

# The Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith*

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# The Spirit of Thanksgiving

*“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.” Psalm 116:12, 13*

Words are used daily to express the deepest feelings of our souls. We seek very early in life to teach our children to say “Thank you” so that their gratitude for gifts given and favors received might be made known.

There are however times when words fail us as we attempt to express our gratitude. The Psalmist found himself in such a situation. David had gone through a period of deep distress and great danger. His son Absalom had been the leader of a rebellion against him. David’s safety had been imperiled. In fact he had come close to losing his life. He declares, “The pains of death

surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me, I found trouble and sorrow.” In that situation he had turned to the Lord and sought mercy. The Lord had heard and had granted him deliverance. His life had been spared. Now he wants to express his gratitude. But how shall he do it? And so he asks, “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”

Words were totally inadequate to express the thankfulness which David felt for all that God had done for him. Nor could he think of any gift which would convey the gratitude he felt for his deliverance. After all, the one to whom he was

indebted “owns the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine.”

Is there then no way in which he can say “Thanks”? The Psalmist provides the answer to his own question for he says, “I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” Because David had nothing to *give* as his expression of thankfulness he would instead *take*. He had asked what he could give and then he answered that he would take from the one to whom he wanted to give.

Isn’t there a contradiction here? Not really, David realizes that in taking he will be showing true gratitude. That is not so hard to understand, is it? As we who live in the United States celebrate Thanksgiving Day many if not most of us will



Volume 51, No. 10 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) “And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).

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be sitting down at tables laden with delicious food on which many hours have been spent in preparation. The one(s) who prepared the food will be greatly gratified if we partake heartily of that on which so much effort has been expended in preparation. So too our God is glorified and His love acknowledged when we in humble faith accept the gift of salvation by placing our trust wholly and completely in the Savior “who knowing no sin was made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (II Corinthians 5:21). So in taking we say “Thanks”.

Having experienced the blessing of salvation we acknowledge our continued dependence upon the God who has saved us. When we give our thanks to an earthly benefactor we often express the hope that we will not have to look to them for help again. Such would not please our God. A recognition of our daily dependence upon the Lord for His grace and His mercy and the daily supply of all our needs brings honor to our God. The Psalmist knew this and so he says he will “call upon the name of the Lord.” Even as we express our thanks for blessings received in the past we must look for help now and in the future. That is the spirit of true thanksgiving.

*What shall I render to the Lord  
For all His benefits to me?  
How shall my soul, by grace  
restored?  
Give worthy thanks, O Lord to  
Thee?  
Salvation's cup of blessing now  
I take and call upon God's name  
Before His saints I pay my vow  
And here my gratitude proclaim*

Psalter Hymnal 230: 1&2

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## The Craze for Amusement

*(Adapted from a lecture given at the RYS National Convention)*

### Introduction

In Louis Berkhof's book *Subjects and Outlines*, published in 1918, he wrote about what he perceived to be a “craze for amusement.” It amazes me that in 1918 he was already speaking about a kind of obsession for entertainment. It also scares me. If they were infatuated with distractions in 1918, what adjectives can Mr. Webster conger up to describe our generation?

If we began to make a mental list of some of the famous people in this world, who might we consider? Julia Roberts? Brad Pitt? Sammy Sosa? I am sure our list would look something like this. Perhaps we are more refined and our list would include people like Bach or Mozart. That's fine, the point is the same.

And that point is this: *people love to be entertained.* We don't make plumbers or farmers or elders famous. You can almost hear a sarcastic voice ask, “Why should we?” As if to say, “They don't entertain me.”

We like what entertainment does for us and to us. Hence, we elevate the tools of entertainment to celestial heights calling them “stars.” I suppose we can do this with relative ease because we are all about having fun. My generation jammed to such rock anthems as “Everybody's Workn' for the Weekend,” and bebopped to such ditties as “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun.” Well, not quite. More accurately, *people* just want to have fun. Even if the point wasn't as gender inclusive as it should have been, we all got the message. Live for fun!

You can see this craze for amusement all around you, and you do not even have to look that closely. It is as obvious as the smell of the people we stand in line with, sweating for three hours, in 90+ heat, to go on a two minute roller coaster ride. In some areas it is not uncommon for people to camp outside Ticket Master so they can get tickets to see the Rolling Stones with their kids. Indeed, this craze is passed on from one generation to the next.

We will spend obscene amounts of money and waste obscene amounts of time for one purpose, to be amused, to escape, or, to be distracted. They are just variations on a theme. But is that a problem? Is there something wrong with having fun?

## Keeping our Clothes Clean

Not unlike many children, I remember coming home from church wearing what used to be called “the Sunday best.” Getting from the church to the car in the Sunday best wasn’t that risky. However, getting from the car to the house could be. After all, boys will be boys! You see, there were all sorts of toys that you had to pass in order to get in the house. Inevitably my little ears would hear those forbidding words, “Don’t get your clothes dirty. You’re in your Sunday best.”

Today you can still see parents struggling against the old man in their young men. Young parents walking into church with young boys just after it has rained can be especially fun to watch. I suppose it’s because most young boys have a little voice that only speaks after it has rained and while they are wearing their Sunday best. If I remember correctly, the voice goes something like, “Do you see all those puddles? Jump in! Go ahead, get wet. It’s fun.”

We might call this “puddle-pressure,” which, physiologically speaking, comes years before peer-pressure in little boys. The net result of

this pressure is that moms end up looking like dogsleds being pulled by Alaskan Husky’s in the Iditerod. It is all quite amusing until mom finds her voice. I remember that too. In fact, it’s indelibly impressed. The reason is because it’s hard to keep good clothes clean. Especially hard when you are a child. The answer to this universal phenomenon lies in the fact that children don’t think in the categories of clean and dirty. They have to learn this. Until then, they only think in the categories of fun and not fun.

The same is true today when it comes to the struggles of our Christian walk with entertainment. By nature, we do not think in terms of clean and dirty. By nature, we only think in terms of what is fun and what is not fun. Put another way, what pleases the flesh and what does not. Parents wisely teach their puddle-jumpers about clean and dirty by pointing out what they are wearing. Similarly, as Christians, we will only fully understand and see the significance of clean and dirty when we hear our Heavenly Father tell us, through Scripture, how we are dressed. This will mean everything for our understanding of entertainment.

When Christ addressed the churches in Revelation, he continually reminded them of what they were wearing. He used this metaphorical device to instill in them the need to be pure in heart and action. Listen to what he says to Sardis, “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I

*“[W]hen we are in Christ, we are not wearing our play clothes. We are dressed in Christ!”*

*will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels” (Rev. 3:4-5).*

To the Laodiceans, the infamous lukewarm church, he says, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Rev. 3:18). The simple message is that when we are in Christ, we are not wearing our play clothes. We are dressed in Christ! We are dressed in the best! Everything we do is in relationship to who we are now wearing. What we do is now effected by the clothes we have on. We are clean and now we need to stay clean in thankful living.

Listen to how Paul addresses the Colossians in the third chapter, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (9-10). This language uses the metaphor of clothing. He goes on further to say that this is a

*“Today you can still see parents struggling against the old man in their young men.”*



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constant work. “*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*”(v 14). In other words, there is a continual putting on of Christ and his attributes. But how can that be? Are we being clothed or are we clothed in Christ? The answer is both. It is the difference between justification and sanctification. In a sense, we are clothed and we are being clothed. Just like we are saved and we are being saved and we will be saved (justification, sanctification, glorification). That is the tension of the converted life (L.D. 33), and that is its challenge as well. It is a constant, daily challenge to remember how we are dressed in Christ so that we do not spatter ourselves with this world. It was a challenge for the Colossians, the Laodiceans, and the Sardinians. It was difficult in 1918 just as it is in 2001. After all, we live in this world of mud puddles and the old man has still not been fully silenced. In all of this, we need to look to our Savior who not only clothes us, but also prays for us to stay clean.

In John 17 we find what is commonly called Christ’s high priestly prayer. Before he is about to be betrayed and die he prays, “*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one*”(v15). This fills us in on something. For the time being, this world is our home. It is temporary, but nonetheless, God wants us to live here for now. We also learn that this world is a dangerous place for those who are clothed in the garments of Christ. This world is the place where “the evil one” roams (I Peter 5:8). Therefore, just like little

children need to be taught that puddles are bad because of what they are wearing, so too with Christians. We need to learn how to walk in an open parking lot of inviting mud puddles wearing clean clothes. Difficult? To be sure. Thus, the comfort of John 17. Our Savior prays for us, just as He did for Peter in the midst of his temptation (Luke 22:31-32). Far from making us lazy though, this should make us wise to how temptation can come at us.

I happen to think that the most tempting opportunities to “jump in” and get our clothes dirty, come from the various forms of entertainment that are around us. The come-in-because-the-waters-warm invitations are delivered round the clock through the television, movies, advertisements, etc.

But does this mean that all forms of entertainment are trying to muddy our clothes? To answer this question, I want to break the entertainment world into two parts. This division is not ironclad. It is simply a generalization for the sake of discussion.

### **Rat Poison Entertainment**

The first type of entertainment I want to refer to is the rat poison variety. This is the kind of entertainment that is simply bad. It is deadly to your spirituality if you consume it. Some is more rapid to the system, some is less severe. No matter. It will have its effect eventually. The solution might seem easy. Just say no. Not quite so easy when it looks good, sounds funny, and seems harmless. That’s why I call this “rat poison entertainment.”

It probably goes without saying that rats do not eat poison because they have a death wish. They probably do not salivate with the wafting smells of Diazinon or other deadly poisons. Therefore, they need to be attracted by something tasty so that they will consume what is not. It is a little known fact that when rat poison is produced, it is roughly 90% good food. Parents have harnessed these deceptive tactics for their own well intentioned agendas. Countless children have innocently eaten their applesauce oblivious to the fact that it was laced with multivitamins. This conspiracy against rats and children is perpetuated by a general rule: if you want to get something disgusting down the throat, use lots of sugar! Welcome to the world of entertainment where the rats have gotten savvy.

From movies to magazines, Hollywood has mastered the rat poison approach to entertainment. Recently, Miramax released a movie named “The Cider House Rules” with typical Hollywood bravado. It was advertised as a heartwarming movie, with excellent cinematography, and picturesque scenes of New England life. It won two Academy Awards.

Once you suck off the sugar coating, the truth is less sweet. In fact, the movie was about incest, premarital pregnancy, and coming to grips with the need for society to embrace abortion. The long and short of the movie’s message was that there are no absolutes. All “rules” are gray. One of the world’s own admits that this movie comes down on a “controversial pro-choice stance on abortion” (David Rooney, Variety). It gets to

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this conclusion by mocking the idea of absolute truth. No, this was not advertised as a comedy. Remember, it is a heartwarming coming of age movie. Therefore, if you are coming of age, go and see it. It's only rated PG-13. Take the whole family and die together. After all, it looks good! It received two awards. It probably even received two thumbs up. But its message is poison packaged as candy.

The world does this so successfully. Therefore, in this world, we are called to be wise. Wisdom means that we will not consume something just because it looks good and smells sweet. As Christians we need to be careful, circumspect, and inquisitive. It's when you are not looking that you get splattered. And instead of looking like Christ, we look like the world. We clothe ourselves with numbness and callousness. I believe this kind of carelessness marks our present Christian generation in America. We have bought into the marketer's advice, "If it feels good, do it." We need to refocus our attention on our Savior's exhortation, "Keep your clothes clean." We do this when we are thankful for being washed and bring that thankfulness into every area of our lives. We do this when we put ourselves under the Savior's influence instead of the subtle influence the evil one. We do this when we think about what kind of entertainment we are ingesting.

So then, are we saying that all entertainment is bad? No, not at all. This leads me to the second kind of broad category of entertainment. I'll call this, for lack of any other creative title, "Innocent entertainment."

### **Innocent Entertainment**

The problem with the craze for amusement is that people *just* want to have fun. You see, the emphasis does not always need to be on fun. There does not have to be anything wrong with fun as such. There are all sorts of innocent entertainments that we may freely engage in as Christians. There may be an appropriate movie here and there that makes us laugh at our comical idiosyncrasies. Outside the world of media, there is baseball, basketball, and all different sorts of physical games and recreations. There are all kinds of fun activities that are not offensive to God. The problem doesn't have to be that people just want to have *fun*. Often times, the fun is not the problem. It is that people *just* want to have fun that often gets us into trouble. All some people want to do is play sports. All some people want to do is laugh. When all you want to do and all you live for is entertainment, albeit innocent entertainment, there is a problem.

As Christians we are especially pro-entertainment and pro-amusement properly defined. We are especially for relaxing and having fun.

God gave us this! Unfortunately, this is where most innocent entertainment scholars return to their game. We need to finish the thought. God gave us entertainment for a purpose. Whenever something is removed from its purpose, it ceases to fulfill its function. So, we need to ask, "What is the function of entertainment?"

The function of entertainment is to refresh us so that we can do a better job in glorifying God in the normal *workload* of our lives. Thankfully, our elementary teachers understood the function of amusement. Who didn't love recess? Here all along we thought it was for honing our monkey bar skills. Wrong. It was so that we could be better mathematicians when we went back to our desks. Our teachers understood recess functioned to serve a purpose – work!

A certain amount of entertainment or amusement is therefore a good thing. It helps us glorify God in our creational mandate to labor. When entertainment becomes an end, instead of a means to an end, we are in serious danger of loosing it altogether. We are reaching for something with one hand which we are knocking away with another. When a child plays with a toy endlessly, watch out. Eventually that toy is going to take flight, the launch sequence initiated by boredom. There is no satisfaction in it anymore. When we were in Junior High we called this the "summer time blues."

***“God gave us entertainment for a purpose.  
Whenever something is removed from its purpose,  
it ceases to fulfill its function.”***



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It came around mid-August. We had all the toys we could want and yet we still said, "I'm bored!" Boredom is essentially the inability to enjoy enjoyment. This happens when entertainment is removed from the purpose of labor and it eventually fizzles out to purposelessness. Sooner or later what looks awesome, fun always and forever, fizzles out in dissatisfaction. In this scenario, we get splattered, not because of the entertainment, but what we did with the entertainment. By not being wise, our clothes get dirty despite our best attempts to stay clean. Even innocent entertainment can be dangerous.

### **But I don't Listen to the Words**

The frequently repeated phrase, "But I don't listen to the words," is the fuel for our craze for amusement. It fuels this craze in that it justifies the worst kinds of entertainment to the best kinds of entertainment with a quick application of verbal salve to the conscience. "Don't worry, I'm ignorant." This has gotten more than one young person out of the entertainment prison their moms and dads would have certainly thrown them in to. But how true is this well worn phrase?

When I was at the RYS convention, I tried a little experiment. I had someone stand up and say the word "silk" ten times. After which, I immediately asked, "What do cows drink?" Without exception, the four groups, through their sacrificial volunteer, answered, "Milk." To me, this serves to illustrate a wonderful point. Our children are telling the truth! They don't listen to the words. I say this in good humor as

I asked this question in good humor. But, this was not simply for kicks and giggles. There was a point. The correct answer to what cows drink is not milk. People drink milk. Cows drink water. And yes, people did try to justify their wrong answer by claiming that calves drink milk. Still wrong. The question was, "What do *cows* drink?" Of course, the confusion came from the way I set the stage before I asked the question. I prepared my brave volunteer to not listen to me when I had

*"When we say, "I don't listen to the words" our sworn enemies rejoice! In this one phrase, we are announcing that our main defense, the mind, is shut down."*

them say silk ten times. I coated their mind with a word that rhymed with the wrong answer that I wanted them to give me. I was looking for an answer. I was counting on the fact that they wouldn't listen to me. What do you know, I was right. In less friendly situations we call this manipulation. Have I introduced you to Hollywood yet?

How many times haven't we used or heard this phrase "But I don't listen to the words," thinking that we are beating the system? Foolishly, we do not realize that much of the system is based on this assump-

tion. Sometimes we fumble simple theological questions because of the "silk, silk, silk..." white noise of the world. We claim that we don't listen to the words or ideas of our culture but strangely our words and ideas, our answers and thoughts can sound a lot like our present culture. There is that same bizarre "ilk" sound to our words. We need to realize that many of us have foolishly believed that we can actually not listen to the words and ideas of our culture's entertainment. When we say, "I don't listen to the words" our sworn enemies rejoice! In this one phrase, we are announcing that our main defense, the mind, is shut down. When the mind shuts down, everything receives an all access pass to our heart. Never mind the fact that our enemies (the world, devil, and the flesh) "cease not to assault us" (L.D. 52). Never mind we are engaged in a war. We just want to tune in and turn off, or something like that.

If you have ever been waiting for the light to turn green at around 11 P.M. at a busy intersection, chances are you know how impossible it is to not listen to the world. There are these cars that are loaded with those thumping, bass booming stereos. Try, try as you may, you cannot tune out that insidious noise. Your windows can be rolled up and still all you hear is, "thump, thump, thump." You can even be three cars away going 65 down the highway and still, "thump, thump, thump" is all you hear. You can try to ignore it but it has this kind of omnipresent nature to it. That's the world. It is all around us. As much as we roll up the windows and ignore it, it is still thumping on your chest and pounding in your ears.

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Perhaps it's not as clearly heard when you don't listen. But it is still there. The "ilks" can still be faintly heard and processed.

### Time To Respond

It is time to respond to our culture as Christians and not self-proclaimed ignoramuses. Put in language we can easily understand, we need to start listening to the words. Rather than ignore the world, which is impossible, we need to listen to it.

In light of everything I have said, this is not as dangerous as it may initially sound. When you want to check to see if the white stuff on the table is salt or sugar, you don't pour it on your toast with cinnamon and hope it is not salt. You take a taste-test first. Only after we have tested can we respond either positively with enjoyment, or, negatively with revulsion. We need to get rid of the "ilky" twang in our voices. That means we need to listen to words, discern ideas, and examine the worldviews of our amusements or our approach to amusements. We will never see the difference between the poison and the innocent if we do not investigate and discern. And that is both our biblical responsibility and Christian privilege.

Roman's 12:2 says, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" Our responsibility becomes our privilege when we are able to enjoy ourselves in God's good will. Here is the only place where there is any real joy. Along this train of thought John writes, "*Dear friends, do not be-*

*lieve every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (I John 4:1). Only when we test the spirit of our approach to and the content of our entertainment, can we enjoy God through our entertainment. Therefore, it is time to kick start our minds, get the mental defenses back up, and get back to the job of listening.

The craze for amusement will always be present. People, it seems, just want to have fun. Sometimes it is a little bit of a bad thing. Sometimes it is too much of a good thing. Either way, we need to learn how to avoid

these dangers when we, unlike this crazy world, carefully approach our entertainment saturated culture. We show this care when we look to our Father to guide us through this puddle filled world. We do this when we hear what the world says and compare it's claims to the truths that our Father has told us. Only then can our true enjoyment be protected. Only then can God be truly glorified through our entertainment.

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# The Preaching of the Word

The sermon occupies a most important place in our worship. The congregation has come to hear the Word of God. This should be borne in mind by both the preacher and the congregation. There is always the danger that we forget this. The preacher can easily forget that he is an ambassador of Christ. The temptation to place the audience ahead of God in importance is greater than we think. And if we are not on our guard we may listen far more to the man than to God. The preacher must be convinced that he can say, *Thus saith the Lord*, and the congregation should be deeply impressed with the fact that God is speaking to it by the mouth of his servant.

We cannot expect a blessing and certainly will fail to have the favor

of the Lord rest upon us unless we are constantly aware that the God of heaven and earth is speaking to his people. We would consider it an insult if we were talking to someone and this person would not pay any attention to what we were saying. It is a grievous sin to sit in church and not be deeply interested in the proclamation of the Word. And yet how easily do our thoughts wander. How difficult it seems to be for some not to fall asleep. It is so easy to blame the minister. Of course, all ministers are not equally talented. But let no one think that the minister is to blame when we are not interested. There may be exceptions. A mother may have been awake most of the night because of the sickness of a child. There may be other such reasons. It is a comforting thought that the Lord



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knows our circumstances. But never forget that as long as the minister presents the truth of God, the soul of the righteous will respond. The big question is whether we are hungry souls. Is our love for God so great and our love for the Christ so intense that we are eager to know what they have done for us and what is now expected of us?

Some excuse themselves for their lack of interest by saying that they have heard the things spoken from the pulpit so often. They complain that there was nothing new in the sermon. I am well aware that the preacher should put forth every effort to present the old truths in their concrete application to an ever changing world. But any one who finds that the old truths are losing their hold on him, would do well to examine his heart whether he is perhaps in the sad condition of having lost his first love.

There is no biblical truth which ever loses its meaning for life. There never comes a time when anyone can honestly say concerning the truth of God that he already knows it, and that it has therefore nothing to say to him. It is very difficult for me to put this into words, but the truth is a revelation of God and there is no knowledge of God which does not call for development and expansion. A sermon which brings the message of God's truth feeds the hungry soul and quenches the thirst of the spirit seeking to know God's will. Lack of interest is a symptom of spiritual sickness.

We must allow the sermon to have its way with us. The Word of God comes to us to instruct us. The instruction of the Word may show us that our way of life is not in confor-

mity with the will of God. In that case the Word will reprove and correct us. God wants us to be perfect, and since even the most advanced have but a small beginning of this perfection, the truth often hurts. If we are truly children of God we will accept correction gladly. It is always a sign of lack of spirituality if we are angered by the correction of the Word. Some demand that a sermon must always bring comfort. Remember that this is exactly what the true

*“It is always a sign of lack of spirituality if we are angered by the correction of the Word.”*

proclamation of the Word always does. It is however very well possible that the comfort can only reach us by humbly accepting the correction.

We should listen to the sermon with the prayer in our heart that it may please the Holy Spirit so to apply his truth that we may be builded up in the faith. Such a prayer *is* always pleasing to God and surely will be heard.

We may have to listen to the sermon for the sake of others. It is often said that we should not do this, and in a certain sense this is true. On the other hand we must often listen for others. The husband may be in church and his wife at home because of small children, which cannot yet be taken to church There

may be some one sick at home. We should listen for them too. We should be able to carry the message home for them.

Parents should listen to the sermon having the need of their children in mind. We often hear the opinion expressed that the preacher should have the children in mind while he is preaching the Word. Undoubtedly this is true. Even so it will not be possible for the preacher to remain on the level of the understanding of children. Most of the time he will be addressing himself to the adult mind. It is the duty of the father and mother to speak with their children about the sermon. They must find out how much the child has heard and understood. It may surprise us to find out that a believing child understands so much. Today we find many parents who leave their children home and are satisfied to send them to Sunday School only because the children get nothing of the sermon anyway. Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit is busy during the preaching of the Word and he does not forget the little ones. Sometimes it is amazing what the child has gleaned from the sermon. And this will increase in the measure in which father and mother make an attempt to explain the sermon to their children.

We must listen one for another. We as Christians are called to keep watch over one another. If we know of sinful ways in the life of our neighbor and we hear the testimony of the truth in connection with such error, we certainly ought to make use of this to bring our neighbor from ways of sin to the way of righteousness. This is, of course, something altogether different from using the

sermon to talk about our neighbor and his faults behind his back

The sermon is important because it has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save sinners. It is well for every one to make good use of the instruction, the correction and reproof afforded by the preaching of the Word. The Word of God never returns void. It may bring us nearer to God and the goal of perfection which the children of God always seek; or the preaching of the Word will harden our hearts. It is possible to know the way and not to walk in it. May our prayer always be "Teach me thy truth, O Lord."

**Rev. William Kok** 1892-1977 was the pastor of the Immanuel CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan when he wrote this article.

### CORRECTION

*Last month we mistakenly attributed the error of the July/August double issue to Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. It should have been Eerdmans Printing Co. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.*

—The editor

# A King Like Melchizadek

When Peter, as the spokesman for the disciples, confesses who Jesus is, he declares, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). These parallel titles, "Messiah" and "Son of the living God", are both royal titles. "Messiah" essentially means the "divinely appointed king of Israel." The "Son of God" is a title that looks, in this context, less to Jesus' divinity and more to His position as the Anointed of Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7. Since Israel also is God's son (Ex. 4:22f, Deut. 14:1, etc.), this means that the king is also the representative of Israel before God.

Jesus is clearly a royal figure from His declaration that He is Lord of the Sabbath, using the example of David, to His triumphal entry on the davidic animal, a donkey,<sup>1</sup> to His kingly act of cleansing the Temple, to the placard over His head on the cross.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus steadfastly refused the kingship. Satan offers Him the kingship over the nations (Matt. 4:9). Later, the crowds in Israel want to make Him king by force and Jesus refuses (Jn. 6:15). When a man came to Him and asked Him to render a judgment - which is a kingly task - between him and his brother, Jesus answered, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" (Lk. 12:14). And when asked to render judgment in a capital case, Jesus again refused to judge. He refused to act as king of Israel (Jn. 8:1-11).

Satan offered Jesus a kingship

apart from the purpose for which God had sent Him. Israel said the same thing. The disciples, too, called on Jesus to reject the path of suffering and death (Matt. 16:21-23). Israel and the disciples had a distorted view of what kingship was. This problem went back as far as 1 Samuel 8. There Israel, on the pretext of the shortcomings of Samuel's sons, demanded a king. Unfortunately, they wanted a king *like the nations* (vs. 5). The end of Judges shows that a king is just what Israel lacked. In those terrible closing chapters, when Israel's apostasy is so deep that she begins to resemble Sodom, the repeated refrain is "In those days there was no king of Israel" (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). But what sort of king was needed?

Of course, Yahweh was the King of Israel. The exodus from Egypt had amply displayed this (Ex. 15:18). This is why He tells Samuel, "[T]hey have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them" (2 Sam. 8:7)<sup>2</sup> Yahweh was the King, but, from the beginning, He had determined to share His throne with the man of His choosing. After all, Adam had been given a two-fold task, to guard and to cultivate the Garden (Gen. 2:15).

The Garden was God's sanctuary, His earthly throne-room.<sup>3</sup> God told the man and the woman that they would have dominion. They would, under God, shape and fill creation. The man and the woman's task would, on a creaturely level, follow



the example of the Creator God Who had, in six days, shaped and filled the dark, formless, and empty earth. The “cultural mandate” calls man to rule as God’s prince and, in a part that is often forgotten, he is to be fed by God. We often begin and end the mandate in Genesis 1:28, but it continues on in verses 29 and 30 where God promises to feed man. Man is created hungry, needing life from outside of himself, life that only God can provide. He is to rule, but only in subordination to God, only in faith and obedience.

Adam had a kingly task, but there was another part to the task given him. He was also to guard the Garden and this is a priestly task.<sup>4</sup> It is in this priestly task that he fails. Instead of guarding the Garden, instead of being fed by God, instead of believing and obeying, Adam entered covenant with the Serpent. He listens to the serpent’s word and eats the food that the serpent offers. Of course, here is the fall of man into sin and Adam is expelled from the Garden; he loses access to the throne-room of God.

This shows us something about kingship. It is interesting that Adam’s sin is a “priestly” sin. He does not guard the Garden, he does not listen to God’s Word, he forgoes the Tree of Life to which he had access, and he eats the food offered by the Serpent and forbidden by God. Adam does not worship and serve the Creator, but the creature. Adam’s sin is priestly, but when God pronounces judgment against him, it is Adam’s kingly work of cultivation, or service, that is cursed (Gen. 3:17-19). Kingship, then, is closely related to priesthood. In fact, the priestly work grounds the

kingly work -for good or for ill. Kingship has to do with service and with eating God’s food. When we see that kingship is rooted in priesthood, we understand why we see the priesthood in Israel centuries before the kingship is established. As with Adam, Israel must be confirmed in her priestly work before the kingly service and rule is given to her.

*“When Israel, however, demands a king, they want one apart from the priesthood and service. They want a king like the nations.”*

This, then, also explains the significance of Melchizedek. He is mentioned only twice in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:18-24; Psalm 110) and, yet, he is tremendously significant in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews. The author of the letter criticizes his readers because they do not understand the things about Melchizedek. As Gerald Bray writes, “The meaning of Melchizedek, for example, has escaped them, yet it was essential to understand Christ’s atoning work as both priest and victim.”<sup>5</sup> We tend to sympathize with them. We seem to think that “the shadowy figure of” is Melchizedek’s first name. But if we reflect for a moment, Melchizedek is a faithful priest-king who dwells on the mountain of God.

He is the one who feeds and blesses Abram, and to whom Abram pays the tithe. Melchizedek reflects the kingship that Adam was to exercise.

This explains how Israel knew that Jerusalem was to be the “center” of the land, the city of God. It was the city of Melchizedek. It was to Moriah, part of the same mountain range with (Jeru)Salem, that Abraham is commanded to go to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:2) . Why? It is the district of Melchizedek.<sup>6</sup> Why is Jerusalem the first part of the land conquered in the book of Judges - and the place where Adoni-Bezek is brought to die (Jdgs. 1:1-10)? Why is it that David’s first act, after being declared king of all Israel, is the conquest of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:1-16)? All for the same reason: this is the place of the priest-king, the place that Yahweh had marked off to be His earthly throne-room, the Garden *redux*.

When Israel, however, demands a king, they want one apart from the priesthood and service. They want a king *like the nations*. That is, they want one like the rulers from the line of Cain, who sought their own power and whose rule was founded on Lamech-like bloodshed. That is what they got with Saul. The principle of the book of Judges is still at work: God gives His disobedient people what they want good and hard. If you want to worship the gods of the Moabites, then you are just going to love being dominated and oppressed by the Moabites, and so on.

With Saul, they get a king *like the nations*. He refuses to wait for the priestly sacrifices, but seizes the

priestly prerogative for himself (1 Sam. 13). Saul, like a new Cain, seeks to kill his son Jonathan, because Jonathan trusted in the blessing of Yahweh and prosecuted war against His enemies (1 Sam. 14). Saul seizes at power and wealth, refusing God's command to destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15). Saul is just like Adam. Saul fears Goliath; he never seeks the Ark which had returned to the land from Philistia; he ends up slaughtering the priests at Nob (2 Sam. 22:6-23); and Saul ends his days consorting with a witch, even to the point of eating a meal with her (2 Sam. 28) He is the anti-Melchizedek.

David comes as the replacement king. He is what Saul was not, a servant-king. David is anointed in secret and, immediately following his anointing, he begins to guard the land from enemies. David defeats the Egyptian-like Goliath, who struck fear into Saul.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, David brings Goliath's head to Jerusalem, which, at that time, is in the control of the Jebusites (1 Sam. 17:54). He is driven into the wilderness by the apostate king and he suffers at Saul's hands. Around David gathers, not the elite of Israel, but "everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented" (1 Sam. 22:2). David, it seems, proclaimed good news to the poor. While in the wilderness, he defends Israel. These experiences of David are written of in the Psalms, especially in the second book of the Psalter, but throughout the entire book; and Israel follows David's example of suffering service in her worship as she sings the Psalms.

All the defining things in David's life

are priestly. He is the one who completes the holy war against the peoples of the land. And here we must remember that warfare, especially holy war, is essentially priestly in nature. The holy warrior is marked out by the Nazarite vow (cf. Num. 6:1-21) which makes an ordinary Israelite a type of temporary priest. It is by the sword that Levi is marked out as the priestly people (Ex. 32:25-29; Deut. 33:8-11). Holy war is rendering God's judgment. David defeats Amalek, in

*"All the defining things in David's life are priestly..."*

*"David does not really do a lot of kingly things."*

distinction to Saul and in obedience to Deuteronomy 25:17-19; he completes the conquest of the land.

When David destroys the Jebusites and captures Jerusalem, he seeks out the Ark and brings it to Melchizedek's city. In fact, this is the defining event in David's kingship, celebrated in several Psalms (e.g. 24, 68, 132, etc.). The coming of the Ark to Jerusalem is the occasion for Yahweh's further judgment on Saul's house and makes clear the difference between the kingship of Saul kingship and the kingship of David (2 Sam. 6:20-23).

It is at this time that David reorganizes the Levites (1 Chron. 15). He

appoints the Levitical singers and orchestra. Before this, worship in the Tabernacle had been silent, without singers and orchestra. Now, Israel's worship is made more glorious. It is David who makes all the preparations for the building of the Temple and he appoints Solomon to the task of building the Temple (1 Chron. 22). In fact, Yahweh revealed the plan of the Temple to David as He had revealed the plan of the Tabernacle to Moses (1 Chron. 28:19) David even appoints some of his sons as priests (2 Sam. 8:18). Add to this the fact that David wrote, or had written, the core of the Psalter, the cloud of praise on which Yahweh is enthroned (Ps. 22:3), and we see that David's kingship is very priestly. He builds a house of people around God.

David does not really do a lot of kingly things, i.e. rendering judgment and building up the land. The few times we see David rendering judgment, he does not do it very well: he plans to act in anger against Nabal until Abigail intercedes; he does not punish Amnon for the rape of Tamar; he does not properly punish Absalom for the murder of Amnon; he does want to see Absalom punished for plunging the nation into civil war; he believes Ziba's lies about Mephiboseth; and he numbers the people, even over the objections of Joab, who is hardly the paragon of virtue. Yet, for all these failings, David is supremely the priestly king, the man after God's heart.

After David, good kings serve with wisdom and righteous judgment. Solomon is the great example here. Good kings glorify the Temple and



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the people. They build cities and provide food for Israel and the world. The history of the kingship shows that if a king forgot to be a servant after becoming lord, he would lose the kingdom.

Thus, when David ascends to the throne, we are told that he sat on the “throne of the kingdom of Yahweh” (1 Chron. 28:5). Of course, *the* throne of Yahweh was not in Jerusalem, but in heaven (Ps. 11:4; 103:19). David rules as the *nagid*, or vicegerent of Yahweh. David did not ascend to heaven. Yet, the palace was connected to the Temple; it is even patterned on the Temple (1 Kgs. 7:1-12). When the king goes into the Temple, he is surrounded by gold shields. His throne is gleaming ivory. The king is very glorious, but, as glorious as he is, he is not as glorious as God. Once in the Temple, the king could not pass beyond the altar. For all his priestly prerogatives, David never entered into the holy place, much less the holy of holies. When kings trespassed on the holiness of the Temple, God struck them down (e.g., 2 Chron. 26:16-23). True, David did once eat the shewbread, but he was not regularly fed from God’s table (1 Sam. 21:1-7). Even as he sat on God’s throne, it was clear that something greater was to come. David’s kingship had to be brought to its goal.

If we consider the Temple, we can see this. In front of the Temple, there are the two huge bronze pillars on either side of the doorway to the Temple. One is named Jachin, the other Boaz (1 Kgs. 7:15-22). Jachin stands for the priesthood (1 Chron. 24:17) and Boaz, of course, for the kingship.

Viewed from the holy of holies, God’s earthly throne-room, Jachin is on the right hand. The right hand is the place of authority, power, and privilege. It is the priests who grant, or deny, access to Yahweh. They eat from God’s Table, being given portions of the sacrifices as well as the shewbread. They draw near to God - nearer than the king.

They, however, are not enthroned. There are no chairs in the Temple. They eat the shewbread, but they are not allowed to eat in the holy

*“Jesus refuses to be a king like Adam and Saul. He follows, completes, and glorifies David’s priestly kingship.”*

place, let alone the holy of holies. Further, they cannot give access to this food. The priest cannot drink wine in the Temple; the wine that is brought in is poured out as a drink offering. The strong drink on the Table of Shewbread is also poured out as a drink offering. The cup represents the king on his throne, at rest and ready to render judgment.<sup>8</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus refuses to be a king like Adam and Saul. He follows, completes, and glorifies David’s priestly kingship. In Mark 10, He distinguishes His kingship from that of the nations: “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great

men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (vss. 42-45).

Jesus is pre-eminently the King who serves. He is glorified just in the way that He dies. He is the priestly Warrior bringing the true sacrifice. At His death, the centurion confesses that He is the “Son of God.” As we saw, this is, at least in part, a kingly title, but on the cross it is surrounded by all sorts of the priestly things. His death is sacrificial. Perhaps even more significant as a symbol is the tearing of the Temple veil. This symbolizes the opening of the heavenly sanctuary. The Temple, in part, protected the people from the presence of God. They could come close, but, because they were sinners, they could not come too close lest God break out against them. Now the Temple no longer keeps us from God’s presence and, in Christ, we do not fear that God will break out against us. The old Temple and the old priesthood are removed by the Son of God.

This is why the author of Hebrews insists on the significance of Melchizedek for understanding the work of Jesus and why the sacrifice of Jesus makes way for His enthronement (8:1, 2; 12:2). Jesus is the enthroned Jachin, or, better, the enthroned union of Jachin and Boaz. He sits on the heavenly throne of God as the Son of David. He has receive power and author-

ity and glory in heaven and on earth (e.g. Matt. 28:18)<sup>9</sup> We have a tendency to read over that, because, after all, Jesus is God so, of course, He has all power and authority. Yet, we must remember that this is all as He is true Man. Yes, Jesus is true God of true God, of one substance with the Father, and thus, everlastingly shares His glory and power. As true Man, however, He receives authority on the basis of His obedience to death. That is, Jesus still rules by self-giving service. He never becomes an arbitrary, self-centered ruler like those of the Gentiles.

By His blood, He made us a kingdom for His Father (Rev. 5:10). All authority is His for the sake of the salvation of the church. Jesus is Head over all things just for the church (Eph. 1:22). He fills all in all, Paul says (Eph. 1:23). This is the language of Genesis 1: "Take dominion and fill the earth." Jesus has that dominion; He fills the earth and the church is His fullness. Jesus is the true King Who builds the true and final Temple. He is also the Priest of this Temple - and the heavenly pattern for it. This kingship will one day reach its goal: the full gathering and perfecting of the church. He will then, in humble submission, present the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The faithful king was not to have horses, Deut. 17:16. One of the signs of David's faithfulness is that he hamstringed the captured horses, 2 Sam. 8:4. When David wishes to show that it is Solomon who is to succeed him, he does so by having Solomon ride on his donkey, 1 KgS. 1:32ff. And one of the signs of

Solomon's unfaithfulness is his multiplication of horses, 1 Kgs. 10:26

<sup>2</sup>This shows that the complaint about Samuel's sons was only a pretext. Whatever their failings, Samuel's sons are not the counterparts of Hophni and Phinehas, nor is Samuel a counterpart to Eli, if for no other reason than that Samuel's sons did not judge in the heart of Israel at the sanctuary, but on the periphery in Beersheba. The damage they could do was limited. The problem was not that Samuel was a bad father; the problem was Israel's unbelief and desire not to be God's special nation of priests.

<sup>3</sup>That this is so is shown in great (and occasionally fanciful) detail in Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 35 and throughout. Also see his *Kingdom Prologue* (Hamilton, MA: Privately Printed, 1989), pp 46ff and throughout.

<sup>4</sup>James B. Jordan points out that the guarding is a priestly task and that the cultivating, or "serving," is a kingly task in *Through New Eyes* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988), pp. 133-138)

<sup>5</sup>*Creeds, Councils, and Christ* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1997, second edition), p. 51.

<sup>6</sup>There is no "explicit" connection between this Moriah and the Moriah of 2 Chron. 3:1, but these are the only two mentions of Moriah in the Bible, both in connection with the place of sacrifice and with God's provision. Unless the Bible is designed to be as confusing as possible, the reader is obviously

meant to connect the two.

<sup>7</sup>Genesis 10 makes clear that both the Egyptians and Philistines are descended from Ham. Symbolically, oppression by the Philistines represents a return to Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>This explains the prominence of the cup at Belshazzar's feast and in the book of Esther. These are royal feasts, not fraternity drinking parties. Both Joseph and Nehemiah are portrayed as cupbearers. They are not someliers; they are the prime ministers who stand at the king's right hand and hand him his cup when he sits on his throne.

<sup>9</sup>It is interesting to note the parallels between the "Great Commission" and Cyrus' decree to end Israel's exile in 2 Chronicles 36:23. Isaiah calls Cyrus both "shepherd" and "anointed," two great davidic titles (Isa. 44:28, 45:1). He has the task to rebuild Jerusalem and deliver God's people. This is also in the section dealing with the Servant of Yahweh. Jesus, then, is accomplishing in fullness what Cyrus was given to do. Jesus is the great World Emperor and the Jerusalem He builds is His church, see Revelation 21 and 22.

**Rev. Ken Kok** is a pastor at the Blue Bell Canadian American Reformed Church in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.



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# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1956*

### **January 1956**

“[T]he work of salvation is not an exclusively spiritual affair, but extends to the redemption of the entire man, body and soul. The Word which operates savingly in man penetrates not only to the spiritual consciousness, but also to the physical being of man.”

*Psychology and the Bible*  
Edward Heerema

### **February 1956**

“Denominational boundaries are never the same as national or social boundaries, that is, they may never be regarded as merely normal differences based upon race or temperament or convenience or tradition. The ideal of the Church organizationally as well as doctrinally and spiritually is union.

*A Sample of  
Ecumenical Agitation*  
John H. Piersma

“Delegates at the conference oozed with the confidence that if enough people talk about the problems in education the right answers will surely come. And how does one know that the answers are right? When the majority of people believe they are. Americans have a great faith in fellow Americans.”

*White House Conference on  
Education*  
Sidney J. Dykstra

“[T]here is a tacit assumption that in man Evolution has had its last word: it has nothing further or better to offer - which some might take to be a tacit admission that Evolu-

tion is a spent force, no longer to be reckoned with.”

*Evolutionary Dogma and  
Christian Theology*  
Philip E. Hughes

### **March 1956**

“Could we be going in the direction of ‘synodocracy’?”

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I am not seeking debate here. I only offer my impression. However, we get the impressions that, for many around us here, Christian action is a matter of expediency, not principle; that neutrality is possible and allowed; that the antithesis is a lost principle.”

*Reflections of  
an Immigrant Pastor*  
Francois Guillaume

“We learn from the Bible and from contemporary history that there are projects whose beginning is in the Spirit but whose ending is in the flesh.”

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“American history is replete with schools and churches begun in the Spirit that today are edifices of the flesh. There is little reason to suppose that Satan would not like to repeat the performance with our Christian schools.”

*From a Principal’s Desk*  
Walter A. De Jong

### **April 1956**

“That which makes the worshipping congregation a church is her relationship to Jesus Christ.”

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“The church must live Christ’s life in such a way that she really represents Christ in the world. Compromise with the sins of the world diminishes the luster of this life. Conformity to the world’s mentality and manners is a radical defection from the church’s essential nature as Christ’s Body.”

*The Church of Christ  
in the World*  
Alexander C. De Jong

“We have taught our people well; but in large measure they remain ‘passive’ instead of ‘active’ as far as implementing and propagating the faith is concerned.

*Toward an Active Membership*  
Peter Y. De Jong

### **May 1956**

“The kind of freedom commonly claimed by men in our day is not the freedom of the creature but the freedom of would-be gods. Properly speaking, God alone is free and beyond responsibility to anything or anyone other than himself. The freedom of the creature is both limited and responsible. Man cannot fly, nor can he be born where he chooses, or with the face or abilities he selects. Neither can he ever act independently of God and man must at all times act with responsibility.”

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“In a Calvinist institution, of all places, the exercise of freedom should be seen in terms of the responsibility and limitations of the creature under God, rather than a rebellious son of Adam seeking to be a god and denouncing all of God’s and man’s just requirements of him.”

*Academic Freedom*  
R. J. Rushdoony

## July 1956

“[M]any who sit in the seats of church councils will have to do much more reading and studying than they are doing now. In their meetings they will have to do vastly more significant things than argue sixty minutes whether they should paint the church interior pastel green or rose. These men must discipline themselves so that they know what they believe in terms of Scriptural knowledge and confessional commitment rather than in terms of pious clichés.”

*The Road Into the Church*  
Alexander C. De Jong

“[T]he passage of time has proved that those who, during the last century, opposed the evolutionary doctrine of inevitable progress were in fact a hundred years ahead of their time.”

*Is Evolution a Dogma  
or Law of Life?*  
Philip E. Hughes

## September 1956

“The Christian school teacher must find the right focus as to the pupil’s covenantal status. It is very easy to distort this position by assuming too much and by assuming too little. What does it mean for teacher-pupil contact that the child is a covenant child? Are these children in a basically right relationship to God or do they live at some half-way station? Must we train them as Christians or as children who need to become Christians?”

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“As educators watch more and more spiritually anemic and anonymous products leave our schools they plead for a direct concern for the spiritual welfare of the child. It

is urged that Christian educators must press for a personal decision for Christ.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“We must ever urge our covenant children to the act of appropriation and commitment. They must be called to repentance and faith without ceasing. To mute this sound is to infect the covenant children with the fatal disease of complacency and ease. And this remains a sickness unto death.

*Finding the Focus*  
Alexander C. De Jong

## October 1956

“The sense of mission seems to be weaker in our churches today than possibly ever before. We give money in abundance, but we are not eager to give ourselves.”

*On Christian Leadership*  
Peter Y. De Jong

## November 1956

“[T]here is a definite relationship between man as God’s image bearer, man as a rational, moral, and responsible being, and the three offices which we recognize and maintain in the instituted church, our various congregations. I refer to our minister, elders, and deacons. The ministers represent Christ to his people as the prophet of truth; the elders represent him as king and ruler of his Church; and the deacons exercise Christ’s office of merciful high priest.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“[T]he fact that all of us as true children of God are his prophets, priests, and kings, in principle restored to the high position once occupied by man in the state of recititude, implies the right and the duty of the believers to organize them-

selves as autonomous local churches.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The members of our churches need not and may not take for granted that everything is always well within the church.”

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“We should never treat God’s believing people as minors who have no voice in matters spiritual and ecclesiastical.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“If a denomination is under control of those who are unfaithful, and if petitions or protests remain unheeded or ineffective, and if attempts at reformation are blocked or unsuccessful, then the true welfare of God’s Church and the spiritual protection of God’s people may require that the faithful withdraw themselves from the corrupt or false church, and establish a new denomination.”

*The Believer’s Office  
and the Church*  
Martin Monsma

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# TEEN SCENE



## Standing On Air

*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Judges 17:6

Rules! Rules! Rules! We have to deal with them all the time and they're just not fair. "Rules always stop me from doing the things that I want to do and sometimes need to do. Like when I'm late going to a friend's house and a police officer pulls me over for going five miles over the speed limit {everyone goes five mph over but the cop has to pick on me}. And now all my friends are waiting for me so we can go out. Or when I'm at school and we can't go off campus to get lunch. My parents let me go to Burger King when I'm at home why won't the school let me do this. They're not my parents. My parents say I have to be in at 11PM on Saturday night when all my friends can stay out until midnight. All these rules just drive me crazy." Why can't everyone just do what they want as long as they don't hurt anyone else?

Most of you may have gone through one of the different scenarios mentioned above and maybe

your parents went through similar difficulties when they were your age. We often like to rationalize (talk ourselves into) doing what we want to do in these situations.

We don't like to admit we are wrong and have sinned. Instead, we like to blame someone else for the situation we are in. One of the

situations you might find yourself in is going to a movie you know your folks would not want you to go to. But your "friend" tries to give you reasons why you should go anyway.

1. There's not that much swearing in it.
2. There's only one sex scene and it doesn't show that much.
3. The story is great and graphics are state of the art.
4. You won't be evil just because you watch this movie.
5. Everybody else can go but you.
6. My parents let me go and your parents are just old fashioned.

These arguments can be very powerful especially when others are around. But lets take a closer look at what these arguments are really saying.

In arguments 1 and 2 we are told: *if it's not too bad it must be okay.* This way of thinking says that be-

Read the following verses and answer the questions: John 14:6; John 17:17-18; Romans 1:24-25; Romans 2:7-8; I John 1:5-7

- A. How does Jesus describe Himself? Does truth matter when we approach God the Father?
- B. How does one become holy? Where do we learn to become holy?
- C. When we are not following God's truth, what are we worshipping? What is left for those who worship themselves?
- D. If we walk in God's truth what can we truly have? How is this possible? If we don't walk in God's truth what are we left in?

A simplified way of thinking about what we just talked about could be this: As children we all have played some kind of game. But what if other children wanted to change the rules of the game as you went along? The game wasn't worth playing anymore. The world wants to change the rules as life goes on. God's truth does not change. The Truth of God and the changing "truth" of the world are in conflict. In the end there is only victor in this battle for truth. So, are you doing what's right in your own eyes or in God's eyes? Are you standing on air or are you grounded in God?

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cause there are movies that are much worse than this one, then this one can not be too bad. We are not going to see the real bad movies so it's okay to see this one.

Argument 3 usually follows closely along these lines: there are some really good things about this movie so *we can look past the bad stuff*. Movies can have good graphics and a good story and there is nothing wrong with either. These effects can be used in movies in a positive way. But just because a movie has a good story or great graphics doesn't excuse the inappropriate parts of the movie. That is why this reason usually quickly follows arguments 1 and 2 to try to cover them. (A fairly recent example of this reasoning was often used for seeing the movie "Titanic").

Argument 4 says, "*You're not bad if you see this*" or "*you won't be influenced and become like the movie*." There is an old saying that states 'you are what you eat'. It means if you eat junk food all the time it is going to affect you, but if you eat healthy food it will have a positive effect on you. Another line of reasoning that goes along with this is "we're just going to do it this one time." If you do something once does that make it right? Is it okay to kill if you do it only once?

The number of times we sin does not make it okay to sin. God doesn't have a scale where he hates some sins more than others. We are effected when we see or participate in sin. Our relationship with God is affected.

When we look closely at argument 5 we see *persecution*. It says that YOU are weird or different be-

cause everyone else can go but YOU can't. This is typical peer pressure that happens to many teens. All of these arguments are pressure tactics by peers to talk you into doing something you would normally not do. It is meant to isolate and single YOU out. These friends want you to go along with them to ease their own consciences. If you go along with them they can justify themselves and their sin by saying "everyone else went, so it must be okay." It is much easier to fall into sin with the group than to stand alone.

In argument 6 the friend wants to point out that *your parents are at fault*. They are no good or wrong because they won't let you go. The friend takes personal offense because your parents' decision makes their parents look bad and you are making a judgment about their parents. To combat that they attack your parents' decision and they try to talk you into coming with them. They are actually blatantly asking you to break the fifth commandment.

These are certainly not all of the arguments used by people to get others to do something that violates their conscience. But what is the common vein throughout their arguments? It is this: the truth doesn't matter! What a friend says, or what a group of friends value is really all that matters.

In a certain circumstance, your friends will argue, the truth can change; or my truth is just as good as your truth. But is that the case? Can there be two truths for the same situation and both be equally right?

The verse from Judges was not praise given to Israel but disapproval. The Israelites were not following the ways of God. Judgment comes for those who follow their own path and not the truth of God's path. Consider Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." That's what God says. If any so-called truth contradicts the Word of God you have no choice but to obey God's Word in order to continue a right relationship with Him. When you stand with God's truth you are supported by Him otherwise you are just standing on air.

**Mr. Dave Vander Meer** is the Youth director of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.



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# Reformed Evangelism: Biblical and Confessional Foundations

## Election and Evangelism (part 2)

### The Means God Uses

I noted earlier that one of the common complaints against the doctrine of election is that it encourages passivity and fatalism. If salvation is entirely God’s work, then what remains for anyone to do?

This common complaint betrays a serious confusion between the authorship and the means of salvation. To say that God in His electing grace has purposed to save sinners, tells us little, if anything, about how He proposes to do it. If I may be permitted a rather simple analogy, no one ordinarily confuses a person’s *plan* or *intention* with his or her *manner of realizing* this plan. Good intentions, as we often say, are not enough! You have to act upon your intention. You have to execute your plan. You have to take the steps necessary to realize what you have in mind. In a far more profound and significant way, the same is true of God. His intention to save His people may not be confused, however important and foundational it may be, with the manner in which He wills to bring that intention to pass. He graciously elects to save His own in Christ from before the foundation of the world. But, in order for that purpose to be accomplished, He ordains and employs the means necessary to do so. The gospel of Christ’s saving work on behalf of His people—as well as the application of that work by the Holy Spirit—describes the way whereby God realizes His saving intention for His people.

Indeed, it is one of the more curious objections to the doctrine of election to say that it diminishes history or the use of means in procuring the salvation of sinners. Those who offer this objection seem not to notice that history itself, in all of its extraordinary richness and complexity, is the realization of God’s all-comprehensive counsel and pur-

*“To say that God in His electing grace has purposed to save sinners, tells us little, if anything, about how He proposes to do it.”*

pose. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism classically defines it, Gods’ “decrees are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass” (Q. & A. 7). All of the works of the Triune God, whether in creation or in redemption, represent the realization of His counsel and purpose for all things. Encompassed within the counsel of God are all of the actions of free creatures (Eph. 1:11; Acts 2:28; Gen. 50:20; Isa. 45:7). Though some might argue that this threatens to do “violence” to the will of creatures, the counsel of God actually establishes “the liberty and con-

tingency of second causes” (WCF Chap. III, i).

Only by means of the ministry of the Word and Spirit, communicating Christ and His saving benefits to His people, does God bring sinners to salvation. The work of evangelism represents the work of the Triune God, *through the means He has sovereignly appointed to that end*, in bringing His elect people to salvation. Sovereign election does not diminish these means. Rather, sovereign election *calls for the use of these means* as God’s chosen method of granting salvation to those whom He loves. The difference between evangelism viewed from the perspective of divine election and from the perspective of human ability, then, is not that the former encourages passivity and the latter activity. Not at all. Difficult as it may be for us to fathom, the sovereign counsel of God provides the only adequate basis for history and human responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The creature’s freedom finds its place within the sovereign counsel and purpose of God, and not outside of it.

Thus, Reformed believers are as committed to the importance of the use of means in the communication of the gospel as anyone. Though we will have occasion to reflect more directly on these means in subsequent articles—when we consider such topics as the covenant of grace, the church as the “mother of believers,” the means of grace, and

the like—it should be evident that the doctrine of election in no way minimizes the importance of evangelistic work. If God’s people are to be saved, then the gospel must be preached to them (Rom. 10). If the nations, which are encompassed within the generous reach of God’s electing love, are to be disciplined, then the church must go and disciple by teaching and administering the sacraments. If sinners are to be brought back to life from the dead, the Spirit will have to get hold of them for the sake of Christ. Only in the way of vigorous preaching and teaching will God’s elect find salvation. Only when there are shepherds who seek out and find those who are lost, who are moved with compassion toward those who are outside of the household of God, will God’s purposes for His chosen people be realized (Luke 15). Not one act, large or small, required for the salvation of any sinner is excluded from the realization of God’s sovereign and saving purposes.

### For God’s Glory

Within the perspective of divine election, the salvation of sinners represents the triumph of God’s grace in overcoming the radical consequences of human sinfulness and rebellion. Nothing less than the Father’s electing love, the Son’s atoning work, and the Holy Spirit’s application of that work, is sufficient to the need of any sinner. No doctrine of Scripture more eloquently attests the glory of God’s sovereign grace than the doctrine of election. When the apostle Paul, therefore, closes his treatment of God’s sovereign purpose of election in the salvation of His people, Jew and Gentile alike, in Romans 9-11, he ends

with a song of praise to God: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:33,36). God’s gracious election is “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). In this age and in the age to come, God wills to “show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7).

*“The doctrine of election reminds us that God’s work must be accomplished in God’s way.”*

This means, as John Calvin often noted, that the Triune God has *joined His glory to the salvation of His people*. Never is greater occasion given for praising and glorifying God than when He brings sinners to salvation. Never are sinners more profoundly blessed than when they enter into the fullness of spiritual blessings in fellowship with Christ (Eph. 1:3). What is to God’s glory, the salvation of sinners, is likewise the sinner’s comfort and blessedness.

### Several Implications

The first implication of the doctrine of election for evangelism has to do with its prospects for success.

Though “success” may not be the most desirable term, I mean to refer by it to the likelihood that the evangelistic preaching of the gospel will bring about the intended result, namely, the salvation of sinners.

One remarkable feature of many objections to the doctrine of election, particularly ones that score it for its negative implications for evangelism, is that they undermine the only sure basis for the confident expectation that the preaching of the gospel will bring sinners to salvation. How can we be sure that sinners, who are by nature hostile to God and the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ, will turn to God in faith and repentance and so be saved? What confidence may the church have that its work in evangelism will not be in vain?

Historic Arminianism teaches that God loves and seeks the salvation of all sinners, without exception, in the same way. This means that God elects all whom He foresees believing the gospel promise. He provides a universal atonement through the work of Christ for everyone without exception. His Spirit strives in the same way, but with the same limitations, when the gospel is preached to anyone. *But nothing the Triune God does actually saves anyone*. Without the free and persistent cooperation of sinners, not one single person would be saved. Indeed, it is conceivable that the combined efforts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, would not lead to the salvation of a single person.

The great comfort of the biblical doctrine of election, which gives encouragement and good hope to the church in her mission to preach the gospel to the nations, is that God



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will undoubtedly accomplish His electing purpose. Nothing in all creation can frustrate His saving purposes (Rom. 8). Not one of those for whom Christ shed His precious blood, and in whose heart the Spirit works through the gospel, will fail to come to him in faith and repentance. In this sense, the doctrine of election lends wind to the sails of the gospel preacher, and for that matter to every Christian in his or her witness.

### Our Means of Success

Furthermore, the doctrine of election answers the question as to the means of success in evangelism. In the history of the church, particularly the history of the evangelical church in North America, we often witness the sad spectacle of the church, in the name and cause of evangelism, resorting to a variety of less-than-biblical strategies to secure the salvation of sinners. From Charles Finney's "new measures" to the more extravagant excesses of the church growth movement, any number of techniques and means have been employed to obtain success in reaching sinners with the gospel.

The doctrine of election reminds us that *God's work must be accomplished in God's way*. If God has ordained the end as well as the means of evangelism, then it is incumbent upon the Christian church to disciple the nations in accord with God's appointed method. If God is pleased, for example, to magnify His own power through the weakness and foolishness of preaching, then what business does the church have in devising a substitute method (1 Cor. 1:18-31). Evangelistic methods that "guarantee" success,

whether the gospel is faithfully preached or the Holy Spirit works through the Word, do not honor God or save sinners. Only the Triune God saves, and He saves by the working of His Spirit and Word.

### God's Glory and the Salvation of Sinners

There are two related implications for evangelism of the theme of God's glory in the salvation of His elect people.

First, God is not glorified when, in the work of evangelism, He is not acknowledged as the one whose sovereign grace alone brings salvation. Nor is He glorified, when the means used virtually assume that salvation can be effected whether the Spirit and Word of God are present or not. The salvation of sinners is of and unto the glory of God!

But second, God is not glorified when the salvation of sinners is not the great interest and preoccupation of the church. After all, if the Triune God is pleased to be glorified in the display of His grace toward His people in Christ, then nothing glorifies Him more than seeking and saving the lost. Who can claim to represent God before a lost world, but have no compassion or interest to welcome sinners in His name? Who dares to profess the God of Scripture, and yet be unmoved by the plight of those who are like sheep without a shepherd. The Triune God of the Scriptures has revealed the fullness of His grace and truth in the person of His only-begotten Son, who came to seek and to save that which is lost (1 Tim. 1:15). Those who are His children, who are being conformed to the image of His Son, must share His

heart, a heart that is full of compassion and unwilling to rest until His house is filled (Luke 14:23).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For a fine statement of this point, which answers the objection to "decretal" theology that says it diminishes the importance of history and human responsibility, see Richard A. Muller, "The Myth of 'Decretal Theology,'" *Calvin Theological Journal* 30/1 (April, 1995): 159-67. The following observation is typical of Muller's argument: "The world is a contingent order dependent in its every moment, its every bit of matter, its every activity, on the divine will. If, then, God did not ordain 'whatsoever comes to pass,' *nothing would come to pass. The eternal decree does not, therefore, abolish history—it makes history possible*" (165, emphasis Muller's).

**Dr. Cornel Venema** is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary where he also teaches Doctrinal Studies. Dr. Venema is a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

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# Like Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver (Part 2)

*[Last month Rev. Murphy looked at the growth and advancements of the Reformed faith in the area of individuals and congregations. This month, Rev. Murphy continues the series by looking at denominations and ministries.]*

## Denominations

It used to be said that once a denomination had gone bad, there was no reversing it. As a matter of fact, I think I had heard that substantiated with historical facts. Once a denomination had gone down the road of spiritual declension and apostasy, there had never been one that had come back.

That is no longer true. I began to first recognize this with the turnaround that occurred a number of years ago in the Southern Baptist Convention. I know they are not Reformed, but the efforts at the reversal in the denomination were largely a result of the Founders movement, which is Calvinistic, in that denomination. They turned that denomination around. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is another example. Twenty years ago it was in terrible shape. Its seminary and college were populated by liberals. Anybody that was conservative knew they could not study in those institutions and they had to go elsewhere to find conservative Reformed theology being taught. Women in office and other liberal doctrines were being propagated and were characteristic of that particular denomination. That denomination has had a complete turnaround now. There is still need

for further reformation in particular areas, but conservatives have won the day in that denomination. A graduate of Westminster Seminary is president of Erskine Seminary and is hiring solid Reformed men for the faculty. The same is happening at the college.

*“There are multitudes of new Reformed denominations that have sprung up in the last 20 years.”*

The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America with which I first became familiar ten years ago likewise had problems. They have reversed that course as well. Not to mention the expansion and growth of existing Reformed denominations. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are all in the midst of church planting programs, multiplying congregations in their respective federations. There are multitudes of new Reformed denominations that have sprung up in the last 20 years, too many to mention. Most

of them are small, but I tell you, I have spoken for them, I have encountered them, I have worshipped with them, and though they are small, they are faithful.

And of course in our own circles, the United Reformed Churches in North America was formed and has flourished. In 1999 there were less than sixty churches within the federation, now that there are close to eighty. Classis Southwest of the URCNA is engaged in aggressive efforts at planting churches. It seems like every time you turn the page in the news, there is a new church being planted in that Classis. Classis Michigan is presently working on at least three church plants.

## Ministries

I became exposed to Mount Olive Tape Ministry, in Mount Olive, Mississippi when I was in Westminster Seminary and it became a very inexpensive resource for me. It is a tape loaning library. You can rent 12-100 tapes at a time at a very inexpensive rate for a month at a time. I remember supplementing my studies, driving back and forth between New York and Philadelphia every weekend, by listening to tapes from Mount Olive Tape Library. Hundreds of Reformed men have sermons and lectures on tape at the Mount Olive Tape Ministry.

The Ministry of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, encompassing Mike Horton's work and Jim Boice's work and a few others, has grown exponentially in recent years. Ligionier Ministries has gained a large influence in American evangelical circles. Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, headed by Don Kistler, out of Western Pennsylva-



nia in the Pittsburgh area, is a huge ministry and hugely profitable in propagating the Reformed faith. Reformation and Revival Ministries, headed up by Rev. John Armstrong in the Wheaton, Illinois area, is having a widespread influence and is being blessed and used of the Lord to propagate the Reformed faith.

Earlier I made reference to Doug Wilson's work in Moscow, Idaho. I went out there in February to attend a conference on American History. You might say, "What a dull thing to travel half way across the country for." American History? I am telling you it was absolutely thrilling! It was very encouraging that Doug Wilson is a very prominent person in the ministries in Moscow, Idaho. He is not he alone. He is joined by Doug Jones, Roy Attwood, Peter Leithart, and many others there. From a work that began with former Jesus freaks in a garage worshipping the Lord, it has grown into a church that is approaching a thousand people. This is Moscow, Idaho! I am sure most of you don't even know where that is. They have a grammar school, a high school, a college (new St. Andrew's College), and they have started a seminary. They are publishers of magazines and books. And because of the widespread interest of people in the northwest and other parts of the country, and the enormous amount of church planting they have been engaged in, they have started their own denomination as well. It is absolutely astounding to see, not only what the Lord has done in that ministry, but the influence they are having throughout the evangelical world across our country. And that is not unique, either.

The same thing is happening outside Nashville in Franklin, Tennessee with George Grant, author of about 20 books. It has grown and been blest. They have started a college, Bannockburn College, and they are doing the same things that are going on in Moscow, Idaho.

The same tiling is occurring in Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church where Steve Wilkins serves a PCA congregation in Monroe, Louisiana. The same thing is being planned by Mike Chastain, an OPC pastor for Annapolis, Maryland. The same thing is being planned by the Detwielers in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. These are great encouraging things that are having widespread

influence not only in the Reformed world, but also in the evangelical world.

**Rev. Paul Murphy** is the pastor of the United Reformed Church in Dutton, Michigan.

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