43, in which he states that Reformed Christians should not be pleased nor satisfied with the nineteenth century common school idea developed by Horace Mann in Massachusetts. Glenn writes concerning this nineteenth century development as follows:

The normal school, then, played an important part in the efforts of Mann and other 'liberal Christians' to promote a form of "common school religion" that was said to have no sectarian character, but that was in fact consistent with their own beliefs and profoundly subversive of that of their Orthodox opponents. It was in the normal school, with its strong emphasis on the teaching of morality and on an atmosphere of liberal piety, that the teachers were formed

upon whom the hopes of education reformers rested. Training teachers was an effective way of avoiding the problems that a direct assault on local control of school would have caused; it made it possible to argue, in all sincerity, that the common schools were under the direct oversight of local school committees elected by parents and frequently chaired by an orthodox clergyman. The real content of public education would be determined by the emerging profession of teachers, shaped by state normal schools under control of the education reformers and not by the parents through their local representatives (Bolt, p. 217).

The goal of Horace Mann, John Dewey, and others like them was reached when students trained to be teachers in state schools and quasi-Christian training college and normal schools were employed in the public schools. In this way the schools were transformed into schools that taught a common school religion. It was religious instruction but a religious instruction that was not truly Christian, nor was it Reformed. It was a teaching and philosophy of life that Reformed parents could not permit their children to receive, since they had promised at the time their children were baptized, that to the best of their ability they would provide pious and religious instruction for their children. This was to be instruction that coheres with the truth confessed by the parents in the Christian church. It must be instruction based on the Word of God and the historic Reformed confessions.

In earlier times the public schools employed teachers who included in their instruction Christian ideas and concepts. The situation has dramatically changed in recent years. Because of intensive lobbying by ardent civil libertarians advocating a radical church-state separation, the Protestant Christian religion is now the minority (marginal) point of view in

public education. Bolt notes that this change in attitude in education can be seen in the exclusion of devotional time from the school day and from the school premises. More serious is the rewriting and publishing of textbooks that exclude traditional Christian values and eliminate direct references to the role of the Christian religion in public life.

Bolt cites the research of Paul Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in our Children's Textbooks*, Ann Arbor, Servant, 1986. A summary of the arguments of Vitz can be found in the chapter, "A Study of Religion and Traditional Values in Public School Textbooks," *Democracy and the Renewal of Public Education*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987, pp. 116-140. Vitz, in his careful examination of American social studies and literature books indicates how the Christian religion is ignored or trivialized. Bolt states that the study by Vitz clearly showed how the public schools systematically denied the history, heritage, beliefs, and values of a very large segment of the American people (Bolt, p. 43).

Vitz concludes as follows:

In sum, then, it seems that it is considered acceptable to mention America's less "typical" religions in textbooks, but mainstream Protestantism is for all practical purposes considered taboo. The effect of this is a denial of the fact that religion is really an important part of American life. Sometimes the censorship becomes especially offensive. One book, for example, devoted thirty pages to a discussion of the Pilgrims, noting that they celebrated thanksgiving because they "wanted to give thanks for all they had" — and yet it nowhere specifies that it was to God that they were offering thanks. This sort of thing occurred again and again in the sample texts. It is permissible to refer to the Pueblo Indians praying to mother Earth, but Pilgrims can't be described as praying to God (Bolt, p. 43).

Another example of the rejection of the true religion occurs in the "Hirsch project," which was intended to spell out the minimum knowledge that is needed to function in American society. After E.D. Hirsch produced a large *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, which included a sizable section of Bible knowledge, he began a project that would attempt to stipulate minimal cultural literacy for each elementary grade. The first volume, *What Your 1st Grader Needs to Know*, omits Bible stories. It is not surprising to hear that the teacher consultants of the Florida schools, where the program was tested, "deemed them unduly sectarian" (*Time*, September 30, 1991, p. 77).

Conclusion

Bolt notes that the impact of the conflicts that have occurred in public education have brought Christian schools to something beyond the question of mere existence. He contends that the Christian schools must exercise their responsibility for narrating, preserving, and transmitting past wisdom and cultural products of the Christian tradition. Bolt asserts that Christian schools must assume this task as an essential for the preservation of our civilization.

Bolt also notes that the development of a completely pagan society should cause us to perceive that our situation is similar to that faced by the medieval monks in a darkening age. Supporters of Christian education and the teachers in these schools must keep the lamp of Christian wisdom burning.

We agree with Dr. Bolt when he states that we must be aware of our context to be certain that our Christian schools are doing what our Lord asks of us. We differ with his emphasis on the purpose for performing this task.

Although Christian schools ought to perform the task of narrating past wisdom, they should not serve as uncritical purveyors of past wisdom, nor should they

think that in this way they serve as the catalyst to preserve civilization. Yes, we may know and read the writings of past ages, but these must be read with discrimination and discernment. In our instruction, and in our construction of distinctively Reformed Protestant Christian schools, we are not to cooperate with the unbelieving world in building the kingdom of God. Such kingdom building we cannot do. Instead, believing teachers and parents, in the noble and necessary work of extending the kingdom of Christ through good Christian schools, must respond and react correctly to developments in the public schools.


Christian schools that remain true to their calling to teach accord-

ing to the full counsel of God as this is taught in the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions will be doing that which they were established to do.

Therefore, instruction that will be helpful in the thorough preparation of the child of God for every good work is the important task of the school. Instruction that will help in causing young people to live as changed people in the world, and not as world changers, is instruction that is extremely important for the children and young people called to live in this present godless age. The life of the Christian in the world is such that he lives a full earthly life and must come into contact with, and must react to, the theories and ideology that develop in this world and are

present in the public schools.

Christian teachers who work in public schools cannot Christianize these schools. They must live a life of the antithesis in these schools. The result of such a life will be persecution. The time may come when the believer, because of the hatred of the ungodly unbeliever, will be forced out of his position.

The calling of the Reformed Christian is to be faithful in the maintenance of good Christian schools that do not teach world flight. Instead, Reformed Christians must be faithful in the maintenance of schools that employ teachers who will instruct students to live antithetically in the world as citizens of the kingdom of Christ. 

Report of Classis East

January 8, 2003
Faith Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 8, 2003 in the Faith PRC. All the churches were represented by two delegates. Rev. Ronald Cammenga was the chairman for this session.

The agenda was not considered to be heavy, but the usual duties of a January classis had to be accomplished. As usual, much of classis' time was taken by voting.

Classis heard a report from its church visitors that there is peace and unity in the churches. Classis discussed one specific item of the report. One council had raised the question of our parents not sending their children to our own Protestant Reformed schools.

The church visitors also functioned as a special committee of classis to investigate the continued viability of our Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ. The committee reported that, in their judgment, Covenant is a viable congregation, that there is evidence of a full-orbed

congregational life and some prospect for growth. The committee also advised that synod reevaluate this matter in three years. The report, along with the recommendations adopted, will be sent to Synod 2003.

Holland PRC, via Question 4 of the Church Order, asked for advice concerning the financial support of the Moores. Classis advised Holland to study the matter and overture synod if they desired. In the meantime, support for the Moores should be in the nature of benevolence.


The following were elected as delegates to Synod 2003: Ministers: *Primi* — W. Bruinsma, B. Gritters, J. Slopsema, C. Terpstra, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi* — R. Cammenga, M. Dick, R. Kleyn, K. Koole, J. Laning; Elders: *Primi* — J. Huiskens, J. Kalsbeek, L. Meulenberg, G. Terpstra, K. Vink; *Secundi* — J. Buiters, T. Elzinga, L. Koole, E. Kortering, S. Miedema. Voting for delegates *ad examina* resulted in the election of Rev. B. Gritters to a three-year *primus* term

and Rev. W. Bruinsma to a three-year *secundus* term. Rev. K. Koole was elected to serve a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Revs. J. Slopsema and R. Van Overloop were chosen to serve as church visitors, with Rev. K. Koole as alternate.

Classis approved the subsidy requests for 2004 for Kalamazoo in the amount of \$20,500 and for Covenant in the amount of \$43,000. Covenant was also given permission to contact the churches in Classis East for collections for their Building Fund. Their request for collections will also be sent to synod so that they can request the same from the churches in Classis West.

Classical appointments were extended to Faith, Southeast, and Byron Center for their evening services.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$954.83. Classis will meet next on May 14, 2003 at the Grace PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

Young People's Activities

The young people of Byron Center, MI PRC provided breakfast Christmas morning for their congregation.

Members of the young people's society of First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored a Christmas sing-along on December 22. There were several special numbers and much audience singing.

Members of First PRC in Edgerton, MN were encouraged to consider hiring one or more of their congregation's young people, this winter, to help with odd jobs around the house: jobs like cleaning basements, painting a room or two, or perhaps a little snow shoveling. Monies raised were to go toward expenses for this summer's young adult retreat.

The young people of Randolph, WI PRC invited their congregation to join them for a day of skiing on January 16, and the young people of Hudsonville, MI PRC did the same on January 17.

In news regarding this summer's young people's convention, we can inform you that our Loveland, CO PRC, this year's host society and congregation, now has a web site up and running. You can view it at: www.prc.org/current/03ConventionWeb/index.htm

Evangelism Activities

The past year's evangelism efforts of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL led them to many different contacts in many different countries. But they also developed contacts in the United States, many of whom are prisoners. This past year

alone they sent literature to thirteen different prisons in nine different states. In addition, Peace is also working to begin distributing their sermons in CD format. They have purchased a CD audio recorder to record their sermons in digital format. They also have built a new computer to assist in recording and saving sermons on CD.

Congregation Activities

On the evening of January 15, the congregation of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI gathered together to say farewell to their pastor, Rev. D. Kuiper, and his wife, Valerie, who served them from May 1992 through December 2002, and our churches from July 1967 until retirement last December. The program included audience singing, a couple of special numbers, some historical details about the Kuipers, and an expression of appreciation. You might also be interested to note that the token of appreciation included items Rev. Kuiper did not have: a tool belt, a pair of blue jeans, and a lawn mower — items he will no doubt need in retirement.

On January 10 and 11, members of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were able to enjoy their church's annual "Winter Retreat." This year's retreat dealt with the subject of "Faith and Finances" — a matter we are all forced to make choices about every day. Single or married, house full of children or newly married, struggling to make ends meet or "comfortable," we all need to have a biblical perspective regarding how to handle the resources God has given. Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, Georgetown's pastor, and Dr. John Visser, of Dordt College, were the featured speakers.

On a cold snowy Sunday morning, have you ever wished you could simply drive your car up to

the entrance of your church and get out and avoid that long walk across the parking lot? Well, if you were a member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, you could. They have made valet parking available to their members for the winter months for both services.

Members of Grace PRC in Standale, MI were encouraged by their pastor, Rev. M. Dick, to obtain a Bible reading schedule to help them read through the Scriptures at least once a year. Members were encouraged to try it personally, or as a family.

Minister Activities


Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, underwent a pulmonary vein isolation procedure at the University of Michigan Hospital on January 16 to correct a heart arrhythmia problem he has had for the past five years. After a one-night stay in the hospital, he is, at the time of this writing, recovering well.

We extend our congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. David Overway, of Wyckoff, NJ, who were blessed with the birth of a baby girl Sunday, January 5. Elena Marie was born a month early and weighed 4 lbs. 9 oz.

The congregation of the Hull, IA PRC was to call a second missionary to our mission field in Ghana from a trio of Rev. D. Kleyn, Rev. C. Terpstra, and Rev. R. VanOverloop.

Rev. W. Bruinsma declined the call he had been considering from Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI.

Rev. R. Cammenga declined the call extended to him from the Byron Center, MI PRC.

Faith PRC in Jenison, MI extended a call to Rev. B. Gritters, having elected him from a trio that included also the Revs. J. Slopsema and C. Terpstra. 

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

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Christian Fellowship Society of Hull PRC expresses heartfelt sympathy to Glenn and Krista Kooima and family in the death of her father,

MR. AL GROEN.

May God give comfort and hope by His Word. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads" (Isaiah 35:11).

Pastor S. Key, President
Michelle Key, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of Peace PRC express their Christian sympathy to the Garry Eriks family and the Howard Hoekstra family in the death of Joan Eriks' and Karen Hoekstra's father,

ART ZANDSTRA.

May these families and all the saints find comfort in these words from Revelation 14:13: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Rev. Steven Houck, President
Don Terpstra, Vice President

NOTICE

The Protestant Reformed Special Ed Board is seeking applicants for a full-time teaching position in our Special Education program at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan. Applicants should have a desire to work with special-needs children and have some knowledge in areas of Special Education.

Interested persons may contact Kurt Kaptein at kurt@spectrumweb.net or phone 1-616-669-1693. They may also contact Dave Moelker at 453-7077.

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2003 - 2004 academic year should make application at the March 20, 2003 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 20 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

YEARBOOK UPDATE

New address and phone number for

Rev. Thomas Miersma:

1324 N. Liberty Lake Rd, #133
Liberty Lake, WA 99019-8523
(509) 869-5102.

New e-mail for Grace PRC bulletin:
jkaptein@chartermi.net

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC, Redlands, extends sincere Christian sympathy to Berend and Janine Meelker and Laurie Jabaay and their families in the death of their beloved father, father-in-law, and grandfather and our elder,

MR. JAKE JABAAY.

And to Berend and Janine Meelker, Henry and Karen Meelker, Dan and Anna Mae Bodbyl, and their families in the death of their grandfather and great-grandfather,

MR. BEN MEELKER.

We give thanks to God for the wonderful hope that He gives us: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52a).

Rev. M. VanderWal, Pres.
Trudi Hopkins, Sec't.

LECTURE

The Lord willing, a lecture on
Labor Unions
in the Light of Scripture
will be given by

Prof. David Engelsma.

This lecture is sponsored by the
Evangelism Committee of
Peace PRC, Lansing, Illinois.

Light refreshments and fellowship will follow the lecture. The church is located at **18423 Stony Island Ave., Lansing, Illinois.** Plan to attend this timely lecture on

**Friday, March 21, at 8:00 P.M.
at Peace PRC.**