

# THE *June 2003* STANDARD BEARER

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# Tempted by Our Lust

*Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

James 1:13-15

"Let no man say, I am tempted of God!"

You and I should never say that. It is sinful to do so. But a bit of soul searching reveals that we often do exactly that, whether wittingly or unwittingly.

The occasion for saying that is that we have sinned, and we know it. It also bothers us. But now our deceptive heart seeks an excuse. "That's my sinful nature." But who gave you that nature? "I really could not help it, I was in a bind." As if God placed us in a situation that made it *necessary* for us to sin! "I had no intention of doing that,

but my companion really talked or forced me into that." Who gave you that companion?! "That filthy liquor always gets the best of me, and I had no one to drive for me." Who drank the liquor that was offered to him?! Thus we could go on and on. There is a familiar saying that speaks of the road to hell being paved with good intentions, and, we may add, with excuses.

Never say in any form or manner, "God tempted me." For thereby we are heaping sin upon sin. The simple fact is that God Himself cannot be tempted. Would you imagine that the devil is greater than our God and could tempt Him? God is holy, upright, righteous, and just! God is God, the supreme Ruler of heaven and earth, far removed above all that is evil!

Nor does God tempt any man. It is true that our temptations are under the supreme rule of the Most High God. Nothing befalls us apart from God's will. The devil is not a power apart from or equal to God. God is also sovereign over the devil. The devil cannot stir except by the will and power of God.

Therefore, when we are tempted, that temptation is also in the wise, good, and eternal plan of God. His counsel stands and He does all His good pleasure.

Yet God does not tempt us. It is the devil who tempts. God tries His people. There is a definite difference between "trying" and "tempting" — a difference in the motive, in the manner in which it is done, and in the purpose.

God's motive is always love for His people. God always tries His children in love. The devil is always motivated by hatred against the people of God. He hates you and me.

Moreover, God deals with us honestly, uprightly. When God sends fiery trials He does so openly. He even warns us not to sin. By His indwelling Spirit, our voice of conscience speaks loudly to us, even though we do not heed it. We know very well that what we are doing is wrong. On the other hand, the devil uses every form of trickery and cunning to deceive us and urge us into sin. He assures us that, under the circumstances, it is perfectly proper for us to do the

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wrong. We condone in ourselves that which we condemn in others.

Finally, God's purpose is always pure. God tries His people as by fire, that they may come forth out of the fiery trial stronger and purer than before. But the devil is determined to deceive us, that he may make us his friend and take us along with him into hell.

Therefore, let us never say when we are tempted, "I am tempted of God!" For God cannot be tempted, nor does He tempt any one. But let us be honest and say, "I am tempted of my own lust. The guilt of my sin lies with me." For that is the truth of the matter.

There is indeed a drawing away and a deception that leads into sin, and that also is according to the will and counsel of God for our good. Satan is given the power, otherwise he could not attack us. An example of that is given to us in the book of Job. God calls Satan's attention to His servant Job, of whom He says that he is "a perfect and upright man, and one that feareth God and escheweth evil." Upon Satan's request, God gives the devil power to take all his children and all his possessions from him, but Satan may not touch Job's person. Later, Satan is given power to turn Job's wife against him, to cover him with sores that make his life most burdensome, and even to cause his friends to heap accusations and scorn upon him. Yet, in the end, God revealed to Job that He is sovereign Lord over all and does all things for the welfare of those He loves.

For us, temptations remain very real. The devil is very cunning, very deceptive. He can also summon many forces to his aid. He has many demons at his disposal, possibly an organized host with degrees of authority, one over the other, so that each demon is appointed to a certain person or task.

He also has the whole world of wicked men at his beck and call.

That world can lure with all its riches and entertainment, all of which strongly appeals to our sinful flesh. Especially in these affluent times we can readily forget that we are pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that our treasure is laid away for us in heaven. How rarely shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, this present evil world can also threaten our business, our position, our job, or our family. The closer we come to the end of the ages the stronger that threat will be. The time is not far off when we will no longer be able to buy or sell, because we belong to the party of the living God. Our possessions will be taken away from us, even our automobile that seems so necessary for our existence. If we still have a home, the beast will know every word we utter and everything we do, even in the confines of our home. We may even be imprisoned or lose our lives for Christ's sake.

Moreover, the devil can use those who are closest to us, a friend or a member of our family, to lure us into sin or betray us. Especially as we approach the end of the ages, all the powers of darkness will put forth one final effort to destroy God's cause, including us, from the face of the earth. Only he who endures to the end will be saved.

Yet, all these powers of evil could not affect us in the least if it were not for our sinful nature, the old man of sin within us. There dwells within us the lust of the eyes, causing our eyes to be drawn to sin; the lust of the flesh, warring within us to destroy us; and the pride of life, that *big I* that likes to be as God. He imagines that he is so much better than others. If all men were like him, what a splendid world this would be.

Paul writes: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

envyings, murder, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Gal. 5:19-21).

All this has its origin in our sinful lust. James warns us that "when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin." Like a woman who becomes pregnant with child, so lust conceives and brings forth a very ugly offspring, sin. That sin produces another child, even more ugly than the former, a worse sin. And that second offspring produces a third, worse than before, and so on and on....

Sin is separation from God; therefore, under His righteous judgment, God gives the sinner over to His sin. The sinner is in bondage, the bondage of sin. Even his will is in bondage. He will never, as long as he is in the bondage of sin, admit that. He boasts that he can stop sinning any time he wishes. But the sad fact is that he never reaches the point where he wishes. He can only will to sin, and he becomes more involved both with body and soul in the bondage of his sin. That accounts for the fact that the devil, who knows that he is fighting a losing battle, never gives up. And the sinner, who knows disaster awaits him at the end, still tries to tell himself that all is well.

Sin is rebellion against the Most High majesty of God. It is transgression of His holy law. Under the righteous judgment of God, the soul that sins must die. Look at what happened in paradise! Witness what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah! To Lot's wife! Sin may very well result in the destruction of the body, so that death results. A drunkard may burn up his body with his drinking. A fornicator may bring on an incurable disease. Besides, we do not live on an island. Others are involved in our lives — our families, our friends and acquaintances, our church. We are an influence upon them for good or for evil.

Sin involves particularly our families. A parent may depart from



the truth and bring his family with him on the road of heresy. He may be a church delinquent, who attends church only once on a Sunday or finds a ready excuse not to attend. His children often break away from the church completely. Our example of a sinful walk places its stamp upon the children. "As father, so son." Besides, families are brought into poverty, into trouble and shame, even to the point where the family is torn apart.


But the certain outcome is that the soul ends in everlasting destruction in hell. Sin breeds sin unto eternal death in torment, where the worm never dies and the fire of God's just wrath never ceases to burn. There we suffer for our own sins, but also for the influence we have had upon others. There was good reason why the rich man in the parable wanted

Lazarus to warn his brothers. He was not eager to meet them there in hell fire.

That death is eternal. Can you conceive of endless suffering in soul and body, endless torment, utter despair? There is no end, no escape, no hope for the future. In hell is only endless remorse. In the parable, the rich man in hell is not allowed so much as a drop of water to cool the extremity of his tongue for a single second.



There is no escape from sin as far as man is concerned. No psychologist, no evangelist, no matter how powerful or influential he may seem to be, can deliver one soul from that bondage. No resolution to change, no matter how often made, can bring deliverance and peace to the soul.

There is but one way out: the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The debt of sin must be paid, and that debt is so great that only the atoning blood of Christ can cover it. The power of sin is so great that only Almighty God in Christ Jesus can make you and me new creatures who are made aware of the dominion of sin over us. We must realize that we are hopelessly lost in sin and death. With David we must confess, "the sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." We must admit our complete unworthiness and helplessness. As the apostle Paul confessed: "The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do. ... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." 

## Editorial

# PRC Synod, 2003

**T**wo of the weightier actions of the upcoming synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches convening on June 10 at the Hudsonville, MI Protestant Reformed Church will involve the denomination's theological seminary. Synod must appoint a successor to the longtime professor of practical theology and New Testament studies, Prof. Robert D. Decker. Prof. Decker has served at the seminary since 1973. In consultation with the faculty, the Theological School Committee presents a nomination of Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga, Rev. Barrett L. Gritters, and Rev. Steven R. Key.

Synod will also hear the examination of graduating seminarian William Langerak. Subject to

synod's approval of his examination, Mr. Langerak will be eligible for a call to one of the vacant churches this summer. At present, there are three vacancies. Acceptance of the appointment to the seminary will add a fourth. In addition, the Hull, IA church is calling a second missionary to Ghana.

There is another graduate, Paul Goh. Mr. Goh will return to Singapore, to work in the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore. These churches will conduct their own, final examination of Mr. Goh.

The Theological School Committee proposes to synod that the graduation exercises for Mr. Goh and Mr. Langerak be held on Monday, June 16, at 7:30 p.m. at the

Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church.

Only one new student will begin training in the seminary this fall. He will join the four full-time students presently enrolled. Two of the four will be third-year students next school year, and two will be second-year students. There will be no graduate in 2004.

The Theological School Committee recommends that synod grant permanent tenure to Prof. Russell Dykstra, who has completed his seventh year at the seminary.

The Domestic Mission Committee informs synod that Rev. Angus Stewart, presently working in Northern Ireland under the auspices of the Hudsonville Protestant

Reformed Church and the Domestic Mission Committee, has been received as a Protestant Reformed minister by decision of Classis East. The synodical deputies of Classis West concurred. The Domestic Mission Committee and Hudsonville recommend that synod "decide to continue the work with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship, with Ballymena as the base of our mission labors in the British Isles." The Fellowship consists of six families and five individuals. Hudsonville is to be the calling church. Hudsonville informs synod that if synod adopts these recommendations concerning the work in Northern Ireland, Hudsonville will call Rev. Stewart to be missionary to the British Isles.

Synod is informed that the home mission work in Spokane, WA with the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church has abruptly ended. The Domestic Mission Committee asks synod's approval of renewing the work in Spokane with four families and three individuals who remain.

Synod will consider the report on the home mission work in Pittsburgh with four or five families committed to forming a Protestant Reformed congregation.

The Foreign Mission Committee reports on the fields in Ghana and in the Philippines. The attached report on Ghana by the council of the Hull, IA Protestant Reformed Church calls synod's attention to a serious weakness of our work in Ghana: the inability of the missionary to speak the language of the people.

In connection with benevolence, the language barrier our missionary faces is quite hindering to the work there. To alleviate this the council, along with the FMC has approved the hiring of [S.A.] to help with the interpretation. This has helped our missionary tremendously when working with the saints there. The past delegation saw this firsthand and recommended that the next mission-

ary to be called to Ghana should take some TWI language classes before going to the field.

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches informs synod that the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore are as yet unable to adopt a position on marriage and divorce. They hope to do so in 2004. The Contact Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches makes the following recommendation to synod:

That with respect to the marriage and divorce issue synod convey to the ERCS the urgency of resolving this issue at their classis meeting in February 2004 and plead that they maintain what we believe to be the biblical position as upheld by their sister church, the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore intend to send a delegate to synod to attend the graduation of Mr. Paul Goh.

The Hope, Walker, MI Protestant Reformed Church, calling church for missionary-on-loan Rev. Arie denHartog, informs synod that, in addition to his other duties, Rev. denHartog gave twenty-six lectures in Myanmar on "All of Grace" and "The Reformed Pastor." He also preached Sundays in a number of churches in Yangon. This is work done under the direction of the Mission Committee of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore.

The Contact Committee informs synod that it carried out the mandate given it by the synod of 2002, that it give "a clear call to repentance to the Christian Reformed Church for its departure from the truth of the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions." This call to repentance was given at a meeting with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church. The Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church responded that it was unconvinced

of the need for repentance on the part of the Christian Reformed Church in the matters specified by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Thus evidently ends the brief, strange contact of the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches nearly eighty years after the Christian Reformed Church adopted the Arminian doctrine of common grace, made it binding upon its officebearers and people, and deposed ministers and entire consistories for opposing the false doctrine. This contact was occasioned, it will be remembered, by an overture from a Christian Reformed theologian to Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed Church. The overture called on the Christian Reformed Church to apologize to the Protestant Reformed Churches for her unjust actions in expelling those who formed the Protestant Reformed Churches from her fellowship.

This was the first official contact between the two denominations in almost eighty years (the "Pantlind Conference" in 1939 was unofficial). No doubt, it will be the last. The Lord Jesus Christ judge between us.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia sends a letter to the synod over the signature of David Torlach, stated clerk of presbytery. The letter thanks the Protestant Reformed Churches for sending delegates Prof. Robert Decker and Rev. Ronald Cammenga to a conference in Australia in 2002.

Among other matters, synod must decide the viability of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, Wyckoff, NJ. Synod 2002 instructed Classis East to inquire into the viability of this very small congregation. Classis East judges Covenant to be a viable congregation. Classis East advises synod to reevaluate Covenant's situation in three years.

The Board of Trustees of the Protestant Reformed Churches recommends that synod take certain



actions, which the Board details, to build up the Emeritus Fund to three million dollars over the next twenty years. At present, the Fund, which provides support for retired ministers and their widows, holds slightly more than one million dollars.

A member overtures synod to rescind Article 27 of the acts of Synod 2001, regarding missionar-

ies' administration of the sacraments and pronouncement of the benediction.

The Yearbook Committee reports numerical growth of the denomination during the past year in the amount of thirty-five families.

The pre-synodical worship service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at the Hudsonville

Church at 7:30. Rev. James Slopsema will preach the sermon.

May the King of the Church bless the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches so that they themselves persevere in the faith and so that they continue to give uncompromising witness to the truth, as regards both doctrine and life, to others.

— DJE 

## Feature Article

Rev. Angus Stewart

# The Real Saint Patrick (4) Patrick's Message (Part 2)

**W**e saw last time (*Standard Bearer*, May 1, 2003) that Patrick believed and preached the grace of the triune God in Christ. Patrick's understanding of grace is demonstrated yet further in that he repeatedly refers to his call to preach the gospel in Ireland as a "gift" of God to him (e.g., *Conf* 16, 33, 62). God, not Patrick himself, called him to his mission (*Conf* 56), for he received his office from God's hand (*Letter* 1). Patrick humbly confesses that he was not worthy of the high calling of the bishopric (*Conf* 32). "I truly am a debtor to God," he affirms (*Conf* 38). With a sense of the greatness of God's blessings to him, he cries out, "Who am I, Lord?" (*Conf* 34; cf. 55-56; II Sam. 7:18). These are the words of a man who believed and preached the gospel of grace.

Perhaps most striking is the fact that Patrick realizes that he was "called and predestined to proclaim the Gospel" (*Letter* 6). He knows that he, and all true ministers of Jesus Christ, were eternally

appointed to their glorious task. It is no wonder that God should deliver him from all his perils. After all, God is the one "who knows everything even before it takes place" (*Conf* 35). When on one occasion during his ministry in Ireland he was "put in irons," it was not his Irish captors but the Lord who struck his chains (*Conf* 52).

Patrick speaks of his desire to return to his "country and kinsfolk" in Britain and to see the saints in Gaul, but knows that he dare not do so. He would be sinning against the Lord for he is "bound in the Spirit" to his Irish calling (*Conf* 43). His life, he tells us, is one of service to "Christ my God, on whose behalf I am fulfilling a mission" (*Letter* 5; cf. *Conf* 56). John T. McNeill rightly speaks of Patrick's "intense consciousness of divine authorization."<sup>1</sup>

His hard labors were the fruit of God's grace also (*Conf* 51, 53), and only in the Lord was he able to persevere (*Conf* 58). Similarly the results of Patrick's labors are in the Lord's hands. Patrick knows that the Lord has His children whom He gathers from the ends of the earth (*Letter* 9; *Conf* 39). In one passage Patrick speaks of the

believers in Ireland as "a people who had recently come to belief whom the Lord *chose* from the ends of the earth" (*Conf* 38). The natural understanding of this is that those whom God chooses before the foundation of the earth come to faith at the appointed time.

For Patrick, nothing is merited; it is all gift and all grace. One who knows the "great grace" of God in the forgiveness of his own sins (*Conf* 3) can preach salvation even to wicked idolaters like the Irish. God saved him, a rebellious child of the church, so why cannot He convert the pagans? Even Coroticus and his men, who, while professing the faith of Jesus Christ, killed and kidnapped many of Patrick's Irish converts, are exhorted to repentance so that they may "be made whole here and in eternity" (*Letter* 21).

Patrick, however, is not soft on sin. Nor is he a man to mince his words. He speaks of the soldiers of Coroticus as "fellow citizens of the devils" living "in death in an atmosphere of enmity" (*Letter* 2). "They shall inherit Hell equally with [Satan] in eternal punishment, because, of course, he who commits sin is a slave and is called a son of

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the devil" (*Letter* 4). Patrick urged that these recalcitrant robbers be excommunicated and forbidden fellowship by all Christians (*Letter* 6-7).

It would be a theological anachronism to claim that Patrick set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Another millennium would pass before that dogma would be clearly set forth over against the full-blown heresy of justification by faith and works that was the death knell of the Roman Church. Hanson is correct, however, that Patrick had a "good *practical* grasp of what justification by faith means."<sup>2</sup>

Patrick's own conversion experience points us in the direction of his "good *practical* grasp" of justification, as does the comfort that he received in believing the promises of God:

I daily expect either assassination or trickery or reduction to slavery or some accident or other, but I fear none of these things *on account of the promises of heaven* because I have thrown myself into the hands of Almighty God who reigns everywhere as the prophet says, Cast your care upon the Lord and he will nourish you (*Conf* 55).

Patrick speaks often and boldly of his steadfast trust in God:

*I believe most confidently* that [should my body be torn limb from limb or devoured by birds] I have gained my soul along with my body, because, *without a shadow of doubt*, on that Day we shall arise in the radiance of the sun, that is, in the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer, as children of the living God and coheirs with Christ and destined to be conformed to his image, because we shall reign from him and through him and in him (*Conf* 59).

Patrick had an eschatology of hope. He had no doubt about his eternal destiny. He would partake in the resurrection of the just and live and reign with Christ forever.

Patrick had the certainty of eternal life because the Lord Jesus "died and was crucified" for the "slaves of God and the baptized maid-servants of Christ" (*Letter* 7). Patrick "awaited" the final fulfillment of God's promise of the salvation of the nations when forever believers "will sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (*Conf* 39; Matt. 8:11). This steadfast and fearless gaze into eternity distinguishes Patrick from much of the medieval church, for wherever the doctrine of justification by faith and works enters, confidence in one's eternal salvation vanishes. After all, how can one ever be sure of acquittal at Christ's judgment bar if even the smallest part of our salvation depends on us?

Interestingly, the Irish believers slain by Coroticus' men (*Letter* 2-3, 15) are described by Patrick as being in "Paradise" (*Letter* 17) and in "the kingdom of heaven" (*Letter* 18). On the other hand, the wicked have "their part in the lake of everlasting fire" (*Letter* 18). Patrick's writings leave no place for purgatory, and James Bulloch points out that "No reference to purgatory is found in ... any ... Irish writing prior to the tenth century."<sup>3</sup>

Underlying all of Patrick's faith and hope is his unshakable trust in the Word of God. He can go as a missionary to a hostile land because he is armed with the Word. He can face fierce opposition "on account of the promises of heaven" (*Conf* 55). He can rebuke the powerful Coroticus and his bloodthirsty soldiers because he knows that the message he brings is not his but the Lord's. As he says near the end of his *Letter*,

That which I have set out in Latin is not my words but the words of God and of apostles and prophets, who of course have never lied. He who believes shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be damned. *God has spoken* (*Letter* 20).

That last sentence, "God has spo-

ken," has a deathly ring of finality about it. Here is Patrick's authority: the Triune God speaking in Holy Scripture.

According to Edward T. Stimson's analysis,

[Patrick] quotes the Bible 54 times in his *Letter to Coroticus* and 135 times in the *Confession*, often unconsciously, quoting from 23 out of the 27 books of the New Testament, 12 books of the Old Testament, and 3 of the Apocrypha. He quoted most from the Psalms, Romans, Acts, Corinthians and Matthew, in that order.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes Patrick quotes Bible text after Bible text as if he would bury his readers in Scripture (e.g., *Conf* 38, 40; *Letter* 2, 18). At other times his use of the Bible is less overt and more subconscious. Christine Mohrmann puts it well:

In every sentence, in every thought which he formulates, there are traces of Biblical language. And not only his language but also his way of thinking is determined by the Bible. But there is also in his writings a constant flow of Biblical words and phrases, which seem to belong to his normal vocabulary.

She speaks of "a sort of omnipresence of Holy Scripture" in Patrick's writings, for Patrick was a man saturated with the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

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1. John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 53.

2. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Life and Writings of the Historical Saint Patrick* (New York: The Seabury Press), 1983, p. 39; italics mine.

3. James Bulloch, *The Life of the Celtic Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press), 1963, p. 126.

4. Edward T. Stimson, *Renewal in Christ As the Celtic Church Led "The Way"* (New York: Vantage Press), 1979, p. 159.

5. Christine Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick* (Dublin: Dublin University Press), 1961, p. 43.



His sober exegesis also deserves recognition. Hanson states that Patrick's "biblical interpretation is remarkably sound and sensible," and notes that after reading the "far-fetched allegorizing" of many of the church fathers, both of the East and of the West, "one turns with relief to the straightforward and simple use which Patrick makes of the Bible."<sup>6</sup>

Patrick was a man of one book, and the Bible that he read and from which he quoted was the Old Latin translation, not the later Vulgate of Jerome. We find no quotations or references to the church fathers in Patrick. This is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that he had received only a limited education as a boy. His studies were incomplete when he was kidnapped by marauding Irishmen, and he was never able to make up for this.

Thus when he writes, in the first line of his *Confession*, "I am Patrick, a sinner, most uncultivated and least of all the faithful and despised in the eyes of many" (*Conf* 1), he is not feigning humility, as some contemporary scholars would have it. What he said was true. His learning was meager, his Latin grammar was very poor, and he knew it. Often in his *Confession* he bemoans his "lack of education" (*Conf* 46; cf. 2, 9-12, 49, 62), and


the same note is found in his *Letter* (e.g., *Letter* 1, 20).

Though scholars struggle in places to decipher Patrick's Latin, Patrick's lack of learning enhances the value of his work in one important respect. His lack of knowledge of rhetoric renders him incapable of writing for effect. Thus we gain a clearer and surer light into the inner thoughts of this man of God.

We should note, however, that although Patrick does not cite the church fathers, he does quote the Apocrypha. Hanson identifies eleven quotations from Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Song of the Three Holy Children, and I Maccabees.<sup>7</sup> Nor does Patrick merely quote them as books "which the church may read and take instruction from," as our *Belgic Confession* puts it (chapter VI). In *Confession* 11, he quotes from Ecclesiasticus 7 with the words "in another place the Spirit testifies." In this, however, Patrick was no further astray than the church of his day. Only with the struggle regarding Scripture versus church tradition at the time of the Reformation did the church make a final, clear proclamation on the canon and sufficiency of Scripture.

Perhaps more objectionable are his seven or eight references to his dreams. Two of these dreams oc-

curred at significant junctures in Patrick's life: the message he received as a slave to depart from Ireland by ship (*Conf* 17) and his call as a missionary to Ireland by Victorinus (*Conf* 23), both mentioned earlier. The former, no doubt, merely presents to his mind the desire of his heart to escape from the land of his captivity. The latter is best explained, not as a supernatural revelation, but merely as the product of his burden to reach the Irish with the gospel of Christ. This was on his mind and he ended up dreaming about it one night. The other dreams are more trivial and can be understood along the same lines.

Most striking is the fact that Patrick introduces two of his dreams with the words "I saw in a vision of the night," evidently taken from Daniel 7:13 (*Conf* 23, 29). From this it would appear that Patrick, in his devout faith in the Scriptures, did not understand that revelatory dreams from God terminated with the apostolic witness in the first century. In this error, as in his view of the Apocrypha, Patrick was merely a man of his times. 

6. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

7. Hanson, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

## All Around Us

Rev. Kenneth Koole

### ■ Christians in India Alarmed by Passage of Religious Conversion Law

The war against Iraq has not been the only war being carried out this spring, nor is it the most important. The war against the Christian faith carried out by the Evil One has also been proceed-

ing according to plan. Case in point: a number of the most heavily populated states in India have passed laws that will sharply curtail preaching the gospel in India, the gospel that calls for conversion from idolatry to worshipping the one true God and Christ whom He has sent. The whole of India may well follow suit.

Correspondent T. C. Malhotra (of CNS News) filed the following report entitled "Indian Christians

Alarmed by Passage of Religious Conversion Law." As you read a description of the newly approved law, notice how devious the law is, how deceitfully the mind under Satan's influence presents things. The advocates assure all that these laws are in the interests of freedom and the protection of the individual's rights. In reality, as becomes obvious, they are aimed point blank at Christianity and the spread of the gospel. After all, the

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Christian faith is the only religion Satan fears, and its gospel is the only weapon that is able to expose him and cast him down.

From New Delhi came the following report late in March.

The parliament of India's Gujarat state on Wednesday (in mid-March — KK) passed a controversial bill purportedly to protect religious freedom but that requires anyone wanting to convert from one faith to another to get prior permission from a district magistrate.

The Freedom of Religion Bill aims to prevent religious conversion by force or bribery, and it provides for three-year prison terms and fines of \$1,000 for law-breakers.

Even for those who convert without threats or inducement, failure to get approval beforehand can result in imprisonment for a year and a small fine.

State officials insist that the law is not aimed at any particular religion, but leaders of the Christian minority are bitterly opposed to it, saying it will restrict Indians' freedom to follow their faith of choice.

The ruling party, in the state — which also heads the federal government — the Hindu nationalist BJP, introduced the law. It had promised during a recent state election to bring the law into effect....

Militant Hindu groups, some of them allied with the BJP, are strongly opposed to Christian missionary activities in India, accusing them of bribing poor Hindus to become Christians by offering them food, education or other incentives.

The general-secretary of the BJP in Gujarat, Jayanti Barot, predicted similar laws would be passed across India. Already, three other states — Orissa in the east, Madhya Pradesh in the center of the country and Tamil Nadu in the south — have passed similar bills.

"Everybody in India understands that one should live and die in the religion one is born into. Nobody should have the right to

disturb this tradition," he said.

That view, while held among adherents of some religions, runs contrary to the strong drive within Christianity to "preach the Gospel to all nations," in the words of Jesus Christ....

(Against this aggression you will find few nations raising any protests about violations of human freedom or condemning such invasion of personal liberties and rights. Where is the French prime minister when you need him, where he could actually do some good?)

The passage of the law comes hard on the heels of a related controversy in Gujarat. Christian leaders recently complained that state police were conducting an illegal survey of their community, asking questions such as when and how people converted to the faith. They accused the state authorities of collecting these statistics in order to justify passing the conversion law, a charge the government denied.

...Christians make up just 2.5 percent of India's more than one billion, mostly Hindu, population.

David Samuel, a Gujarati Christian now living in New Delhi, said the state government should instead focus on far more pressing issues there, such as unemployment, illiteracy and access to clean water.

"Religion is something very personal between an individual and his Maker," said Jacob Thomas, who works for a non-governmental organization in Gujarat. "In a democratic and secular country, if one finds peace in professing a particular faith, why should the government or others concerned feel threatened?"

John Matthew, a friend of Thomas, pointed out that the size of the Christian minority — 2.5 percent of the total population — had not changed since India became independent more than half a century ago. This belied the claims of "all these so-called forced conversions."

Matthew said he could not

understand "why the majority community is so scared of the minorities."

Late last year, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom urged the State Department to add India — along with five other countries — to the list of "countries of particular concern" because of religious freedom problems involving Hindus, Muslims and Christians....

However, when the State Department issued its current list of "countries of particular concern" in early March, India was not named. Countries that are on the list are Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Sudan.

A couple of comments are in order.

First, isn't it striking how the same old canard that Christianity has endured century after century is cast at the Christian faith once again, namely, Christianity is a threat to the State's peace and good order? How many times in the book of Acts was not Paul charged with being a disturber of the peace! He, of course, never lifted a hand against one soul. It was his enemies who resorted to physical violence and rioting in the streets. So it has been through the centuries. Makes no difference. The Christians with their missionary enterprises are the trouble makers. Why? Because the unbelievers hate them so much that somehow they feel forced to assault them with violence. So, it is all the Christians' fault. This has been Satan's reoccurring tactic and charge. And once again it surfaces in India.

Second, such law obviously gives the civil magistrate wide latitude to forbid any and all to convert from the Hindu religion, claiming that, whether the converts realize it or not, they have been brainwashed.

And third, obviously such a law is not only going to make the work of missions in India increasingly difficult, but believers themselves are going to come under re-

newed assault as being "disturbers of the peace."

The church and those who bear witness in India continue to need our prayers. But even more, it strikes me there comes a time when we as Protestant Reformed believers must do more than just pray. We must act. Is it not time that we become more active in writing our congressmen, confronting them, reminding them of such matters, and urging them to address this growing anti-Christian evil in India and in other foreign lands as well?

## ■ More Worrisome News in SE Asia

Adding to the above anti-Christian legislation (in India), and more worrisome to true health, namely, the spiritual, than any SARS scare, is legislation in Malaysia that has banned Bibles translated into the language of various ethnic groups, as well as forbidding the translated versions of various popular and instructive Christian books.

In an article entitled "Bible Ban Shock in SE Asian Democracy," Patrick Goodenough, of the Pacific Rim news service, reported the following (just prior to Easter).

As Christians around the world prepare to mark their most important holiday, hundreds of thousands of believers in south-east Asia face the prospect of celebrating Easter without free access to the Bible.

In a decision indigenous Christians in eastern Malaysia have found incomprehensible, their government in Kuala Lumpur, which considers itself one of Asia's more successful democracies, has banned the Bible in their native tongue.

The Iban, the largest of 27 indigenous ethnic groups in Sarawak province on Borneo Island, have since 1988 had access to the entire Bible in their own language, published by the Bible Society of Malaysia. But now the mainly Muslim government's Home Ministry has named the

Iban-language Bible as one of 35 publications it is banning because they are considered "detrimental to public peace."

Among the other books listed are Christian books in Bahasa Malaysian and Bahasa Indonesian, the national languages of those two countries. They include translations of books in English by well-known Western evangelical authors J. I. Packer and John Stott. Others are books on Islamic subjects.

The books are listed in a ministry statement that cited various publication laws and said the "printing, import, production, reproduction, sale, circulation, distribution and possession (sic! — KK) of books listed under the schedule are banned in the country." Anyone found guilty of breaching the ban faces up to three years in jail, fines of up to \$5,200, or both.

About 9 percent of Malaysia's 23 million people are Christians, and most live in the east of the country. Iban is spoken by more than 400,000 people, members of a Borneo tribe that was once feared for its head-hunting. Many have converted to Christianity....

Islam is Malaysia's official religion, although the federal constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to profess, practice and propagate their religion. That freedom is subject to another clause saying that laws "may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam." Critics say this provision provides the authorities with a loophole, for example by identifying publications they claim can cause confusion among Muslims....

A local paper quoted a senior official in the ministry's "publications control" division, Elias Mat Rabi, as saying the banned books breach guidelines for religious books. They used several terms that were also used in Islam, which could confuse people, he said. Some Muslim leaders thought this could perplex Muslims who picked up such books.

Among the words that cause concern is "Allah." It is the word Muslims use for the deity they worship. But the Arabic word predated Islam and is also used by Christian Arabs when referring to God, despite the considerable differences in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic conceptions of God.

...[the Rev. Wong Kim] Kong (of the Malaysia Christian fellowship) said it was wrong for a specific religion to claim monopoly over certain words. "Terminology or language doesn't belong to any particular religion, it is universal property.... In a multi-religious society such as ours, it is important for the government to go through a process of what we call 'natural justice' — it should consult or discuss with the organizations concerned before making a decision affecting them."...

A representative of the Bible Society of Malaysia, Dr. Victor Wong, said ... the publishers were flabbergasted at why the government had chosen to ban the Iban translation 15 years after the first edition came out. The Iban version was now its eighth edition, and runs of around 5,000 were printed every five years, he said....

...lawmaker Teresa Kok called the ban arbitrary and unjustifiable, and asked the government to "explain why it considers the books to be detrimental to public health."

In many ways the above article is self-explanatory. Law in yet another southeastern Asian country intends to make outlaws of those who subscribe to the Christian faith and to prevent the spread of the gospel. Ungodly men do not want the Word of God in the language of the people. They never have. Think back to Rome and the Reformation. The Word of God has too much power in exposing evil. What is worthy of note is how this anti-Christian spirit, which has always been in these nations, is gaining in boldness and becoming more and more aggressive. And in this



instance, a country that has a reputation for being democratic and committed to protecting liberties, Malaysia. The anti-Christian spirit infects more and more, and continues to spread.


What is also of interest is how men justify this action against Christianity, namely, Christianity is detrimental to the spiritual health of the nation; Christianity is an infectious disease; Christianity disturbs national unity and peace. "If only these Christians were out of our country, especially missionaries with their literature and promotion of things that stir up our

people, things would settle down. The international world would no longer have to worry about unrest and violence and agitation in our state."

One wonders. How easy it would be for some President, a great "Peace Maker," to call all missionaries home (on pains of revoking citizenship and repercussions for their denomination), and to forbid all others to go out, all in the name of peace. "Practice your religion here or not at all." Now a Western leader of that caliber and mentality even the nations of the Muslim east might approve for a time. It would be something like

Hitler's "Jewish solution," only now it is the "Christian solution." Those days seem close at hand.

But what a small price to pay for world peace! And surely, if even Christians are convinced that the Christian faith is not the one and only way of salvation and truth, as the apostate church is today, why should they care!


It is as if Satan has been loosed and the Great Deception is in progress. It is the Christians who are the carriers of the loathsome disease from the West. Quarantine them, and everyone will be better off for it. 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

*Rev. Jason Kortering*

## *Mission Preaching in the Established Church (3)*

# *The Character of the Message*

 bviously, when we speak of "mission preaching" in the established church, we are focusing on the fact that the true gospel includes a call to conversion. This call is the object of our attention in these articles; we simply designate this as "mission preaching." We are not saying that the gospel must be divided up into different kinds; we are simply establishing that the gospel preached in the local church includes such a call to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. When this is done regularly, as it ought, then any non-Christian, unconverted person whom God may place under such preaching and wills to save will hear what is necessary to respond properly and be saved. At the same time, if such a one refuses to

respond properly, the same preaching must declare to him that he stands outside the kingdom of God.

In our former articles, we developed the reason why this is necessary to do in the established congregation. We can summarize it this way. Even though God gathers His church in the line of continued generations, we cannot assume that all the members of the congregation who come under the preaching of the gospel are right with God. There are those who are not the true Israel of God and who reject the message of the covenant. The preaching has to say something to such people. At the same time, there may be members of the congregation who are not walking in true faith and repentance before God and are walking in unrepentant sins, who need to be converted. The preaching has to say something to such members. Also, every member has to contend with his own sinful flesh and must be

instructed and exhorted to turn from evil and embrace the Lord Jesus on a daily basis. The preaching has to address such needs in the congregation. In addition to all of this, it ought to be the expectancy of every pastor and congregation who take seriously their calling to reach out to others outside the congregation, that non-Christians from time to time are sitting in the pews as the congregation worships, and something has to be said to them.

The point that we have been making is that mission preaching meets the needs of all such people, whether members of the congregation or guests who join them for worship. If the pastor truly has this perspective in mind when he prepares and delivers his messages, God will work through such a call of the gospel to accomplish His purpose unto the gathering of the church.

Scripture makes abundantly

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clear that the message of the gospel is more than instruction. There is no doubt that a major part of preaching is conveying knowledge. We do this by expository preaching, by opening up the Word of God and explaining it to the congregation. We must carefully define the terms or words used in the passage. This must be done in light of its usage in the immediate context and as it is used in the entire Word of God. Truth is conveyed through gospel preaching, and it forms the foundation of every message. As the inspired writers of the Bible do so often, it must be taught in the context of error and controversy. This sharpens the thinking of God's people. The preacher is called by God to set forth such truth in as clear and faithful a manner as he is able to do.

There is more to preaching than teaching. The task of the preacher is to take the truth of the Word of God and call the congregation to do something with it. Even the didactic element of gospel preaching calls for the response of faith. Truth is to be believed. The preaching must lead the listener to the conviction of faith. It must be embraced personally by the hearer and appropriated by faith.

The preaching of the gospel requires more action than belief. It also requires obedience. James makes this point in chapter 1:22: "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." We must hear the word to be sure, but we must respond by believing and obeying it. The preacher must be sure that he emphasizes this in his preaching. Obviously, passages of the Bible differ as to how this is worked out, but the goal of all preaching is action, and the preacher must include that in his message and application of the text. If the burden of the text is a call to repent from sin and seek forgiveness at the foot of the cross, the preacher must preach it

in such a way that the congregation is confronted by a serious call of God to respond and obey. The same is true for specific instruction in working out our salvation as children of God. The saved ones are called to live a life of thankfulness and obedience. The preaching must come across as such a call to holy living.

To sum this up, when the preacher preaches the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), Christ uses him to meet the spiritual needs of *everyone* sitting in his audience. Every time I mount the pulpit and look over the congregation, the burden of the pulpit hits my soul. Look over there, that aged saint, who probably put forth more effort to come to church than others did, turns his partially deaf ear towards the pulpit to grasp something of forgiveness for past sins, strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow. Yes, there are the children who have come with parents to hear what God has to say to them. They are the babes who need to learn about the true God, Creator and Maker of heaven and earth. Their conscience has to be sensitized to know right from wrong, and they must be exhorted to love the right and hate the wrong. They must be led by the preaching of the gospel to the cross of Calvary and learn to kneel by faith and cry to God for mercy. Teenagers and youth must be taken by the shepherd's hand, guided through the pitfalls of temptation, exhorted, and warned concerning the consequences of sin and the great liberty that we have in Jesus Christ. The unmarried as well as the married need to know the sanctity of marriage and sexual purity in a permissive society, and the pastor must serve as Christ's mouthpiece to warn them of the consequences of sin and the urgency to be pure for God's sake. The parents need help in the rearing of their children, and the preaching of the gospel must give them that help. All need to be

stirred in their hearts that faith in God is of paramount importance to a meaningful life and that God is a holy God who does not tolerate or condone sin.

The point is that if there is a person sitting in church who is not right with God because he is walking in sin and making excuses for it, he will not feel comfortable while sitting under the preaching of the gospel. So also those who are not willing to embrace the true faith because they do not want to take the responsibility that it requires will know that they are not right with God. The preaching will expose to themselves their sinful response. Those who struggle with doubts will be guided towards assurance for their faith. Those who have committed sin and carry the burden of guilt will hear the word of forgiveness. Those who are ignorant will be instructed. Those who are hardened will be condemned. Whether such persons are within the congregation itself or come from without the congregation as guests, it makes no difference, they need to hear and will hear the Word that God wants them to hear.

I need not belabor the point that the Word of God sets forth preaching in such a manner. The very first narrative in the Bible, the fall of man into sin, is given as more than a historical fact, which it is to be sure. It is recorded to teach us the source of our misery and the need we have for Jesus Christ. The lives of the Old Testament saints are recorded for us not simply as moral examples or role models. They are that to be sure, but they are much more. They are the testimony of the wonder of salvation through Jesus Christ. Their lives are a testimony of human unworthiness overcome by the sovereignly free grace of God. That promise of God was not for all of them. God worked a mighty division among them, so much that Paul correctly said, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom.



9:6). The Word of God came to them and made such a division among them. It was true during Israel's history, from their deliverance from Egypt, the wilderness sojourn, the period of the judges, the history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, all the way to the preaching of the prophets. In summary form, it was, "Turn ye, turn ye, O house of Israel, why will ye die?" Those who turned received all the promises of the covenant, and those who continued in their evil ways heard in the preaching of the gospel the message of divine condemnation and judgment.

Jesus preached that way. He spoke the sweet consolation of the familiar words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He also gave the stirring rebuke, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." We read in Luke 13:2, 3 that when some told Jesus that Pilate had mingled the blood of some of the Galileans with their sacrifices, Jesus responded, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The apostles preached that way. From the Acts of the Apostles and continuing throughout all the letters, the emphasis is the same. To the repentant jailor in Philippi, who cries in his distress, "What must I do to be saved?" the gospel call went forth, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." To the ignorant, Priscilla and Aquila expounded more perfectly the way of God. To the hardened and those who rejected the gospel, Paul controverted with vigilance, exposed their errors, and held them accountable for their false teaching. "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain

words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6).

This explains why the preaching has a double edge to it, in order to accomplish this twofold purpose. This is described in II Corinthians 2:15ff.: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient unto these things?" God's very purpose in the preaching of the gospel is not to save all men, but to confront all men with the good news of salvation and to assure those who embrace it that they have the blessings of it, and those who despise it, that they stand under the divine curse.

Our Reformed confessions summarize for us the teaching of the Bible concerning what must be said in the preaching. The Heidelberg Catechism, A. 84, describes the preaching of the gospel as the primary key of the kingdom of heaven. How does the preaching function as a key? In a twofold way. It opens the door of heaven to all believers. "...when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits." The preacher in his preaching has to address clearly the believers with the message of the gospel. On the other hand, he must also address the unbelievers. By doing this, the preaching also shuts the door of heaven. "...on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them, both in this and in the life to come."

Herman Hoeksema explains these words in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, *The Triple Knowledge*.


To be sure, the particular gospel must be proclaimed to all that hear the gospel externally. This is true, partly because we do not know who the elect are, and therefore it is impossible to preach to them only. And secondly, it must be preached to all also, because it is the will of God that even the reprobate shall hear the gospel of salvation by way of faith and repentance, in order that sin may appear to be sin indeed, and that they may be without excuse. The gospel does not mention the elect and reprobate by their natural names. Therefore, its preaching must needs be general. Nevertheless, in this general preaching of the gospel the heirs of the promise must be called by their spiritual name, in order that they may know that the sure mercies of David are for them. Under and through the preaching of the gospel God gives them a new name, a spiritual name, by which they may know that He intends the promise for them. Objectively, they are the elect. But according to their spiritual name, wrought by the Holy Spirit of promise in their hearts, they are believers. And believers are those that sincerely repent of their sins. They are the weary and heavy laden, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the contrite and brokenhearted, they that have learned to place all their hope and expectation only in the blood of Jesus Christ their Lord, who loved them and died for them and was raised for their justification. They are those that principally are crucified unto the world and the world to them. They have an earnest desire to walk in all good works, and they manifest this in their lives. They fulfill their part of the covenant of God, and walk in new obedience, cleaving to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, trusting in Him, and loving Him with all their hearts, with all their souls, with all their mind,

and with all their strength; forsaking the world, crucifying their old nature, and walking in a new and holy life. To those the kingdom of heaven is opened by the preaching of the gospel. To them the promise of God is Yea and Amen. They shall never be ashamed. They shall be kept in the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. But on the other hand, that same preaching of the gospel shuts the kingdom of heaven to all unbelievers. They too have a name of their own. They are not filled with sorrow after God, and never repent of their sin. They love the darkness rather than the light, and refuse to be converted to God. To those the preaching of the gospel proclaims that they stand exposed

to the wrath of God and to eternal condemnation. They are outside the kingdom of God.

Such opening and closing of the door of heaven by the key of preaching takes place wherever the gospel is properly preached. It is not the preacher who does this, but rather Christ through the human agency of the preacher. Christ Himself does not make some sort of artificial distinction between the mission field and the established church. All true preaching will include both aspects of the key power. This is necessary in the mission setting, and it is necessary in the established church. If we

err on the part of calling all men to repentance and faith, we fall short of functioning as God's shepherds to draw men into the kingdom. If we wink at sin and do not warn the sinner of the error of his way, we give him false assurance and compromise the holiness of God.

Awareness of this by the preacher is crucial. Not only will he preach with the authority of Christ, but he will preach with passion, as he seeks to be faithful to his Master. The Word will live in his soul and come across with urgency to the hearer. In our next article, we will explore what the preacher can do to make this true for him. 

*That They May Teach Them to Their Children*

Miss Agatha Lubbers

## *The Christian Story and the Christian School (4) A Defense of the Narrative Approach in Reformed Christian Education*

**T**his article continues a series of articles that have identified the narrative approach as one in which the Christian school through its teachers must tell a specific and distinctive story. The story, rooted in the correct source, must reflect the truth of the inspired Scriptures as summarized in the creeds of the Christian church. Dr. Bolt defends the narrative approach in *The Christian Story and the Christian School* and argues that "a concept of narrative could help resolve some of the

problems involved with maintaining distinctively Christian education" (Bolt, p. 158).

The articles have reviewed the analysis and description by Dr. Bolt of the educational enterprise during the late twentieth century. These articles demonstrated that the real problem of public education is the lack of a consistent and coherent vision to guide the vast and unwieldy enterprise — an enterprise that is subjected to all the social and political pressures of the present time. Dr. Bolt concludes that, because of the many diverse opinions of those involved in the movement, it is impossible for the school to possess and develop a consistent and coherent vision. He analyzes the problem as follows:

"The conflicting expectations for public education seemed to create an unsolvable problem." In addition Bolt writes that the "conflicts in educational philosophy are part of a broader cultural warfare, and as the Christian knows all too well, this conflict is serious because it is spiritual in nature" (Bolt, p. 47).

Christian parents and teachers ought to be more convinced than ever that public schools do not and cannot provide the Christian nurture that Christian students need. Christian schools, working to develop a coherent and consistent vision based on the truth of the Word of God, are an absolute necessity if students are to be taught a Reformed worldview and be given a truly Reformed perspective. Even

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if the public schools were able to resolve their differences and develop a consistent vision, we know that the consistent vision developed by public schools would be contrary to the Word of God and would be Satan's tool of subversion. Such training and education is contrary to the promise made by Reformed Christians, that to the best of their ability they would provide distinctive Christian education for their children.

Dr. Bolt examines several aspects of the culture in which the schools exist to prove his contention that the narrative approach is one that will be most helpful in providing sound Christian education. In the chapter entitled "Critical Questions About Our Culture" (*The Christian Story, et. al.*), he describes and analyzes the influence and development of modernism, postmodernism, individualism, relativism, pluralism, secularism, and paganism. It is possible to review only briefly the analysis by Bolt of several of these ideas and attempt to see how they impinge upon and affect the task of the educator. In the diverse dimensions of the present cultural crisis, he states that an underlying common thread exists. He argues in his discussion of the critical questions about our culture that the "loss of narrative unity — loss of a common story and unified cultural memory — is the one consistent feature giving rise to individualism and secularism, while pluralism and paganism represent the rise of alternative narratives" (Bolt, p. 49).

### Modernism and Postmodernism

The term "modernism" is used often, both in a popular and philosophic sense. In the popular sense, modernism refers to chronology and speaks of things being up to date or speaks of progress. Used in the philosophic sense, modernists refer to a time that in their opinion is superior to previous ages of myth, superstition, and re-

ligion as guides to human understanding and conduct.

René Descartes, a seventeenth century philosopher, is considered by many to be the father of modern thought. Descartes sought mathematical-like certainty in thought and began by systematically doubting everything until he arrived at a foundation of truth that, he believed, could not be doubted. Descartes said that systematic doubt removed everything except the one certain fact of his personal existence. *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I exist) was the basic tenet of the philosophy of Descartes. Therefore he concluded that certainty is to be found in the rational self.

The thinking of modernism is that the beliefs of the early Christian church, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation period must be changed. Beliefs concerning the sinfulness of humanity and the need for revelation and grace must be replaced by a belief that humanity is not sinful, that divine revelation is not necessary, and that humans can save themselves. Modernism teaches the erroneous and detestable idea that one can know the truth about oneself and the meaning of the world apart from God's revealed Word in the Scriptures. Modernism teaches that man's reason is the source of truth. Martin Luther in his commentary on Galatians 3:7 said that when man "will measure God without the word and believe Him according to the wisdom of reason, he hath no right opinion...."

The belief that an autonomous and rational person is the final judge of all truth caused, among other things, the development of the new political and social experiment called liberal democracy or rule by the people. Dr. Bolt writes that

Prior to the modern era rulers, governors, and magistrates were considered in some sense servants of God, accountable to divine

law.... One feared God's servant, the king, because one ultimately feared God. Religious convictions were publicly expressed and deemed essential for public wellbeing. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, attempted to establish political order on the basis of reason, universally available to all people, whatever the religious conviction (Bolt, p. 53).

One of the results of the establishment of liberal democracy has been the deliberate effort to secularize and remove the Christian story, tradition, and moral order revealed in Scripture from public life. Religion has become something strictly private. Our public world is the universal one of facts, science, technology, process, and efficiency. Our private world is the specific and individual one of values, opinions, beliefs, and religious conviction. Bolt cautions Christian educators to beware the error of technique and process as the sole and prime concern of education. Christian education must in its concern with the facts and the process not neglect its most important task, the telling of the Christian story.

Dr. Bolt also expresses concern that Christians not accept the split between private and public life and the withdrawal of the Christian faith to the inner private chamber (Bolt, pp. 53, 54). If Christian schools are to be truly Christian, the Christian faith cannot be withdrawn to the private chamber. Supporters of Christian education must recognize and must insist that the Christian faith be evident in the instruction, because the doctrines of the Christian faith are absolutely essential for all distinctive Christian education.

### Pluralism/Relativism

Postmodernism rejects the ideology of modernism that universal reason is the source of all truth. Postmodernism says that prejudice and bias are unavoidable, and therefore universal reason divorced from all religious, social, moral,

political commitments is impossible. The postmodernist contends that all human thought is embedded in a particular narrative, and therefore bias and prejudice are unavoidable. He claims there is no point of view outside all tradition from which one can offer a universal and unbiased judgment.

Postmodernism affects political life because it rejects the universal rights of individual men, a theory that was explicit in the ideology of modernism. The pluralism of groups or classes is the new point of orientation. According to postmodernist thinkers, rights belong not to individuals but to diverse groups with particular needs and interests. According to postmodernism the language of rights must be specific — rights of women, rights of blacks, rights of homosexuals, rights of native people.

Although some might view the postmodern rejection of universal rationality in favor of prejudice and presupposition as a welcome development, Bolt asserts that postmodernism is not acceptable for Christian educators because, like modernism, it denies the existence of any certain or universal truths. Bolt states that “for the Christian who believes that the gospel and God’s moral law are universally true, this wholesale relativism presents a formidable challenge” (Bolt, p. 59).

### Individualism

Individualism, according to Bolt, is the quintessential fruit of modernity. In his discussion of individualism, as the essential characteristic of modern societies, he indicates that modern individualism creates profound moral problems for society because all moral decisions are subjective, and all moral decisions are based on individual choice and preference. Bolt writes as follows: “From a moral standpoint, the issue is clear.... If it is all a matter of individual choice and preference, if it is sim-

ply my subjective value versus your subjective value, how can we decide on any communal good?” (Bolt, p. 66).

Dr. Bolt advocates “communities of memory” as the solution and antidote for the profound moral problems resulting from modern individualism. He defines a community of memory as one that does not forget its past. The school as a community of memory would be involved in retelling its story, and in so doing it will present examples of men and women who have exemplified the meaning of the community. Bolt argues in chapter six of *The Christian School, et. al.* that “a community of memory is precisely what the Christian school is called to be” (Bolt, p. 69).

### Secularism and Paganism

Dr. Bolt notes that society has moved more and more in a secularist direction. Religion and the rules of religion, say the secularists, must be separated from the main business of society. Religion is private and is not a legitimate part of the public scene. But Dr. Bolt observes that secularism does not work. By denying the legitimacy of religion and the rules of true religion in society, man’s attempts to make society and life in the world better have not resulted in a new and better world, but have resulted in the rise of nihilism and moral anarchy.

Dr. Bolt also notes that paganism has been one of the consequences of secularism, pluralism, and relativism. Paganism is idolatry because it deliberately and intentionally substitutes false deities for the living God. Paganism is destructive because it removes all restraints on the sinful desires of human beings. The Christian, who by nature is not one wit different from the pagan, must beware this deliberate and intentional destruction of the moral rule in society. Paganism is a power that cannot be changed, but the Christian must at all costs avoid it. It has existed

in every age, and members of the church have been commanded to beware the contamination and destruction caused by paganism.

### Concluding Comments

Dr. Bolt’s examination of these cultural developments leads him to conclude that the Christian religion is no longer the privileged or majority faith of the West but is instead a public minority religion. That this is true can be observed in culture and society, and one can observe the results of this development in the public schools. The public schools no longer evidence the influence of the Christian religion. They have become secular and pagan. Many Christian schools have been affected by the influences of secularism and paganism. The battle against these malicious influences presents a challenge to those who are busy maintaining distinctively Christian schools.

The only acceptable schools for the covenant children of God are Christian schools that are distinctive because of their insistence on what is Reformed and scriptural. A significant function of the schools is to conserve the wisdom of the Christian tradition — the Christian story — as that wisdom has been garnered from the Holy Scriptures. The existence of distinctively Christian schools is a witness to the faith of those who establish and use these schools. Distinctive Christian schools are as important today as they have ever been, and the challenge of maintaining such schools is as demanding as it has ever been.

It is appropriate to speak of the Christian school as a “community of memory” because all communities have memories, sometimes called traditions. We should observe that the Bible often refers to memories when it uses the term “remember.” Psalm 105:5 urges one to remember God’s marvelous works, His wonders, and the judgment of His mouth. Ecclesiastes 12:1 declares: “Remember thy Cre-




ator in the days of thy youth.”

The Christian school is the place where the supporting community seeks to pass on to the next generation its God-given heritage, i.e., the Christian story. In this sense the school demonstrates that it is a community of memory that employs the narrative approach to prepare students for citizenship in a specific community. The school in this community encourages virtuous living in agreement with the history, the values, and the traditions gleaned from the Word of

God. The Christian community remembers the sacred history recorded in the Scriptures, the teachings and doctrines of Holy Scripture, and the history of the Christian church. The community of memory will be involved in narrating the story of the past — its successes and failures. Good narrative will indicate that all happens according to the plan of God and in the way of sin and grace. Essential to the telling of the correct story and telling it correctly is the important reality that this earth is

not the Christian’s home.

The narrative approach, although essential and necessary, will not save the children and young people. Education does not save, only God through Christ saves. Saved sinful children and young people must be instructed so that they will learn to live in the world and participate in every legitimate aspect of the culture but as those who are passing through this life as pilgrims and strangers that seek a better country.

(... to be continued.) 

*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. Steven Key*

## Created Unto Good Works

**W**e have seen that our salvation, which focuses on our justification with God, is entirely of grace, the gift of God. All boasting is excluded. We cannot even boast of our faith, as if faith is *our* work. It isn’t. Faith is not our act as a determined cause of our justification, but is the instrument and channel by which God unites us with Christ. Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end. He it is who quickens the dead. He alone is the one who calls the things that are not as if they were. He alone has established us in Christ. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

### **Divinely Ordained**

But we have also seen that this work of God’s grace surely bears evidence in the lives of His people. As earnestly as the apostle Paul proclaims the gospel of sovereign grace, so earnestly he maintains

that the work of sovereign grace bears fruit in the lives of God’s people. It bears fruits in our sanctification.

Has God chosen His people in Christ before the foundation of the world? Indeed He has — “that we should be holy” (Eph. 1:4). Did Christ give Himself for us? He certainly did — “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

Salvation by grace is confirmed and evidenced by holy conduct. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Such is the holy ordinance of God Himself, His purpose and design. It is God’s purpose that the life of *Christ* be seen in His workmanship. That is the necessity of good works. It is a *divine* necessity.

We are not taken into Christ of works, or *because of* works, or *by* works. Salvation is first. Sanctification and works follow.

### **Necessary for the Christian**

The Christian does good works. Of necessity the Christian does good works. God has given us to enter into His service. He made us rational, living creatures, who consciously perform our deeds, and who as His children perform works to His glory. The necessity of good works is not that I might attain blessedness for myself. The motive is not that I might reach heaven. Good works are necessary — in the words of Lord’s Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism — “Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image.”

Never can good works be separated from redemption.

In this connection it is important for us to remember that we are not the ones who set the standard for defining “good.” God does. And in the light of Romans 14:23, I Corinthians 10:31, Deuteronomy 12:32, and other texts, we learn that good works are “only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to

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the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations or the institutions of men" (Heid. Cat., Q & A 91).

It is a fundamental flaw, indeed, a denial of the biblical doctrine of total depravity, to teach that the unregenerated man is able to do good works.

Good works are the fruits of Christ's life as those fruits come to expression in His people, expressive of their faith and serving to glorify their Redeemer. They are expressions of the *thankfulness of the redeemed*. We who are the people of God do good works exactly because we are saved by grace. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Such is the Christian life. That I do a single good work is only because God has chosen me as a little piece of mirror to reflect His own glory, and because Christ now lives in me by His Holy Spirit, who shines His light in and through me.

### A Tremendous Blessing

What a glorious place God has given us! The Bible speaks of us in terms of a "new creation." The child of God is a new creature in Christ. That's an astounding figure!

Think for a moment about God's creation. All the works of God's hands function according to the purpose He has ordained for them. The sun sheds its light and fills the universe with its energy and glory. The clouds are gathered by God and emptied upon the earth according to His purpose. The birds sing their songs; the earth yields its increase. All things move and function in their place by God's sovereign governing hand and according to His purpose with them. But man *works*.

God has given us to *enter into* His service. He made us rational, moral, living creatures, capable of reflecting the very virtues of Him our Creator. Consciously, with mind and heart and will, we perform our deeds. Willingly we do

the good, working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12,13). God does not just drag ungodly but justified sinners to heaven. He draws them, so that they enter into the joy of salvation. We behold the works of God in the light of our thinking minds, interpreting them according to what God tells us about them in His Word, and standing in awe before Him. We sing and pray, rejoice and weep, love and hate — as rational, moral creatures. We do so to the glory of God! For we are His workmanship.

That is not to say that when we have been created unto good works, we do those works perfectly. We are not yet perfected. Those good works still must come to expression through sinful flesh.

But as those who are justified in Christ, we are most certainly created unto good works. That is the divine purpose in our salvation.

Not only are we ordained unto good works, but our very good works are before prepared for us. Every specific work that we do to God's glory was ordained by Him from eternity for that purpose. That means that we fit the good works that God has ordained for us. He so creates us, forms us after the image of His Son, that we are molded upon those works, so that they become a part of us.

That is true of the whole body of Christ, the church. God has created His church and formed it and preserves it, also as He leads it in the way of those good works that He has ordained for His own glory.

That is the gospel of the Christian life.

And isn't this exactly how it must be? Doesn't the musician, in composing an oratorio, design in the most minute detail each part for the choir that is to sing it? And if the church is to reflect the glory of her Redeemer and Head, must He then not ordain just how the whole and each member thereof is

to serve that purpose? Of course. We are created unto good works. Those works are not of our conception, nor of our creation, but of God's own ordination and purpose.

We don't bring them to Him, except He first brings them to us. And when we perform them, He does not become obliged to us. Rather, we owe to Him our everlasting gratitude for the *privilege* that we may perform them! That is our blessed life as the children of God.

That is also why the man who has no desire to be holy is a man who has no right to think that he is a Christian. Those who think that they can separate forgiveness from a life of holiness, claiming the first while having no interest in the latter, have no spiritual understanding of what it is to be a Christian.

There is no such thing as justification without sanctification. There is no such thing as faith without works. Faith without works is *dead, is no faith*, writes James. For faith, God's gift, certainly bears fruits, unto His glory.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works. So He has made us. And so we walk — in all of our life.

That in turn leads to this, that we become more and more aware of the new creation God has made of us in Christ Jesus. And in that consciousness, we have a new outlook. That new outlook isn't always so pleasant for our flesh. It runs contrary to our old man, because we see that certain things must change in our lives.

We can no longer remain comfortable with old habits, and perhaps with old companions. We understand what the psalmist meant in Psalm 119:63, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." And we desire in all things to express our gratitude to God for His work in us.

In short, we desire to be more and more like Jesus, holy and pure,



separate from the world and from sin, that we might serve the God who so saved us by His grace.

When you so understand your place as a Christian, and see yourself as *God's handiwork*, then you realize that your whole life belongs to this work of God.


The circle of good works is as broad as life itself. For the Christian life is your life not only in the church, but also as a husband or wife, as a father or mother, as a child or young person. The Christian life is your life as a farmer, as

a businessman, as a tradesman or a teacher. The Christian life is your life in your relation to government, and to your unbelieving neighbors.

All of our life is an extension of this handiwork of God. And as we live, guided by the Word of our God, we bear fruits of the life of Christ in us, showing forth the handiwork of God to His glory. All the praises we sing and prayers we express from the heart, all the righteous prayers that we offer in harmony with God's will, all the glories of our Redeemer that we con-

fess and express in our lives, all the suffering that we endure with patience, all our tribulations, every expression of faith in and love toward God are all ordained by God for you and for me.

What a glorious life He has given us, the life of *Christ*!

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Not only now, but forever. And heaven will show it more clearly. 

## A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

# Remnant

**F**or many of us, our first exposure to the word remnant was in connection with the sewing our mothers and sisters did at home. The pieces of fabric that were left over after the project was finished were called remnants. Today also we see in the papers that fabric stores have remnant sales. The several Hebrew and Greek words translated remnant in our Bibles have the same meaning: a little piece, a small amount left over, the remainder, the residue. This word is used in the Bible in respect to things such as curtains of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:12), meat offerings (Lev. 2:3), and oil (Lev. 4:18); in respect to the wicked, such as the remnant of giants (Deut. 3:11), of Amorites (II Sam. 21), of sodomites (I Kings 22:46), and of the house of Jeroboam (I Kings 14:10). However, the main use of this word in the Scriptures is in connection with the people of God. At every moment of history there is a remnant that is saved.

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It is very striking that, on the one hand, the true seed of Abraham is described as more numerous than the stars of the heavens and the sand which is upon the seashore (Gen. 22:17); yet the church is also called a little flock (Luke 12:32), a cottage in a vineyard and a lodge in a garden of cucumbers (Is. 1:8); there are many called, but few chosen (Matt. 20:16); there be few that find the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). We are to conclude, therefore, that compared to those who go lost, the church of Christ is a small number, a minority of the human race. But the number of the host of the redeemed is nevertheless a number that no man can number!

The truth that there is always a remnant of God's people on the earth stands very closely related to the truth of the preservation of the saints. The church does not endure because of her strength or goodness, but only because of the preserving mercy of God. At the time of Ahab and Elijah, the prophet of God was convinced that he alone served God, but God instructed him that He reserved unto Him-


self seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Even so, writes Paul, at the present time, and at each and every time, there is a remnant (Rom. 11:5). So wicked had Judah become during the time of her last kings that the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Is. 1:9). When the nation of Judah was led into captivity, the prophet spoke of her return *before* she was taken to the strange land, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God" (Is. 10:20, 21). When Jerusalem was besieged by Sennacherib the king of Assyria, Hezekiah prayed for the remnant that was left (Is. 37:4), and God answered the king through His prophet, "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall



again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion; the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this? (Is. 37:31, 32). The fruit that the remnant brings forth is visible, for it is the keeping of God's commandments, for which she has the comforting testimony of Jesus Christ, and on account of which the devil-dragon goes to make war with the remnant of the church's seed (Rev. 12:17).

That there is always a remnant, that this remnant is firmly rooted

in Jesus Christ and is busy bringing forth fruit upward to God is due to eternal election. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). Note that election is of *grace*. That grace stands out so vividly in all these passages in which the remnant is mentioned. There was no good thing in Israel or in Judah, there is no good thing in the church today, that conditioned election or that deserved preservation. But there is a remnant because of God's grace in Jesus Christ!

We conclude with the observation that the all-wise God can be glorified the higher and the more through the salvation of a very small remnant of the human race, a remnant of Israel even, than by the salvation of a great majority of mankind or the totality of mankind. That the church is small, a minority, a remnant, is not due to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but derives from the eternal decree of predestination, the fountain source of all our salvation. 

## Review Article

Rev. Arie denHartog

# Christ's Spiritual Kingdom

*Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism*, by David J. Engelsma. Published by The Reformed Witness, Redlands, CA. 2001. 158 pp. \$9.00 (paperback). [Reviewed by Rev. Arie denHartog.]

As the subtitle of this book indicates, this book is a defense of Reformed amillennialism. The book is strongly polemical in nature. The occasion for Engelsma's writing of this book was his strong conviction of the need for exposing the errors of and making a judgment of the new postmillennialism that has arisen in the last few decades in many Reformed churches. This teaching has come through a movement called reconstructionism, or theonomy. Very briefly, the movement teaches that the church of Jesus Christ should work towards a golden age on

earth, which will come before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This age will come through mass conversions all over the world, which will take place before the end of time. Through the labors of the church, Christianity will gain great power and influence in the world in politics, culture, and art, in all spheres of this world, and exercise dominion over this present world. The nations of the world before the end of time and the return of Christ will be restructured on the basis of the law of the Lord, including much of the law of the Old Testament. There will be an age of peace and great glory for the church on earth before the Lord returns. Postmillennialism is obviously the basic teaching of this movement.

Engelsma's book is a compilation and revision of a series of articles that appeared first of all in the *Standard Bearer* critiquing the movement. When these articles appeared, some of the leading proponents of reconstructionist and

theonomist teaching reacted strongly. They cried "foul," especially because of the strong language Engelsma used. They made accusations that Engelsma had not done sufficient careful exegesis of Scripture. They claimed to have done volumes of exegesis of relevant passages of Scripture, which, they say, is the basis of their teaching. The old thinking of the Reformed church, which she has maintained for centuries, must change. She must be stirred up to action according to the ideals of reconstructionism.

Professor Engelsma was undaunted in his severe criticism of the reconstructionists. The reason for the strong judgments of the book arose from several factors, as Engelsma himself points out in the book. For the last several decades now the advocates of the reconstructionist movement have made repeated, vicious attacks on historic Reformed amillennialism. Just one quote that Engelsma makes from Rousas J. Rushdoony,

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probably the "greatest" leader of reconstructionism, clearly indicates how vicious the attacks on Reformed amillennialism have been.

Amillennialism...(is) in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender(s) it to the devil. By its very premise ... the world will only get worse ... it cuts the nerve of Christian action.... If we hold that the world can only get worse, what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of this world? The result is an inevitable one: ... amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God ... are also the most impotent segment of American society, with the least impact on American life. To turn the world-conquering word of the sovereign, omnipotent, and triune God into a symbol of impotence is not a mark of faith. It is blasphemy ("Post-millennialism versus Impotent Religion," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, pp. 126, 127).

In his book, Engelsma turns the tables on such vicious condemnations of historic Reformed amillennialism. By historic Reformed amillennialism is meant amillennialism taught by the great reformers, by Reformed confessions, and in the Reformed churches for centuries. The need for defending the truth in this area of Christian doctrine is urgent. The errors of reconstructionism are widespread, even among the more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches of our day. Serving as a missionary in the Far East, I have been reminded of this. A few months ago I was invited to a conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where the errors of reconstructionism were dealt with and thankfully also refuted. In a few weeks I plan, the Lord willing, to be the speaker at a conference in Myanmar, where I have been asked to speak on the subject of amillennialism, in part also because of the inroads of the false teaching of the

reconstructionist movement even in this isolated country.

Engelsma clearly shows that the errors of reconstructionism are serious and fundamental. He makes bold to call the errors of reconstructionism heresies. They strike at the whole doctrine of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the manner in which the church presently in the world must be looking for and prepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and live in the blessed hope of His final and glorious heavenly kingdom. It is the contention of the author of this book that the Reformed churches should not allow the positions of premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism peacefully to co-exist together in the churches.

When theological controversy is properly engaged in by the church, she, by the grace and Spirit of God, develops in her knowledge of the truth of the Word of God and her understanding of the great doctrines of salvation. We are thankful that this book of Professor Engelsma is a great aid to the members of the truly Reformed church for doing this, especially in the area of biblical eschatology.

In his book, Engelsma sets forth the fundamental teachings of biblical amillennialism. Amillennialism teaches, above all, that Christ is now already the exalted and triumphant Lord sitting on His throne in the heavens at the right hand of God and ruling over all nations and over the course of history victoriously and triumphantly for the ultimate purpose of realizing His final and glorious kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. Ever since His exaltation, Christ has been triumphant and victorious in the true sense of the word. He will finally appear as the victorious Lord of lords and King of kings at the end of the ages, when He establishes His glorious kingdom in the new heavens and earth.

The coming kingdom of Christ will not be earthly and carnal. Engelsma shows that one of the most serious errors of theonomy, as is the case with all forms of postmillennialism and premillennialism, is the carnal and earthly conception of the kingdom of Christ they espouse. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly teaches that His kingdom will not be of this earth, it will not be carnal, it will be spiritual and heavenly. This will be its true glory and blessedness. Engelsma shows that the kingdom of Christ as taught in the Scriptures will be infinitely superior in glory and blessedness to the false conceptions of the kingdom promoted by reconstructionism.

Reconstructionism constantly boasts of having a triumphal view of the kingdom. With the strongest possible language the leaders of this movement try to claim that amillennialism is defeatist and pessimistic. Engelsma, in his book, does an excellent job of showing that the amillennialist position in fact promises the victorious, certain, and glorious triumph of the kingdom of Christ presented in the gospel.

The kingdom of Christ was realized through the cross and resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of Christ is presently evident and realized in the salvation and preservation of the church of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of Christ is realized in its glorious universal extent through the mighty and glorious power of the preaching of the gospel among all the nations of the world. In this true triumph the church of Jesus Christ must glory, now already while she is yet on earth.

Rather than having the church focus on the glorious heavenly kingdom of Christ, postmillennialism wants that church to look for an illusory earthly and carnal kingdom of Christ that will be realized through the earthly and temporal power and influence of the

church in this present age. The church will realize this kingdom through active involvement in world politics and the various spheres of earthly society and culture to bring about a golden age here on earth before the final return of Christ. By the force of large numbers that will be converted according to the expectations of the theonomists in the last days, and by reconstruction of earthly society according to the principles of the word of Christ, much of this world will be Christianized. The church will already on this earth gain a position of great power and glory and influence.

Engelsma clearly shows that the gospel does not prophesy such an earthly golden age. Rather, Scripture clearly teaches that in this present age the church will suffer persecution by the ungodly world powers. She will be hated and despised by the world even as her Lord was. Especially at the end of time the wickedness of the world will increase more and more. Apostasy will abound in the church. The faithful who remain steadfast to the end will be few in number. This we believe is the clear teaching of the Scriptures. Yet, in spite of all that appears to men, the kingdom of Christ will triumph and will be glorious in the end — far more glorious and triumphant than the temporary earthly kingdom envisioned by the reconstructionists. The church will triumph through the work of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ. Her final glory will be in her heavenly citizenship in the new heavens and earth. She is in fact, by all of Scripture, exhorted not to look for earthly glory and power but always to set her heart on the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness.

In his short book, Engelsma offers extensive exegesis of many important relevant and controversial passages of Scripture, such as Matthew 24 and a number of others. The extensive exegesis of Matthew 24 is excellent and clearly proves

the opponents of Reformed amillennialism wrong. In a careful exposition of Isaiah 65:17, Engelsma shows the biblical way of how Old Testament prophecy must be interpreted in the light of its fulfillment in Christ. Crucial to the right understanding of the question of the millennium is the method of interpretation, especially of Old Testament prophecy. It is wrong and even impossible to interpret Old Testament prophecy literally. This method of interpretation leads to all sorts of absurdities and inconsistencies and to carnal ideas of the kingdom of Christ similar to those held by apostate Judaism. Most importantly, however, Scripture itself shows us how Old Testament prophecy must be interpreted in the light of its New Testament fulfillment in Christ.

In the last three chapters of the book, Engelsma gives an excellent and necessary criticism of the seriousness of reconstructionism's preterist interpretations of many of the prophecies of the New Testament. To support their visions of a golden age of an earthly kingdom, the teachers of reconstructionism must necessarily have preteristic interpretations of many New Testament passages. The preterist method of interpretation of New Testament prophecies of the last days maintains that many of the prophecies of Christ's return and the coming of His final and glorious kingdom must be understood as having been exhaustively fulfilled in the past, especially at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Professor Engelsma has very strong criticism of the preterism of leading teachers of reconstructionism.

In response to this strong criticism, some of the leading teachers of the movement vehemently insist that they are not consistent preterists. They claim that they do not follow through on the extreme preteristic interpretation of some. Extreme preterists so interpret New Testament eschatology that they


end up with the position that there is nothing at all left in the New Testament of the blessed prophecies of the final hope of the coming of Christ and of His glorious final kingdom. Engelsma admits that theonomists do not teach complete, radical preterism. The preterism of leading theonomists is nevertheless very serious. The seriousness of their preterism becomes evident when one considers how many of the major passages of eschatology are excluded by their wrong, preteristic interpretations, and how very little of the biblical teaching of blessed hope for the return of the Lord and of His glorious heavenly kingdom is finally left for the church as a result of this destructive way of interpreting Scripture.

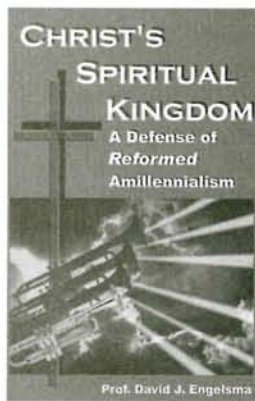
By no means are the issues of this book merely a matter of abstract theoretical interest. Professor Engelsma points out repeatedly in his book that the doctrines at stake in this controversy have very serious practical consequences for the church. The eschatology of Scripture that the church must faithfully preach in the world must prepare her for living in the end times. The church must live antithetically in the midst of an increasingly wicked and ungodly world. She must not imagine that the world is in fact getting better and better, so that she may make common cause with the world to bring about the kingdom of Christ on earth. The true church of Jesus Christ must not be wrongly discouraged when she sees the number of the faithful in the last days becoming fewer and fewer because of the apostasy in the church. The saints of God must be prepared to suffer tribulation in the world, as Jesus and His apostles constantly exhorted us to be prepared for.

The church in the last days will be able by the grace of God to endure even the great tribulation when she has a clear understanding of the blessed hope of the coming of her Lord and Savior, and the vision of the glorious, everlasting,



heavenly kingdom, which cannot be in this world, which will finally be destroyed by the exalted Christ, but which will be, in the world to come, realized by His sovereign Almighty power.

We urge all to read this book, even read it over several times, to help in understanding some of the false teaching of our day and to equip ourselves for living with spiritual understanding and faith in the blessed and sure hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of the ages. 



cover design  
by Jonathan denHartog

The 22 chapters of *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom* appeared originally as a series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer*. The Evangelism Committee of Redlands PRC has undertaken the publication of these articles in book form, out of the conviction that it will be useful in the defense and promotion of the Reformed faith, fundamental to which is a sound doctrine of the end-times.

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## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

**M**embers of our churches around the Chicago, IL area were invited to Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL on May 2 and 3 for their annual spring evangelism lectures. This year Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' home missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, was the featured speaker. He addressed those gathered at Bethel on "Preaching and Witnessing as conducted in our Pittsburgh Mission." Rev. Mahtani intended to use this occasion to draw out biblical principles related to the church's calling to leave a witness of the truth.

On Monday, April 28, the Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC hosted a spring lecture. Rev. C. Haak was this year's featured speaker, and he spoke on, "The Place of the Law in the Life of the Believer."

May 2 the Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC sponsored a spring seminar. Rev. W. Bruinsma, their pastor, spoke on the subject, "The Two Sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael."

A recent bulletin from First PRC in Holland, MI contained the follow-

ing excerpt from a PCA minister in Florida: "I am writing to request some Spanish literature. I am taking a small group of young people to Mexico this summer for a short-term missions project, and would like to spread far and wide the booklets you make available in Spanish."

### Mission Activities

**A** special visit was arranged for the Allentown, PA area April 25-27 by Rev. J. Mahtani and Rev. D. Overway. In recent months there has been increased interest in the area and it was the purpose of this weekend-visit to evaluate that interest further. Because Rev. Overway and Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ are only a couple hours away from Allentown, it was thought wise to have him accompany our missionary for this visit. The two pastors led a Bible Study on Friday evening, met with various families on Saturday, and preached for them on Sunday.

As reported here last time, Rev. M. Dick and Elder D. Moelker from our churches' Domestic Mission Committee visited the PR Fellowship in Fayetteville, NC in early April. Sadly, part of their mandate was to convey to the Fellowship there the decision of the DMC not to continue giving regular pulpit

supply to them due both to their small numbers and our limited manpower. The PRF received this well, but would like to continue worshipping together, and witnessing to the truth of the Reformed faith in Fayetteville. The DMC is considering various ways our churches can continue to help the Fellowship.

### Congregation Activities

**T**he Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI sponsored a community-wide garage sale for TRAC May 1-3 in the parking lot of Hudsonville Plaza in downtown Hudsonville. TRAC, or the Transylvania Reformed Assistance Committee (Transylvania being a province in northwest Romania), has been assisting Reformed people in Romania for twelve years. Rev. B. Woudenberg has headed the work and has seen firsthand the monumental struggle of these Christians. Having come out of Communism in 1989, they have been left in poverty and despair. TRAC works primarily with the Hungarian Reformed Seminary to help these people spiritually, medically, educationally, and economically to come out of the devastating effects of the godless government under which they suffered for

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



so many years. TRAC raises money to transport seminary students from the city of Clug to worship services at village churches. They also pay doctors to visit villages, help establish Christian schools, and help area farmers get produce to market.

Good Friday, April 18, the Trinity PR Men's Singers in Hudsonville, MI presented a wonderful concert of praise, focusing on the theme of Christ's death and resurrection. The first half of the concert featured just men singing, while the second half had Trinity's women joining in to sing a few numbers. Both sounded great.

Everyone in and around Grand Rapids, MI was invited to attend an inspiring evening of praise to God as the PR Mass Choir, made up of nearly 100 voices from the GR area churches, presented its concerts. The choir gave the concert on two Sunday evenings, April 20 at Hudsonville, MI PRC and April 27 at Georgetown PRC.

The Doon/Hull, IA Choral Society presented the program "Hallelujah, What a Savior" on two Sundays, April 20 at Doon PRC and the following Sunday in Hull.

## Young People's Activities

This time of year virtually all our churches' young people are busy with fund-raisers for the upcoming young people's convention this summer in Colorado. Each year we continue to be amazed by the wide variety of choices available. For example, a soup supper at Hope in Walker, MI; an Aussie Burger Fry in Edgerton, MN; a gym-night at Immanuel in Lacombe, AB; a car wash at First in Grand Rapids, MI; a Dutch Dinner at Byron Center, MI; a dorm

clean-up in Doon, IA; and my favorite, the sale of Crispy Kreme donuts in Hull, IA.


## School Activities

Under the direction of Miss Sarah Linker, their teacher, the lower room of Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI invited the rest of their classmates, as well as parents and friends, to their chapel on April 28. Rev. C. Haak spoke to the students on the topic, "The Lord is My Light and My Salvation."

This being June, we also want to pass along our congratulations

to all our graduates. Completion of academics at any level, from kindergarten to college, is quite an accomplishment. May you use what you have learned this past year to the honor and glory of God's name.

## Minister Activities

The Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI formed a new trio of Rev. J. Laning, Rev. J. Slopsema, and Rev. R. Van Overloop. From the trio of the Revs. A. Brummel, C. Terpstra, and R. VanOverloop, the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI extended a call to Rev. Terpstra to be their next pastor. 

## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southeast PRC expresses its sincere sympathy to Mrs. Kaye Moelker, together with her children and grandchildren, in the passing away of Kaye's husband,

#### MR. ROBERT MOELKER.

Our brother has served many terms as officebearer, and he will be missed. May the family find comfort in God's Word. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Harlow Kuiper, Vice-President  
Doug Mingerink, Clerk

### REMINDER

The *Standard Bearer* is published only once a month in June, July, and August.

### ADDRESS CHANGE:

Rev. Dale H. Kuiper  
7507 21<sup>st</sup> Ave.  
Jenison, MI 49428  
Phone: (616) 667-0865

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Joyce Kooiker and family in the death of her sister,

#### MRS. EDNA O'BRIEN.

May God give comfort and hope by His Word. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

Ed Westra, Pres.

LaDonna VanDenTop, Sec.

## Reformed Witness Hour

### Topics for June

Date	Topic	Text
June 1	"Go to Prepare a Place for You"	John 14:1-3
June 8	"Try the Spirits"	I John 4:1-3
June 15	"A Father's Pity" (Rev. Doug Kuiper)	Psalms 103:13
June 22	Jehovah, the All Knowing God — Psalm 139	
June 29	"His Thorough Knowledge of His People"	Psalms 139:1-6
	"His Omnipresence"	Psalms 139:7-12