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# The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



• Breadwinner Blessings • Can We Welcome Muslims as Fellow Believers • Reformed Education: A Doubtful Future • Bible Studies on Jacob  
• NT Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion • Indian Idolatry in Every Heart • True Worship • The Great Multitude • Bernardus Smytegelt

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**Editorial Office**

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.  
 Portage, MI 49024  
 (269) 324-5132 Phone  
 (269) 324-9606 Fax  
 editor@reformedfellowship.net  
 or wybkath@juno.com Email

**Circulation Office**

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.  
 Grandville, MI 49418  
 (616) 532-8510 Phone

**Business Mailing Address**

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.  
 Grandville, MI 49418  
 Email: reffellowship@juno.com

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*"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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Send all copy to:

Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord  
 7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.  
 Portage, MI 49024

Phone: (269) 324-5132 Fax: (269) 324-9606

Email: editor@reformedfellowship.net

Website: www.reformedfellowship.net

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**Contributing Editor:**

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**Business Manager:** Shellie Terpstra

**Design & Production:** AVP Services

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# Breadwinner Blessings

*“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways”  
(Psalm 128:1)*

Back in high-school, I worked part-time at a restaurant. One of my jobs at the end of the night was to take inventory. I was responsible to determine what was left in the freezer. I would check off a stock list so that my manager knew how much food to order for the next day. There was no way we could keep track of how much there was left in stock without going through inventory at closing time.

Have we taken inventory lately? Thanksgiving Day is high time to take stock. It is sad to say but we know it is true: days on end go by without us even paying a second thought to our giving and forgiving God. Saying “thank you” to the Lord sometimes means that we just have to sit down and tell ourselves we should not forget something so important as our Breadwinner’s blessings.

## Harvest

What is the first thing that comes to mind when we think of work? Stress and sweat, fear and frustration, thorns and thistles may be some of the first words out of our mouths. “It is going to make an old man out of me.” Maybe we get tired just thinking about it.

Creation under the curse of sin does not hand its harvest over to us on a silver platter. It takes energy and effort to put food on the table and pay the bills. But thank the Lord that our work is not a total waste of time. It is not an exercise in futility.

All who fear the Lord are happy because, “you will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours” (Psalm 128:2).

The Lord Jesus makes your hard work productive. His grace is the reverse of the curse. It is never a matter of “God helps those who help themselves.” Your harvest this year is a pure gift from our open-hearted and open-handed God. You do not have to be a farmer to have a happy thanksgiving. Faith says and sings, “we have got it made even though we may not be millionaires.” Looking over the last year with our stock list in hand, we gratefully check off the fact that the bills were paid, needs were met, broken bones were healed, mouths were fed, prayers were answered, and there are even leftovers. The Lord gives us every reason to rejoice.

Our mothers taught us that it is impolite to refuse a gift. In fact, it is downright rude. Nowadays we think we are being nice because we do not want to put anybody out. What may be closer to the truth is that we do not like to say “Thank you.” To say so would be to humble ourselves and admit that we are better off because of

someone’s generosity. Are we not the recipients of God’s great generosity? Signs of prosperity are everywhere. North America is a land of plenty. Our storehouses are bursting. So our duty and delight to give thanks must shine in all we do every day of the year.

## Home

God has made us happy for good housekeeping, too. “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table” (Psalm 128:3). Do vines and olive trees—ring a bell? Here is the produce of the promised land. You can really celebrate if you have vines and olives. God’s gift of a Christian marriage and family is a little piece of Paradise regained. Home land security is the fruit of a wife’s hands. Children and grandchildren are the icing on the cake filling family reunions with love and laughter.

Part of passing the baton of faith on to the next generation means that families must not just be religious; they must be joyful in Jesus Christ. “Rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household” (Deuteronomy 26:11). A home without the happiness of holiness will drive children away from the Lord Jesus. Parents full of God’s joy make everything their children do more effective. Nobody is perfect. There will be

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*A family flourishing under the Lord's good housekeeping is an oasis of grace that lets others taste His living water.*

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times when we complain more than we count our blessings. But we should be in the business of complimenting the home team more than we criticize it.

Take the time to play the “I’m thankful” game with your children and grandchildren. In this game, you describe something you are thankful for and your children or grandchildren try to guess what it is you are thinking of. Try this one: I am thankful for the place we go on Sunday and the people we see. What am I thankful for? I am thankful for Church! Everybody is a winner playing that game. Nobody wins when we play the grumbling game.

By in large, family life in America is a spiritual wasteland. A family flourishing under the Lord’s good housekeeping is an oasis of grace that lets others taste His living water. And with God’s blessing, the gifts just keep on coming from one generation to the next. What goes around comes around: “children’s children are a crown to the aged and parents are the pride of their children” (Proverbs 17:6).

### **Hope**

Thankfully, we are not the only ones singing this happy song. Jesus Christ takes lead vocals as our breadwinner and homemaker. Here is our hope that defeats despair. All year around, not just on Thanksgiving Day, we give

thanks to God for the best blessing of all: Jesus Christ, our harvester and wage-earner. Christ is the One, above all, who feared the Lord and walked in His Father’s ways so that we may have abundant life that never ends. He paid dearly for that abundant life He gives to us. The wage with which He earned it was His death. The gift we received was life. Jesus did it the old fashioned way: He earned it. It was hard work. He put in a lot of long days burning both ends of the night. He earned our daily bread by His blood, sweat, and tears. And the Father rewarded His Son’s hard work with a great harvest. He brings many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10-13). The fruit of Jesus’ suffering is sons and daughters who will grow up and produce a happy thanksgiving.

If we are not finding our happiness and holiness in Jesus, even a turkey dinner with all the trimmings will leave a bad aftertaste. But if we trust in the doing and dying of Jesus Christ alone, we can be sure that God receives us and invites us to celebrate with guilt-free gladness. We certainly do not deserve a good harvest and faith-filled family, let alone the hope of heaven.

In Christ, it is all good and it is all right – dedicated by the word of God and prayer. So enjoy! Savor the sweetness of your

Breadwinner’s blessings with family and friends. Share some of the wealth God earned for you and some of the food He puts on your table. What a winsome Christian witness thanksgiving can be in our social circles. Failing friendships, broken families, gloomy marriages undermine the credibility of our Christianity. Our neighborhoods would change for the better when Bible-believing Christians were known not, first of all, for their political talking points, but for a faith that seems too happy to be true.

Let us grab our check lists and take inventory again this Thanksgiving Day so that we may say and mean what Paul said and meant, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. (II Corinthians 9:15)!

**Rev. Kevin Hossink** is the pastor of the Hudson Valley United Reformed Church in Middletown, New York.

## Can We Welcome Muslims as Fellow Believers in the One True God?

Under the banner of religious pluralism, many seem to downplay all real differences among religions. They claim disputes among the different “ways” of salvation are pointless. Christ may be called the one way to the Father, but He is not the only one. Many believe Christians and Muslims worship the same deity. A traditional Japanese saying states: “Although the paths to the summit may differ, from the top one sees the same moon.” When applied to religion, this axiom suggests that although there are different religious paths, ultimately each way will reach the same destination.

Unfortunately, a growing number of Christians have embraced the notion that while the Christian faith is “true” and legitimate for them, other religions can be equally “true” and legitimate options for others in different circumstances. This view makes it difficult to appeal to the Bible as one’s sole authority. It also hinders missions. The Gospel story has become only one among the many stories.

Religious pluralism is not a new experience for the Christian church. As far back as recorded history takes us, there have been different religions and practices. The apostolic Church was launched into a religiously pluralistic world, a world where, as the apostle Paul wrote, there were many gods and many lords (1 Corinthians 8: 5). The relationship between the Christian faith and other religions was al-

ready discussed when the Christian church was no more than a small group, scattered over the whole Roman Empire. The Church knew that the Gospel would not be welcomed with “open arms.” The early Church was despised, persecuted, and living in very difficult circumstances. The New Testament clearly states that the normal attitude toward the Christian Church will be one of hostility.

### The Way of Islam

Among the religions of the world, there is not one that has a shorter creed than Islam; and not one whose creed is so well known and so often repeated. The whole system of Muslim theology, philosophy, and religious life is summed up in seven words: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*, “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle.”

By this creed Muslims are called to prayer five times daily. It is the platform on which all the warring sects of Islam unite. It is the very foundation of the Islamic religion. In *Islam in Focus*, which was written for “the young and lay readers,” and distributed by the Vanguard Islamic Association and the Canadian Islam Congress, Dr. Hammudah Abdalati states that Islam is the universal religion of God, the Maker of human nature, Who knows what is best for human nature. He says that whoever refuses the confession that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, refutes the first part of the confession that Allah is God.

Islam is the only religion that can be based on the Koran revealed to Muhammad. Abdalati says that the original founder of Islam is no other than God Himself, and the date of the founding of Islam goes back to the age of Adam. Islam has existed in one form or another all along, since the beginning, and will continue to exist until the end of time. Every person is born “Muslim.” All the characters of the Bible, from Adam to Abraham, Moses to David, the Hebrew prophets, Mary, Jesus, and the apostles were Muslim prophets who preached Islam. It is only in their quality as Muslims that they are recognized. Muhammad is the “Seal of the Prophets.” Whoever obeys him, obeys Allah (Sura 4:80).

Islam means submission to the Will of Allah and obedience to His Law. Only through submission to the Will of Allah and by obedience to His Law can one achieve true peace and enjoy lasting purity. Therefore, whoever departs from Islam, stands outside the true religion and falls victim to “excommunication.” Muslims oppose idolatry and do not want to be identified with Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, or whatever. They believe Islam is unique. It is the only way!

### The Koran

For Muslims, the norm is first and foremost the Koran itself. For centuries, Muslims have read and memorized the Koran in Arabic as “the language of heaven.” And those who can read Arabic call the language of the Koran “divinely beautiful, terrifying, tear-inducing, spine-tingling, mesmerizing,” and impossible to imitate. Abdalati notes

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***Whatever agrees with the Koran is accepted as Divine truth, and whatever differs from the Koran is either rejected or suspended.***

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that the Koran came to Muhammad “through the Heavenly Messenger Gabriel” who was sent down with concrete divine words to convey Allah’s message. For Muslims, the Koran is the word of Allah. It is the Word of God incarnate, eternal, and uncreated. Muslims believe every letter in the Koran is the word of Allah, and every sound in it is the true echo of Allah’s voice. Every Muslim must abide by it and reflect on it. Abdalati clearly states the Muslim’s conviction that the Koran has the “sole truth.” He says that it “is given to the Muslims as the standard or criterion by which all other books are judged.”

Whatever agrees with the Koran is accepted as Divine truth, and whatever differs from the Koran is either rejected or suspended. The Koran is the only way to Allah. It frequently censures Christians for believing in false doctrines—including beliefs that are central to their faith as it has been understood and practiced for as long as six centuries before Muhammad began preaching. Referring to both Jews and Christian, the Koran says, “Allah’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth” (Surah 9:30).

### **Salvation by Works**

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household” (Acts 16:30,31). Muslims would answer the jailer’s question by saying, “Every

Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure in his heart.”

Islam has an optimistic view of human nature. Conspicuously lacking in Islam are concepts of the radical depravity of human nature, the pervasive impact of sin and the complete inability of humankind to redeem itself from the bondage of sin. Sin is considered more a weakness, a defect or imperfection rather than a radical corruption of the nature and the will. Abdalati declares that every person is born free from sin and all claims to inherited virtue. “He is like a blank book.”

Each person must bear his own burden and be responsible for his own actions. “Consequently, the Muslim cannot entertain the story of Jesus’ death on the cross just to do away with all human sins once and for all.” In other words, Muslims believe there is no need for a Savior and Redeemer.

Islam is a legalistic religion, insofar as it stresses the law of Allah, which every believer must observe wholeheartedly. Obedience to the law is something that is held to be within the grasp of disciplined and religiously sensitive persons. In other words, Islam seeks self-salvation. Muslims believe that man must work out his salvation through the guidance of God. The Koran says, “Whoso makes effort to follow in Our ways, We will guide them: for God is assuredly with those who do righteous

deeds” (Surah 29:69). The Koran teaches there definitely will be compensation and reward for the good deeds, and punishment for the evil ones. On the Day of Judgment there will be a final settlement of all accounts.

### **The Jesus of Islam**

Today we increasingly hear and read that Christianity and Islam “share” Jesus, that He belongs to both religions. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15,16). Christians think of God in terms of Christ.

The opposite is true for Muslims. If you asked them, “Who do you say Jesus is?” They would answer, “Isa (His true name according to the Koran) was a prophet of Islam. His message was pure Islam, surrender to Allah. He was a lawgiver.” Isa was simply a created human being and a slave of Allah. Muslims claim that Isa’s mother was Miriam. While still a virgin, Miriam gave birth to “Isa alone in a desolate place under a date palm tree” (Not in Bethlehem). He did not die on the cross but ascended to Allah. On the day of the Resurrection “Isa himself will be a witness against Jews and Christians for believing in his death.”

The Koran expressly denies the divinity of Christ. Islam has always looked upon Jesus as one of their greatest prophets. Abdalati states that all prophets of God, including Jesus, and their faithful followers were Muslims, and their religion was Islam, the only true universal religion of God. Islam commands Christians not to believe that “Isa is the Son of God.” At the last judgment He will condemn Chris-

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tians to hell for believing in the crucifixion and the incarnation.

By Islamicising Jesus, and making Him a Muslim prophet who preaches the Koran, Islam destroys Christianity and takes over all its history. But the Isa of the Koran is based on no recognized form of historical evidence, but on fables current in seventh-century Arabia. The Koran is oblivious to the real contents of the Bible. The identity of Jesus Christ reveals the unbridgeable gap between Islam and Christianity. Both cannot be correct.

### **Islam and the Trinity**

The Trinity is not an appendix to the Christian faith. It is at the heart of the Christian faith, but Islam denies it. Allah has neither an associate nor equal. The cornerstone of Muhammad's message was the absolute unity and sovereignty of God. The famous Islamic scholar al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) said about Allah, "as touching His essence, He maketh known that He is one, and hath no partner." Abdalati teaches that Allah has no partner or son, and neither gives birth, nor is He born. He is eternally besought by all and has not beginning or end, and none is equal to Him (Surah 112:1-5). There is only one God for Muslims, and he is the same God for all peoples. It is due to this uncompromising emphasis on God's absolute unity that in Islam the greatest of all sins is the sin of shirk, or assigning partners to God (Surah 4:116).

The Koran clearly shows that Allah is not the same as the Triune God of the Bible. The Triune God is different from all other gods. Only He has the answer to the question, "Who can save men and women from their lost

condition?" The Triune is the God of love. The love of God the Father is evident by giving His Son. The love of the Son is evident by His acceptance of the death on the cross.

### **The Jesus of the Scriptures**

Who is Jesus? The Christian believes Jesus Christ is the Seal of the Prophets, as priest, king, and the only begotten Son of the Father, and therefore is God. Scripture presents Jesus as the Creator and preserver of the universe, as the incarnate, crucified and risen Redeemer and living Renewer of His people. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End; the entire eternal order is grounded in Christ.

The Gospel is not about Jesus discovering the way and the truth, and that if we follow His teaching we too can find the way ourselves. The apostle Paul says that not even apostolic status, not even angelic existence, stand above the unchanging gospel. Paul argues for the centrality of the cross. It is the only way of salvation for guilty sinners -- justification comes to guilty men and women exclusively on the ground of the grace of God in the cross (Galatians 1: 8-9).

Salvation means, therefore, that the guilt that rested on human beings and made them God's enemy has been taken away by the wholly mysterious event of the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Salvation also includes

the restoration of creation, the new heaven and earth. Christ does not stand at the beginning but in the midst of history, the event of His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Islam denies Jesus' death; Christianity glories in it. No one is reconciled to God except through the cross of Jesus Christ. Our Lord gave us the responsibility to proclaim this unique Gospel of reconciliation. It is precisely this uncompromising exclusivism of the early Christians that provoked the antagonism of the surrounding culture.

### **The Radical Difference between Islam and Christianity**

Christians, who hold that salvation is available only through Jesus Christ, and that sincere Muslims are mistaken in their basic beliefs, are routinely dismissed as intolerant. Although the Christian faith is one of several world religions, this does not mean to imply that they are more or less identical and rooted in the same soil. These religions are radically different from each other.

Islam seeks salvation through obedience to the law; Christians believe that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Islam claims to be the only true revelation and pathway to God. Not all revelations can be equally true, equally right, equally good. Insofar as

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***Abdalati states that all prophets of God, including Jesus, and their faithful followers were Muslims, and their religion was Islam.***

other religions actually contradict the revelation of God in Scripture, we claim that these religions are not true revelations at all, the Koran included. The Bible serves Christianity as its normative standard.

God's revelation declares other religions as forms of idolatry. Paul's assessment of the idolatrous religions of his time is true for our own generation. He says, "Since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30,31).

A genuinely biblical perspective on other religions should recognize that much religious activity and belief is influenced by the adversary, Satan (1 Corinthians 10:20). Scripture speaks of those who are not yet saved as "spiritually blind" and under the power of the "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:17-18). The sphere of religion is the battlefield par excellence for the demonic. We neglect this fact to our peril as we witness to Muslims of the saving grace of our Triune God. We must be firmly rooted in the life of the Church, in Scripture, in the creeds and confession of the church if we want to engage the world of Islam for Christ.

**Rev. Johan Tangelder** is an emeritus pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He is a member of the East Strathroy CRC in Strathroy, Ontario. Other articles by Rev. Tangelder can be viewed at <http://www.Reformed-Reflections.ca>

## Reformed Education: A Doubtful Future?

In a previous article we traced the staunch historic commitment of Dutch Reformed people to provide authentically Reformed Christian schooling to covenant children and youth. We saw how in North America, God richly blessed both Reformed church and Reformed school through this commitment up to the mid-twentieth century.

Let us now survey what has happened to Reformed Christian schooling in North America since 1950, and assess what the prospects appear to be for its future. As may be guessed from the title of this article, the author believes that the past fifty years have witnessed a dramatic decline in Reformed Christian schooling, and that – apart from a special blessing from our God – it has a doubtful future amongst us if present trends continue.

In the 1950s, by reason of both its long history of support and its relatively large size, the Christian Reformed denomination was the ecclesiastical champion par excellence for the cause of Reformed Christian schooling in North America. But in the 1950s, the post-World War II CRC was beginning to change significantly in its theological direction.

Extreme tensions between "progressives" and "conservatives" in Calvin Seminary resulted in most of the seminary faculty being removed by the CRC Synod of 1952. R. B. Kuiper, who at the age of 66

had just retired as Chairman of the Faculty at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, consented to serve as Acting President of Calvin Seminary during a period of transition and rebuilding. But in 1956, in his last report to the Board of Trustees, Kuiper expressed his "disappointment with the present interest of the seminary community in distinctive Calvinism."

The selection process for the next president of Calvin Seminary also proved to be a disappointing struggle – both at the Board of Trustees level and at the synodical level. Though Kuiper was a conservative Reformed stalwart, his successor in 1956 – J. H. Kromminga – was not, and Kromminga was to hold this most influential post for the next 25 years.

These developments of the 1950's at Calvin Seminary are rightly seen by both conservative and liberal CRC historians as a turning point in the CRC's theological history. James Bratt writes that 1959 was the last unqualified Synodical triumph of the CRC conservatives (or "Confessionalists"), and that by the mid-1960s it became clear that "[t]he Confessionalists' dominance was broken on the official level". The "progressives" had seized the wheel of the CRC ship. A new course was being set.

The old direction had been to maintain Reformed confessional distinctiveness and to emphasize the an-

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tithesis between the world and Christ; the new direction was to emphasize common grace, the universal love of God, and the need for freedom from Reformed traditions.

This new direction reflected itself in the Christian schools. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s there was a gradual erosion of commitment to the Reformed creeds and to Reformed distinctiveness in the CRC-dominated Christian schools. References to the Reformed creeds in school by-laws were in many cases excised or diluted. Requirements for teachers and board members to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity or to be professing members of conservative Reformed or Presbyterian churches were relaxed or ignored.

Possible curricular offences to dispensationalist or charismatic or other non-Reformed constituents – which comprised an increasing percentage of the student body – were more and more avoided. At the high school level, Reformed Doctrine classes using texts such as Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine* were eventually changed to "Christian Doctrine" classes with less rigorous texts that were more broadly evangelical in nature. For non-religious subjects too, secular texts were increasingly preferred over texts written from a specifically Christian perspective. After all, one can rely on the world to get it basically right (there is so much common grace out there, you know) – and one can rely on the teachers to add (like frosting on the cake) a Christian perspective.

Christian School teachers were often taught at "Reformed" colleges, such as Calvin and Dordt,

that adopted the same progressive/liberal mindset that had overtaken the CRC Seminary. Upon their graduation from such colleges, most new teachers had a great appreciation for the thought of social Darwinists such as John Dewey, but little acquaintance at all with antithetical Reformed thinkers such as Cornelius Van Til. However, the general decline of Reformed education at the college level is beyond the scope of the present article.

In many of the established K-12 Christian schools, historically dominated by CRC, there is now less of the antithesis in these schools, not only in theory, but also in practice: dress codes have been relaxed; junior-senior banquets have given way to proms and dances; athletics on Sunday have become more common. Evolution has become the way God created, and Biblical teaching on male headship must be re-interpreted in light of modern culture.

One is reminded of the complaint of Brummelkamp and VanRaalte in 1846 regarding the nominally "Reformed" public schools in the Netherlands: "a general moral instruction is given which may offend neither Jew nor Romanist." Our Reformed forefathers came to America to avoid schools that were "Reformed" in name only, and to set up authentic Reformed schools instead! A hundred and fifty years later, this cycle sadly begins to repeat itself.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the Baptist/Arminian school in town is probably still Baptist/Arminian, the Charismatic school remains Charismatic, the Lutheran school is probably still Lutheran, and the Roman Catholic school continues to be Roman Catholic. But the erstwhile Reformed Christian school gradually has become broadly evangelical. Reformed distinctives in these schools that remain tend more and more to be but artifacts – forgotten attic furniture left over from a deliberately abandoned heritage.

Conservative Reformed parents, who found themselves dissatisfied with the existing Christian schools, increasingly have turned either to home-schooling or to the Arminian, charismatic or dispensational schools that happened to be locally available. If these alternative schools did not even pretend to be Reformed, at least an antithesis between Christ and the world was often recognized. At least the dress codes were stricter, evolution was not taught as fact and Christian textbooks were used. Often these schools were less costly as well, seeking more to serve the needs of their own churches filled with plain folk than to seek their own institutional interest.

On the positive side, home-schooling, when diligently done by capable Reformed parents, has proven to be a viable form of Reformed schooling for some, but not an option that all families are able to do, or to do

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***There is now less of the antithesis in these schools, not only in theory, but also in practice.***

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***In many of the established K-12 Christian schools there is now less of the antithesis in these schools not only in theory but also in practice.***

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well. Another hopeful development in recent decades is important and should also be mentioned: conservative Reformed parents from non-CRC churches such as the Protestant Reformed, the Netherlands Reformed, the Canadian Reformed, and lately, the United Reformed, have begun to establish small Christian schools of their own, often parochial or quasi-parochial in nature.

But though such schools typically accept students whose families attend non-sponsoring Reformed churches, the fragmentation of the Reformed school community must overall be seen as something of a weakness. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the schools begun by conservative Reformed parents typically served students and parents hailing from a variety of Reformed denominations (CRC, PRC, Netherlands Reformed, OPC, RCA). Today there are sometimes two or three small quasi-parochial Reformed schools struggling for survival in a region whose conservative Reformed population, if united, could more firmly establish a single Reformed school offering a greater variety of programs.

For parents for whom a full-blown athletic or music program is very important, or for those who seek a wide variety of study options (foreign languages, vocational training, etc.), the distinctive Reformed nature of the smaller Reformed schools is, sadly, not always a sufficient attraction.

One factor in this is that there is not so much of the “immigrant glue” remaining, as there was in earlier times, to provide added motivation to the Reformed folk to use their own schools, or even to live in the vicinity. Our immigrant forbears are perhaps three, four, or more generations distant from us. We have become thoroughly comfortable in our identities as Americans. Proximity to Reformed church and school seems generally to be regrettably low on the list of priorities when new job opportunities or relocations are considered. We have dispersed ourselves willy-nilly across the country, not mindful of our covenantal duties.

As a result of these various trends, new small Reformed Christian schools struggle to maintain their enrollment numbers, much less to grow significantly. Overall, in North America it is clear that the number of students in authentically Reformed schools in 2006 is proportionally much diminished compared to what the numbers were in the 1950s. This is a great loss! One, at times, wants to cry out with the prophet of old “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).

Though there are some hopeful developments, an honest evaluation of recent trends leads to the conclusion that – humanly and generally speaking – authentically Reformed Christian schooling has a

doubtful future in North America.

It is well to remember, however, that the same depressing assessment might well have been voiced in the 1840s. Nevertheless, at that time, and also again in the 1890s, our sovereign God stirred up His people to an increased commitment to the Reformed faith and to the living and teaching of that faith. We are the beneficiaries today of that outpouring of blessing and to that exercise in faithfulness. Let us seek, as did our pioneer forefathers more than a hundred years ago, to build one another up and to stir up amongst ourselves the vision of providing covenantally-faithful Reformed Christian education.

God remains our hope for the future! May we pray to Him for revival in our commitment to Reformed Christian education and for His blessing of our small works begun in His name! “Establish Thou the work of our hands” (Psalm 90:17). Let us not despise “the day of small things” (Zech. 4:10). May God give us not to become weary in well-doing in this duty which is both to our covenant God and to His covenant children and youth. He may yet richly bless both church and school.

**Mr. David Kloosterman** is an Elder at the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was instrumental in beginning the Reformed Heritage Christian School in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

# True Worship, Our Response to Grace

Worship is the response of man to the initiative of God in grace. We see this in the life of Abraham. The Lord sovereignly bestowed a word of grace, a promise of the heavenly country through the shadow and type of the land of Palestine (Hebrews 11:16). “To your descendants I will give this land,” was the word of gift and bestowal (Genesis 12:7). The response of Abraham to this message of incomparable favor was one of worship: “So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him” (Genesis 12:7). The construction of an altar entails the worship of God, even calling upon the name of the LORD (Genesis 13:4).

It cannot be disputed that worship is central in the Christian life, yet worship is so often a subject of numerous disputes. This is true today, but it was also the case in the ancient world. The woman of Samaria referred to a long-standing disagreement between the Samaritans and the Jews. Speaking to Jesus, she declared, “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). In this statement, she drew attention to the debate between the Samaritans who promoted worship on Mount Gerizim and the Jews who advocated Jerusalem as the proper place of the public adoration of God.

The debate, however, was coming to an end with the advent of the

Messiah. Jesus was bringing change. Worship would no longer be tied to a geographic location: “An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21). Jerusalem was central in the old covenant, but the new covenant meant that “from the rising of the sun even to its setting” the “name” of the LORD would be “great among the nations” and that “in every place incense” would be “offered” to the name of God (Malachi 1:11). Furthermore, what God really wanted was a certain kind of worship: “The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

The Father seeks people who will worship Him in spirit (John 4:23). The great complaint of the Lord in the Old Testament was not that his people were secular and irreligious. The Kingdom of Judah, for example, was careful and meticulous with respect to the outward forms of worship under the Mosaic covenant. The problem was that while their bodies were engaged in the rituals of the divine worship, the inward spirit was somewhere else: “This people draw near with their words and honor me with their lip service, but they remove their

hearts far from me” (Isaiah 29:13).

We, in the new covenant period are not immune from the possibility of such hypocrisy. There is no question that the church in Ephesus was eminently orthodox (Revelation 2:2). The issue that the Lord raised against them related to the weakening of the devotion of their hearts: “I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4). The one thing that God must have is the heart. Our devotion and worship must come from the inner man, the spirit. Christ therefore admonishes, “Remember from where you have fallen, and repent” (Revelation 2:5).

We must worship God in spirit (John 4:24). But there is more. “The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit *and truth*” (John 4:23). This was the problem with the worship of the Samaritans in contrast to that of the Jews. Jesus gave the woman of Samaria his own assessment: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). The religious devotion of the Samaritans was directed to what they did not know. Although they bordered the Jewish heartland with the temple in Jerusalem, they might as well have lived across the Mediterranean Sea in Athens. It was Paul who later had to tell the Athenians that they worshiped what they did not know evidenced by their altar with the

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***Worship is central in the Christian life, yet worship is so often a subject of numerous disputes.***

inscription “To an unknown God” (Acts 17:23).

The Jews in contrast had knowledge upon which worship could be based. Their knowledge was due to a very specific reason: “We worship what we know, *for salvation is from the Jews*” (John 4:22). The true worship which arose unto God from within Israel was a response to what God had given to Israel, namely the saving knowledge of God. As Paul spelled it out, the “Israelites” were the ones, “to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh” (Romans 9:3-4). Such blessings of sovereign grace elicited the response of worship in the hearts of God’s elect within the nation of Israel (Romans 11:5).

True worship is our response to the word of truth, the good news about Jesus, that he is indeed the Messiah (John 4:25-26). Worship that is pleasing to God flows from our believing appropriation of the Christ in which we confess with the Samaritans of old that “we know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

**Dr. Mark J. Larson** is the home missions pastor at Providence OPC in Aiken, South Carolina.

## Bernardus Smytegelt

In his monumental book, *Netherlanders in America*, Henry S. Lucas states that almost every Netherlander who came to America during the 1840s and 1850s carried with him some work by one of the following “old writers:” Smytegelt, Brakel, Hellenbroek, or Comrie. During a recent trip to the Netherlands, I noticed that there is still considerable interest in these writers. Books about them are available in most every Christian bookstore.

I was reminded of a visit to my grandparents farm in the vicinity of Barneveld some seventy years ago. My grandparents were discussing Smytegelt with their visitors. Being a young lad, I thought they were talking about business transactions using the words “*smijjt met geld*” which means “throw one’s money about.” It sounds very similar. Later in life, I learned that they were referring to a man of great importance in Reformed circles.

Bernardus Smytegelt (1665-1730) was born in Goes, Netherlands, a province of Zeeland, the son of Marinus and Ann Smytegelt. He grew up in a fine Christian family. At the age of ten, he went to Latin school in preparation for studying science. Only those who went to Latin school would go on to study further. At age eighteen, Smytegelt went on to study theology in Utrecht. He chose to study in Utrecht because a former minister in Goes, Rev. Herman Witsius, was a professor there. In addition, a cousin, Rev. Melchoir Leydekker,

also taught in Utrecht. In his teaching, Leydekker stressed that ministers should pay attention to practical experience.

In 1686 Smytegelt debated in public concerning St. Augustine’s unity of the church. He received the *testimonium ecclesiae* and in August 1687 successfully passed the exam of Classis Zuid-Beveland in Zeeland. Smytegelt would remain in this province for the rest of his life. In 1689, he accepted a call from the church in Borssele where he served for three years, after which he became pastor in his hometown of Goes until 1694 when he moved to Middelberg where he stayed until the end of his life.

Known as “Father Smytegelt,” he certainly belonged to those of the *Nadere Reformatie*. His strength was not in the way he made theology known, but in the way he knew how to captivate the ordinary people. It was his desire to bring the Word of God in a language understandable to everyone. He criticized politicians for, not only what they did in their jobs, but also attacked them for their behavior in their personal life.

First and foremost, Smytegelt was an ambassador for Christ. His calling, as he saw it, was to give “the common people” some certainty and assurance so that they could grow in the faith and be dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ in all things. He devoted himself to the inner reliving of the Reformed doc-

(continued on page 32)

# Bible Studies on Jacob

## Lesson 5: The Lord Awakens Jacob to his Covenant Calling

Read Genesis 28:10-22

### Introduction

Jacob must flee from his own home because his brother Esau is plotting to kill him. He leaves with only his staff in hand. But he also leaves with something very significant, namely, his father's blessing and his directives to find a wife among his relatives in Paddan-Aram (Gen. 28:2ff). This story in verses 10-22 begins then with this flight away from his family, and it will end with a reference to a safe return to this same family. Jacob will receive more than his father's blessing; he will receive God's promises that will direct Jacob's life in the covenant of grace. Jacob will be gone for twenty years (Gen. 31:38). It is likely that his mother Rebekah dies before his return (cf. Gen. 35:8).

### *"He reached a certain place..." (28:10-11)*

Jacob sets out on a journey without the benefit of any trains, planes, or automobiles. Beersheba is the point of departure, a place in the southern part of Canaan, and he heads north to his relatives at Haran in Paddan-Aram, near the northern point of the Fertile Crescent. This was a journey of about 500 miles (800 kilometers), almost certainly on foot (Gen. 29:1 says literally that he "lifted his feet"). The spot where he stops is over 50 miles (over 80 kilometers) from Beersheba.

This stop is not named, interestingly,

until the end of the story. It is only called a "certain place." The word "place" will be used six times in this story. Of course, this place to stop in order to rest for the night is not a place chosen by chance in God's plan: the LORD remains in full control of the events in this story.

### Sights and sounds in Jacob's dream (28:12-15)

The sun has set, and Jacob stops for the night. This sets us up for the kind of event that has happened before. In Genesis 15, God had appeared to Abram as a burning torch and smoky oven. God made great unconditional promises to Abram that concerned the central pillar promises of the covenant of grace. God holds before His people these key promises: land and seed (descendants). Now in Genesis 28:12ff, Jacob has a dream. God is going to reveal more of Himself to this fleeing patriarch.

What does Jacob see in his dream? Some translations say that it was a "ladder" that reached between heaven and earth. Other translations are certainly closer to the picture seen in the dream when they translate the word as a stairway or a kind of staircase. In the ancient world people might build an artificial "mountain" and at the top would be a temple or shrine to the gods or goddesses they worshiped. These constructed "mountains" with a staircase were called *ziggurats*. Steps or stairways would allow the

priests and worshipers to ascend to the top and down again. This kind of structure is likely what Jacob sees in this dream.

Besides this structure that connects earth and heaven, Jacob sees angels going up and coming down on the stairway. They descend on "it," which can be interpreted to mean on "him," i.e., on Jacob. Angels are messengers, created beings that inhabit the corridors of heaven, always ready to do the will of God. The book of Revelation pictures heaven as occupied by many creatures, and many of those creatures are the angels who join together with the saints in praise to God Almighty and to the Lamb. The angels in this dream are likely shown to be the fellowship link between Jacob on earth and the LORD God in heaven. Divine revelation will make its way to Jacob, even as his own situation and concerns will be known to the Father in heaven.

But the most important character in the dream is the LORD Himself. He is standing at the very top of the stairway, and thus He is the central focus of the dream. We may very well understand that God is standing over "him," i.e., over Jacob. He watches over His people, day and night (Ps. 121). But more important at this point than His appearance is the short speech that the LORD gives to Jacob. In His word of address, God draws attention to the following important items:

1. He is the "God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac." He is the God who maintains His covenant relationship through the

generations of His people. The God of Abraham and Isaac has “caught up,” one might say, with Jacob.

2. The land on which Jacob now sleeps will belong some day to Jacob’s descendants. Remember, Jacob is not yet married, and the LORD is talking about children!

3. In fact, the children will be numerous, and they will spread out in all directions.

4. All nations will be blessed through Jacob’s family.

5. God will be with Jacob always. Here is the “immanuel” promise: God will be with His people.

6. God will protect Jacob wherever he goes.

Count your many blessings, Jacob! God promises Himself, land, children, blessing, and protection. Is Jacob merely dreaming all this? Can God deliver on what He promises?

**Jacob responds to divine revelation (28:16-22)**

That’s it! The dream ends, but Jacob has now been awakened to divine realities in the covenant of grace that God makes with His people. How will he respond to what he has seen and heard in this amazing dream of the night?

Jacob responds with both words and works, with both fear and a vow. First, he notes that LORD is in this place but he (Jacob) was not aware of it. This is an interesting statement if we might, for a moment, place it against the back-

ground of some pagan beliefs of that day and age. Some say that the ancient peoples believed that if you slept in a sacred place and had a dream there, that you could induce or almost force the god or goddess to reveal himself or herself at that spot. Jacob came and stopped at “a certain place” (verse 11), but we do not get the impression that Jacob was trying to coax God to reveal Himself to him. In fact, quite the opposite! Jacob says in verse 16, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” Jacob was not looking for God in particular, so God came to him, even when Jacob was not expecting it. God chose to be here that night because Jacob was there in God’s providence. In the Biblical text, this is the first direct encounter between God and Jacob. But it will not be their last meeting!

Second, as the thought of encountering God in this place sinks into Jacob’s heart and soul, he is struck with fear (verse 17). No wonder! This is the great God who created all things by the word of His power, the God who is a consuming fire, unable even to look upon sin. Can anyone see God and live?

Third, we note that God has obligated Himself to Jacob, but curiously, the LORD has not explicitly demanded anything from Jacob. This does not mean that he can live in any way he pleases. God’s

people are always required to live holy and blameless lives. But the events of Genesis 27 have not particularly shown any of Isaac’s family members as especially attractive, and Jacob’s deception of his father hardly shows him to a kingly-priestly type of character. Yet it is quite striking that God’s revelation (first) to Jacob draws out of him several other reactions.

Jacob draws attention to the awesomeness of this place. This will lead to the place receiving the name that is the most familiar to Bible readers: Bethel (“house of God”). God’s revelation causes a name change (so common in Biblical revelation, isn’t it). What is more, Jacob declares that this place is the “gate of heaven” (verse 17). When we turn back to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, we find similar ideas but coming from the wrong direction. At Babel, man wanted to make a name for himself, so he built a towering city, a highway to heaven, a stairway to the stars. But God broke up that wicked, humanistic program with a confusion of man’s languages so that later in redemptive history He might unite all nations in Jesus Christ, in His church, through the preaching of the holy gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit. At Bethel, God reached down to Jacob, so that he might respond in faith.

Jacob anoints his pillow of stone. This was an act of consecration.

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*Jacob has been awakened to divine realities in the covenant of grace that God makes with His people.*

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***Jacob has received much in the birthright and the blessing, and God has promised him much. But to whom much is given, much is required.***

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Something that has been anointed is now holy, marked as separate from ordinary use and given over to God. In the Old Testament both people (e.g., kings, priests) and physical objects are anointed. This stone pillar, now set apart, is a kind of prophecy of a time when the land of Canaan will be set apart and occupied by God's people fully, as now in the New Testament era, God's holy people are called to fill the whole earth and dedicate everything in life to the Lord God of heaven and earth (see Zech. 14:21-22; Matt. 28:16-20).

Jacob also makes a vow. The word "if" in verse 20 can also be understood as "since." Jacob is not so much doubting God's word of promise so much as he is setting before Him the realities of what is in the future. After all, what does Jacob have in his own hand? His staff! But the future in God's covenant is rich in its prospects. God says that He will be with Jacob, but only time will tell. God is always true to His Word, but Jacob must see this for himself. Amazingly to him and to us all, Jacob will see the promises fleshed out. The LORD will be His God, and this is what Jacob will confess as he approaches his own death.

Jacob also vows to give to God a tenth of all he will receive from God. This statement at the end of verse 22 is significant because in

it Jacob confesses that what he will receive will be a gift from God. God's generous revelation has now stirred up in Jacob an awareness that the birthright and the blessing will be significant for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jacob has received much in the birthright and the blessing, and God has promised him much. But to whom much is given, much is required.

As beautiful as Jacob's reaction is to this event and to this place, the Israelites would later introduce corruption in their worship here and elsewhere. For example, Jacob sets up his stone pillow and anoints it as a consecration spot to the Lord. But superstitious Israelites would later set up such pillars as images of idolatry. Deuteronomy 16:21-22 says, "Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the LORD your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates" (cf. Exodus 23:24; 34:13). Jeroboam I, first king of a divided Israel, would set up golden calves at Bethel in order to keep the northern Israelites from traveling to Jerusalem and worshipping at the Temple. How easy it is for our wicked hearts to manufacture idols and to corrupt the pure worship of God. Superstition about things and places is still with us, even with people who call themselves "Christians."

**Ascending and descending  
on the Son of Man**

Read John 1:50-51. In this context Jesus has encountered Nathanael, who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel. Jesus responds by telling him that he would see even greater things. Indeed they would see heaven opened with God's angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, the title that Jesus typically uses in the Gospels to identify Himself. Jesus is drawing upon the dream of Jacob at Bethel, but He drops any reference to a ladder or staircase. The "house of God" (Bethel) is the place where God and man meet to have true fellowship together. Jesus Christ is today that Person through whom God and sinful humanity are reconciled. He alone is our Mediator, whose cross on Good Friday points to the true and only way to heaven. There is no more need for an earthly Temple composed of gold, stone, wood and veils. Christ has opened Paradise for all God's elect through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Thus Jesus' words in John 1:50-51 reveal that the great honor given by the Jews to the patriarch Jacob must truly shift to Jesus Himself. It is in Jesus that divine revelation has become flesh to dwell among us (cf. John 1:14). He is the true Temple for His people. Only Christ is the "gate of heaven" (cf. John 14:6).

**Conclusion**

Jacob was running for his life. He was not looking for God. But God came to look for him by

means of a dream. In this way Jacob is awakened to new realities, made aware of promises that God will keep in order to restore all things to Himself again. Jacob and his family (yet to be) will have important responsibilities in that great redemptive plan. But in order to move forward by faith, God must put His promises underneath Jacob's feet. Therefore, what God does on that night by that "certain place" which becomes Bethel, is good news—for Jacob and for us who read this story of grace.

## Lesson 5: Points to ponder and discuss

1. Read Genesis 15 again. What does God promise specifically to Abram? God makes a covenant with Abram, but the language literally says that God "cut a covenant" with Abram. What does that mean in Genesis 15? How does Abram respond to God's promises?
2. Look up the word "angel" in a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. What does the Bible teach us about the role of angels in God's world?
3. Read Isaiah 6. What are the similarities and differences that Isaiah experiences when he sees the Lord "seated high and lifted up," compared to Jacob's dream?
4. There are other people who meet the LORD or His Angel. Can you name these people? How do they react when meeting Him? What do they say and do? For starters, see Exodus 3:1ff; 24:10,11; 33:12ff; Judges 13; etc.
5. We sing in one great hymn, "How vast the benefits divine that we in Christ possess." What were the benefits that Jacob possessed by the end of Genesis 28? How do these relate to what Christians today have in the finished work of Jesus Christ?
6. Jacob says that he will give a tenth to the Lord. How is this also an act of faith in God? How is all giving to the work of the Lord supposed to be an act of faith for us today?

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# Bible Studies on Jacob

## Lesson 6: Jacob Marries the Mothers of Israel

Read Genesis 29:1-30

### Introduction

Jacob has traveled the great distance from his parents' lodging in southern Canaan to the region of Paddan-Aram. The LORD came looking for Jacob, and He revealed His covenant promises to Jacob by means of a dream at the place that is renamed Bethel ("house of God"). Jacob hears for himself the covenant promises of God, and he responds in faith with a vow to serve the LORD God in the future.

### Meeting at the watering-hole (29:1-12)

Jacob can now continue his journey to his relatives, to "the land of the eastern peoples". We remember in our reading of Genesis of another arrival there in an earlier chapter. In Genesis 24 Abraham had sent his servant to this region to look for a wife for his son Isaac. The issue then is the same issue now for Jacob (at least in part), namely, the wife must be from the same larger clan and thus (presumably) from the same faith. But there is something that is quite different: Abraham's servant goes with ten camels and "all kinds of good things" (Gen. 24:10). Abraham wanted to impress the potential bride for Isaac (and the bride's family) with his wealth, presumably a bridal gift. But what does Jacob have in his hand when he arrives at the local well? He has his staff. In other words, he is virtually empty-handed

when it comes to the physical things of this world.

Jacob heads to the local watering hole where people would bring their flocks for a drink of water. It is remarkable that this kind of story in the Bible is almost a kind of "type scene," the kind of story that is repeated at several points to indicate where a man meets the woman whom he would marry. We have already referred to Genesis 24, where Abraham's servant travels to obtain a wife for Isaac, Abraham's son. He comes to a well (Gen. 24:11). Moses also meets his future wife at a local watering hole in Exodus 2:15ff. We see the pattern: 1) a man travels and stops at a well; 2) a girl (or girls) comes along to get water for her flocks; 3) the man introduces himself, often by drawing water for the flocks; 4) the girl informs her parents of the man; 5) the man is brought to her home; and 6) a marriage is then arranged.

Jacob actually tries to get the shepherds to move along, to leave the site of the well since they have told him that Rachel, Laban's daughter, is making her way to this well. "It's the middle of the day. This is not the time to water the flocks," Jacob says to them in verse 7. "Get back to work... in the fields!" in other words. Apparently Jacob wants his meeting with Rachel to be relatively private.

The well is covered by a large stone. This is obviously done in

order to prevent excessive amounts of dirt, filth, and garbage from falling into the water, thus polluting it. A large stone covering may also have been a safety feature, used to keep a person (perhaps a child) or an animal from falling into it, especially at night. It may also be in order to restrict its use to the local residents. Outsiders perhaps may have been required to pay for the use of the well. The shepherds would have to work to roll this large stone away to use the well, and then roll it back in place. Some stones in these situations might require two or three men to remove them in order to get the needed water.

Verse 3 notes that the shepherds (plural) were the ones who rolled this stone away, but in verse 10 the text says that Jacob alone rolled it away. Not bad for a man in his late 70s! He experiences a surge of strength that enables him to perform this particular feat. We think of the strength of Samson later on, when the Spirit comes upon Samson to enable him to carry out his warfare against the Philistines. Apparently the shepherds are still hanging around and witness this act of great strength (see verse 9).

But more importantly, these shepherds show no hostility to this recently arrived stranger. In fact, they know Jacob's uncle Laban and that he is doing well (verse 6). God's providence is clearly in evidence here in this encounter at the watering hole. At Bethel earlier God had promised to be with Jacob (Gen. 28:15), and here is a meeting that shows God to be true to His word. There are no chance en-

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counters or accidental meetings. God is working out the events so that He might advance His plans in Jesus Christ. Jacob had fled Esau to escape being murdered, but God has bigger things in mind for His Kingdom in Christ.

A further example of God's timing and arrangement of meetings here is the fact that at this very moment, while Jacob is talking with the shepherds, Rachel is coming along with the sheep. Here comes his cousin Rachel, a woman whom he probably had never met before in his whole life. She is in charge of her father's sheep, since in that culture, care for sheep might be handled by either a man (e.g., Moses, David) or a woman. Jacob proves himself quite useful as it is he who "puts his shoulder to the stone," so to speak, removes it and proceeds to water the flock. Whereas Jacob has been in a conversation with the shepherds, the text does not report any conversation (at least not yet) between Jacob and Rachel. Jacob acts, he works, and once he has finished watering the sheep, he kisses his cousin and breaks down in tears.

Why the tears? What is it that releases such emotion in Jacob? Perhaps it has struck him deep in his soul to see the coming together of so many providences from the Lord. His original reason to flee his own home was to escape his murder-plotting brother Esau. The story about getting a wife was a useful cover story. But then God steps directly into the picture via the dramatic dream at Bethel. "I will be with you wherever you go," the Lord had promised Jacob. And who else but the Lord could have

brought Jacob to this particular well at this particular moment when his own cousin, Rachel, daughter of his own uncle Laban, was coming to the well?

Jacob explains who he is to Rachel (verse 12), and this sets her into motion to report this remarkable news to her father Laban. Jacob has found "family," or better put, God has guided his steps in such a way that this man now finds himself in the midst of his own people. Many English translations do not bring this out so clearly, but in the original text there is the frequent use of the word "brother." See, for example, verses 4, 10, and 12. On one level, the word "brother" may simply be a term of general friendship; in Genesis 29 it has even stronger connotations. Read verses 4-12 and see how many times a word or phrase of family relationship is used. God truly is putting this solitary figure Jacob into a new circle of family.

#### **Meet the parents (29:13-20)**

By the field well, Jacob had kissed Rachel. But when Laban hears this news from his daughter Rachel that this relative Jacob has arrived in the area from such a great distance away, he appears to drop everything in order to run out to meet Jacob. We read in verse 13 that he "embraced him and kissed him," immediately showing his own emotional acceptance of Jacob and happiness at his arrival. This is an embrace of a family member as Laban says lit-

erally to Jacob, "Indeed you are my bone and my flesh" (verse 14).

In verse 13 we read that Jacob told Laban "all these things." Everything? Did Jacob tell Laban that he had followed his mother's directions (remember: Rebekah is Laban's sister) in order to mislead his father Isaac and take the blessing away from his twin brother Esau? Or, did Jacob say that he's now here in Paddan-Aram in order to find a proper wife? If that is the story, Laban may very well have wondered what the bride-price was that Jacob had to offer. After all, Jacob is really empty-handed at this point. Would Jacob have traveled all this way to get a bride, but his wallet is empty, so to speak? The text leaves us with some questions at this point: what was the whole story that Jacob told to Laban? And how does Laban react?

A month passes, and Laban has an idea about how the relationship with Jacob might be brought into line. We must also admit that we are not exactly sure about the nature of the relationship that develops between Laban and Jacob. By saying to Jacob that he is "my bone and my flesh" ("flesh and blood"), Laban uses the language of blood relationship (verse 14; cf. Gen. 2:23; 37:27; etc.). Some scholars claim that a man with only daughters might adopt a male heir in order to keep his property in the family. Does Laban "adopt" Jacob as his own son? If so, we are surprised Jacob

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*There is nothing more startling to our ears these days than silence.*

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never calls Laban his “father,” and Laban never calls Jacob his “son.” In any case, Laban proposes paying Jacob for his work. And while we might be favorably inclined to receive a wage, does this perhaps reduce Jacob to the status of a hireling? What is Laban’s game-plan in all this? Is there a hidden agenda at work here?

**Meet your first wife... and second wife! (29:21-30)**

Laban has two daughters, as Isaac has two sons. Just as Esau and Jacob differ from each other, so the daughters also differ, at least in appearance. We have read about the elder – younger sibling difference already in Genesis 25. Will something develop here along similar lines? Leah (her name means “cow”) has delicate eyes, while Rachel (her name means “ewe”) is beautiful in appearance. “Delicate” eyes need not mean that Leah has poor eyesight. It may mean that she does not have the dark eyes that many consider a feature of beauty. Jacob comes to love Rachel, the younger daughter, and he proposes to Uncle Laban that he work for seven years to acquire Rachel as his wife. Laban agrees, noting that it is good if such a marriage stays within the larger family circle. Better Jacob than some other man, reasons Laban. And Jacob’s love for Rachel grows.

The seven-year engagement goes by quickly, and the day of the wedding arrives. This was an occasion of feasting and celebration, as weddings of two people in love should be. But evening comes, and darkness falls. Jacob takes his bride to bed; she is almost certainly veiled. Father of the bride Laban gives his

maidservant Zilpah as a wedding gift to the newlyweds. Perhaps Jacob thinks, “It does not get better than this!”

But in the morning, Jacob wakes up to a new reality... and a different wife! What a surprise, even shock, for Jacob! After seven years of work, and it’s Leah who is now his wife. Jacob had deceived his father, who could not see who was before him, and now the deceiver has been deceived when he could not see who his new bride is. But it is all legal and according to custom: Leah is now Jacob’s lawfully wedded wife. In reading this we feel a bit scandalized by Laban’s behavior, but for this wedding-night trick to succeed, both Leah and Rachel are playing along with it. We do not read of any protest from Rachel, for what happens here is not done in secret to her. In other words, the whole household of Laban is playing along with this, and therefore we can understand Jacob’s morning-after outrage. “What is this you’ve done to me?... Why have you deceived me?” (verse 25).

Laban gives Jacob a very lame answer. “Oh, sorry! Didn’t I tell you that the oldest daughter must be married first before the younger one?” A deal is worked out: the wedding week celebration with Leah must be completed, and then Jacob may take Rachel as his second wife. But he must work another seven years to acquire Rachel as well. Very shrewd deal, indeed! Laban gets fourteen years of work from Jacob, marries two daughters off to a close relative (his own nephew), and Jacob has two wives, not just one. Aren’t we all happy?

But Jacob’s love remains focused on Rachel, and the seeds of a new conflict have been planted.

**Rev. Mark Vander Hart** is Associate Professor of Old Testament Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana.

## Lesson 6: Points to ponder and discuss

1. Jacob happens to come to the well where the shepherds know Laban. Plus, Rachel soon arrives. We confess that nothing comes to us by chance (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10). We think of Ruth happening to come to Boaz's field. What other incidents in the Bible have people and events "happen," but with important results? What events in your own life, perhaps, were significant as you look back upon them, but at the time seemed to be "chance" events?
2. Jacob meets his future wife Rachel at the field well. Jesus also encounters a woman in John 4. What different things does Jesus focus on in His conversation with this woman at the well? Jesus was not looking for a wife. Rather, He came to seek a spiritual "bride," the church. How does this connect with what Jesus does and says at the well in Samaria? What do we learn about the spiritual "bride" from John 4?
3. Laban appears in the story to be very thrilled at the arrival of his nephew Jacob. He embraced him, kissed him, and, in general, welcomed him into his home. Yet later events suggest that Laban will develop a kind of agenda in which he will "use" Jacob for his own ends. How is it possible for people to act lovingly and yet really be using people for selfish reasons? Do we always understand clearly our own motives? How is the love of God so different?
4. Jacob marries two women (sisters), and he acquires their maidservants as (secondary) wives as well. Does bigamy (or polygamy) violate a basic Biblical principle regarding marriage? How would you argue your position from Scripture? Why do some Mormon sects still practice polygamy? What is the Mormon teaching on why polygamy is a "good" thing?
5. The people who had more than one wife in the Bible experience many things in terms of their several wives. Think of Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines! Who else in Scripture had many wives? Did that situation bring good, or did it bring distress and pain? Or sometimes both?
6. Laban's deception of Jacob in the matter of the brides recalls Jacob's deception of his own father Isaac in Genesis 27. What might God be teaching or showing to Jacob in this? Could these recent events be a sanctifying thing for Jacob?



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# The New Testament Evidence Regarding Paedocommunion (Part Four)

In our introduction to the New Testament evidence that might have a bearing upon the question whether children of believing parents should be admitted to the Lord's Table, we observed that this question is not directly addressed in any passage. Whatever conclusions we draw from the New Testament regarding paedocommunion, they will have to be derived from general biblical themes that describe the nature of the sacrament and the manner in which it is to be received. Since 1 Corinthians 11 is the one passage that extensively deals with the proper reception of the sacrament, it is the most important piece of New Testament evidence that has implications for the practice of paedocommunion. Accordingly, we will have to give this passage special attention in a forthcoming article.

Before treating 1 Corinthians 11, however, there are two distinct pieces of New Testament evidence that will be the focus of this and a subsequent article. The first of these is the New Testament teaching regarding the Lord's Supper in its similarity with as well as distinction from the Old Testament Passover. The subject of the relation between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is an especially important one, since the argument of paedocommunionists depends almost entirely upon the alleged Old Testament precedent of children participating in the Passover as a household rite in Israel. If there are significant dissimilarities between

the Passover and the Lord's Supper, a principal leg under the paedocommunionist argument may prove to be too weak to support the weight placed upon it. The second of these pieces of evidence is the teaching of John 6. Since this passage speaks directly to what it means to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ, it has implications for the question of the sacramental eating and drinking of Christ that occurs by means of the Lord's Supper. Though often overlooked in debates regarding the subject of paedocommunion, this passage is a significant piece of New Testament evidence for the manner in which Christ is to be received by His people.

## The Passover and the Lord's Supper: Similarities and Differences

In its basic form, the argument of many paedocommunionists is easily stated. If all children (with the exception of unweaned infants) in the old covenant participated fully in the Passover meal, and if the Lord's Supper is a new covenant form of the old covenant Passover, then it follows that children should be admitted to the Lord's Table. Any refusal to admit children to the Lord's Supper is tantamount to a denial of the continuity within the covenant of grace in its old and newer administrations. Such a refusal spiritually impoverishes the children of believing parents and is incompatible with the greater fullness of the new covenant adminis-

tration. When children are not received at the Table of the Lord, their participation in Christ is compromised and their status as members of the covenant community through baptism is called into question. In order to assess the force of this argument, we need to consider whether its premise, that the Lord's Supper is a kind of new covenant Passover, is valid.

The apparent plausibility of this premise stems from what we have already acknowledged regarding the *occasion* for the institution of the Lord's Supper. In the Gospel accounts of Christ's institution of the Supper, we are told that it occurred "on the first day of Unleavened Bread" (Matt. 22:17; par. Mark 14:12). The meal Christ ate with His disciples on the night He was betrayed took place in the context of the annual celebration of the Passover feast. In the accounts of the institution in Mark and Luke, the Gospel writers note that this meal was eaten on the "first day" of the feast, "when they sacrificed the Passover lamb" (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). On the basis of these Gospel accounts, it is traditionally believed that the elements that Christ consecrated as signs of His body and blood, the bread and the wine, were elements of the Passover meal. The Lord's Supper, therefore, has clear connections with the Passover, not only in terms of the occasion for its institution but also in terms of the elements that are constitutive of its sacramental character.

I use the language "traditionally" at this point, because there are some interpreters of the New Testament accounts of the last supper who

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argue that it did not actually occur on the night the Passover was celebrated. For example, Paul Letham appeals to John 18:28 (cf. John 19:14,31), which suggests that the Passover was eaten on the day after Christ's betrayal, to argue that the Lord's Supper was not instituted on the day of the Passover meal. On this construction, the meal Christ shared with His disciples on the night of His betrayal was not the traditional Passover meal and, therefore, there is no direct historical link between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. In his comments on this apparent discrepancy, John Calvin suggests a different construction, namely, that the "day of preparation" was the traditional day in the Jewish calendar on which preparations were made for the celebration of Passover on the Sabbath day of the Passover week (cf. John 19:14). On Calvin's view, the meal Christ celebrated with His disciples was the Passover meal, though it occurred on Thursday evening (14 Nisan in the Jewish calendar) before the official date of the Passover meal on the Sabbath in the traditional Jewish calendar. The problem with these constructions, however, is that the Gospel accounts clearly teach that Jesus' meal with His disciples occurred on the day when the Passover lambs were traditionally slaughtered (Mark 14:12; Matt. 27:62).

A simpler and likelier explanation of the apparent discrepancy be-

tween the Synoptic accounts and the Gospel of John is represented in the New International Version's translation of John 19:14: "It was the day of Preparation of Passover week, about the sixth hour." This translation is based upon two instances of traditional language usage in this verse. First, the term used for "preparation" had a technical meaning in the first century A.D., and referred to Friday as the day of preparation for the Sabbath. And second, the term used for "of the Passover" also had come to refer to the entirety of the Passover week as the period during which the feast of Unleavened Bread was kept. The language of John 19:14, therefore, should probably be rendered as "Friday of Passover Week." On this understanding, the Lord's Supper was instituted on the occasion of the Passover meal, which was itself part of the celebration of the week of the Passover feast. Admittedly, there are some difficulties and differences of opinion regarding how John's references to the time of Jesus' betrayal and death prior to the Passover can be squared with the clear testimony of the Gospel accounts. Nevertheless, it seems undeniable that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the setting of a celebration of the Passover meal.

Though it is clear that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of the celebration of the Passover,

the similarities between the Lord's Supper and the Passover should not be overstated on this account. Though both rites involve fellowship meals that commemorate an important event in redemptive history, there are several important differences between them. When these differences are borne in mind, it is not correct to view the Lord's Supper as a kind of new covenant Passover, as many paedocommunionists are inclined to do.

The first important dissimilarity between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is evident from Christ's words of institution. When Christ consecrated the cup as a token of His blood shed upon the cross, He declared "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28; par. Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). This language is derived from Exodus 24:1-11, which provides an account of the covenant fellowship meal that was eaten by Moses, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel on the top of Mount Sinai. Rather than connecting the meaning of the elements of the Lord's Supper with the celebration of the Passover meal, Christ connects it directly with the covenant renewal ceremony of Exodus 24, a ceremony that was itself reminiscent of the way the Lord had confirmed His covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:7ff.).

In each of these Old Testament antecedents of the Lord's Supper, the covenant between the Lord and His people is confirmed by a ceremony of blood-letting that signifies the solemn bond between them. Not only does the Lord bind Himself to

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***Whereas the Passover was an old covenant observance that commemorated the event of the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord's Supper is a new covenant observance that commemorates Christ's sacrificial death.***

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keep the covenant by means of a kind of "self-maledictory oath," but He also reminds His people that covenant disobedience will require a blood atonement for the sins of the people. Though there is a great deal more that can be said about the meaning of these Old Testament antecedents for the Lord's Supper, the point to notice is that *Christ's words of institution do not connect the Supper with the Passover, but with the covenant renewal meal that Moses and the elders of Israel celebrated on Mount Sinai.* Unlike the Passover meal, which was originally a household observance in Israel, the meal that constitutes the most important Old Testament antecedent for the Lord's Supper was shared only by Moses and the twenty-four elders of Israel.

The second important dissimilarity between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is already implied in the first. Whereas the Passover was an old covenant observance that commemorated the event of the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord's Supper is a new covenant observance that commemorates Christ's sacrificial death, which is the fulfillment of *all the types and ceremonies of the law, especially the sin and guilt offerings of the old covenant.* It is certainly true that the Lord's Supper fulfills the Passover. Christ is, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "our Passover lamb." This fulfillment of the

Passover certainly belongs to the fullness of the meaning of the death of Christ, which is commemorated and proclaimed by means of the Lord's Supper. However, consistent with Christ's own appeal to the Old Testament precedent of Exodus 24, the sacrifice for sin that Christ's death represents is linked up in the New Testament with all of its Old Testament antecedents. When Christ institutes the Lord's Supper, He does so in order that it might be a means of remembering and proclaiming Him and His atoning death upon the cross. In the New Testament's understanding of Christ's sacrificial death, it is not the Passover but the sacrifices that typify atonement for the guilt of sin that are most pertinent. As we noted in our earlier consideration of the Old Testament evidence regarding the participation of children in various covenant observances, the meals associated with the sacrifices that most typify the atoning death of Christ were not shared by the entire old covenant community. Though we may not appeal directly to these Old Testament restrictions to determine whether children should participate in the Lord's Supper, we may conclude that there are no Old Testament precedents that are sufficient to determine whether this sacrament ought to be received by all members of the new covenant community, including the children of believing parents.

In addition to these two important dis-

similarities between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, there are several lesser differences between them in terms of the manner in which they are to be kept. As we have seen, the Old Testament Passover was an *annual* observance, which required the participation of the male members of the covenant community (and, in traditional practice, only those males who were "sons of the commandment"). Furthermore, the observance of the Passover was to take place in a *particular place* where the Lord had placed His name. The Lord's Supper, however, was instituted by Christ to be celebrated wherever His people gather as a fulfillment of the old covenant temple. When the new covenant community gathers, they gather as a sanctuary of God by His indwelling Spirit (cf. Eph. 2:22). Consequently, the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the new covenant in a different location than the Passover, and as a regular feature of the worship and ministry of the church. Furthermore, though the New Testament does not explicitly command the women of the new covenant community to participate, their participation is an evident implication of the New Testament's teaching of their participation in Christ through faith (cf. Acts 2:42; Gal. 3:28). There are, accordingly, a number of striking differences between the manner of the administration of the Passover and of the Lord's Supper. It is instructive to note also that one of the elements that was consecrated as an integral feature of the Lord's Supper, the "cup of blessing," was not a stipulated feature of the Passover according to the Old Testament legislation. Thus, an element of the Passover meal that had no divinely authorized part in its Old Testament institution,

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has become an essential element of the Lord's Supper as it was ordained by Christ.

### Conclusion

Any evaluation of the common paedocommunionist appeal to the Old Testament Passover to argue for the admission of children of the Lord's Supper, may not overlook these significant differences between the two rites. Though the Passover celebration was undoubtedly the setting within which the Lord instituted the sacrament of communion, there are too many substantial differences between the old and new covenant rites to allow any easy inferences from the one to the other. This holds true in particular for the question with which we are concerned. Our consideration of the similarities and differences between the Passover and the Lord's Supper indicates that we need to look especially at the New Testament evidence, when it comes to the determination of the proper recipients of the new covenant sacrament. As we have previously noted, that New Testament evidence is provided for us principally in two places, John 6 and 1 Corinthians 11. It is simply impossible to establish the practice of paedocommunion on the basis of the alleged similarities between the Old Testament Passover and the New Testament Lord's Supper.

**Dr. Cornelis Venema** is the President of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He also serves a contributing editor of *The Outlook*.



# Book Review

*Hope for the Southern World: Impacting Societal Problems in the Non-Western World* by Timothy M. Monsma, PhD. Published by CCW Books, Loveland CO. Reviewed by Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel.

Dr. Timothy Monsma makes a very helpful contribution to the vexing problems in the Southern World of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The five common threads that are woven through the Southern World of Africa, Asia and Latin America are: first, a history of European colonialism; second, poverty; third, democracy as a relatively new system of government; fourth, an absence of religious freedom; and fifth, the lack of government stability. These five common experiences produce some great societal problems.

The question Dr. Monsma wants to answer is why the Christians in the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are not a great influence for good in these nations, and how they can become a greater influence for good.

The author sees the problem as arising from a one-sided view of the church's mandate received from our Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. Christian missionaries generally have been effective in proclaiming the gospel, but have not been as effective in teaching the converts to observe all that Christ has commanded. There has been a failure to integrate the gospel with all of life. The Gospel of Christ is the *Hope for the Southern World*, but that Gospel of Christ must penetrate all the areas of life.

There are six crucial problems that have to be addressed in the Southern World of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They are the persecution of Christians, poverty, poor health, ethnic and tribal hatred, civil strife, and dictators. In dealing with these problems, Christians face a daunting task. They cannot resort to violence which denies the very essence of the Gospel. Christ sends His people out like sheep among wolves; therefore, they must be as clever as snakes and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:26). This book deals with how Christians can be clever and innocent at the same time in addressing and dealing with these vexing problems in the Southern World.

The author and his wife have lived, worked, and traveled in many of the countries in the Southern World and are able to give firsthand observations on many of the issues which plague these countries. They have seen the persecution and the terrible results of poverty, the horrible conditions surrounding poor health care, and the results of ethnic and tribal hatred, civil strife and dictators. This book is a very helpful and useful tool to help Christians in the Southern World cope with these serious problems that they face.

The author is a Calvinist Christian who sees God as sovereign, and Christ as King over all areas of life, Whose kingdom will prevail and never

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end. He sees the church as having the answer to the enormous problems that exist. The answer is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the goal is not simply to deal with one's personal relationship with Christ. This is basic and absolutely necessary, but that relationship with Jesus Christ must be worked out in all areas of life.

A major theme in this book is the crucial necessity of believers to work together in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is broader than the church. The Kingdom of God is Christ's rule over all of life. The Christian is a citizen of the Kingdom and has a vital role to play in applying the great principles of the Word of God to all areas of life. The author is very practical in his suggestions of how Christians can address specific social problems like corruption, civil strife, inferior medical care, poverty, and poor schools in both democratic and non-democratic societies.

This book will be of great value to Christians struggling in developing countries. It is written with passion born out of personal experience, and it demonstrates how to work in hostile environments with the power of the Gospel.

*Hope for the Southern World* is a book that needs wide distribution throughout the Southern World. Readers who wish to buy the book are encouraged to send a check for \$12.95 to CCW Books, 2474 Boise Ave., Loveland, CO 80538. A substantial discount is given to agents and bookstores that order ten or more books.

E-mail:  
monsmatd@comcast.com. The  
web site for the book is: [http://  
ccwbooks.com](http://ccwbooks.com).

## Looking Above

*A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*

*Revelation 7:9-14*

*"The Great Multitude"*

What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is sore oppressed? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is by schisms rent asunder? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is by heresies distressed? What is your confidence that the night of weeping shall soon be the night of song?

Has the opening of the first six seals, recorded for us in Revelation 6, impressed upon you the trials and tribulations of the Church? The first seal is opened and a rider upon a white horse rides forth, conquering and to conquer. The second seal is opened and a rider upon a red horse rides forth bringing bloodshed and warfare upon the earth. The third seal is opened and a rider upon a black horse rides forth and the earth is ravished with famine. The fourth seal is opened and a rider upon a pale horse rides forth, visiting the earth with death, and Hades follows in its wake. The fifth seal is opened and the souls of the martyrs under the altar are told to rest a little while longer, while the rest of the Church is killed and slain as they were. The sixth seal is opened and creation itself is confounded, as the great day of wrath has come.

The opening of the seals sets before us the history of the Church in the world as she lives between the first and second comings of Christ. This

is our history. This is our story. We are caught up in the middle of the action! We are not spectators in the stands; we are participants in the arena! Even now the horsemen of the apocalypse ride forth. Even now the souls of the martyrs under the altar cry out. Even now the blood of many Christians runs with that of the martyrs before them.

Is it any wonder, then, that the Church is set before our eyes in the opening half of Revelation 7 as the Church Militant? She is numbered and listed in terms of a military census. She is pictured as an army arrayed for battle. She is a Church under attack: she is attacked by the wolves on the outside, she is attacked by wolves dressed in sheep's clothing on the inside, she is attacked by the Evil One, even Satan himself. The Church is the object of his wrath. The Church is the object of his fury.

What, then, is your confidence that the Church will prevail?

Revelation 7 gives us the answer. Here we are given a picture of the Church. This is evident from verse 9, where this great multitude, "which no one could number, of all the nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues," stands before the throne of the Lamb. Who is able to stand before the throne, but the Church, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? In Revelation 7 we are given a picture of the Church in verses 1-

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## *We have in Revelation 7, two pictures of the same Church.*

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8, and yet, another picture of the Church in verses 9-17.

But how could both of these sections have in view the Church? After all, in verses 1-8, we read that the Church is *numbered*: there are 144,000 sealed; in verses 9-17, we read that the Church is an *innumerable* multitude! Furthermore, in verses 1-8, we read of the Church pictured in terms of *the twelve tribes of Israel*; in verses 9-17, we read of the Church pictured in terms of *all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues*! How could both of these sections have in view the Church? Do you sense the tension? Verses 1-8 speak of a definite number: 144,000; verses 9-17 speak of an innumerable multitude! Verses 1-8 speak of the twelve tribes of Israel; verses 9-17 speak of those from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues! How can both of these sections have in view the Church?

The answer lies in the fact that we have in Revelation 7, two pictures of the same Church. In other words, both verses 1-8 and verses 9-17 have in view the Church, but she is viewed from two different perspectives. Verses 1-8 have in view the Church Militant; verses 9-17 the Church Triumphant.

But then what explains the different imagery? Why do we have 144,000 in verses 1-8 while we have an innumerable multitude in verses 9-17? Why do we have the twelve

tribes of Israel in verses 1-8 while we have all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues in verses 9-17? How can the same group of people be viewed so differently?

As others have pointed out, the answer lies in the common background of the imagery of the chapter, which is found in the Old Testament Exodus from Egypt. Consider the parallels. In Exodus 3:17, we read of God's promise to Israel to "bring you up out of the affliction (literally, *tribulation*) of Egypt..." So in Revelation 7:14, we read "these are the ones who come out of the great *tribulation*..." In Exodus 12:51, we read "that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their *armies*." In Revelation 7:1-8, we read of the Church as an *army*, an army that is delivered in verses 9-17. In Exodus 19:10 and 14, we read, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them *wash their clothes*' .... So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they *washed their clothes*." In Revelation 7:14 we read, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and *washed their robes* and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." In Exodus 24:8 we read, "And Moses took the *blood*, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the *blood* of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you according to all these

words.'" In Revelation 7:14 we read that the people made their robes white "in the *blood* of the Lamb."

The parallels continue further. Do you remember what Feast the Israelites observed in commemoration of the Exodus and the subsequent wilderness wandering? The Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. We read about that in Leviticus 23:39-43, "Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days, on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All you who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." Note the presence of palm branches for the celebration of God's protection, for the celebration of the victory and salvation God wrought for His people in the Exodus from Egypt! Now, what do you find the people of God holding in their hands in Revelation 7:9? They have palm branches in their hands!

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From all of this it is evident, then, that Revelation 7 has in view one group of people, the redeemed of the Lord, even the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is pictured and portrayed from different perspectives to be sure, but it is one and the same Church! The redeemed of the Lord are pictured as the Church Militant in verses 1-8; they are pictured as the Church Triumphant in verses 9-17.

Now consider their activity, verses 9b-10, they stand “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands...crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

The emphasis of their song is on salvation, deliverance, and victory! The Church Triumphant sings out of the victory God has wrought! The Church Victorious sings out of the deliverance God has wrought! The Church at Rest sings out of the salvation God has wrought! This is their song through all the ages: “Salvation belongs to our God!”

The Church Militant would do well to learn the song of the Church Triumphant. To whom does salvation belong? To God! Who has wrought salvation? God! Note the thoroughly God-centered worship of the Church in glory! There is simply no mention of what man has done, no mention of the works of man’s hands, no mention of what man has contributed, in fact, there is no mention of man at all! The song is focused on God who alone has wrought salvation!

God has wrought salvation through the Lamb. This also the Church Triumphant recognizes. “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne *and to the Lamb!*” As the song is thoroughly God-centered, so it is thoroughly Christ-centered! God has wrought salvation in the Lamb! It is not man who has worked salvation, it is God who has worked salvation, and that through the Lamb! The song of the Church Triumphant, then, is a song that extols the mighty acts of God in history, rejoicing in the salvation wrought through the Lamb that was slain! “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!”

So great is the salvation God has wrought, even the angels in glory join in. Verses 11-12: “All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’” The angels of heaven rejoice and sing over the salvation God has wrought for us!

Why, then, would we ever be satisfied with singing songs that have more to do with man, than they do with God?! We should not come to church to have our eyes set upon ourselves; we do that all week long! We should not come

to church to sing about us and what we have done, we can do that all week long! We come to church to have our eyes set upon Christ! We come to church to sing about Christ and what He has done! We come to the church to sing about what God has done in history for the salvation of our souls!

To God belongs blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might. God has wrought salvation, not man! It is not of man whom we sing! We sing of God! That is the song of heaven! You can check every single song that is sung in the book of Revelation and you will notice, not one of them speaks of man and what he has done, every one of them speaks of God and what He has done! Let the Church Militant learn the song of the Church Triumphant! And let us sing that song with joy!

The scene that is set before us here is a scene that is intended, then, for our comfort. Notice verses 13-14, “Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

Notice that once again, we have

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***Note the thoroughly God-centered worship of the Church in glory!***

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one of the 24 elders instructing John. The 24 elders, we have maintained, are symbolic of the office of the elder. And what is the role of the elders? Their role is to instruct, to teach, to comfort.

We saw an elder instructing John once before, back in chapter 5. “So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals’” (5:4-5). There, John wept because he was afraid that the redemption of God’s people would not be fulfilled. The elder comforted him by pointing him to Christ. Now the elder instructs John by pointing to the countless multitude arrayed in robes of white, thus instructing John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb that was slain, has actually accomplished and secured the redemption of His people!

In other words, the elder instructs John, teaches John, and comforts John, by instructing him regarding the history of redemption. He focuses John’s attention upon what God has done in history. William Hendriksen writes, “He asks John a question, not in order that the apostle may inform him, but in order to rivet John’s attention upon that countless multitude; especially, upon that amazing miracle, namely, that all these individuals who once were sinners are now righteous and holy, clothed around with white, flowing robes.... They have placed all their trust in the saving blood of Jesus Christ. This blood,

representing the complete atonement which the Lord has rendered, has cleansed them of the guilt and the pollution of sin. By means of the red blood of Christ they have been made white.”

The emphasis, then, is entirely upon Christ. It is His blood that is in view, not the blood of the martyrs. The point is that the Church is sealed by the blood of the Lamb, enabling her to go through tribulation, knowing that she belongs to the Lamb, the One who has overcome the world! Our blessed hope is in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ! Because of His work, we know that the Church Militant shall stand before the throne of God and the Lamb as the Church Triumphant!

What is your confidence that the Church will prevail? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is sore oppressed? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is by schisms rent asunder? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she is by heresies distressed? What is your confidence that the night of weeping shall soon be the night of song? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she finds herself in the midst of toil? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she finds herself in the midst of tribulation? What is your confidence that the Church shall prevail when she finds herself in the tumult of war? What is your confidence that the Church will prevail?

Your confidence is Christ alone—

the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world—the Lamb in whose blood you are washed—the Lamb in whose righteousness you stand clothed—the Lamb to whom you have been joined—the Lamb that has gathered you—the Lamb that protects you—the Lamb that preserves you—the Lamb who has wrought your salvation!

**Rev. Brian Vos** is the Pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.



First Place Winner  
 College  
 The Outlook 2006 Essay Contest

## Indian Idolatry in Every Heart

Bangalore, the city where I spent most of my time on a summer mission project, is in the south-central part of India. It resides on a plateau, which makes the weather perfect — it is in the 70s-80s the whole summer! Bangalore is one of the five largest cities in India, with a population pushing eight million and growing everyday — growing so quickly in fact that the infrastructure can barely keep up with the growth.

Traffic and construction are everywhere. It seemed like roads, buildings, and lots of things in India are in a constant state of being *almost* finished but never quite done. Some parts of the city look just like North America, with shiny skyscrapers, paved roads, men in business suits, and even several McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chickens, and Pizza Huts.

Most areas, however, are still very very Indian—dirty and dusty, with cows wandering in the middle of the road and leaving their cow patties all over the place, women wearing sarees and gold anklets, and with their hair in long black braids. Streets are congested with motorcycles, cars, camels, and dump-trucks. Everyone takes breaks for tea in the afternoon, shamelessly relieving themselves on the side of the road, and squatting to eat their rice with their hands.

I went to Bangalore hoping to work with street children — children who have been either abandoned or orphaned, or who have a home but are not welcome in it. These children spend most, if not all, their time living and working on the streets — as beggars, trash collectors, construction workers, prostitutes, or street vendors.

While in India, I lived with the family of a pastor and worked closely with them, as well as with the assistant pastor, his wife, and an American named Elizabeth who was a two year intern in Bangalore. Our daily schedule took us out into the city every day. I loved the constant bustle of people living their daily lives spilling over onto the streets. There was always something new to see.

One thing we saw a lot of was the religion of the people. Like most of India, Bangalore has a huge Hindu population. Whether they are nominal or devout, about 80% of the people in the city claim to be Hindus. There were also Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, and the occasional Buddhist and atheist. You could tell most people's beliefs clearly from their clothing—a colored saree and a red dot or jeweled *bhindi* on her forehead meant a woman was Hindu. A man with a beard was probably a Muslim, especially if he had a white skull cap or a long white *khurta*

shirt on. A woman with a black robe and black veil was clearly Muslim. Turbans were a sign that a man was a Sikh. Simple orange robes were a sign of a Buddhist monk. All these styles gave clues to what religion a person followed, and that religion, in general, was an important part of their daily lives.

In the midst of such a highly religious atmosphere, idolatry was something we encountered constantly. It was everywhere. Tiny shops and big western malls alike had a small shrine somewhere in them, with a picture of the favored deity, and with incense burning in front of it and offerings of flower garlands and fruit laid out for the god. When we got in the auto-rickshaws, the motorcycle-taxis that we rode in everyday, there was often a multi-colored blinking icon of some Hindu god stuck to the dashboard. Empty walls or surfaces around the city would be painted or carved with gaudy statues, religious symbols, or scenes from their holy stories.

Other evidence of their devotion and superstition was seen in the hideous masks that were sometimes hung on the corners of roofs to scare away evil spirits, and in the faithful Hindu wives who would daily adorn their doorsteps with complex decorative chalk designs to welcome the gods into their homes. Every day as we rode around the city we would pass countless shrines and temples, painted cartoonish colors on the outside but dark and eerie inside.

As we passed these buildings, I would always try to peer inside them, but the most I ever saw was a glimpse of gold or a shadowy outline of an idol covered in flowers and of-

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ferings. This overt idolatry intrigued me. I searched the faces of the people surrounding the temples for a clue to understanding the idols and the effect they had on their lives. Part of me felt that the idols were merely physical objects, no different from the lamp sitting on my desk, but it also seemed that the idols held the people in a very real and powerful bondage.

I wondered if it was something purely psychological or cultural that they could snap out of if they wanted to, or if there was more to it, perhaps a demonic presence involved. Something seemed to be enslaving the people — ruling their lives and routines, and keeping them in perpetual fear and uncertainty as to whether they had done enough to please the god. It made sense to me that it could be some demon behind the idol, since the devil would love to do anything to steal worship from the true God. As I thought about all these things, I continued to wrestle with the obvious idolatry around me and sought to understand it.

One day, during the last few weeks of my time in India, I got a clear wake-up call about what this idolatry was about. I was sitting with my host family in the living room eating lunch when we heard a strange drumming. I got up and looked out to see a wild procession coming down the street. My family told me it was something connected with bringing a new idol to a temple, or celebrating or asking blessing from the Hindu gods.

As we watched the procession come closer, I sensed an eerie feeling. First came men dancing with heavy jingling bracelets and anklets on, performing all kinds of contortions and acrobatics. Behind them were the drummers. A little farther back, surrounded by doz-

ens of women in bright orange and yellow sarees, balancing offerings on their heads, was a man who was clearly the most important part of the procession. He had a huge, wide, “tower-thing” covered in flowers, precariously balanced on his head. He was swaying and dancing, but must have been in intense pain from all the weight on his head. Around him, thick black smoke and heavy incense were pouring from silver bowls held by men in red robes. The whole group of them would walk and then stop to dance and chant and cheer, then move on.

At first, the mother of the family I was with, who was a Christian, did not even want us to watch — she said that demon-possession was closely associated with these parades, and that we should just pray inside, away from the windows and not even let them see us. But I watched from a side window (while praying).

Among the followers you could see people who definitely did look like they were demon-possessed. One man had a long metal rod with weights on the ends pierced through his face, through his cheeks. He was walking calmly and you could not see any trace of blood around the holes. A few women were swaying with their faces painted and eyes closed, or staggering along as if walking was a horrible chore. Others seemed like they were dragging huge weights, and one woman was dancing slowly with

her eyes closed, but looked like she did not want to be dancing at all.

As I watched, the procession finally passed and continued down the next block. It left me sobered. I could not ignore what I had just seen. I knew that spiritual warfare and oppression were very real and very close, and that these people needed to be set free from their idolatry.

Clearly, the enslaving effects of demonic power and idolatry in India were obvious and plentiful. As I observed this and pondered and prayed about it, I came to realize is that idols are really everywhere. Idols in our culture and in our lives might not be as obvious to us as the blue elephant-headed god Ganesh, or the goddess Shakti with her six arms that I saw in India. Though they have different forms, I realized there still was idolatry — at home, in churches, in my friends, on college campuses, and in my own life. These idols around us are harder to see, but they are just as powerful, and have just as many lives in their grip. Idols are more than just things like “money” or “your grades” or “friends.” Idols are at the root of all our sin and all our motivations. Anything we try as an alternative to fully putting our hope and trust in God is an idol. All our hearts have the tendency to stray to something other than Christ for salvation and righteousness and happiness.

Just as idols were dominating the lives of the people I saw in that procession

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***The idols were merely physical objects, no different from the lamp sitting on my desk, but it also seemed that the idols held the people in a very real and powerful bondage.***

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*The enslaving effects of demonic power and idolatry in India were obvious and plentiful. As I observed this and pondered and prayed about it, I came to realize is that idols are really everywhere.*

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that came past my house in India, idols may be dominating our lives more than we know. Just as some of those people seemed to be weighed down by invisible chains, or dragged along against their will, idols we are not even aware of might be ruling us, beating us up, lying to us, and robbing us of joy and freedom.

Idols can be identified by looking at whatever makes you bitter, scared, frantic, or discouraged; whatever you look to for happiness but is not giving it; whatever you look to make you sufficient; whatever you think you are not an acceptable person without; this might well be your idol. Maybe your idol is manifested in how you change your personality to try and be the right person for your parents or boyfriend. Maybe it is seen in you not eating enough and working out too much in order to keep your body just how you want it. Maybe it is you getting horribly angry on the sports fields when your team misses a pass. Maybe it is your desperate fear of letting a friend go and grow in new ways apart from you, or maybe it is being consumed with getting perfect grades to ensure your future.

For me, God showed me that while I was indeed a Christian, desiring to love and serve Christ more each day, there was still a huge idol in my life that I had been completely blind to — the idol of approval.

In my own life, the desire to please others and be approved and liked by

them had become a god I bowed down to, and really, a form of works-righteousness — something I looked to as an alternate source of salvation, a way I tried to earn love and favor. This idol of Approval promised its blessing in the form of acceptance from others, but was never satisfied, and never gave peace. It warned of punishment in the form of rejection by others if I did not obey its commands. Its chains on me kept me intimidated by people and things — anxious, jealous, always striving and treading water, just trying to get scraps of approval from people around me to make me reassured again that I was okay and that I was a good person. These ideas had become such normal parts of my life that I did not even realize it was an option not to struggle with them! But God showed me that idols do not have to weigh us down and keep us blind and enslaved.

In Luke 4, Christ speaks hope and life and freedom for all those bound by sin and idolatry. In this passage, He is just beginning His earthly ministry, after wrestling with Satan in the wilderness. Satan did not win that contest, and Christ comes back to proclaim His dominion, and the freedom He brings. Satan and his idols are defeated! Christ the Messiah has come to set us all free! Luke 4:17-21 says, “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news

to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then, he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

This passage shows that Christ brings freedom — He is the answer for us, for the Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs in India, and for all those trapped in idolatry. It is only in salvation through Christ and His work that we have already been given everything we need even though we deserve none of it and can never earn it. In Christ we are already accepted and approved, loved, and precious. Every need we have—whether for comfort, for control, for power, for meaning, or for anything else—can only be filled by Christ. When we turn to Him, He does fill those needs and longings in us. In Him we are free. We do not need to earn anything or save ourselves by “being” or “having” or “doing” anything more; we do not need to pierce ourselves, or dance, or perform certain rituals. He has done it all, given all to us, and saved us. He gives us a sense of worth, confidence, peace, and zeal that no idol can ever give. I challenge you to look for idols in your life, and flee from them and to Christ. Idols make us poor. Idols make us captive. Idols make us blind and oppressed. Christ sets us free!

*Miss Abigail Barr* is from Portsmouth, Virginia. She is a Senior at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania majoring in Christian Thought.

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trines and the personal life of sanctification as well as the radical and total sanctification of all areas of life. In all its facets, living had to give entire satisfaction to the Law of God. The obedience of the one's faith expressing itself in a way that proved a communion with Christ.

His sermons were simple, clear, serious, and distinct. He explained the text from beginning to end as to how it applied to one's spiritual life. Smytegelt's name is closely connected with the sermons he preached under the title "*Het Gekrookte Riet*" (The Bruised Reed). In this series of sermons, the weak and lacking in faith Christian is provoked and guided to hope on the Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in the way of gladness, always striving, and,

in due time, sharing in the blessedness of eternal life. Of the one hundred forty five sermons in this book, only the first six deal with this theme. The rest of the book focuses upon questions from young Christians.

Smytegelt preached his last sermon on October 24, 1734 from Song of Songs 1:4. Sickness caused him much pain which grew worse until his death in 1739.

**Mr. Nicolaas Van Dam** is a member of the United Reformed Church in Escondido, California.

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