



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

**Inside this *Outlook***

***The Christian: God’s Delight..... Rev. Fritz Harms .....2***

In this meditation Rev. Fritz Harms looks for the balance between a sorrow for our sin and an understanding that we have been accepted of God.

***Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1964):***

***The Legacy of a Missionary, Professor and Author***

***.....Rev. Johan D. Tangelder .....4***

Rev. Tangelder reviews the influence that Dr. J. H. Bavinck had in the field of missions.

***Teen Scene: Let’s Get Ready to Rumble ..... Mr. Dave Vander Meer .....8***

Mr. Dave Vander Meer looks at the battle that all Christians must fight as soldiers in God’s army.

***Some Distinctive Aspects of Rural Evangelism .... Rev. Jack L. Vander Laan .....9***

This edited for size reprint from the March 1961 *Torch and Trumpet* describes some of the difficulties of evangelism in rural churches.

***Sound Bites - 1961 .....14***

Quotes from the eleventh year of the *Torch and Trumpet’s* publication that still speak to us today.

***Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel (2) ....Dr. Cornel Venema ..... 16***

In part 2 of his discussion of the “Free Will Offer”, Dr. Venema looks at the Biblical basis for the “traditional” reformed view.

***Folk Islam ..... ‘Dick Wunnink’ .....20***

Writing under the name “Dick Wunnink”, the author looks at how local traditions have influenced the Islam religion.

***God’s People, My Parish .....Rev. Wybren Oord .....22***

“Year after year Alfred and Alice farmed the little plot of land they owned...”

# The Christian: God's Delight

Easter, 2002

*Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment; He has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*

Zephaniah 3:14-17

The other day I received a copy of a published prayer. The prayer of the young writer reflected a tremendous struggle with God. His view of God was that he needed Him. He had to please and satisfy God because God demands holiness, yet he knew he could not attain that holiness.

He prayed that God would give him a good night's rest so he could feel refreshed in the morning to try again to do what God wanted from him. The

prayer was written in a most thoughtful and respectful way. From the prayer itself one would surely consider it to have been written by a godly person.

What should be the test by which we gauge our view of God as Christians? When we read Scripture, we need to ask ourselves if the God who reveals Himself in it agrees with the picture we have of Him? Personal upbringing, preaching and teaching may all

explain our personal impressions and feelings about who we think God is. The question is, however, whether or not our understanding of God is based on God's Word itself?

The church background of this young man whose letter I read might help to explain the spiritual pain he suffered as he wrote his prayer. His perception of God's demands and his own inability to live up to those demands drove him to such a state of depression that



Volume 52, No. 4 (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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he saw no other way out than to end his own life. The man simply could not handle the burden any longer.

The causes of this kind of problem may turn out to be more complex than we first think. This prayer was such an urgent call for help, that I believe we, as churches, should pay careful attention to the matter of how we present God to our covenant people. Do we let Scripture speak in a careful and balanced manner or do we single out theological emphases that reflect a certain bias within church tradition? As a preacher I am the first to admit how exceedingly difficult this task is. But we must strive to be biblical and balanced in all the things we preach and teach.

There should be no doubt that the weight of God's glory has been watered down in modern times. In much preaching and teaching today God is somebody who will not and cannot hurt us. On the opposite side there is the emphasis on the depravity of man in his fallen and in his renewed state. In that case, man is nothing but a worm even if he can confess with humility and joy, according to Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The prophet Zephaniah reminds us that the church is God's prized possession. This is all the more true in light of the future redemption of which Zephaniah speaks that has made its appearance into our world, namely through Christ's birth, death and resurrection. God has come to dwell with sinners so that He might restore fellowship with them. In Jesus Christ, God is now truly with us (Zephaniah 3:15,17). The ancient prophet gives us the picture of God as

One who greatly delights Himself in His people. This picture of paternal affection from God is far removed from the perspective that God is still calling us to give an account of ourselves at the close of each day as we come to Him with fear and sorrow because we realize how deeply we have disappointed God.

Don't misunderstand me. Sorrow for sin ought to have a meaningful place in the Christian's life. What is impor-

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### *Do we let Scripture speak in a careful and balanced manner?*

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tant for a healthy spiritual development, however, is that our people know that God, through Christ, has accepted them as His full sons and daughters (Q/A 1, Heidelberg Catechism). Let Scripture be our guide as it shows us the real God who delights Himself in His people.

Test what view of God you have when you look at God's involvement on Good Friday when He let His own Son die? How deep do we look into the heart of God's pure love when we see Jesus hang on that cross crying out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?"

This knowledge should determine how we preach and teach about sin and judgment to come. This love expressed by Christ's suffering in our place should teach us that we are the

prized object of God's love. When we consider that Christ rose from the grave, His open tomb should fill us with absolute wonder and joy and continuous amazement at how much we are loved by God!

The severe nature of sin and its stubborn resistance in the life of the reconciled sinner and saint may not and should not be ignored as though this is something of the past. No, like 'Christian' in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, we as God's people are on a long journey. Our path is filled with potholes and opportunities to waver.

The church is engaged in spiritual battle on the way to glory. We must recognize that something has dramatically changed. We are speaking about when Christ was born in the flesh, suffered and died to atone for the sins of the church, and rose in victory on Easter. (I John 4:7-12). Christ has laid the foundation for the promise to come true for all of God's children when He says "I will bring you home" (Zephaniah 3:20).

If you struggle with sin in your life and despair of the lack of sanctification, take your eyes away from yourself and look to Christ. See Him who loves you and always will. His triumphant love always comes before our inadequacy. By God's grace, you are God's delightful child in whom He greatly rejoices.

**Rev. Fritz Harms** is the pastor of the Champlain Valley URC in New Haven, Vermont.

# Johan Herman Bavinck

## (1895-1964)

### The Legacy of a Missionary, Professor and Author

I have often been asked, “Why did you decide to go to the Philippines as a missionary, leaving behind your relatives, your friends, your congregation?” Obedience to the Great Commissions was the key factor. But the love for missions instilled by professor Dr. J.H. Bavinck, while I was a student at the Free University in Amsterdam, also contributed to the acceptance of the call to the foreign mission field.

Bavinck was a wonderful, inspiring professor with a broad range of interests. His lectures were profound, always intellectually stimulating and spiritually enriching. They left an unforgettable impression on his students. His great impact is best measured by the great stream of students who pursued their doctoral studies under his guidance.

He was a missionary “who thought it important to confront the world of Eastern religious thought with the message of Christ.” His inspiring example left a powerful impression. A Brazilian, who was studying with Bavinck when the professor had already become extremely fatigued and worn out, testified, “He doesn’t have to say much; just to see him once in a while is for me a fount of inspiration.” I can identify with this sentiment.

Bavinck was a unique man, who spoke from the heart and by his life and deeds. No wonder that shortly after he began to teach at the Free University, he attracted many students from the United States and Canada. He was also a prolific and gifted author, one of those rare learned scholars who could write with childlike simplicity for specific groups of people.

All his writings show his intimate devotional knowledge of Scripture. He read the Bible as the book of the daily meeting with God and man. His fertile mind was always busy. From 1923 onward there was scarcely a year without the publication of one or more books or articles. Many of them were devoted to missions; others were Biblical studies and meditations.

#### Bavinck’s Background

Johan Herman Bavinck, the second son of Grietje Bouwes and Coenraad Bernard Bavinck (1866-1941), a pastor in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), was born in Rotterdam in 1895. Jan Bavinck, his grandfather, had been a leading pastor in the Secession church. Jan’s eldest son, Herman, became a professor of dogmatics. Coenraad, a deeply spiritual man, was also a theologian

at heart, and an authority on the works of Augustine. However, he left the writing of theological works to his elder brother.

J.H. Bavinck grew up in an atmosphere of mild piety, blended with a lively interest in theology. In 1912 he enrolled as a student of theology at the Free University. In addition to his theological and philosophical interests, he also developed a fascination for psychology.

In this time period he became critically ill and had serious surgery. This experience deeply impacted his spiritual life. Bavinck was a man of great faith which was continually fed by the Bible and his close walk with God. His sermons, his writings about religion and missions, and his published Bible studies testify to his deep and warm spirituality.

Bavinck felt overwhelmed by the awesome greatness of God. He said that the Almighty God always takes the initiative in His dealing with people. Salvation is, therefore, “fundamentally a mystery of grace.” We can only speak when the living God speaks to us and in Jesus Christ answers us.

After completion of his work at the Free University, Bavinck went for further studies to Germany. In 1919 he received the doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Erlangen. His thesis was on the mysticism of the medieval Heinrich Suso. Throughout his life Bavinck

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*Bavinck was a wonderful, inspiring professor with a broad range of interests.*



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was intensely engaged in showing how the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ opposes the alluring forces of mysticism.

During his student years he joined the Netherlands Student Christian Movement. Through his involvement Bavinck showed his desire to present the Gospel to the intelligentsia both during and after the First World War.

Bavinck was a transparent Christian; a harmonious and humble man who used his many talents in the service of his Lord. He neither aspired nor attempted to become a denominational leader. He was more at home in his study, on the pulpit and in the lecture hall than in a crowd. He was a good listener and genuinely interested in people. I can testify to it. When I sat for an exam in his book-lined study in his home, he put me at ease and asked questions about my background.

Bavinck was adverse to absolutism, party forming and ecclesiastical strife. The outbreak of a long-smoldering conflict within the GKN on matters of doctrine and church order, which resulted in division of the denomination and the formation of the GKN (Liberated), deeply hurt him.

### **Pastor and Missionary**

In 1919 Bavinck accepted a call to serve the Dutch-speaking churches (GKN) in Indonesia. During his brief stay in Medan he married Tine Robers. (She died in 1953). Afterwards he went to Bandung, the capital of the province of West Java. He worked chiefly among the Dutch. But he opened their eyes for the needs of Indonesian and Chi-

nese societies. Bavinck gained the attention of young Indonesians and Chinese. Every Sunday many of them came to hear him preach. His contacts with the Indonesian and Chinese world while serving a "Dutch congregation" prepared him for the missionary service which would follow.

In 1926 Bavinck returned to the Netherlands and became affiliated with the GKN church in Heemstede. His remarkable personality and unique style of preach-

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ing caught the attention of people outside his own congregation. During his Heemstede period he also concentrated on studying psychology. His book *Inleiding in de zielkunde* ("Introduction to Psychology") was a marked achievement for that time. In the foreword he cited the words of Augustine that are so typical of his own approach: "I desire to know God and the soul" To those words he added, "For one who has faith in God in his heart, in this world few things are more beautiful than to be allowed to penetrate into the depth of the soul."

In 1929 Bavinck became a missionary in Solo, a town of central Java, the very heart of Javanese

culture. He was put in charge of the youth work. He wrote small book describing it, *Youth Work in Middle Java*. It describes the great variety of work done among young people. He saw as his crucial task, through vital contact with the Bible, to bring young people to Jesus Christ.

Bavinck said that the Bible calls us to conversion, to surrender. It invites us to be reconciled to God through the blood of the cross. In *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* Bavinck states that "Conversion is not a psychological, but a theological phenomenon; every effort to describe it will prove unsuccessful because the hand of the Lord is in it, and we are not authorized to scrutinize God's own work."

According to Bavinck, the Apostles' Creed lacked one article, namely, "I believe in conversion". What he meant was perfectly clear. Many don't seem to believe in conversion. But there is no other way to God than through the Gospel of the crucified and risen Savior. It calls people from the East and the West to repentance and conversion.

While in Solo he strengthened his contacts with Javanese mystics. He was well qualified in both personality and education to penetrate the mysterious and subtle world of Javanese mysticism. Bavinck had a rare gift of fully understanding other people's spiritual experiences, so much so that he was sometimes nicknamed "the white Javanese."

His understanding of Eastern thought did not lead Bavinck to any form of syncretism. He was a re-

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spectful missionary, but still a missionary who confronted the world of Eastern religious thought with the claims of Christ.

### **Jogjakarta**

In 1933 Bavinck was called to teach at the theological college in Jogjakarta, central Java. In preparation for his teaching position he went back to the Netherlands to study at the Leiden University. During that time he completed his famous book *Christus en de Mystiek van het Oosten (Christ and Eastern Mysticism)*. Although it went through only one edition and was never revised, it is his most important publication.

In this book Bavinck shows an appreciation for the attraction of mysticism as few others have. He was once said, "I was born with an Eastern soul." But he also dispels the delusion of mystical speculations, using the results of his father's studies in Augustine to clearly explain the difference between Eastern mysticism and Christianity. He notes that the cutting difference between Eastern religions and Christianity is in the two opposing views of salvation. "Salvation in the Gospel is never a psychological process, but it is first and foremost a profound change in the relationship of God and man, it is reconciliation, justification."

In 1935 Bavinck went to Jogjarkarta to join his colleagues in training pastors for the Javanese and Chinese congregations. In Jogjarkarta he was able to pursue his studies, especially in the field of Oriental mysticism. At the same time he was able to help his students

relate to the Gospel which they were going to preach to their own people.

In those years Bavinck wrote a number of works on Biblical subjects- I refer especially to the fine book *Mensen Rondom Jesus (People Around Jesus)*. He teamed up with Dr. F.L. Bakker to write *Geschiedenis der Godsopenbaring (History of Divine Revelation)*. Bavinck did the New Testament section. The book was trans-

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lated into both Javanese and Indonesian. Because it provides new and unexpected perspectives on the sacred Scriptures, it speaks to the simple "dessa" (village) Christians, but also to Western theologians. Indonesian pastors, teachers and evangelists still use it today.

### **Professor**

When the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) decided to establish a chair of missiology at Kampen, Bavinck was their logical choice. He accepted the call and returned to the Netherlands at the eve of World War II. At the same time he was appointed professor extraordinaire of missiology at the Free University.

He began his teaching career at

these two institutions toward the end of 1939 by delivering an imposing inaugural lecture entitled "Christusprediking in de Volkerenwereld" ("Proclaiming Christ to the Nations"). In it Bavinck shows how the apostles already struggled with the question of how to bring the truth of Christ in such a way that the Gospel becomes understandable for those who are not acquainted with its language. He also stated that the key to missions is to preach Christ to people who do not know Him, who is the Light of our light, and the Life of our life. The cross is central to the Gospel proclamation. Bavinck observed; "It is remarkable that many Christians from the East came to realize the terror of sin when they saw the cross."

### **Why Missions?**

In joyful and humble obedience to her Lord's Great Commission, the Church goes into all the world to preach the Gospel. But the Great Commission can only be understood from the perspective of John 3:16. God does not want to build His Church only in Europe and America, but the whole world must know the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ, God's Son. Missions is striving to win people to Christ, but it is also a struggle with cultures which bear the traces of other religions.

Since Christians long to see the coming of the Kingdom of God, they cannot let society remain in the devil's control. The Gospel is for all of life. Christians may not disobey the call of the Kingdom in the social and the economic life of their time. In other words, the Church of Christ is always busy, always seek-



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ing, always struggling. She stands in history as the seeker of the Kingdom. Missions is not an option. It is our God given duty to do missions, to pray for it, to give it a place in our heart. Hence, we must show interest in it because it concerns God's work and because we, as members of the Church of Christ, are involved in it.

In his lectures Bavinck repeatedly stated that missionaries need to have a proper academic training. In fact, a missionary needs more education than a pastor at home. For instance, one blunder made by a missionary may effect the whole missionary situation in a particular field for years to come. But he also said that the best missionaries are ordinary Christians, who -in word and deed - confront a nation with the message of Christ.

### World War II

After the Netherlands was caught up in World War II, academic teaching was still possible only for a few years; ultimately all universities and colleges were closed. The connection with the Dutch East Indies were cut off. The war became a time of great tension for the family Bavinck. Three children were actively engaged in all kinds of underground activities. Bavinck himself gave spiritual guidance in various ways, among them the writing of books and pamphlets on a popular level, preparing the church for the resumption of her missionary task after the ceasing of hostilities.

After the war he taught for a while - once every two weeks - at the Theological School of the Free Reformed Churches in Apeldoorn.

In the fall of 1947 he lectured at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, on "The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World". In 1949 he wrote *Religious besef en christelyk geloof (Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith)*, a masterful study on Romans 1 in which he showed that God in His general revelation is at work in the world, but that at the same time people replace God's revelation by images of their own making.

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***God does not want to build His Church only in Europe and America, but the whole world must know the message of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.***

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In 1953-54 he was guest lecturer at the Theological School at Potchefstroom, South Africa. Considering his pioneering work in missiology, it is no wonder that he has been called one of the greatest builders of this still young "science."

### Conclusion

A summary of Bavinck's approach is his great work *Inleiding in de zendingswetenschap*, published in 1954, which has been translated into English as *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. It will continue to be used as a text in Evangelical Seminaries and Bible Colleges for its exposition of Bibli-

cally based mission principles. In 1955 he gave up his position in Kampen and became full time professor of missiology and practical theology at Free University.

Although a serious kidney ailment sapped his strength for a long time, Bavinck kept working until the very end of his life. His second wife, F. van der Vegt, whom he married in 1956, was a wonderful support during this very difficult time. The kidney problem clouded his spirit. When he was coherent, he testified of the love which drives out all fear of death. On June 23, 1964, the Lord welcomed into His eternal home his faithful servant Johan Herman Bavinck.

**Rev. Johan D. Tangelder** is a retired minister in the Christian Reformed Church who resides in East Strathroy, Ontario.

# TEEN SCENE

## Let's Get Ready To Rumble!!!

*Fight the good fight of the faith. I Timothy 6:12*

“Let’s get ready to rumble” is a common phrase used today when sports teams are going to square off in some contest. A rumble was also once a reference to a fight between two gangs. Even though in our culture this phrase isn’t as popular as it used to be, most of us have heard it and understand its meaning. Two combatants are about to go at it. For some, just the thought of a “fight” in an emotionally charged atmosphere where this phrase is used is enough to make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

But do you realize that Christians are in a battle each day? I’m not just talking about some Christians on the other side of the world being terrorized by some warring group. Each and every day we are in spiritual battle with the evil one and his followers. We are embattled within ourselves with the temptations that would have us turn away from God and seek our own glory and pleasure. And we are embattled with the world which wants us to change so that we will fit into its mold.

Let’s be honest, the Bible is not a nice fluffy book stating that

we should just “all get along”. While the Bible does not advocate that we should kill all who do not follow God, we are still engaged in a battle. It is a different kind of battle. Today’s fight for the most part is not with swords or guns. Our weapon is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What we learn from the New Testament is that followers of Christ will live in Heaven glorifying God and the rest will be sent to hell being eternally tormented for their sins. That’s no fluffy book.

We have to realize that we are at war. A war that does have a physical side to it, but it also has a spiritual side. You need to be ready and equipped for that fight. That’s why Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. Faith is something to struggle for, but it’s a good struggle. All fights are not bad. You are in a war for Christ but you cannot win this battle yourself.

You need to realize that it is Christ’s work on the cross that empowers you for this battle. He is the one who calls you to be His soldier. He is the one who sends the Holy Spirit into your heart to strengthen you for battle. When you are in Christ you are a soldier for Him!

### For Further Study

Let us look at the Bible to help us prepare for the battle.

*Read Ephesians 6:12*

What is the nature of this battle?

*Read John 14:6; 17:17-19*

What is the battle over?

*Read Matthew 6:24; 12:30; James 4:4*

Can we be neutral in this battle?

*Read II Corinthians 10:3-7*

Where does the power we fight with come from?

How must your mind be prepared to fight?

*Read Ephesians 6:10-18*

Whose armor do we use for battle?

Write down each piece of armor. Notice what other words are related to that piece of armor. Is the piece of armor offensive or defensive?

What is the final command in this passage? Whom do we need to win this battle?

**PERSONAL:** Are you equipped, ready, and willing, to battle for God?

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



# Some Distinctive Aspects of RURAL EVANGELISM

Throughout the world men and women work with the soil. Some do not produce enough food for their own families. This is true in areas in which there is not sufficient moisture, or where there is not enough warmth. Many live in poverty and under the shadow of disease. This is true in lands other than our own, but it is also true to a certain extent in our country.

Some who farm have large farms to work, whereas others find that their farms are much too small so that they are required to supplement their income with work away from the farm. The people who live in this way are those in rural areas. And many of them do not know Jesus as their Savior. They must be reached for Christ.

The task still facing the Church is to see to it that those who know not the Christ may come to know Him and the salvation that is available in Him.

## **Rural Evangelism Has Its Own Problems**

In this article we shall deal with the matter of bringing the gospel to those who live in the rural areas of our land. We shall discuss some of the distinctive aspects of rural evangelism. We must not think that evangelism as it is to be carried out in the rural areas of our land is much different than city evangelism. It is not. The principles are the same. But the application of the principles is much different. We shall concentrate on some of the differences which are

significant in the work of rural evangelism. As we consider the distinctive aspects of rural evangelism we shall consider the problems that are faced by any church which would take up this work. We shall consider, first, *The Problems in the Church*; and secondly, *The Problems in the Field*.

### **Unrealized Opportunities**

Those in the rural church who are

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***The principles are the same. But the application of the principles is much different.***

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enthused about evangelism are likely to face the problem that many people there do not recognize; namely, that there is work to be done in rural districts. They will meet with outstanding men in rural communities who say that there is no opportunity for evangelism in their areas.

I recently read of a young man who was called as a candidate to a rural church. He chose the rural field because he felt that in it was to be found good opportunity to reach those unacquainted with salvation in Christ. After he had gotten acquainted with the people in his church, he had a meeting with his

official board and suggested to the members that a careful house-to-house survey be made within five miles of the church to discover any unreached families. Members of the board smiled indulgently at their young pastor and informed him that there were no unreached families in the area. Those members of the board had lived in the surrounding territory most of their lives and knew all the people personally.

The young pastor accepted the word of the board members. However, after two years had passed, he began to realize there were some people in the surrounding area with whom he had gotten acquainted through business contacts who did not seem to have any church relationships. He succeeded in persuading his young people to make a house-to-house canvass within a five-mile circle of his church. After the study had been made, he had the names of forty-four families who claimed no church connections. He announced this at the next meeting of the board. As he mentioned the names one by one, a board member would say, "Oh, but I know that his father always attended church," or "Why, his grandmother belonged to the Bethel Lutheran Church," and so on. They did not think there was work to be done, when there was plenty of it. This is a problem that will face many who wish to undertake the work of rural evangelism.

### **Lack of Enthusiasm**

Another problem which must be faced is the lack of enthusiasm on

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the part of many members of the church. They may be outstanding members of the congregation in certain respects, they may be good leaders in other things, but they cannot be interested in the task of evangelism. This is no doubt true in city churches too.

Probably the only churches in which you will find that this is not the case are those which contain only first generation Christians. They have just newly experienced the redeeming grace of God. They have recently come from a life of sin and are filled with the joy of salvation. They realize very keenly the need of others. But in most churches, and surely in most rural churches, which generally have a long history, it is inevitable that one must meet the problem of a lack of enthusiasm. This must be made a matter of prayer. The need of the people ought to be clearly presented to those who are lacking in evangelistic zeal. They ought to be reminded of the tragic end of these people if they do not come to know Christ. And their responsibility to shed light in this world must especially be pointed out.

### **Less Education in Rural Churches**

In the rural church in which the pastor or evangelism committee is striving to inaugurate or advance a program of evangelism there is another problem which must be met. It is a fact that in rural areas the people do not have as much education as members of an average city congregation. Such people are strongly inclined to think that they are not qualified to do the work of witnessing. They will hesitate to vol-

unteer for making contacts with those who do not know the gospel of salvation in Christ. These people must be encouraged to do this work. One way to do this is to show them that Christ chose disciples who were not highly educated and used them for His work.

### **Familiarity a Hindrance**

In rural areas it is generally true that a man knows his neighbors much better than the city-dweller does.

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*The minister cannot do the work alone. That has been one of the most serious mistakes that have been made in the past.*

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They have possibly lived next door to each other for many years. They may even have worked together. Some are inclined to be hesitant about speaking to their neighbors about Christ just because they know them so well. It is true that this will be difficult if they have not spoken to their neighbor about such things before.

Still, every advantage is theirs, just because they know their neighbor so well. They are in the best position to determine the proper time to approach their neighbor and what approach will be the most effective. The advantage that such a person has ought to be made clear to him, and he should be given encouragement to make use this advantage.

His obligation should be made clear too.

### **Layworkers Needed**

Many other obstacles will surely be faced in the endeavor to enlist the aid of members of the church in the program of evangelism. But their aid is indispensable. The minister cannot do the work alone. That has been one of the most serious mistakes that have been made in the past. There are still many in the church who believe that when they have a minister they are paying him to do their witnessing for them, But lay workers are a necessity. Someone has said that you cannot win a war with only the graduates of the military academy. That is very evident, But thousands of ordinary fighting men are also needed. In the church of Christ this is true too. The ministers cannot do it all. If the task is left to them, it surely will never be completed. They should guide the program. They should lend their leadership and support. But laymen are needed. Of this both city and rural churches must be convinced.

### **The Lack of Opportune Time**

There is another problem which is faced in the rural church in getting the work of evangelism done. Those who are unchurched or who are neglecting their church membership altogether must be contacted. Calls have to be made. Members of the church will be needed to make most of these calls. In the city church there are usually several members who are available in the summer time. They can go out just before and just after supper and make these contacts. They have jobs which give



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them this free time. And this is possibly the best time to make contacts in the city. The summer is surely much better than a cold winter day. And, the evening of the day is possibly the best, too, because then the whole family is likely to be at home. This is a problem in rural evangelism. For the farmers are not available at that time of the year, nor at that time of the day. Many of them work from sun-up to sun-down. And the people on whom they would call are also busy at such times. Possibly the month of August is best, because then the farmer is not nearly so busy as otherwise.

#### **Failure to Welcome Visitors**

I have been in city churches of our denomination whose members were not very friendly. They did not go out of their way to make a visitor feel welcome. Yet as a rule, I imagine the city churches will be more friendly, and will make visitors from the community feel more welcome at the services than is usually the case in a rural church. The members have a convenient way of standing in a circle and talking to each other with the result that a visitor sees only their backs and hardly dares try to enter the circle.

This is something that must be eliminated. A fine practice is to have a welcoming committee greet the visitors before the service. Perhaps it would also be well to have a rotating committee of people who make it a point to seek out the visitors after the service and make them feel welcome. If they have once been contacted and the contacts resulted in attendance at the worship service, everything ought to be done to see that such people are not discouraged by a lack of

receptivity on the part of the members of the church.

#### **Past Neglect May Require Explanation**

Because of the failure of many a church to begin the work of evangelism as soon as the church was established, there maybe another problem which will have to be faced. Those who are contacted by the church will want to know why the church has not been interested

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*It would be well to have a rotating committee of people who make it a point to seek out the visitors after the service and make them feel welcome.*

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in them before. They have lived in the same place for several years. The church was there all the time, and yet no one from the church ever came before to talk to them about their soul's welfare. This is something which must be faced. Those who make the calls must explain that the church has failed in this duty up to that time. They must make it clear that now, however, the church is concerned about their eternal destiny.

#### **Rural Members of City Churches**

Churches which are located in a city may have a responsibility toward the people living in the rural area. Some of these churches have

several families living in the country. If the work of evangelism is practiced in such churches it will likely be limited to the area immediately around the church. And thus it will be confined to the city alone, while the rural area is neglected. Such churches have a tremendous task facing them. They should put forth effort to reach the unchurched in the rural areas surrounding them.

#### **Problems in the Field**

Today it is much more difficult to persuade the unreached among us that they should affiliate themselves with the local church than it is to take the Christian church with its claims into an area where it is relatively unknown. Most of the unreached people in America today have a general knowledge of the work of the church. Many of them have relatives in the church. Others have had parents that were members of the church. Consequently they are well acquainted with the ethical standard of the Christian church. Often they conduct themselves within the influence of this standard.

Upon being contacted for the church they will say that they are just as good as the people who attend church and consequently they do not feel any particular need for, or attraction to, the local church. Someone has very pointedly described such people as being inoculated with Christianity, and consequently immune against it. This problem is found in the rural area and in the city situation alike.

#### **The Problem of Distance**

There are problems in the field of rural evangelism which cause spe-

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cial difficulty in pursuing the work of evangelism. The people are not found by the thousands in a couple of city blocks as in Harlem. They are scattered. Many of the people are quite isolated. Some of them are located at considerable distance from the church. They may use this fact as an excuse for not coming to church. They say it is too far for them to come. This is very clearly an excuse, since they do not find it too far to come and do business during the week.

True, the isolation of the people in the county does make it a little more difficult to make calls on the unreached. But this is not an insurmountable difficulty. They can be contacted by mail from time to time, if necessary. Their neighbors can then make the calls. One will not be able to make quite as many calls, but they can and must be made.

#### **Sunday School and D.V.B.S.**

The Daily Vacation Bible School and the Sunday School are put to good use by many city churches. In this way unchurched parents are contacted through the children and frequently brought into the church.

The Sunday School cannot be used quite so effectively in a rural situation because, in some instances at least, the children have to be brought from quite a distance. If they are to be picked up and brought back after church there will scarcely be enough time to do that. Daily Vacation Bible School is usu-

ally held soon after school is dismissed for the summer. But this probably would not work out quite so well in many rural areas, because it is just at this time that the farmers are very busy, and can use the children at home. For that reason Daily Vacation bible School should probably be conducted in the rural areas just before school begins in the fall.

#### **The Problem of Poverty**

A real problem which is faced in the rural evangelism program is the extreme poverty of some of the families which are to be contacted. They live on small, poor farms. They can barely eke out a living. Some of them cannot even do that. They have difficulty getting enough money to buy their food and other necessities of life.

One family that I contacted told me that they would come to church as soon as they could afford to buy clothes that would be fit to wear there. This is a problem. But with the help of the diaconate of the church it can be solved. Here is a wonderful way to use some of the stagnant money in our benevolent funds - a wonderful way to show the mercy of Christ to those who are in need.

The extreme poverty of some of the people results in another problem for the church which would do the work of evangelism in the rural areas. Because some are not able to make a living on their farms, they are compelled to work in the

city in order to supplement their income. The father tries to work the farm a little and hold down a full-time job in town. It is very difficult to find a time when you can visit him. During the day he works in town, and at night when he gets home a great deal of work is waiting for him. So he has to work into the night as well. In addition, sometimes the mother works too.

It is extremely difficult to try to contact such a family for Christ. But in such a situation, the evangelistic worker must adapt himself to the situation, and look for the rare occasions in which there are breaks in such activity. Perhaps in such instances it would be best to make the calls on a Sunday afternoon.

#### **Lack of Education**

On the rural field more often than in the city, it will be noticed that the subjects of evangelism are lacking in formal education. The truth of the gospel must be adapted to their needs and to their ability to understand it. But here the versatility of the gospel is seen very clearly. The truth of God's Word should be put in such a way that it can be understood even by those who have very little education.

In presenting the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation one can explain the passages of Scripture which are not so deep and involved. We can turn to such passages as those which refer to the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats. These things will probably

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*One will not be able to make quite as many calls, but they can and must be made.*



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be easily understood by those who are working with fields and livestock.

This is by no means an insurmountable obstacle. In fact, those who are lacking in education may often be more easily reached with the gospel than those who have had considerable schooling.

Such people, however, may present another problem. That is the matter of their assimilation into the church after they have manifested an interest in the gospel. Especially will this be true if the church is a city church. Those who are lacking in education may feel out of place. They may feel inferior. They are not as good as the rest of the members, they think. And thus, there is the problem of making these people feel at home. I'm afraid that in the past many churches have somewhat failed along this line. The fact that our church is known as a middle class church does not make this problem an easy one.

### **Shifting Farm Population**

The work among rural people is becoming increasingly difficult because of another fact. The economic situation, especially as it affects the farmer, has a bearing on this. Many people cannot afford to own their own farm. More and more farmers are renters. It is simply too expensive to go into farming on their own. The result is that those living on farms in such a situation do not stay in the same place very long. There are more and more renters, but there is less and less permanence.

This makes the work of evangelism more difficult because it often takes a great deal of time before a person is brought by the Spirit of God to a saving knowledge of Christ. Although this is true, the church must nevertheless minister to the spiritual needs of these people, even though they may be living on a certain farm for only one year.

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***The truth of God's Word should be put in such a way that it can be understood even by those who have very little education.***

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### **Familiarity With the Faults of Church-members**

A problem which faces the evangelizing church, no matter where it is found, is that many of the members themselves are a hindrance to this work, because of the discrepancy between their profession and their conduct. But I believe that this is an even greater problem in the rural situation than in the city because the unchurched person in the country knows where his neighbor goes to church, and he links the person with that church. For that reason, he is likely to be prejudiced against the church. It must be pointed out to that person, that those who are in the church are not perfect, and do not profess to be so. It should also be stressed that individual believers are dissatisfied with their own lives

because there is so much sin in them.

### **Conclusion**

These, then, are some of the problems which cause rural evangelism to be distinctive. These are some of the reasons why rural evangelism cannot be carried out in exactly the same way in which it is done in urban areas. These problems must be looked upon as challenges to prove the effectiveness of the gospel. Let us remember that the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Let us be like the apostle Paul who says in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation." In the face of these problems let us go to God in prayer and ask him to help us solve these problems, and to so guide us that we may find the satisfactory answer in each case.

**Rev. Jack L. Vander Laan** wrote this article while he was the pastor of a CRC church in Leighton, Iowa. He is currently a chaplain in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

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# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1961*

### January 1961

“The whole Word is truth — not just its central message concerning salvation, not merely a core or kernel wrapped in the husks of historical forms that have no meaning today. Not one jot or one tittle of the law shall fall to the ground. For ‘the scripture cannot be broken’.”

*Will a Man Rob God?*  
Henry R. Van Til

“We firmly believe that Catholicism preaching keeps us balanced in presenting the Gospel of God’s free grace; assists us in proclaiming the whole counsel of God; aids us in building up our people in the saving knowledge of God in Christ Jesus; and helps us to combat both old and modern heresies.”

*Why Do Not All Our Ministers Preach the Catechism?*  
Edward B. Pekelder

“In order rightly to resist beginnings of error it is necessary for us to learn to know God’s truth as fully and faithfully as we can.”

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“Our lands have many beautiful seminary buildings and campuses where the teaching is not sound. It started with so-called ‘peripheral’ matters and ate to the very heart.”

*Pray for Jerusalem’s Peace*  
Corneal Holtrop

### February 1961

“The Bible does not speak to us as it should unless its very words have found a lodging place in our

hearts. Its voice should be like that of a familiar friend.”

*Stick to One Bible Translation*  
Henry J. Kuiper

“Unless we sharpen our witness, knowing where we stand as churches and where we are going under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word, we shall fail to give spiritual guidance to men within and outside of the churches.”

*If I Were a Missionary*  
Peter Y. De Jong

“God’s works, all His works, whether in nature or in the realm of grace, always demand His words — His interpretation. Whenever man ignores or denies the Word and interpretation of God he goes astray, creates misconceptions, and lapses into paganism.”

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“...a proper understanding of the first three chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-3) is absolutely essential to the proper understanding and evaluation of all the rest of the Bible. If these chapters are ignored or misinterpreted the entire Bible will — sooner or later — be misunderstood.”

*The Relation Between General and Special Revelation*  
Nicholas J. Monsma

### March 1961

“...when the Calvinist is completely certain that a matter is taught in the Word of God, he takes that matter into his system, whether

it seems to fit in or not. For him the test of truth is not human reason but the Word of God.”

*Complementary Truths and the Reformed Faith*  
R. B. Kuiper

“Some of our present-day preaching, under the guise of being ‘practical,’ seems to be in danger of being little more than moralizing.”

*Indifference Stagnation  
Bankruptcy Apostasy*  
Christian Huissen

### April 1961

“I feel that the secret of preaching with power is to be found in the extent to which the truth to be preached has taken hold of the preacher. It has to live for him before he can make it live for others.”

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“Odious comparisons by pew-piteers make for picayunish picking at spiritual food instead of hearty eating.”

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“...the preacher is but a link — a link between God and the congregation, a link which serves its purpose best by drawing least attention to itself. If the people are to hear God, and in hearing Him to see Him, then they ought not to hear the preacher.”

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“I yearn for more spiritual force in my ministry. The holy joy that comes of working not so much out of duty only, but out of delight and love — of this I want more.”

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“I have found that the more Christ means to me the more my ministry becomes personalized and ‘pastoral’ as over against mechan-



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cal. The more Christ means, the more His people mean, the more His Word means, the more His cross means; and through all this, professionalism gives way to humble wonder and love.”

*My Greatest Problem as a Minister — and How I Seek to Solve It*  
Various Ministers &  
Managing Editor

### May - June 1961

“How shall we reevaluate the concept of infallibility and not come up with fallibility? Who can explain how anyone can tone down infallibility and escape fallibility?”

*As We Grow Older*  
Corneal Holtrop

“Those who have sought to defend the position of the possibility of actual historical inaccuracies or mistakes have frequently assumed that their opponents were possessed of an extremely narrow, unduly literalistic view of inspiration and infallibility. While rightly repudiating such a view of infallibility, those same people continued to posit the possibility of actual historical error in matters not pertaining to the Spirit’s purpose. But it was here that an unjustified jump was made. The legitimacy of that jump has never been proved in any of the discussions that have come to my attention. No matter how much emphasis one may lay on ‘letting Scripture speak for itself,’ the possibility of actual historical error or contradiction does not flow from a stress on the phenomena of a divinely inspired Scripture, produced under the impulse of a sovereign God who controls all things and makes them usable for

His purpose of revelation.”

*Reformed Old Testament Scholarship Today*  
Marten H. Woudstra

“With all its superficialities and shams, middle-class respectability looks like a comfortable way of life. Yet for true believers it cannot be reconciled with gospel demands. It produces not only stomach ulcers in an effort to keep ahead of the bill collectors but also heartaches in the realization that God sits in judgment on us.”

*Straws in the Wind?*  
Peter Y. De Jong

“Without being aware of it, we are the recipients of a system of training where the training aids have almost, if not entirely, replaced the direct handling of the Bible. We are so preoccupied with sources and aids about the Bible that we as a people suffer from a deplorable lack of Scriptural knowledge.”

*Says the Bible Is Not Duly Honored in the Christian Reformed Church*  
Arnold Jonker

### September 1961

“It is never enough for a church to have a fine mission program, well organized and efficiently administered by competent and Spirit-filled leaders. At heart every Christian, born again by the Spirit and living by the fullness of grace in Christ Jesus, must be a missionary.”

*Men Without Souls*  
Peter Y. De Jong

### October 1961

“When one ignores the doctrine of salvation by faith alone unto justification and puts in its place the

doctrine of salvation by doing the law, he has perverted the Gospel of Jesus Christ in truly modernistic fashion and has returned unto the yoke of bondage from which Paul says we have been redeemed.”

*Faith Versus Works: A False Antithesis*  
Henry R. Van Til

“From the viewpoint of the Covenant, Reformed churches have been impressed with the fact that it pleases the Lord to continue His Church in the way of succeeding generations, as well as by accessions ‘from without’.”

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“...it has pleased God to place our children in the particular office of church member from their very birth.”

*Some Thoughts on Catechizing Our Youth*  
John H. Piersma

### December 1961

“...sins against fellow-men are sins only because they are first of all sins against God.”

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“No sin mentioned or implied in the second table can be defined without due regard to the first table.”

*Distorted Prayers*  
Nicholas J. Monsma

“Is the Christian Reformed Church a sleeping giant? I think it is more precise to say that it is in imminent danger of becoming a shorn Samson.”

*Is the Christian Reformed Church “A SLEEPING GIANT”?*  
R. B. Kuiper

# Reformed Evangelism

## “Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel”

### *Part Two*

In my previous article, which introduced the subject of the so-called “free offer” of the gospel, I noted that Reformed believers have often distinguished between the *universal call* of the gospel to all sinners and the *effectual call* of the gospel. Though all sinners are called to faith in Christ through the gospel, only those who are effectually drawn by the Spirit respond appropriately to this call. Through the Spirit working by means of the Word of the gospel, God unfailingly brings all His elect to salvation through faith in Christ.

Despite the general consensus of Reformed believers on this distinction between the universal and effectual call of the gospel, considerable differences exist regarding the character of the universal gospel-call. Three distinct views of the gospel-call have emerged within the Reformed tradition. One view, which I termed “strong hyper-Calvinism,” amounts to a denial of the legitimacy of a gospel-call that extends to all sinners alike. In the strictest sense, this view claims that the call of the gospel addresses only the elect. Since God does not intend to save the non-elect, and since they have no capacity to answer the gospel call, it is inappropriate to summon them to faith and repentance. Another view, which I termed a “mild hyper-Calvinism,” affirms the legitimacy of the gospel-call to all sinners, elect and non-elect alike, but rejects the idea that it promises equally to all its recipients salvation upon the condition of

faith in Christ. This view maintains that the call of the gospel merely commands all sinners to believe and to repent, but does not express any goodwill or desire on God’s part that all sinners be saved. Language like the “free-offer of the gospel” or the “well-meant gospel offer” must be

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### ***Does the Bible teach that the gospel should be preached indiscriminately to all?***

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strictly avoided, since it suggests that the gospel-call manifests a favorable disposition on God’s part toward all sinners.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these two views, a third view, which I termed the “classic” or “historic” view of the Reformed tradition, claims that the gospel not only summons all sinners to faith in Christ but also expresses a genuine desire or good-will on God’s part toward them. This view of the gospel call maintains that, though God has not decreed to save all lost sinners, He nonetheless sincerely calls all sinners to salvation through the gospel. The gospel addresses all sinners with the *same gospel* summons and in *the same manner*.

Now that we have considered these different views of the gospel call in a general way, the time has come to take up the most important questions relating to the call of the gospel.

The first and most important of these questions, of course, has to do with the Scriptures’ teaching. Does the Bible teach that the gospel should be preached indiscriminately to all, and that in the call of the gospel there is expressed a disposition of lovingkindness or goodwill on God’s part toward sinners? This question will be the focus of our attention in this article. Only after we have attempted to answer this question will we be in a position to take up in a subsequent article such subordinate questions as: Which of the three views distinguished has the predominant support of the Reformed tradition? Is the teaching of a “well-meant offer” of the gospel not contradictory and inconsistent with the teaching of particular and sovereign election? And lastly, so far as our particular interest goes, what significance does this subject have for the work of evangelism and missions?

### **The Biblical Basis**

Without attempting to be in any way exhaustive, there are several kinds of biblical passages that support the teaching of a well-meant gospel offer.<sup>2</sup>

### **Passages expressing God’s desire to save the wicked**

A number of biblical passages de-



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pict God wishing or desiring that His people, Israel, would fear Him and keep His commandments. What makes these passages significant is that they portray God desiring salvation for all the children of Israel, even though some among them may persistently choose otherwise. That is to say, they allow us to see how God desires the salvation of those whom He may not have sovereignly determined to save in His electing counsel.

In Deuteronomy 5:29, we read, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” This passage, which expresses a general desire on God’s part for His covenant people (including their children), does not tell us that it is God’s sovereign intention to bring to pass what He desires. In the context of the history of God’s dealings with His people, Israel, it is readily apparent that many did not fear Him or keep His commandments. And yet, God expresses quite emphatically His earnest wish that it were otherwise, that the children of Israel would be pleased to walk in covenant faithfulness before Him. Though it would not be impossible to argue that this desire only refers to God’s will for His elect children, such a reading is most unlikely and tends to insert issues into the text that are not being addressed.

In a similar passage, Deuteronomy 32:29, language is used that expresses in the strongest terms God’s desire that His people would be wise and considerate of their final end: “Would that they [His people, Israel] were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their future.” The Hebrew conjunction used in this verse, *lu*, often introduces the expression of a strong desire or wish.<sup>3</sup> In this passage, then, we have an example of God desiring something beneficial for all of His people, though nothing is told us that would indicate that it is His sovereign intention to effect what He desires.

Other examples of these kinds of passages are Psalm 81:13 and Isaiah 48:18. Psalm 81:13 portrays God as One who wishes that His people would listen to Him and walk in His ways: “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!” Isaiah 48:18 records the Lord’s wistful lament that His people have not paid attention to His commandments and, as a result, are suffering the adverse consequences of their failure to do so: “If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your wellbeing would have been like a river. And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” These passages, like those cited from the book of Deuteronomy, undoubtedly reveal God’s genuine desire and wish for all of His people, even though the context

indicates that what He wishes for them He has not determined to effect. John Murray, commenting on these passages, correctly observes that “the Lord represents himself in some of these passages as earnestly desiring the fulfillment of something which he had not in the exercise of his sovereign will actually decreed to come to pass.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **God takes no delight in the death of the wicked**

Just as there are biblical passages that express God’s desire for the salvation of those who do not fear Him and keep His commandments, so there are biblical passages that reveal God’s displeasure at the death of the wicked. Because God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, these passages also portray Him earnestly calling the disobedient to turn from their wicked way and be saved. Three passages of this sort are found in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 18:23 the Lord declares in vigorous terms that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked: “‘Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord God, ‘rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?’” The grammatical construction of this verse (literally it reads, “taking pleasure in, do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked”) suggests that the answer to the Lord’s rhetorical question must be, “of course not!” The Lord takes no

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*These passages portray God desiring salvation for all the children of Israel, even though some may persistently choose otherwise.*

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pleasure or delight in the death of the wicked. Much rather—and emphatically so—He would rather that the wicked turn from their way and find life. Later in the same chapter of Ezekiel, verse 32, a related but somewhat different point is expressed: “‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Therefore, repent and live.’” This verse states quite directly that the Lord has no delight or pleasure in the death of anyone. For this reason—because He has no delight in their death—He summons the wicked to repent and live.

A most significant instance of this kind of passage, however, is found in Ezekiel 33:11: “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’” This passage begins with an oath-formula underscoring the truth and weight of the words spoken. Once again the Lord declares that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. To the contrary, what pleases Him is that the wicked should turn from their way and live. The call to repentance, therefore, which the Lord expresses at the end of this passage, is a heartfelt expression of what He desires for the wicked.

The remarkable feature of these passages is that they resist any attempt to restrict their application to elect sinners. One could argue, for example, that in these passages the Lord is only speaking of and addressing the wicked *who belong to His people, Israel, and who are*

*numbered among the elect.* On this reading of these passages, all of the wicked are presumably elect sinners, whom God has sovereignly purposed to save and to bring into communion with Himself. Not one person addressed in these passages is an elect sinner. Now, why would anyone attempt this kind of reading or construction of these passages? The likeliest answer is that they would do so in order to avoid the

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sinners.***

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implication that in the call of the gospel God not only summons sinners to repentance and life but He also desires that they do so. The restriction of these passages in their application to God’s dealings with the elect alone is likely born out of a dogmatic prejudice that God could not desire the salvation of sinners whom He has not sovereignly purposed to save. But this is precisely what these passages apparently teach.

**Christ’s disposition toward  
Jerusalem**

One of the themes running through the New Testament Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry is that of the unbelief and impenitence on the

part of many of the children of Israel. Even though Christ went preaching the kingdom of God first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” their response to His preaching was often one of hostility and rejection. Despite their abundant privileges and opportunities, they spurned the call to repentance and Christ’s invitations to receive the kingdom offered to them.

A remarkable instance of this pattern of unbelief and impenitence is recorded in Luke 13:37 (par. Matt. 23:37). After Jesus answers the question, “are there just a few who are being saved?” (v. 23), by commanding his hearers to “strive to enter by the narrow door,” He goes on to note how many fail to do so. Remarkably, many of those who will not gain entrance into the kingdom of God are people who knew the master of the house and even, by their own testimony, “ate and drank” with him. However, because they refused to enter when the opportunity was granted to them, they will find themselves outside the kingdom of God where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 28). Despite the fact that many will enter the kingdom, including some from “east and west and north and south,” there are some who are “first who will be last” (vv. 29-30). In the context, it is clear that Christ is warning many among the covenant people of God that, despite their many privileges and ample opportunity, they will not be saved.

What is important to our question is that Luke concludes this section of his Gospel by recording Christ’s lament over Jerusalem: “O Jerusa-



lem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (v. 34). Within the context of Luke's account, these words can only mean that Christ is lamenting the unbelief and impenitence of many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. What Christ expresses as His desire and wish for them, the text declares not to be their desire or wish. The language used to describe Christ's lament, moreover, emphasizes the deep anguish and distress that He felt in the face of the unwillingness of many of Jerusalem's inhabitants to be gathered under His wings. This language of being "gathered under His wings," when interpreted in the light of the preceding discourse on the way of salvation or entrance into the kingdom of God, indicates that Jesus is speaking of their salvation.

It is difficult to see how this text could be taken in any other way than as an expression of Jesus' heartfelt desire that the inhabitants of Jerusalem find salvation.<sup>5</sup> It seems clearly to express a desire that could only arise from a compassionate and earnest interest in their salvation. If someone were to argue, for example, that this is merely an expression of Jesus' human will as the God-man, two insuperable difficulties would arise. First, it would be inconsistent with an orthodox doctrine of Christ's Person to suggest that any feature or expression of His humanity is not also to be ascribed to His Person. Even were we to grant for the sake of discussion that this lament arises out of a human compassion on

Christ's part for his countrymen, such compassion would necessarily belong to His Person.<sup>6</sup> And second, the perfect harmony of the will of Christ with that of His Father militates against any suggestion that the desire expressed in this lament is somehow contrary to or different than that of the Father (compare John 12:49,50; 14:10,24; 17:8). The best reading of this passage is one that takes it for a

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simple declaration of Christ's desire for the salvation of many who refused to believe and repent at the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.

#### Endnotes

1. It is also objected that the language of "offer" is inappropriate and unbiblical because it suggests that the sinner is free "to take or leave" what is presented to him. I will address this objection in a subsequent article, when I consider the language of the Canons of Dort on the gospel call.
2. For a more detailed treatment of some of these passages, see John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, "The Free Offer of the Gospel" (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth,

1982), IV:113-32.

3. Murray, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," p. 118.
4. Murray, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," p. 119.
5. Cf. James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen But Free* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), pp.136-9. White treats the parallel to this text in Matthew 23:37, and tries to argue that in the context Jesus is not speaking about the salvation of *all* the inhabitants of Jerusalem but only of the leaders of the Jews. On his reading, the text does not express any desire for the salvation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some of whom may be non-elect. Though White's reading of Matthew 23:37 is rather unlikely, he neglects to note that the context in Luke 13:37 has to do with the issue of salvation or non-salvation, and that it speaks generally of many among the inhabitants of Jerusalem who forfeit their opportunity to enter into the kingdom while the door was open to them.
6. In the doctrine of Christology, this follows from what is known as the "communion of the attributes" (*communicatio idiomata*) in Christ's Person. All the essential attributes of deity and humanity must be ascribed to Christ's Person. This accounts for such expressions as "the Son of God died" or "Jesus was almighty," etc. Affirmations are made about Christ's Person either by virtue of His being "true God" or being "true man."

**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*.

# Folk Islam

*The supreme need of the Moslem world is Jesus Christ. He alone can give light to Morocco, unity to Persia, life to Arabia, re-birth to Egypt.”*

Samuel Zwemer [1867-1952]

Since the horrific September 11 slamming of two planes into the World Trade Center and a third plane into the Pentagon, and the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, many Americans and Canadians are debating the nature of Islam. For example, Aaron Hughes, professor of religious studies at the University of Calgary, says the number of students taking his class, Introduction to Islam, is “way, way up” since Sept. 11.

Secular journalists are also showing great interest in Islam and religion as such. But what most of the journalists describe is not the Islam that is practised by the average Muslim. They seek to understand Islam from their Western-postmodern perspective, defining it in terms of formal, institutionalized religion with its sacred text the Koran, commentaries, and organized mosques.

## Responding to Islam

Scripture mandates that we bring them to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But if we are to reach the Muslim world with the Gospel, the pioneer of Reformed missions to Muslims, Dr. Samuel Zwemer, noted that we must first know of it and know it. To understand Islam we must begin by making distinctions of various kinds of Islam. There are fundamentalist Muslims as well as mystics and secularists. The 1.2 billion Muslims in the world are divided along three major groups: Sunni, Shi’ite, and

Sufi, each with their own branches and subdivisions. But while their leaders might be wholly committed to Islam, the ordinary Muslims are impacted by folk Islam, a mixture of formal Islam and local animistic practices and beliefs.

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***This folk Islam  
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These beliefs contradict many formal aspects of the Islamic faith. They are, however, common and permeate the every day life of Muslims from Morocco to Malaysia. In fact, in Arabia, Pakistan, and Indonesia most Muslims are folk Muslims. In other words, when Islam became the major religion in these regions, animistic beliefs and practices did not disappear, nor were they stamped out.

This folk Islam worldview built upon and integrated with the everyday stresses and joys of ordinary people must be addressed in reaching Muslims with the Gospel. In his carefully documented book *The*

*Unseen Face of Islam. Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims*, Bill Musk notes that the commitment to folk Islam by many Muslims has remained mostly hidden from or ignored as irrelevant by Western missionaries. Not only must formal Islam be studied but Folk Islam as well. These two expressions of Islam, tend to live easily with one another. In fact, Musk says, that “both views may well operate in veiled partnership within any one single Muslim.” Muslims may attend mosques, but they also go to the shaman or the witchdoctor.

In his book, *The Influence of Animism on Islam*, Zwemer shows how Islam sprang up in pagan soil and retained many old Arabian beliefs in spite of its vigorous monotheism. Wherever Islam went, it introduced old and new superstitions. Superstitions and animistic beliefs still bind mind and heart with constant fear of demons, with witchcraft and sorcery and the call to creature worship.

Zwemer believed that the rapid spread of Islam in Africa and Malaya was largely due to its animistic character. His accounts reveal that many Muslims live in a world densely populated by an array of good and evil and earthly spirits which influence human affairs. For example, in the Philippines, ceremonies connected with rice planting and harvesting, birth and death, are part of the living routine for Filipino Muslims. Much of the pre-Islamic, Malaysian belief systems and customary laws (adat), which are indigenous to the people of Mindanao and Sulu, were simply carried into Islam.



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Filipino Muslims conceive the world as alive with spirits and make offerings to these spirits, the same way as pagans do. They believe that these spirits relate not only to the physical and mental well being of a person, but also to the success and failure in agriculture and business. For these Muslims their religious practices are nothing less than Islam. They believe that they are faithful and true to the basic teachings of the Koran. There have been instances when foreign-fundamentalist Islamic teachers have tried to point out that many of their local religious practices were un-Islamic, but in each case the local religious leaders repudiated these charges by saying that they (the foreigners) didn't have a correct understanding of Islam.

The practice of animism extends to the use of the Koran. Various surahs (chapters) and verses are reputed to be powerful for such problems as headaches, fevers, blindness, and toothaches. For example, Surah 113 is believed to be a deterrent to all sorts of disease. Surah 114 has the power to counter psychic afflictions, and Surah 13 is a sure cure for headaches. And throughout the Islamic world, the Koran is used as a charm in itself. Miniature copies of the Koran are pinned on to children's clothing as talismans. In Egypt a common saying is that Satan does not enter the house in which the Koran is recited every day. The act of recital keeps evil at bay.

Musk notes that such unorthodox views of the Koran are exaggerated among Muslim populations for whom Arabic is a foreign tongue. He observes that although the read-

ing of the Arabic Koran may be encouraged as an act of piety, its obscurity in non-Arabic societies helps promote an alternative view in its effects, where it is seen as power and efficacious in a magical sense.

### **The Saints of Folk Islam**

In Folk Islam saints fulfill an important role. A major distinction is between the dead and the living saints. Whitewashed, domed shrines dot the landscape of much or rural Africa and the Middle East.

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*There have been instances when foreign-fundamentalist Islamic teachers have tried to point out that many of their local religious practices were un-Islamic, but...*

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Both the corpses of saints and their shrines - even the ground, water, or foliage surrounding their graves - are endowed with large deposits of baraka. Folk Muslims believe it is a magical power that can be created by ritual and manipulated for human benefit.

Anwarul Karim says, "It is the saint who can avert calamity, cure disease, procure children for the childless, bless the efforts of the hunter and even improve the circumstances of the dead." In return, devotees express their gratitude

and dependence in the form of vows, visits to shrines, and celebration of saints' days.

Living saints (pirs) are Muslims who have progressed beyond the confines of legalism. The pir is expected to have almost magical powers. Muslims believe that living saints are capable of performing miracles. They are expected to render certain services to believers. Bab Farid, a Pakistani saint, is said to have cured incurable diseases, raised a dying man to life, converted dried dates into gold nuggets, and covered vast distances in a moment.

### **Muhammad**

For Muslims, the birth of the prophet Muhammad is one of the most important events in history. Veneration of the prophet Muhammad, including his relics, are part of the religious devotion for multitudes of Muslims. In Qandahar, Afghanistan, the cloak belonging to Muhammad is treasured. The Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey displays an encased hair from the Prophet's beard. In Cairo, Egypt, the Qaitbey Mausoleum houses a stone block bearing the footprints of the prophet. His footprints marked in the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem are world famous. And his tomb in Medina is perhaps one of the greatest objects of veneration associated with Muslims devotion today.

Although the Koran stresses the humanness of Muhammad, in reality he became deified. The prophet's biographer, Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, a Muslim historian who died about AD 768, passed on stories of miracles, such as those in

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which Muhammad melted a rock with a drop of water, or produced water from a dried waterhole with an arrow.

Addressing Muhammad with blessing and prayers constitutes an important feature in daily religious life of most Muslims. Musk observes that orthodox Islam, although unwilling at times, has usually yielded to the imagination and needs of the ordinary Muslim's heart concerning an object of devotion, a mediator with God, and a powerful answerer of prayer. The key place of Muhammad in Islam and his veneration by millions demonstrate that he is believed to be more than a prophet. They ignore and distort the basic facts of Christ's life and purpose of His coming into this world.

In practice, Muhammad has supplanted Christ in the mentality of the Muslim community. Islam,

therefore, poses for Christianity a greater problem than any other religion or belief system. As Zwemer states:

The sin and guilt of the Muhammad world is that they give Christ's glory to another, and that for all practical purposes Muhammad himself is the Moslem Christ. Jesus Christ is supplanted by Muhammad not only in Moslem world tradition and in the hearts of the common people who are ignorant and illiterate. He is supplanted in the hearts of all Moslems by Muhammad. They are jealous for his glory and resist any attempt to magnify the glory of Jesus Christ at the expense of Muhammad.

The folk-Islamic view of the world presents a great challenge for Christian mission outreach minis-

tries. The world of popular Islam demonstrates the reality of the kingdom of darkness. Its demonic nature must be exposed and dealt with. Christianity is the final religion and not Islam. The message of Christ incarnate, crucified, risen and glorified has not changed and must be proclaimed for the evangelization of the Muslim world. The task of the Christian church then is not only to show folk Muslims that their religion is without hope. They must be brought to the point that they realize that their spiritual need can be met only in Jesus Christ, rather than in false teachings and practices.

**The Author** of this article writes under the alias of "Dick Wunnink" due to past threats received from the Islam community when writing about this subject.

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Wybren Oord

## God's People, My Parish

They looked like they were already in their seventies when I met them. The first time I visited them on the farm I was amazed by the old machinery they had. Not antique, but, like their owner, old and worn from use. But it worked. Year after year Alfred and Alice farmed the little plot of land they owned with that old machinery, never asking for help from anyone. Unlike the other farms that surrounded them, theirs never yielded a great crop.

Some people would consider Alfred and Alice to be dirt farmers be-

cause of the small yield that they received from their crops. They would just plod along, season after season, working the fields with their old machinery. And so, although they were happy and content with their lives, Alfred and Alice were poor. So poor, some people said they didn't have two pennies to rub together.

It didn't take long for me to find out why. Whenever Alfred and Alice did have two pennies to rub together they would give one of them to the church. Not only in monetary form,

but also by their impact upon the church and the community. Every Sunday they would drive their old station wagon to church, and after every worship service they would be sure to welcome any visitors that were in church. It was a touching sight to always see this frail, seventy-some year old farmer and his wife talking one Sunday with a college student, the next Sunday with a seven year old child.

Not only were Alfred and Alice faithful in their church attendance, they attended every meeting, every society, and every Bible Study that the church offered. If anyone was



in the hospital, Alfred would visit them while Alice would bring a meal to the family. If it was your birthday or anniversary, Alice would call and congratulate you. If there was anything to be done, they would be there to help.

The time came when Alfred and Alice decided to retire. They wanted to sell the machinery and move into town. When the auction flyer came out, most of the people thought it was kind of amusing. Most of the machinery would probably wind up going straight to the junk yard. And most of it did. It was basically sold as scrap metal. Alfred and Alice hardly made enough to buy a cheap, run-down house in town.

But then something happened. People began remembering all the things that Alfred and Alice had done for them. Before the elderly couple moved into town, a group of people met at their new home and began painting, re-shingling, and basically fixing up the place. By moving day, the house looked beautiful.

While they were on the farm I was among the many who often thought, if Alfred and Alice would have spent as much time on the farm as they did running 'errands', they could have been more successful. They would have been able to afford a house in town that didn't need so much work.

After they moved to town, I realized all the lives they had touched with their phone calls, their rhubarb desserts, and their many visits. I discovered there were more ways than one to count success. Success was found in the joy it brought to

friends and neighbors to be able to be a "big" help to this couple that had done so many "little" things for them.

Success is being content in the Lord. Alfred and Alice were always satisfied with what the Lord gave them. Anytime the Lord gave them anything extra, they always gave it back to Him. In that, they were truly blessed by the Lord who faithfully provided them with all they needed. And through them, we were blessed.

Alfred and Alice lived in that house for many years. The yard was never neat nor trim, but the garden never had a weed in it. And you could always count on a bag of vegetables when they came in season.

**Rev. Wybren Oord** is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

## 2002 Men's Conference Bethany United Reformed Church

Plans are moving forward in preparation for the fourth annual Men's Conference. It will be held on Friday evening, Sept. 27, and on Saturday, Sept. 28, at the Bethany United Reformed Church, 5401 Byron Center Ave. S.W., Wyoming, Michigan (616.534.0006).

Four different speakers will center their thoughts on the theme: "An Everlasting Foundation." This theme is found in Proverbs 10:25: "When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more. But the righteous has an everlasting foundation" (NKJV). This text will be considered in conjunction with Psalm 11:3, where the Psalmist in his distress cries out: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (NKJV).

Men of all ages, married or single, will certainly be challenged by the insights given by the speakers as well as by the "Round Table" question and answer sessions. You are urged to mark your calendars with plans to attend the Men's Conference on Sept. 27 and 28.

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