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The Outlook



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Death swallowed up
BY Life

Death Swallowed Up By Life

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8

Brian Vos

"And he died...And he died...And he died..." (*Genesis 5*). The repeated refrain reverberates in our ears echoing the dreadful damnation, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (*Genesis 3:19*). Death is the way of all the earth. Not one of us is free from the talons of this beast. Not one of us shall escape the sword of this last great enemy. Death hovers upon us; we sense its wicked weight upon our shoulders; we perceive its putrid panting upon our necks; we feel its ever-tightening grip around our throats, wrenching from us that which we call life. It matters not when death comes—whether in the womb, in infancy, in the prime of life, or in the golden years—the point is, death comes!

In Adam all die (*1 Corinthians 15:22*). The wages of sin is death (*Romans 6:23*). The wages of sin is *physical death*: the rot of the tomb, the corruption of the flesh, the stench of decay. The wages of sin is *spiritual death*: a heart that is hard, eyes that are blind, ears that are deaf. With death—everlasting death—we pay our eternal debt: the satisfaction of the justice of God. Indeed, the sting of death is sharp, the victory of the grave powerful.

Now the outward man is perishing (*2 Corinthians 4:16*). Now we live in the tent of this body, an earthly house that is being destroyed and will be destroyed (*2 Corinthians 5:1*). Is not every affliction a reminder that death awaits? Is not every sickness a reminder that there is a sickness unto death? Is not every funeral a reminder of the sting of death? Is not every cemetery a reminder of the power of the grave? One day the sting of death will stab us. One day the victory of the grave will claim us.

We now walk in the valley of the shadow of death (*Psalms 23:4*). We now live in the midst of death. Yet

Paul calls us not to despair, but to hope! "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (*2 Corinthians 5:1-4*).

How can Paul speak of hope in the valley of the shadow of death? How can he speak of life in the midst of death? Because he lives by faith, not by sight (*2 Corinthians 5:7*). "We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (*2 Corinthians 4:18*). When *sight* shows us death, *faith* shows us the shadow of death. What is needed for a shadow but light? The light of the resurrection dispels the shadows of death.

Jesus has entered our death, and in its place He has left life! Consider the cost of the life He gives: He who is the Life must die; He who is the Resurrection must be crucified. How sharp the sting of death! How chilling the power of the grave! Yet death was powerless to hold Him; the grave was unable to keep Him. He looked death in the face and said, "Come death, I will take away your sting!" He entered into the terror of the tomb and said, "Come grave, I will win the victory!" How could death hold Him who is the Life? How could the grave claim Him who is the Resurrection? Death has been swallowed up by life!

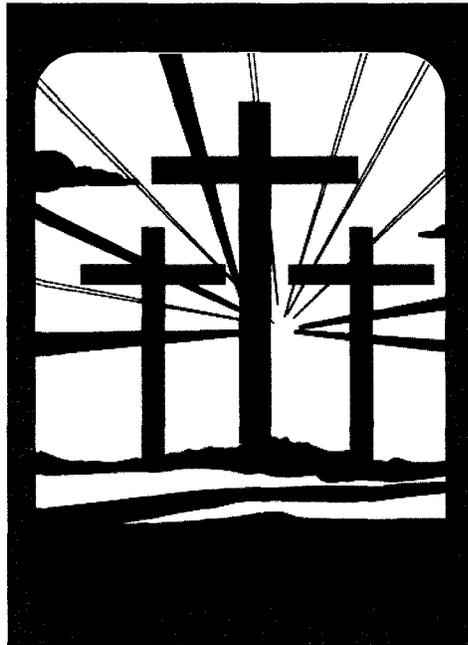
All who are in Christ shall be made alive (*1 Corinthians 15:22*). The wages of sin is death. The wages of sin is physical death; but we have died in Christ (*Romans 6:5-11*), and our physical death now puts an end to our sinning, and it is our entrance into eternal life (*Heidelberg Catechism, Question & Answer 42*). The wages of sin is spiritual death; but we have been raised in Christ (*Ephesians 2:4-7*), and our spiritual death has been replaced with spiritual life: a heart written with the Word of God, eyes that see, ears that hear. Christ's death has paid our eternal debt the justice of God has been satisfied. "Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O grave, is your victory?" (*1 Corinthians 15:55*).



For us, the resurrection of Christ means that we do not remain in the valley of the shadow of death. By faith we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even as our Lord before us. Our resurrection in Christ is our hope and joy. Because of His resurrection we are justified (*Romans 4:25*). Because of His resurrection our inward man is renewed day by day (*Colossians 3:1-4*). Because of His resurrection, we do not lose heart. Because of His resurrection we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (*Psalms 27*). Because of His resurrection, the weight of glory is upon us (*2 Corinthians 4:17*).

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope, for You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (*Psalms* 16:9-11). There in glory, we shall behold the face of Him who lives, who was dead, and now lives forevermore (*Revelation* 1:18).

"And he died...And he died...And he died..." The repeated refrain reverberates in our ears echoing the dreadful damnation. But Christ has taken our damnation, and in its place has given salvation! "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who



believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (*John* 11:25-26). Rise up, your Lord is risen!! Death has been swallowed up by life!!

Rev. Brian Vos is the pastor of Trinity United Reformed Church (URC), Grand Rapids, MI.

Thank You-Farewell-Welcome

Thomas & Laurie Vanden Heuvel

In this issue of *The Outlook* we want to say *thank you* to our typesetter/graphic layout artist, Mary Van Der Aa, and our proofreader, Norene Aukeman.

Mary came to us as a new bride, full of enthusiasm and creative ideas for our journal. She has worked very hard to produce an attractive format through which to market our message. But she has now become a busy mom and feels the need to be relieved of the pressing deadlines which this job demands, and to devote herself completely to her home and family.

Norene Aukeman has been on board as our proofreader for a number of years. She has scrupulously searched copy with x-ray-like vision to discover errors of many kinds. We have deeply appreciated her work and the dedication she brought to her task.

Most of all, we thank God for these two women who served in these capacities out of love for their Lord. They have enhanced our work as a team, and from the bottom of our

hearts we say a huge *thank you* to both of them. Farewell — may God bless you.

The editors conducted many interviews and collected many bids for Mary's replacement. The board of Reformed Fellowship accepted the editors' recommendation that we engage the services of the highly competent team at The Image Group in Holland, MI. We have seen many samples of their work and are excited about the *new look* they will bring to *The Outlook*. To The Image Group we say — Welcome!

It was in January, 1990, that we became the editors of *The Outlook*. The magazine had, for 39 years, adhered faithfully to its purpose stated on its masthead: "...to advocate and propagate this (Reformed) faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action." It had focused

closely on the Reformed denomination with a mostly Dutch heritage. We knew that, as editors, we were embarking on very troubled waters in that denomination.

Much has happened in ten years. Many who eagerly read this magazine for updated information and guidance, have now moved on to different denominational affiliations. But we must never stop *growing personally* in the Spirit. We must never stop *working together* as Christ's body to defeat the cause of Satan in this world even if we function in different Reformed denominational contexts. There are people with strong Reformed convictions, of different ethnic and geographical roots, to be found in other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. There has been a significant amount of writing and speaking about the need for everyone of Reformed persuasion around the world *to forge a unity* which will be a visible demonstration of the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17, and *to wage a formidable battle* against the "powers of darkness" in this world.

For these reasons, *The Outlook* will be devoting its pages more to "strengthening the stakes," (fortifying Christians in their personal, daily walk with Christ), and "enlarging the tent" (Isaiah 54: 2), (cross-fertilizing its readers with articles from authors in a variety of Reformed bodies), so that we may get to know one another and experience the bond which unites those of like mind. *The Outlook* will also

seek to "enlarge the tent" by *arming* Christians for their interaction with those in this world who craft beliefs and practices which militate against the faith of the Bible, doing so with the prayer that many will be saved and the kingdom of Christ enlarged. An example of this is a woman who recently wrote us, asking for back copies of articles on homosexuality because her state was preparing to put "same sex marriages" on the

ballot soon. We sent her an advance copy of the article that appears in this issue on this subject.

We pray that you will read *The Outlook* with this in mind, and be proud to offer it to your children, your churches, and yes, even your neighbors.

Agents of Authority

G. Ph. van Popta

In the last issue, the source of authority was written about. God is the source of all authority. God the Father gave authority to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ exercised authority while on earth—authority to forgive sins, to drive out demons, to teach, to judge, and to give eternal life. Today the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is seated at the right hand of God the Father as King of the universe. The Lord God has given us His holy Word, the Scriptures. The Scripture is the God-breathed Word of God. Today God speaks to us by way of His Word. We need to listen to that Word. Now we go on to the topic of *agents of authority*.

Agents

Not only does the Lord come to us by way of His holy Word, He also enters our lives through different *agents*. God comes to us by way of different people whom He puts in authority over us. We need to understand that. By the same token, the one who is in a position of authority needs to understand that as well. And he had better not abuse his authority. From the Word of God we can even say: Woe to that person who abuses his or her authority and who thereby hurts the one under their authority. We will write more about that in a future issue - about the abuse of

authority. But let the warning ring out that it will not go well for him who abuses his authority and hurts a little one. If he does not repent, it would better for that person to have a millstone hung around his neck and for him to be cast into the deepest part of the ocean.

But we have gotten well ahead of ourselves. This issue's topic is: *agents of authority*.

Basically, God places us under three spheres of authority. They are: our parents, the church, and the state.

Parents

The first persons with authority in your life were your parents, your mom and your dad. They were given the task and the responsibility to raise you, to teach you, and to discipline you. Children are to submit to the good instruction and discipline of their parents. The LORD God even had something to say about this in the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment says: "Honor your father and your mother." There are many places in the Bible that teach children to obey their parents.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul mentioned this as well. In Ephesians 6 he said: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is

right. 'Honor your father and mother...'" In this context, he had a special word for the fathers: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

We can also think of the beautiful summary of what the Bible teaches about this in Lord's Day 39 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

104. Q. What does God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline, and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.

Church

But God does not only govern us through our parents. He also draws near to us through the church. The Lord Jesus Christ has vested authority in the church. This authority is, first of all, to preach the gospel. The church is Christ's preaching agency. Before He ascended to heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ sent His disciples out to preach the good news about

salvation in His name and to teach people how to live in obedience to His will. He said to them: "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The apostles took this command seriously. They themselves went out into the world preaching, discipling, baptizing, and teaching. Before they died, they trained others to preach. In the last letter he wrote before he died, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, minister of the church in Ephesus: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). Timothy, taught by Paul, had to teach others who would, in turn, be able to teach others.

"God comes to us by way of different people whom He puts in authority over us...parents...the church...and the state..."

And so to this day the apostolic message has been handed down through the church. The faithful church of Jesus Christ has continued to preach the good news about salvation in the name of Jesus Christ.

Not only does the church have the authority to preach the Word of God to those who are already members of the church and to those who do not yet know Christ, but also the church received authority from Christ, the Head of the Church, to exercise discipline over the members of the church, over those under its care.

In Matthew 16, the Lord told Peter and the other disciples that He was giving them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever

they bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. The Lord hereby gave the church authority to declare guilt or innocence. If a member of the church is living in disobedience to the commandments of God, then the church has the authority to tell that person he stands guilty before God. And when a person repents, again the church has the authority to declare that person innocent - innocent before God on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus developed that a bit more in Matthew 18. There He said that if a member of the church refuses to repent of a specific sin, if he hardens his heart and holds on to that sin, if he loves that sin more than Jesus Christ and obedience to His Word, then the church has the power, authority, and responsibility to excommunicate that person. To bar him from the rights and privileges of membership in the church, and to declare that he, because of his hard-hearted sin against God, and because of his unwillingness to seek forgiveness at the foot of the cross of Christ, no longer has a place in the kingdom of heaven.

We have an example of this process at work in the New Testament. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 5, Paul said that it had been reported to him that there was a case of sexual immorality in the church that shocked even the pagan unbelievers of Corinth (as depraved as Grecian society was, apparently incest was almost unheard of). The case was one of incest. A member of the church was publicly living with his stepmother. The church did nothing about it. In fact, the church was kind of proud about how enlightened it was that it could tolerate such a thing.

Paul said to the church: Put this man out of your fellowship! He continued: "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this

man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

The church was to put this man outside, to excommunicate him, to hand him over to Satan. By expelling the man from the church, he would be thrust into the devil's territory, severed from any connection with God's people. The purpose was not only the preservation of God's good name, but also that by being officially ostracized from the church, the man would experience such anguish that he would repent and forsake his wicked way.

So, you see that the authority to discipline, which Christ gave His church, is remedial. It is meant to reconcile the sinner to Christ and the church. All discipline is meant to be therapeutic. You can make the analogy with discipline in the family. It is supposed to be healing. Administered in a firm but loving way, it brings correction. Sadly, discipline is sometimes administered in a cruel, abusive and destructive way. That is no longer discipline. That's something else. It's abuse. We will turn to that painful topic in a future issue.

The point is that discipline in the family and in the church is meant to bring healing and correction — to reconcile the sinner to God.

State

There is a third agent of authority, and that is the state.

In Romans 13, Paul taught that the government authorities have been appointed by God. Paul even calls the government "God's servant." God has ordained kings and civil officers whom He calls to govern by laws and policies, so that the sinfulness of man may be restrained and things may be conducted in our country in good order. God even gives the state the sword to punish the evil doer. Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* provides a wonderful summary of the Biblical teaching on this.



Typically, governments do not acknowledge that they have their

authority from God. In our country, called a democracy, the governments of course think they have their mandate from the people who elected them. That is only partially true. The full truth is that God mandates them. God uses the election to bring them into power, but He gives them the authority they have. Governments ought to realize that. The authority and power they have, they have from God.

Now that we have considered the source of authority and the agents of authority, we need to think about the

style of authority. How ought those to whom God gives authority in this world - parents, the church, the civil governments - exercise that authority? What ought to characterize their authority? In a word: service. All authority ought to be qualified by service. Servant-leadership. To that matter we turn next time.

Rev. George van Popta is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario.

Always Keep A Fishing Rod Handy

Roger S. Greenway

One thing that I learned from my fisherman grandfather was that a serious fisherman always keeps a rod handy. You never know when you'll have a chance to fish and you don't want to be unprepared.

I remember well the rod and baits that Grandpa kept in the trunk of his car. In the course of his travels he would keep his eyes open for a stream or lake where he could take a few casts. The "travel" rod and reel that I keep handy fit into a suitcase. They have traveled with me in airplanes to many foreign countries. Whether I get to use them or not, I am ready. Who knows when an opportunity to fish will appear?

Always be Ready

Readiness to witness for Jesus at any time and under all circumstances is basic to faithful discipleship. Opportunities often come along when we least expect them. I will illustrate this.

It was a warm Sunday afternoon and I really needed a nap. I assumed no one would disturb me on such a warm afternoon, so I stretched out on the bed and fell asleep.

But you guessed it; the doorbell rang. Frankly, I was in a grumpy mood as I stumbled toward the door. I didn't feel like talking to anyone about anything!

I opened the door, and to my surprise I found a middle-aged man standing there. I had seen him in the neighborhood several times before. Today he looked different. His eyes were wild. He was known to be a heavy drinker, but he seemed to be sober. He was obviously very troubled.

I invited him to sit down on the front porch. He promptly began to pour out his troubles. He had lost his job (probably because of his drinking). They had run out of food and his children were hungry. His wife was pregnant. He admitted that he had abused her badly and she was now at the point of leaving him.

The man's sense of failure and hopelessness seemed to overwhelm him. "Why did you come here?" I asked. He hesitated. Like a trapped animal, his eyes darted in different directions. He mumbled something I couldn't pick up. Then he said plainly: "I was on my way to commit suicide. But a voice inside me said, 'Try going to that house; maybe they will help; give yourself one last chance.' So here I am."

"I'll help your family," I told him. "They will have food tonight, I promise you. But helping you is more than I can do."

He seemed bewildered.

He sank to the floor like a lead sinker. He was doubled up, with his forehead almost on the hard floor. His shoulders heaved.

He sobbed and pleaded with Jesus to save him. He confessed more things than I care to remember. We prayed together, and when finally we were finished, there was a puddle of tears on the floor where he had kneeled.

His conversion was apparently genuine. He went home to his family and begged their forgiveness. We helped the family temporarily, and soon Gogerly found a job. He stopped drinking and joined a church. The last time I saw his family, they looked happy and well fed.

What began with an irritating interruption to what I had hoped would be an afternoon nap ended with a father saved and a family rescued from abuse and poverty. It turned out to be what some people call a "divine appointment." By God's grace, I was ready when the man came to my door.

In I Peter 3:15, the Bible instructs us: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.



The Reason for Our

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The Reason for Our Hope

The world is filled with people without God and without hope (Ephesians 2:12). But as Christ's followers, we are people with hope. Even when times are hard, we can testify that life has meaning and something better awaits us beyond it.

We have hope because God through the blood of Christ has drawn us near to Himself and given us hope (Ephesians 2:13). Our witness is all about hope. "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (I Peter 3:18).

Here lies the great need of so many people. On the surface they may enjoy lots of good things. But their lives are essentially empty. They live only for today. Sooner or later their inner hopelessness becomes evident.

The Bible says to us: Offer people hope! Tell them of the glory of God and His saving compassion revealed in Christ. Don't muffle God's law, nor deny that He judges. But tell lost

and confused people that through Christ there is forgiveness from God. There is room in the Father's house. Offer them hope!

Hope in the Hour of Death

The first and final reason for hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whenever the New Testament speaks of hope, the case for hope is built on Christ's resurrection.

In this world death is all around us. The saying is true that "the young may die, and the old must die." Friends and family die. One day each of us will die. What hope does anyone have for a better life beyond the grave? What basis do we have for expressions of condolence to someone grieving? When we speak to persons about to die, what can we say that has eternal significance?

Only the resurrection of Jesus Christ supplies the answer: "The dead in Christ shall rise!" Joined to Christ by the unbreakable bonds of divine grace, we have the hope of seeing God, of entering another world and a better life, and of deliverance from suffering and every work of the devil.

We are people of hope. "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him" (I Thessalonians 4:14).

Witnessing in a Doomed Jetliner

One of the most striking stories I have ever heard about witnessing to Christ in unexpected and horrifying circumstances is about Andrew Meakins, a missionary who worked with the poor in Ethiopia for 20 years.

Meakins was aboard the Ethiopian Airlines flight that was hijacked and eventually crashed into the Indian Ocean near the Comoros Islands on November 23, 1996.

According to survivors, when it became clear that the hijacked plane was running out of fuel and was going to crash, Meakins used his last moments of life to lead fellow passengers to hope in Christ.

Meakins took one of the microphones and spoke to calm other passengers. He then presented the gospel, inviting people to place their faith in Christ. About 20 people indicated their response to his invitation, including a flight attendant who did not survive the crash. Meakins himself was killed.

As a missionary engineer, Meakins had spent most of his life offering hope to desperately poor people in Ethiopia. When the moment of extreme crisis arose on the doomed aircraft, Meakins knew what to say. He was ready.

The lesson for us is this: always be ready. Effective witnesses spend time quietly reflecting on the hope of the gospel and on the reason for that hope, before the crises come. They are ready for God's unexpected appointments which He is sure to send them.

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Abortion Lies

"If you lie about this, what else will you lie about?"

asked Bill Bradley of Vice-President Al Gore in a recent debate. He was talking about Gore's mischaracterization of his plan for universal health insurance. A few days later, Bradley got his answer. Gore would lie about his position on abortion.

I've frequently quoted from Gore's 1984 letter to a constituent, in columns and in public speeches, but apparently it isn't news until the big media boys decide it's news. In that letter, Gore said it was his "deep personal conviction that abortion is wrong." That sure is a lot stronger than the pathetic "personally opposed, but" rhetoric to which pro-choice politicians usually treat us. You might be justified in thinking that someone who holds a deep personal conviction would be unmovable, as most are on civil rights. How could anyone rationally favor civil rights, then become a segregationist?

As a senator, Gore voted to amend the Civil Rights Act to define the term "person" to "include unborn children from the moment of conception." By 1988, Gore had

caught the political pragmatism virus. As a presidential candidate that year, Gore brazenly denied casting such a vote and claimed, in his new incarnation as a pro-choice politician, "I have not changed...I have always been against anything that would take away a woman's right to have an abortion."

Gore tried that line again in New Hampshire when reporters began inquiring about his 1984 letter and pro-life voting record, but this time it didn't work. After three days of denials and stonewalling, Gore was forced to acknowledge that he once held another position. In other words, he lied. Gore is in good (or bad) company on abortion. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt once made persuasive pro-life statements until he decided he wanted to be president. So did Senator Ted Kennedy and Rev. Jesse Jackson. So did Bill Clinton. You can't get the Democratic Party's presidential nomination if you are pro-life, so politicians are willing to sacrifice their supposed "convictions" (not to mention 30 million babies and counting) on the altar of political expediency.

Now that Gore has been outed by the big media, the question reporters

ought to be asking him is, why did he switch? Most people who change their positions on abortion go the other way—from pro-choice to pro-life. And they give good reasons, often citing the disgust they felt when exposed to pictures of aborted babies, or, in the case of abortionists, when the carnage caught up with their consciences. But how does one go from pro-life to pro-choice? Did Gore see a sonogram and decide that what he saw looked like something other than human? Did he contemplate the life growing inside his oldest daughter as she nourished the earliest stages of his grandchild's development and think that the child wasn't alive until it was born? Is he unaware of the thousands of facilities available to women for free counseling, adoption services and parenting help (not to mention baby clothes, cribs and job advice)? Surely he knows that every argument in favor of abortion raised 30 years ago has now been answered.

Pro-choice politicians and women who seek abortions have to deny a lot of truth and believe the lies that the financially lucrative abortion industry tells them. There is no rational way someone who has developed "deep personal convictions" can so easily abandon them in

favor of the opposite position. What does this say about the depth of anyone's convictions? What does it say about the learning process that leads one to form convictions about anything?

While Bradley gets no points for "always" favoring "a woman's right to choose," any more than a segregationist might receive credit for being a racist longer than his opponent, he has raised the central question concerning Gore's presidential

candidacy. If Gore lies about this issue, what else is he lying about? What other lies would he tell, has he told, in order to enhance his career?

Los Angeles Times Syndicate

Christian & Homosexual?

Pro-Gay Theology and Unbelief

David C. Rowe

While the growing movement to legalize same-sex marriage has raised many issues, it has also exposed deep cracks in the framework of American Christianity. Among those fractures is the fact that church denominations are either accepting the homosexual lifestyle or at least struggling with the lifestyle's implications in their general assemblies. Some rogue' or splinter churches cater specifically to those involved in homosexuality, and these churches are blossoming. Accommodating homosexuality requires an often subtle, often masked theological shift that is slowly gelling into an acceptable "choice" within Christianity. In fact if Christians follow the implications of this theological shift to its logical conclusion, we may find that we are not in a church that is historically Christian at all. In short, the Christianity that allows for support of the gay lifestyle will also be a Christianity that will allow for unbelief.

A number of books are popularly available at the local Barnes & Noble that assert common theological arguments for the acceptance of the homosexual or "gay" lifestyle. One of the books you may run into as you dialogue with your gay friend, parent, or child, is the best-selling *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* by Mel White. Any discussion of the church with someone in the gay community who is serious about belief will invariably include a reference to this book, among others, because of its pre-con- viction that "gay" and Christian can be synthesized. Historically and tra-

ditionally, Christianity has taught that people may not do whatever they like with their bodies (see Rom. 6:13 and 1 Cor. 6:19-20). However, in an effort to appear open-minded, tolerant and loving, many in the church have moved to permit, if not embrace, what we must call "pro-gay theology." This change on the part of the church has followed the culture's psychological, political and ethical embracing of the gay agenda: Anything that you do with your body, as long as no one is hurt, can be tolerated and appreciated. The Church has not moved in this direction through cultural influences alone. Philosophical views within the Church - the way we look at Scripture and what it says about our world today - have made the *assimilation* of pro-gay theology a possibility. Charles Hartshorne, American philosopher, theologian, and writer, has said that even God is considered "in process" through His relationship and association with a changing world. Process Theology seeks to look at the deepest problems of humanity today, refocusing the gospel on these problems and issues, and then "listening" to God's Word to find the salvational answer to the basic questioning of this age. Ultimately, Process Theology intends to *reinterpret* the Christian message and teaching, in light of the new focus. For the gay person in the church, sexuality is that new focus. Pro-gay Theology also synchs up quite well with today's secular, post-modern relativism. As an example, many choose a church today because they like the praise music at one church more than another, or

because the people that attend a certain church are more like themselves. These reasons are not wrong, but the taste of the individual is often placed above what is actually taught as truth. Taste or the desires of the heart take precedence over truth, and truth is rather secondary. Man is in process, as is truth, and God is allowing us to finally go our own way. God has decided that we are finally at the point in the process where it's time to take off the training wheels, so to speak. As modern man cuts his apron strings from God, and even the Church, he realizes that he becomes totally responsible for his life, making decisions without looking to God. *Unfortunately, when you have no God to be guilty before, you have no need for a God to be redeemed by.*

But how did issues of homosexuality become the skirmish point along the ramparts of what is church orthodoxy? Why has this issue been the most contentious issue for nearly every mainline denomination? The answer may be that as concern for individual salvation decreases, attention toward social concerns, such as personal rights and justice, increases. In the process, man takes on roles formally left to God. This theology alters our relationship to God, men, and the Church. Instead of a church focused on what everybody everywhere and at all times has believed, now we have individuals listening to what everybody everywhere all over the world today believes. These times, and Pro-gay Theology specifically, are based on a belief in the God.

Where the Debate Occurs

While Hermeneutics is often where this debate rages, the true field where the discussion is played out is elsewhere. Today's gay man or lesbian says, "When it comes right down to it, I know it in my heart. I'm gay. My desires confirm this." All other arguments, biblical or otherwise, are a distraction from this central commitment. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, states, "The homosexual agenda is pushed by activists who are totally committed to the cause of making homosexuality a sanctioned and recognized form of sexual activity, and the basis for legitimate family relationships. Every obstacle which stands in the way of progress toward this agenda must be removed, and Scripture stands as the most formidable obstacle to that agenda."

And the envelope continues to be pushed. With at the very least great honesty, William M. Kent, a member of the committee assigned by United Methodists to study homosexuality, declared that "the Scriptural texts in the Old and New Testaments condemning homosexual practice are neither inspired by God nor otherwise of enduring Christian value. Considered in the light of the best biblical, theological, scientific, and social knowledge, the biblical condemnation of homosexual practice is better understood as representing time and place bound cultural prejudice." Listen closely to Kent. He is not denying that the Bible expressly forbids homosexual practices; he acknowledges that the Bible does specifically that. But Kent is saying that the post-modern man must abandon the Bible in light of modern "knowledge." He first says that the Scriptural texts are not "inspired by God," and then even if they are, they are bound up in an ancient "cultural prejudice." Kent's ultimate is man's reason as set above the wisdom of the God revealed in Scripture.

Another approach taken is one that denies that the biblical passages actually refer to homosexuality at all, or that argues that the passages refer to specific non-consensual or oppressive homosexual acts. Some argue that Paul's references to homosexuality are actually illustrations of pederasty (the sexual abuse of young boys [see I Cor. 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1: 10]), homosexual rape, or "non-committed" homosexual relationships. Using this approach, gay theologians point out that the Levitical texts should be dismissed outright because of the other Levitical commands all Christians routinely ignore. Mel White, ghost-writer for former clients Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy, Ollie North, and Pat Robertson, writes about his early years in evangelicalism:

I grew up really believing that God was on my parents' side and that any of my intuitions, desires, or feelings that didn't conform to theirs had to be straight from hell.

If going to dances could lead to hell, is it any wonder that I didn't even think about bringing up the issue of homosexuality? By then, I had memorized the Old Testament lines from Leviticus that say a man who sleeps with another man is an abomination and should be killed. Of course a little earlier in the same text, anyone "who touches the skin of a dead pig" is also called an abomination (Lev. 11:7-8). There goes Monday night football.

While these approaches are creative, it should be obvious that these are not ambitious in their exegesis. Though White labored many years to be obedient to the Word of God, he decided he could no longer be at war with his body and found a scientific and social paradigm that fit this need:

No one bothered to explain to me the difference between "sexual-ori-

entation" and "sexual preference." Now I understand my mistake. Today scientists explain that sexual orientation is involuntary, something that happens to two gametes at conception, or to a fetus in the womb, or to an infant in childhood. A few folk in the middle of the sexual-orientation scale are stimulated in both directions. They may have a choice...I believed that I could change my preference from homosexual to heterosexual by an act of pure will, aided by God, by daily discipline, and by the beautiful young woman at my side. "All you really need to get over this homosexual thing is a good woman," or so I heard. Sadly, I was wrong. My sexual-orientation, like everybody else's, is forever, and to ignore or to deny that fact can be a fatal mistake.

There are a number of issues to address here.

First, White's presuppositions - the primacy of his feelings - lead him into some familiar territory. The distinction between sexual "orientation" and sexual "preference" is a popular, modern view that says the Bible cannot be trusted to address what is happening in homosexuality today because Scripture draws no distinctions between the outward homosexual act and the inward homosexual orientation. It is the latter orientation, often referred to as "sexual inversion," that is understood as genuine homosexuality in today's discussions. In addition, the Bible does not address what causes the homosexual condition, or inversion. The argument, as White here and others have stated it, is that homosexual orientation was unknown in biblical times. First century Christians must have thought that these were heterosexuals distorting their heterosexuality.

Therefore, Scripture speaks only to the acts of a heterosexual who perverts his or her own sexuality, and does not address those who have a "God-given" propensity for homosexuality. And since science tells us that the individual is not morally responsible for his sexual preference (because it happens in the mother's womb), then homosexuality is the moral equivalent of being born handicapped. Ultimately, the Bible's teaching on homosexuality is irrelevant in the light of modern day discoveries. While this argument is again, creative, it falls short of strong exegesis of Scripture. All men are born of Adam, and have inherited the sinful nature. In addition there are clear passages that speak to our orientation or inward desire to sin, and that the act itself is not what makes a sin a sin. The thoughts or desires themselves are sufficient (see Matt. 5:27-28).

Second, this view suppresses the fact that God, the author of Scripture and the Creator, does not need His revealed will updated or qualified by modern psychology. He is an eternal and omniscient God. But White has presupposed a god that is not the providential governor of nature, creation, and history, and so therefore does not see that God would not need modern psychology to guide His revelation. Again, quoting White, "in those days (the fifties), we were all victims of blind, unreasoned fear and hatred of homosexuality that had been passed down generation after generation without much thought and almost no careful historical, cultural, or linguistic study of the ancient biblical record, let alone of the new data being gathered by the medical, scientific, and psychological communities." Scripture will not interpret Scripture, but new data will.

Third, what is most troubling about the comments of White, and those that argue as he does, is that, while he accepts that there is such a thing as sin, man's facility for reason seems to be the one area of the mind

that is untouched by sin. In essence he is saying, "The Bible doesn't speak to our problem, so we must determine what is to be said about gayness." He is holding himself - his fallen feelings and reason - above Scripture rather than living in submission to it. The theology of White is a system of unbelief, or is un-Christian, because it presupposes man's feelings are the ultimate standard in viewing the world. Thus the gay theologian has redefined what it means to be a Christian, into something that is historically non-Christian.

"Unbelief is a turning away from God and His Son in order to seek satisfaction in other things." -John Piper

Some Practical Concerns for Ministry

The force of "political correctness" has a huge effect in our day. The "gay Christian" with whom we as Christians speak, will not push his argument outside the borders of another person's well-being and will endeavor to keep his thinking consistent within those lines. And as previously stated, many churches now maintain, by social pressures from outside and within Christendom, that homosexuality should be normalized, seeing gays as an oppressed minority. In the Church today, tolerance is an absolute, and if it is to attract people it cannot appear to be less tolerant than the surrounding culture. This places the person appealing for the truth of the Gospel, in the position of the guilty oppressor. So how can the Christian approach his dialogue with the professing gay Christian who is stuck in *unbelief* despite professions to the contrary? As we see all the time at Harvest USA, one of the cornerstones of gay

ideology is the fact that they feel religious people (or "fundamentalists" to the religious gay or lesbian) don't understand and are out to negate them. To the extent that we have conflict with them, Christians are affirming their worldview. If we are to walk in their shoes, we must at some level deal with their contention that they are an oppressed minority and the orthodox believer is the oppressor. After all, when we witness to our straight friends who may be fornicators, at least they do not have Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson decrying their lifestyle on "Nightline."

But the person involved in the gay lifestyle has much invested in being oppressed. He must not be allowed to live his life based on what Jerry Falwell or his other reactions or desires tell him - or we leave him in bondage to sin. He also has a well-developed, ghettoized, subculture to which he may return where he appears to be consistent with his thought. The straight fornicator does not. But the "truth" his subculture provides is mythic. The gay man must be pressed on what Paul claims he knows to be the truth. Is the truth based on feelings or the Word of God? The gay man is not unique or misunderstood. We who witness must know that, "He is just like me. He is caught in sin. I don't want to deny myself anything either. He is in no way exceptional. It's just that he or she has a unique conspiracy theory that every one, and especially evangelicals, are out to get him." We exist in the same, single circle of God's world.

The person involved in homosexuality cannot be allowed to assert his "gayness" based merely on the fact that he is oppressed. Nor can the quality of interpersonal feelings, commitment and respect which may or may not exist between homosexual partners, affect our reaction. Good or bad attitudes or intentions do not make the gay life

For us to accept the homosexual lifestyle as satisfactory in any way,

(continued on pg. 22)

The Beast Out of the Sea

R e v e l a t i o n 1 3 : 1 - 1 0

At the end of chapter 12 we left Satan standing on the seashore.

He has been cast out of heaven. He knows himself unable to destroy the true church. But filled with rage, he is determined "to make war" on "the seed of the woman." And in order to carry this out, he needs helpers on earth. These he will use to arouse, if possible, the entire world, individually and collectively, to attack all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. As in the Garden of Eden, he will employ "seduction," tempting people of low and high degree with lies and lying wonders.

This was the method which he also used when tempting our Savior-King in the wilderness. We do well to reflect on this for a moment.

As "the prince of this world" (our Lord called him this too), he offered to Christ all the kingdoms of the earth for the price of a moment of worship. And that temptation was real, felt by Jesus, as perfect man, much more deeply and intensely than we experience in our temptations. Salvation was at stake, for Jesus was tempted in His God-ordained position as the second Adam. He was the Messiah without whose perfect obedience to the Father, any hope of redemption and reconciliation would be irretrievably lost. Without arguing with the devil, our Savior dispels and dismisses him by the power of God's Word (Deut. 6:13). Only by using that same weapon in faith can "the seed of the woman" stand in the conflict of the ages.

And this will be severe. Knowing that "his time is short," Satan will, by God's permission, marshal every person, agency and power possible to corrupt the world, to attack believers and so defame the honor of our God. With those efforts much of the rest of this book concerns itself. His first confederate on earth is this "beast out of the sea." Let no one who names the name of the Lord Jesus take the beast lightly even for a moment.

The description, vss. 1-4

In a vision John "saw" a strange apparition. It is a "beast," (therion, as a wild and untamable ani-

mal). He (or "it") is seen "rising" to indicate that a process is involved. This beast does not appear in full strength at once as it comes "out of the sea." In Holy Scripture the "sea" often describes peoples and nations in great agitation (Ps. 18:16,17; 98:7; Isa. 57:20; Jude vs. 4).

Now the beast is described in detail. It has "ten horns," reminding the reader of its power; also "seven heads" representing its intelligence and cunning. The devil who seeks to control this beast acts, as Luther said, like "God's ape." These horns are not specific nations or Roman emperors who will somehow be revived toward the end of the ages. Rather, the beast represents all the nations under their many-sided leadership gaining control over the attitudes, the ambitions and the activities of mankind. Here then, is no mythological figure borrowed from a heathen world of ideas. This is the earthly reality which the devil seeks to use in his war against the saints of the Lord. John sees it as real in his day. But its rise antedates his time and will continue -- on this Revelation is clear -- until the end of time. But remember that it is always essentially "one."

On its head is "a blasphemous name," reminding us that it arrogates power and position to itself which belongs rightly only to God. But in man's sight it is "crowned" to suggest absolute rule. This kind of rule, Nero, and especially Domitian, exercised officially while demanding a kind of worship. Its appearance is impressive like that of the kingdoms described in Daniel 7. But this one is far more horrible as it combines all the features of those earlier empires. It has the swiftness of the leopard; the strength of the bear; the appetite of the lion which devours its prey. The secret of this ambitious, all-consuming and deadly strength is also mentioned. Satan gives his "power" and "throne," as the prince of this world to the beast. How cunningly and stealthily he operates with his lies, so that those under his sway seldom realize that they are being used by him. Such is the power of the lie which he has employed since the days of Adam and Eve.

But a strange marvel is added to the picture. One of its "heads" suffers a "deadly wound." Yet it does not die. And consequently "the whole world followed

the beast with wonder." Appealing to 1 John 2:18 which speaks of "antichrist," and especially 2 Thessalonians 2:3 where Paul writes about "the man of lawlessness," many have identified the beast as the personal "antichrist." And that is not without warrant. But John does "see" it already in his day. In a sense this beast has been "rising" with increased strength through the ages. The Bible speaks of Nimrod as the first empire-builder even before the confusion of language at Babel (Gen. 10:8-12). Daniel's beasts, too, often showed themselves under satanic control. Nor should we forget that Christ's victory in the resurrection and ascension filled Satan with frustration. This was without question the decisive act of that "wounding" as the "war in heaven" indicated. But the "deadly wound" need not apply solely to that event. Throughout the centuries empires have sprung up, faded away for a season, only to be revived again. Some of this can be recognized in France under Napoleon, Germany under Hitler, Russia under Stalin, and others. The beast always seems to be "rising." But this does not complete the picture. We believe firmly that toward the end of this dispensation, a personal Antichrist will arise to dominate all the peoples of the earth with world leaders under him directly or indirectly. Everything will be under state-control. At that time "the two witnesses" of chapter 11 will be slain, leaving only the elect of God without any official structure or manifestation. How such world-wide sway is possible in those dark days will be further explained in the coming of the second beast.

This is not intended to frighten us. The Lord Jesus gave this "vision" to alert us and our children who still enjoy much freedom. But every decade in our time represents more Christians tortured, imprisoned and even killed for their loyalty to the Savior-King, than in all the Roman persecutions or in the period of the Inquisition. We need only remind ourselves of what has occurred in Mexico, Colombia, Russia, Germany, China and the southern Sudan to drive the faithful church underground. All of that was still occasional and sporadic. One day it will be world-wide. To this our children and grandchildren must be alerted lest we and they fall asleep.

The activities, vs. 7a

The beast, in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, employs the "word." All his words, however, are lies which are "haughty and blasphemous." From his throne on earth, he defies the living God, to act as one in supreme control. Here he imitates the devil. But his authority lasts only "for forty-two months."

Immediately our mind goes back to chapter 6. There the rider on the white horse with a bow "went forth conquering and to conquer." Here demonic character of such imperialism is exposed. Everything that belongs to God and heaven is "blasphemed." With this he wages an endless war against God's people. They will experience trial and temptation during this period allotted to the beast by God, who remains in control. Often he will seem to be successful as the masses including many Christians in name are seduced by the lies. But John reminds his readers and therefore also us that everyone faithful to the Lord Christ will be "preserved" even as they are commanded to "persevere."

Here, then, we have the "state" or world government in its manifold appearances but, especially toward the end of this age, united in open defiance of the Almighty.

This interpretation faces us with questions which demand discussion. God Himself instituted civil authority among mankind immediately after the flood (Gen. 9:4). Jesus also told His followers to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matt. 22:2). In Romans 13 Paul speaks of governments, including the one under which he lived, as God's gift to preserve order by punishing evil-doers and rewarding the good. But this is no contradiction of what John now sees and records. What was provided for man's welfare, sinful mankind, succumbing to the devil's lies, soon turns the state, throughout history and especially toward the end, into a powerful agency for injustice, corruption, dictatorship, terror and persecution of those who walk in the Lord's ways. Let believers in every age be alert, seeking, where possible, to restrict political lust for power while respecting the authorities as long as they do not demand the honor and obedience which is to be given only to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The influence, vs. 7b-10

As God's grace throughout the ages spreads across the earth, to make life sweeter and even safer for believers, sin develops and spreads as a reverse tide. Like cancer, it gnaws away at the vitals of individuals and entire societies. From the beast rather than from the Lord of heaven and earth, they expect all good. Hence they "worship" it in its stations. This is the subtle idolatry which in many lands is increasingly evident. In the days of the personal Antichrist, such false worship will prevail every-

where to fill the cup of the world's sin to overflowing. And then suddenly, after all John's prophecies are fulfilled, the Day of days will dawn. Therefore, closing words are added.

First, the command to the readers to **listen well**. Then an announcement that those going into captivity, whom we believe are the suffering saints, should be **prepared** for this. Thereupon an **encouragement** follows. For all who, under the beast's orders, use the sword, will be slain by it. Finally the **exhortation**. Such circumstances "call for the endurance and faith of the saints." Look up with confidence, the apostle is saying, for as the days grow darker and more dreary, the day of your full deliverance is also nearer than when you first believed!

Questions for discussion

1. Compare and contrast our Lord's temptations with ours. What comfort does it provide that He too, was tempted?
2. Why did Jesus call Satan "the prince of this world"?
3. Where do you see Satan's influences in the governments today?

#25

The Beast Out of the Earth

R e v e l a t i o n 1 3 : 1 1 - 1 8

Without pause John introduces us to another beast, totaling two. Two, often in Scripture, indicate **companionship** and **cooperation**. And these, both under Satan's influence, are not rivals competing for attention. Rather, they are preparing the way for "Babylon, the great whore" of chapter 17. Antichristian civilization, always present incipiently from the beginning, will in the last days attain full development. These two then, stand in sharp contrast to "the two witnesses" in chapter 11.

The "war" against the Lord Jesus Christ is in full swing. Satan refuses to surrender. Not for a moment will he be caught napping. By him antichristian forces are set in motion. And these powers — the two beasts — seem invincible; their cunning is

4. Who and what are Satan worshipers? Why does this captivate people? Mention some of their beliefs and practices.

5. What is "blasphemy"? How can governments also engage in this?

6. Discuss how civil authority was established after the flood; also its power and purpose.

7. Why and how does the "lie" exercise such a seductive influence in its lust for power?

8. How do we explain "the deadly wound"? Only as a single event still to come?

9. What is the church's duty toward the civil authorities? Why may it never, in its official capacity, seek to exercise political clout? Should believers as citizens organize for this purpose? If so, how?

10. How should we, in homes and at schools, prepare ourselves and the next generation to meet the increasing deterioration and corruption of political life?

well-nigh inescapable in its deadly effects.

Everyone, already in John's day and ever since, is faced with the choice which is presented as clearly as possible. The choice is an either/or issue; a matter of life or death.

Our Lord Jesus Christ summons us unambiguously to such commitment. He is not like Satan who, lurking behind the scenes, deceives with flattering words. Instead, the Savior-King is nauseated by "lukewarmness" (ch. 3). Only those will be "safe" in the age-old conflict who can testify:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame

*But wholly lean on Jesus Name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand!*

Terrifying as the first beast is, he (the symbol is a personification) needs the second beast to support him in his totalitarian ambitions. And this second one to all appearances is far more clever and cunning; hence far more deceitful. Multitudes have been, and are falling, and will continue to fall under his bewitching spell.

The appearance, vss. 11, 12

This beast arises "out of the earth." This seems to make him less fearsome and mysterious. Actually John sees him with only "two horns" instead of ten. Even more, this makes him "like a lamb." Likely the thought behind this is that of imitating the Savior, who, as the Lamb of God, came to take away the sins of the world (John 1: 29, 36).

But let no one be deceived. This beast "spoke like a dragon." Actually in all his speaking (for this is the method he employs) he follows the arch-deceiver of mankind. He will promise peace and prosperity, with every imaginable benefit to those who submit to the power of the first beast. In fact, "he exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence."

What we have here, so it appears, is the great propaganda machine which keeps the growing civil authority among men in power. Often, also because later the beast is identified as "the false prophet" (ch. 16:13; 19:20; 20: 10), many find here a false religion, or more specifically, the papacy as in Reformation days, or liberalism and liberation theology in our times. And, while such views are not as far-fetched as some suppose, we believe that propaganda of every sort (every view and theory is "religiously rooted") is intended here. Look, for example, at how education, business, the arts, the media, agricultural and environmental and even medical societies all make their pitch for state aid while allowing for its encroachments. All these, some more knowingly than others, have a view of life and the world which undermines the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of these speak smoothly. But increasingly all of life falls under political control to pave the way for totalitarian governments. So insidious is the influence of the propaganda machine of the second beast that, unless believers stop being naive, they can be swept away for a season.

The method, vss. 12-15a

Now the close connection between the two beasts is clarified. With the power and authority given by the first, the aim of the second is to make earth's dwellers "worship the first beast." Healed from its "deadly wound," it appears invincible as well as uncontrollable. High honors must be paid to it instead of to the Lord of heaven and earth.

To that end, the second beast "works great signs" (semeia, a word used often for miracles). All these are in sharp contrast and contradiction to those accomplished by God. And these are much more than tom-foolery. "Remember the magicians in Pharaoh's court and those who lived in Daniel's day. So too, in Jesus' day exorcists cast out demons. All this show of power seems baffling to us. But clearly they are part of Satan's war against the cause of the Lord (Mark 13:22; 2 Thess. 2:9). "Even making fire come down from heaven" is mentioned by the apostle, although nowhere is it said that this works destructively. The aim is to impress people everywhere. Within the framework of the created order, things undreamed of earlier are also now being accomplished. Such wonders are done "in the sight of the first beast." And these sway the minds and hearts of multitudes.

This beast "ordered" the people to set up an image of the first who had been healed. For this "power" was also "given" (by Satan's inspiration, of course) "to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image... should even speak." In John's day this was not at all surprising. Many "idols" in several lands were fashioned with mouths through which, unseen by their worshipers, priests spoke! And when Antichrist appears on the scene for which both beasts prepared the way, there need not be a physical idol as in Nebuchadnezzar's time, but surely some from through which he, as supreme ruler on earth, will speak his blasphemous words (cf. 2 Thess. 2). One commentator appropriately summarizes this:

When the priests of Antichrist have thus animated their idol (making it appear alive and able to speak), they have acted a blasphemy exceeding that of all previous idolaters; this is the magician's most impressive usurpation of God's power.

Our generation has witnessed something like this in the godlike acclaim given for a season to Hitler

in Germany, and to Stalin in Russia. Those too, were "signs of the times" which many failed to discern.

The effects, vss. 15b-18

All earth's inhabitants (true believers excepted as chapter 14 will assure us) offer "worship." Today we note more modern and refined ways of accomplishing this by way of the media, military parades and rallies. But the goal is clear. Man is to be enthroned. By means of all kinds of human accomplishments man shows that there is no longer room for the one true God and the Lord Jesus. The peoples have hardened themselves against the gospel so that seeing, they can no longer see and understand. One world demands one leader with one religion, the worship of Man as the captain of his own soul.

And with that, orders are given to kill all who will not bow down in worship. John's thoughts too, may well have gone back to that image which Nebuchadnezzar raised up for his personal glory (Dan. 2).

This second beast is exceedingly clever. He causes a mark to be affixed on "the right hand or the forehead." No one can buy or sell unless he wears it visibly. John says: "The name of the beast or the number of the beast... is 666." And, says the apostle, "It is a human number." So many explanations have been suggested throughout the centuries that books could be filled with these. One of the better ones is that the apostle borrows this as a figure from the custom of branding slaves with the name or number of the owner. As Christians should openly acknowledge and demonstrate their baptism in the sight of all, so the world will clearly, in the last days, show its complete allegiance to Antichrist. In other words, true believers will then be clearly distinguishable from Antichrist's followers, and be economically bankrupted to the point of starvation and imminent death. Further than that we dare not go with this "mark."

Now the encouraging application. Here, "wisdom" is proclaimed by the apostle. It consists of the manner in which sound knowledge and understanding are to be practiced. That gift comes from the Lord Jesus, our "wisdom" (I Cor. 1:29), who imparts His Spirit to guide us each day anew into His ways even in the most perilous of times.

Nothing is said here about the end of those who, with Antichrist and his propagandists, have fallen into Satan's snares by worshiping human power and

achievements instead of God. All that will come. But as the world wallows in its deliberately chosen wickedness, we take heart and sing with the psalmist:

All those who wander far from Thee
will perish in their misery;
Thou hast destroyed the carnal-hearted,
who from Thy covenant ways departed.
But unto Thee, my God on high,
'Tis good for me that I draw nigh;
I'll trust Thee, Lord, through all my days
And publish all Thy works and ways (Ps. 73).

Such is the "wisdom" which Jesus gives to all who live and look for His appearing.

Questions for discussion

1. Why does the first beast need the second? Be specific.
2. Why is double-talk always devilish?
3. Mention several kinds of propaganda which appeal to and influence the masses today.
4. Why is faithful Bible reading and study in the homes essential for a strong Christian faith?
5. How do both true and false teachings always demonstrate their effects in deeds?
6. What kind of propaganda machine can you find in your nation? Is it effective?
7. Can the state and its officials ever be "neutral" with respect to religion? Explain.
8. Is all sorcery, magic and fortune-telling, satanic? Why did God strictly forbid dabbling with it?
9. What does "666" mean to you and why?
10. Can you demonstrate by facts that liberalism and pleading for tolerance in the churches always show themselves intolerant as soon as they are in control?

#26 The Lamb on Mount Zion and the 144,000

R e v e l a t i o n 1 4 : 1 - 5

What terrifying scenes have been recorded for us by John.

The "dragon" is making war on the seed of the woman. Two beasts rise up to carry out his efforts to destroy the people of the Lord. They are so successful that in time, almost without exception, all who dwell on earth will be seduced. And orders are given to "kill" anyone who refuses to worship the first beast.

Who can stand when such an overwhelming avalanche of satanic-inspired power is let loose throughout the world? Undoubtedly this may have crossed John's mind for a moment, and even more the minds of the first readers of these visions when they paused without passing on to the next scene. Tribulation even worse than the seven churches were experiencing would break out in the future. And today, many believers who fail to follow the story-line of Revelation from step to step, find this writing frightening.

But, and this is the message of the present section, the Lord Jesus is confronting all His foes. Not only has He gained the victory; all the saints living by faith share in this victory even now.

What we have here is a repetition of chapter 7, but with additional insights for all who love and serve the Savior-King. Even in the darkest hours they are "more than conquerors through him" (Rom. 8:37). Nothing can separate them from the love of Christ!

The scene described, vs. 1

Again, a precious consolation for all who read and believe, John sees "the Lamb." He is "standing on mount Zion." With Him are "a hundred and forty-four thousand."

On "mount Zion" itself there can be no disagreement. It was in Jerusalem, the place where the Lord God tabernacled behind a veil but always gloriously, among His chosen people. Close by was the seat of government where David, himself a type of the Lord Jesus, ruled in God's name.

Many will insist on a **precise literalism**. Some day

in the future, when Antichrist rules, Christ will return to establish His millennial rule in earthly form. Then the 144,000 — for them these are the Jews out of the tribes — will reign physically and visibly with Him over the earth. But such an interpretation, as noted earlier, creates far more questions than it answers. While claiming that only such a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies is faithful to the Scriptures, none of them take all the details literally. In those details there is far too much figurative and symbolical language which cannot be dismissed.

Far less speculative and in full harmony with Scripture is the view that, also here, John "sees" all God's elect in Jesus Christ still on the earth. And while here, as Paul affirms in Ephesians 1, these elect are "blessed...in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places!" True faith, as the closing verses demonstrate, makes them triumphant even in the terrors which, for a time, may assail. And as for "mount Zion"? Let the writer to the Hebrews explain this. He writes of believers living in his day (note the present reality!), "But you have come to mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God..." (Heb. 12: 22f.). In every age, also at the end of world history, the Lord Jesus in the fulness of His grace and power, remains with His people on earth. That is His firm promise (Matt. 28: 19, 20). Note the clear connection with chapter 7. They have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." How safe the struggling church on earth always is and will be according to this comforting vision.

A scene from the Old Testament comes to mind when God's people were in extreme peril. The Syrian king with his armies had again invaded the land. He was determined to destroy not only the Israelite kingdom, but especially Elisha. As one commissioned to bring the Word of the Lord, Elisha knew all Syria's war plans beforehand. With many others, the prophet and his servant were shut up in Dothan without any earthly hope of escape. But the covenant God, who never lets His word fall fruitless to the ground, surrounded that city with an innumerable heavenly host. And the deliverance came speedily

(2 Kgs 6:13f). It is always this way with the Lord's own. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against them.

The sound from heaven, vss. 2-3

Heaven is never ignorant of, or indifferent to what happens on earth. John hears from heaven a sound like "rushing waters and...thunder." In his ears it rings like the sweetest music.

While it is one "sound," it is uttered by many. All sing the song which only the 144,000 as the redeemed can learn. Its content is not mentioned. Nor is this essential here. It is, of course, a song of victory, of praise to God in Christ who always works salvation for His own. It is sung "before the throne" as well as before the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Let us not overlook these "creatures." They symbolize the "earth" which swallowed up Satan's venom spewed against the true church.

A word of caution is in order. Some read far too much in the preposition "from" at this point. For them it "proves" a physical rapture of New Testament believers at the great tribulation. But are not all believers, even though not yet perfected, "redeemed from" (i.e. "out of") the world which otherwise, with ten thousand chains, would enslave them in Satan's service? Scripture itself leads the way by denominating the church the "ek-klesia," the ones called out of this world of sin to serve the living God. Reading a physical "rapture" into this passage supports a **preconceived theory** which separates the Jewish people from the New Testament church.

The 144,000 depicted, vss. 4-5

At first reading, what John now writes may puzzle many. The Jehovah's Witnesses of course, have their peculiar interpretation. But they are not alone. Others too want to make this an exclusive group. But note well that John provides us with a fourfold description. One aspect is incomplete without the others. And all designate qualities found with every true believer.

First of all, and this may occasion most of the misunderstanding, we are told that these individuals "have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste." Or as some translations have it, "they are virgins." Does this demand a literal and physi-

cal interpretation? Hardly, in the light of all the symbols which are used in this connection, even the "number" as well as the "name written on their foreheads." And surely, to regard celibacy as a state to be highly preferred to marriage flies in the face of what the Bible teaches (Gen. 1; 2; Ps. 127, 128; Prov. 31; 2 Tim. 4: 1-4; Hebr. 13:6). The phrase is clearly symbolical. It designates those who have kept themselves "pure" in their love for and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. With this they glorify God in their bodies as well as their souls (1 Cor. 6:20), a needed emphasis since the Bible repeatedly associates immorality with idolatry. For them the sin-laden world with its allurements holds no charms.

The following three descriptions corroborate this:

- While living in this world, believers "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Faith produces a godly obedience which, looking up to Jesus who is "the truth" in contrast to the lies of Satan and the false prophet, puts His word into practice.

- As the "redeemed" (note again the "from"), they are "first-fruits for God and the Lamb." They are "holy" to the Lord in a very special sense (Exod. 23:19; Neh. 10:35).

- Characteristic of the 144,000 is the fact that "in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless." Here very clearly the pattern of their lives is set off against the multitudes entranced and enslaved by the "lies" of Satan and his confederates on earth.

Is the apostle endorsing a kind of perfectionism? Certainly not, for this would be contradicting himself and the rest of Scripture. In his first epistle he affirms that the new nature born of and indwelt by the Spirit, does not sin. Prior to that he also states, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1: 8). Both are equally true. In life-union with Jesus Christ who is also our "sanctification," we are "holy unto the Lord." At the same time, as believers we are exhorted to "work out (y)our own salvation with fear and trembling." This is the "war" which always goes on within ourselves as long as we are still in the body. Cutting the proverbial Gordian knot by denying either one of these revealed truths, is as unrealistic as it is unbiblical.

Here we should hear the call to sincere self-examination. Neither the shallow optimism of the perfectionists, nor the pessimism of those who only bewail their sins, can learn to sing "the new song" of the 144,000.

Questions for discussion

1. Why did our Lord prescribe this section for the struggling church on earth?
2. Compare this passage with what is found in chapter 7.
3. Why is the name "Immanuel" such a strong comfort to us on earth? Why do many church members seem to take our Lord's promise of His abiding presence so lightly?
4. Explain the symbolical number 144,000.
5. Have you any idea why the content of this song isn't included here?
6. Do you think that the "harps" are physical realities here?
7. Discuss the importance of "the four living creatures" in connection with Christ's reign over the earth.
8. Why is it outright "heresy" to esteem marriage as spiritually inferior to celibacy?
9. What is the serious error of the perfectionists?
10. How does Christ's perfection, both as justification and sanctification, become ours to experience and enjoy even now?

loving attitudes included, is to say that we are attempting to be more humane than God Himself. Homosexuality is demonstrated unbelief, and involves rejection of the truth of God and the goodness of God. It also represents unbelief that real change is possible. Our approach must also be balanced so that the fulness of God's revelation is communicated, and His grace is seen as sufficient for all sins, in all situations, for all people. Only as we

faithfully, consistently hold forth a potent, full-strength Gospel of hope through the power of the risen Christ will unbelief of all sorts — including pro-gay theology — be answered and vanquished.

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It Ain't Over Yet

Have you said, "If I hear another word about Y2K I'm going to scream!"? Well, start screaming because this isn't a done deal yet. It's obvious that the threat was very real since American corporations don't make a habit of pouring millions of dollars down "non-issue" drains.

Our nation and even the world seems to have dodged the millennium bullet. Personally, I am delighted that my lights work and the shower pours forth hot water on cold winter mornings.

However, before we start up the band and sing "Happy Days Are Here Again," let me give you some food for thought. It would be foolhardy to think that we have faced down the last great enemy of our lives and that from here on out it's nothing but smooth sailing. We still live in a nation where 1.3 million innocent babies are cut off from life every year. Most of those children lose their lives because others do not want to be inconvenienced, because the costs are too high (in their estimation) to carry the child to term, and because there are many in the medical profession who handsomely profit from this money-making industry.

You cannot spill that much innocent blood and not be held accountable, much as our country would like to think so. I once did a radio interview with Curt Young who, at the time,

was the president of the National Right to Life organization. I asked him if he thought God would judge America for the lives lost. His response made my eyes snap open wide. He said, "It is not a matter of *if* God will judge this nation, but only an issue of *when*."

No civilization has ever walked down the path that we, as a people, are traversing, and lived to tell about it. Are we so arrogant as to think that we will be any different? Nobody likes "prophets of doom." I've seen disheveled street people with sandwich boards slung across their bodies that say, "Repent, for judgment is coming" or wording to that effect. I think Satan loves to parade such people across our collective consciousness because when a true prophet of God comes (maybe in a shirt and tie, and seems to be in his right mind) and preaches a similar message we can easily dismiss his warning as we conveniently put him in the same box as the seedy-looking character with the sandwich board.

I now believe that when the bottom really does fall out we won't have much time, if any, to prepare. What I am trying to say is this - don't let your guard down.

Don't put your head back in the sand if that's where it used to be. Don't think as Jesus said, "peace and safety"

for then, He goes on to say, "sudden destruction comes." Christian, if you failed to prepare for the Y2K crisis that, I admit, has yet to materialize, you are not wise to be smug in your lack of prudence.

If you did prepare then don't dismantle what you set aside as one might remove sheets of plywood after a hurricane has harmlessly passed you. I assure you, there will be more deadly storms to come. Stay vigilant. Stay on your knees. Stay focused upon Christ and His continuing commission for His people to be salt and light as we take the gospel into the culture. My thanks to all of you who worked so hard to keep our water hot, our lights on, the hospital working, and all the rest of those common conveniences that we take for granted every day. Thanks to you who prepared for your own family and for others who either did not have the foresight or the resources to prepare. I remind us all of what Yogi so eloquently said one hot summer's day: "It ain't over till it's over" and believe me when I tell you on the authority of God's Word - "It ain't over yet!"

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The Changing Face of Missions

Bassam and Shirley Madany

We date modern missionary activities from the days of William Carey in 1792. What tremendous differences there are between Christian missions of two centuries ago and our own times! In the period following the long religious wars, Europe was divided into Protestant and Roman Catholic areas. At that time, religious and commercial energies seemed to be released simultaneously. The Reformation and emergence from the Middle Ages had paved the way.

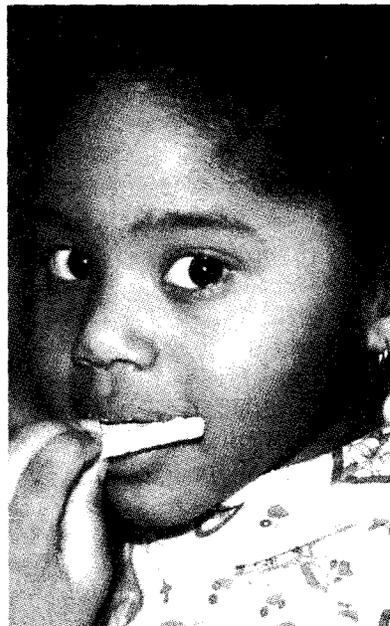
These new energies were directed to the expansion of the church's work overseas and the opening of new areas for trade. The work of Gospel proclamation and the building of national churches in Asia and Africa coincided with the emergence of the empires of Great Britain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, and Spain.

Colonial Empires Fade Away

This period of joint expansion slowly disappeared in the 1900s as, one by one, countries began to win their independence. The nations of India and Pakistan emerged in 1947, a result of the partition of British India. This was followed by the disappearance of the Dutch presence in the East Indies, giving the world one of its largest Muslim countries, Indonesia. The expulsion of the French from Indochina in the 1950s gave birth to Vietnam. The French and British colonies in Africa gained their independence in the sixties, followed by the emergence of independent countries in former Portuguese territories. Mapmakers were kept busy updating the names on their maps.

These changes had a strong impact on missionary plans and presence in Africa and Asia. But these were not the only changes. We can't restrict our attention to the political factors alone. We must consider the great

advances that were made in *transportation*, shortening the long sea voyages as speedier air travel developed. Likewise, *communication* by telegraph, telephone and radio altered the scene. Then shortwave transmissions made it possible to broadcast the Good News to distant areas of the world. Radios developed rapidly with the introduction of the transistor, making radio available to wider and wider audiences at reasonable prices. Now, finally, at the end of the Second Millennium, Internet has taken that one step further with its use of "audio" and the very real "World-Wide Web."



From Radio to E-mail

We can describe from our own experience the use of radio and the beginning of a daily Reformed ministry like Saatu'l Islah (The Hour of Reformation). This was a pioneer venture. It began in 1958 and has spanned over forty years of broadcasting the Good News to the Arabic-speaking world on a daily basis. We witnessed the benefit of the transistor radio, which made the Gospel available to the average person throughout the Arab world.

These radios could run on batteries and were thus easily transportable. Millions of Muslims heard the claims of Jesus Christ for the first time in their lives. Then advances were made in recording methods. Programs were recorded on reel-to-reel tape, then on cassettes, and finally on the mini-disk, which added long life and fidelity to both voice and music. What a potential for proclaiming and defending the Gospel!

Statistics that record the number of "hits" or visits on our webpage, safeplace.net/members/mer, tell us where people live who are making these "hits." We find an astonishing list of countries in descending order of quantity. Some are countries which were not within hearing range of our various shortwave transmissions. To name some of the top countries on the list: Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, The Netherlands, United Arab Emirates, Italy, South Africa, Germany, Finland, New Zealand, France, Sweden, Lebanon, Belgium, and of course, the bulk of them in either the U.S.A. or Europe.

Millions of Migrants

A new demographic phenomenon has made its appearance since the end of World War II. Millions of Muslims and adherents of other world religions have migrated to Germany, The Netherlands, France, The United Kingdom, Belgium, Spain, the United States, and Canada. *There is no longer a great difference between foreign missions and home missions.* The entire world has come to our doorsteps, especially in the metropolitan areas of Western Europe and North America. The size of the Muslim population in America is estimated at six million at this time! One hopes that seminary courses on missions are keeping abreast of this development.

A great difference exists between the religious climate of our times and the situation that prevailed at the dawn of modern missions. Two centuries ago, strong and important doctrinal differences existed among the Christian communions that engaged in foreign missions. But they all agreed on the supremacy, uniqueness, and finality of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That consensus no longer exists today. Various theologies of pluralism exist which advocate the equal validity of all religions. Those churches and agencies that have succumbed to these novel views carry on their "missionary" activities mainly in the areas of relief and development. Thus, there has been a necessity for the believing churches and agencies to separate themselves from those who simply bear a Christian name. Unless we subscribe to the apostolic declaration that was uttered by Peter in Acts 4:12, "There is no other name," we cannot claim that our activities at home and abroad are genuinely Christian missions.

Study of World Religions a Necessity

The theological training of the ministers of the future must be strengthened by the addition of a basic course on world religions as essential in our study of systematic theology. Just as Christians, in the apostolic and post-apostolic age, had to present their message and defend it within a hostile pagan atmosphere, we must be equally prepared to meet the challenge of our times. This does not mean a lesser emphasis on the traditional Reformed study in theology. The works of Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof and Herman Bavinck still are needed. An analysis of Calvin's *Institutes* will never be outdated. These works are still very relevant to today's situation.

However, something more is now required. *We need to learn and understand the basic tenets and practices of the followers of world religions, many of whom have suddenly become our neighbors.* Preachers today, especially in

metropolitan areas, sooner or later will encounter parishioners who ask questions about Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. People are beginning to want some guidance on how to respond to their new Muslim neighbors or their friends whose children have married Muslims.

The foreign fields have come to our door. More and more American Muslims are finding a voice on public radio and television. We recently had a vivid example of this. A statement by a Muslim needed to be challenged on the spot. But who can do this without knowledge of 1,400 years of Islamic history? An Iraqi activist in Los Angeles was interviewed at length on Public Television regarding his view of the peace process in Israel and what he felt was a misconception over terrorists. He made the usual plea that terrorist activity within the Muslim structure is only the work of a small group of fanatics. This is similar to the frequent denunciation of the interpretation of "jihad" as meaning "holy war." Spokespersons for Islam would have us believe that "jihad" means only a great striving for personal spiritual betterment.

One could have answered the Iraqi with a few questions: How about the untimely deaths of the first few caliphs in the 7th century at the very inception of Islam? Were they not murdered? How about the untimely and repulsive bloodletting in Iraq itself when members of the royal family were killed in July 1958 in a most ferocious manner? Followers of Islam are well aware of their history. We need to remember that Christianity survived and grew in an atmosphere of severe persecution. Not so Islam, which flourished by the sword.

Christians Today Need to be Informed

There is an urgent need for a change in our training of ministers to meet the challenge of world religions. Naturally this change cannot take place over night. We need to prepare

for it. After a realistic assessment of our times, we must come to the conclusion that the people of God in the pews do require some specific guidance. They, more than the clergy, rub shoulders in the business world with Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. The cultural atmosphere that surrounds Christians today keeps on telling them that all faiths are equal. The time has come to be better informed about the faiths and allegiances of our new neighbors from overseas. Many of them, in order to survive culturally, are asserting the uniqueness and relevance of their religious traditions. They advertise their faith through media, public meetings, and the Internet.

The author of Hebrews affirms the superiority of our Lord Jesus Christ in the introduction to his letter: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs* (Hebrews 1:1-4 NIV).

In these words, the inspired author set forth his thesis about the superiority of our Lord, on the basis of His pre-existence, His involvement in Creation and providence, and the specific work He accomplished for the redemption of mankind.

Likewise, when we assert the uniqueness of Christianity we need to be aware that all other religions, even the theistic ones, teach an optimistic view of man's present condition. They foster the vain hope that each human being can attain the goal of existence through his or her effort. The biblical concept of

salvation, therefore, is entirely foreign to the followers of these religions.

With our complete trust in the supreme and final authority of the Word of God, and following in the footsteps of the church fathers and reformers of the church, let us pray that we may rise to the needs of the hour and prepare ourselves to proclaim the Christian message to

all people. We should not neglect those who, in God's providence, have left their homelands but not their traditions and have come to live among us. To love God above all, and our neighbors as ourselves, requires the sharing of the Good News with the followers of world religions.

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F E E D M Y L A M B S

Image-Bearers (II)

When white light is passed through a transparent prism, it is refracted into the many colors of the rainbow. It is an impressive demonstration of the beauty of God's design in creation.

Similarly when the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, shines through the life of a spiritually dead person, the *image of God* revives and becomes refracted in many different ways.

As we saw last month, the concept of *image* can have a variety of meanings.

CARVING

An image can be a *carving*. God wants His image-bearers to be a carving. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructs Israel: Love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...and strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. *Carve* them on your children. How? "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." It is not uncommon today to hear parents as well as children complain that they get too much of God and His Word — church, Sunday School, catechism and Christian school. But the truth is that we can never get *too much* of

God and His Word. His truth must be engraved upon us so it *shapes* all of our thoughts, words and actions. The family altar must be strengthened, in fact, revived in our homes today. Only by daily fellowship with God can the image of God be restored once again in our lives.

COPY

Image-bearing also means that we are to be a copy of our God. We are to *imitate* Him. *Imitation* is not a very popular concept today. Imitation stymies creativity we are told. But Ephesians 5:1 says: "Be imitators (copies) of God therefore, as dearly loved children..." What is there about God that we and our children must imitate?

- His *truth* — absolute integrity in all of life

- His *goodness* — the absence of evil and the demonstration of unselfish love

- His *spirituality* in this body-oriented society

- His *knowledge* in this society of distorted views of God, man, and of created reality

- His *wisdom* in this warped society of twisted value judgments

REFLECTION

Image-bearers are also to be *reflectors* of our God. Not only are they to contain the communicable attrib-

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

utes of God, but as a mirror throws back a reflection, so the believer is to throw back or actively demonstrate those attributes in daily living. The light of Jesus Christ which shines through the believer must be reflected constantly. Acts 4: 13 says that people marveled at Peter and John and "took note that they had been with Jesus." Can it be said of us and our children that we have been with Jesus? Do our lives reflect His deep abiding presence within our hearts?

THOUGHT

An image can also be a *thought*, a mental image. We are told to "think God's thoughts after Him" as image-bearers. Why is this important? It is important because "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." The relationship between thought and action is very close. Consequently, the *shaper* of our thoughts is very crucial in image-bearing. Unfortunately, the most powerful shaper of thoughts in today's world is the television set (and more recently the internet), and the results are there to see. Sexual lust and material success are the dominant motifs in today's world, and spiritual apathy is the result. Consciences are becoming insensitive to adultery and violence. What we desperately need as image-bearers

is a housecleaning of our thoughts. Romans 12: 2 says: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

IMPRESSION

An image can also be an *impression*. Every country has an image – high or low. Every community has an image – neat or unkept. God has an image too and that is you and I and our

children, all of us bound in covenant to Him. We are God's advertisements to the world. Paul says: "You show that you are a letter from Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (II Corinthians 3:3). Someone has aptly said, "The Christian is the only Bible some people will ever read." What a responsibility! As image-bearers we, together with our children, are to witness, to make an impression on a godless world.

Image-bearing is the primary activity of every Christian. Training for image-bearing (because it doesn't just "happen") is the primary task of every parent. May God equip us for this task.

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In Spirit & Truth Jesus at the Supper

W. Robert Godfrey

In preparing His disciples for His death, Jesus gave them a wonderful promise: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). Jesus assured His followers that He would not leave them alone, leaderless and defenseless. But how would He come to them? In the Scriptures we see a number of ways in which He came to His own. He came to them in His glorious resurrection from the dead. Death could not hold Him and He came forth from the grave as the Lord and giver of life. He came to His disciples also at Pentecost giving His Spirit to unite them with Him (Acts 2:33). He will come again in glory at the end of this age to unite His people with Him forever. And there is still another way in which He comes: He comes to His church in the means of grace that He has established. He comes in the preaching of the Word and He comes in the sacraments.

How Jesus comes in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper has been one of the most controversial issues in the history of the church. Reformed Christians sometimes seem vague or confused over what the coming of

Christ in the supper means. One way to clarify this matter is to review discussions early in the Reformation on the eucharist. Examining Martin Luther's reflections on the sacrament and his criticism of early Reformed teachers will *illumine* the doctrine.

Luther as a priest in the medieval church knew that the eucharist stood at the heart of the church's teaching and experience. The center of worship was the altar and the mass. The priest performed there the miracle of transubstantiation (turning the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) and sacrificed Christ to the Father as a propitiation for sin. Luther as a reformer came to see that the mass had to be purified from all elements of priestcraft and human accomplishment. He insisted that the service should be in the language of the people and that both the bread and the wine be given to the people. He utterly rejected the idea of sacrifice in the mass as a form of works righteousness.

Luther continued to insist, however, that Jesus was truly present in the sacrament. He believed that the

words of Jesus, "This is my body," were clear and simple. He became very suspicious of those who tried to spiritualize those words. He thought spiritualizers of the Christian religion missed the whole character of biblical teaching.

He had faced such a spiritualizer in the person of Thomas Muentzer in the mid-1520s. Muentzer disparaged the literal meaning of the sacrament and of the Bible as the revelation of God. He dismissed the Bible with the words, "Bible, bubble, babble." Luther thundered against Muentzer, "He thinks he has swallowed the Holy Ghost feathers and all." Luther believed that such "spirituality" must ultimately not only reject the sacrament and the Bible, but also the incarnation and the cross.

Luther perceived such spiritualizing tendencies also in his former colleague at Wittenberg, Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt. When Carlstadt left northern Germany in 1524 and was warmly received in Strassburg by Martin Bucer and in Zurich by Ulrich Zwingli, Luther concluded that these men too must be

spiritualizers and dangerous. The written exchanges on the Lord's Supper between Luther and Zwingli from 1524 to 1529 did nothing to reduce Luther's concerns.

Luther's critique of Zwingli's early Reformed theology centered around three issues: 1) the Bible and reason, 2) grace and works, and 3) flesh and spirit. On the *first* issue, *the Bible and reason*, Luther maintained that the Bible was perfectly straightforward in saying, "This is my body." Some people believed the Bible and that statement, and others who were rationalists did not. The rationalists offered many reasons why the words could not be true, but in the process only demonstrated that they were unbelievers. Luther wrote, "...the Word says first of all that Christ has a body, and this I believe. Secondly, that this same body rose to heaven and sits at the right hand of God; this too I believe. It says further that this same body is in the Lord's Supper and is given us to eat. Likewise I believe this, for my Lord Jesus Christ can easily do what he wishes, and that he wishes to do this is attested by his own words."

The *second* issue was *grace and works*. Luther rejected the medieval teaching that the supper was a sacrifice that the church offered to God. The sacrament is not our work but God's. Then he heard some theologians teaching that the supper was a memorial meal the significance of which is found in our believing. Luther viewed such an idea as another way of making the supper man-centered. Such doctrine was still focused on what the church does rather than on what God does.

The *third* issue was *flesh and spirit*. Luther taught that the heart of our religion is in the body, the blood and the cross of Jesus. He did not minimize the divinity of Christ, but insisted that it is what Christ did in the body that is key to our redemption. And as Jesus came at first in the body, so He comes in His body in the bread and the wine of the sacrament. Luther wrote, "Our fanatics...think

nothing spiritual can be present where there is anything material and physical, and they assert that the flesh is of no profit."² But how can the flesh of Christ on the cross be of no profit? It is our salvation.

Luther and Calvin Differ

Luther proclaimed that in the Lord's Supper God's people receive the true Christ and the whole Christ: they receive the very body and blood of Christ. Zwingli never fully agreed with that teaching although by the time of the famous Colloquy of Marburg in 1529 when he met Luther, he had moved closer to Luther's view. John Calvin, however, did agree with Luther on that point, and the view of Luther and Calvin is contained clearly in the *Belgic Confession*, article 35: "In the meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ."

Where Luther and Calvin differed was on the question of how Christ comes to His people in the Lord's Supper. The classic Lutheran expression is that Christ is "in, with and under" the bread and wine. The glorified body of Christ is everywhere and so by divine appointment is in the bread. The Reformed tended to say that Christ comes with and through the bread. They focused on the work of the Holy Spirit uniting the believers to Christ. Luther saw Christ as present in terms of the glory of the second person of the Trinity. Calvin saw Christ as present in terms of the power of the third person of the Trinity.

Historically the Reformed have seen their differences with the Lutherans as less important than the Lutherans have. Why is that? Luther and his followers want the grace of Christ to be truly present and available for all. They teach that Christ is truly present in the bread so certainly that even the unworthy receive Him. Here their doctrine of universal grace

comes to the fore and that is a significant disagreement with the Reformed.

Calvin by contrast taught that the certainty of Christ's presence with His people is in the promise to which the bread points. Christ is truly present in His sacramental institution but is received only by the faithful. The Holy Spirit connects Christ to His people through the bread.

The Lutherans often allege that the Reformed stress on the Spirit is not supported by Scripture. If they mean that no verse in the Bible explicitly links the Spirit to the eucharist, they are right. But the Reformed are right that the work of the Spirit as generally described in the Bible also applies specifically to the Lord's Supper. That general work is precisely to link us with Christ. The Spirit links the believer to the life of Christ: "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Romans 8:9,10). The Spirit makes God dwell in the believer through the work of Christ in the flesh on the cross (Eph. 2:15-18, 22). The Spirit is also our link to Christ in terms of knowing Him (John 16:14,15; Eph. 1:17). The Spirit makes Christ dwell in and strengthen His people: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he [the Father] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:16,17). The Spirit who unites the Christian to Christ in so many ways also unites him to Christ in the sacrament.

The centrality of the Spirit in applying Christ and His work is not an invention of the Reformed. Rather, as Calvin saw, it is clear biblical teaching. To stress the role of the Spirit is not to spiritualize the supper, but rather to see the powerful link between the body of Christ and the believer. When Christ's people come in faith to the table of the Lord, the

Word and the Spirit unite the communicants to Christ and all His blessings. Christ promised not to leave His followers as orphans and He has fulfilled that promise in the Spirit,

in the Word and in the sacraments. All His promises are fulfilled and confirmed in the faithful reception of the Lord's Supper. "My body which is for you" is given to His people. How graciously and

wonderfully Jesus continues to provide for and come to His own. 1 James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, Minneapolis (Augsburg), 1986, p. 207. 2 *Ibid.*, p. 208.



What We Believe

The Doctrine of Justification (I)

Its Importance to the Gospel Today

With this article, I am beginning a brief series of articles on the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. These articles are adapted from two public addresses given at a Banner of Truth Conference in May, 1998.¹ Though they have been edited for *The Outlook*, they still retain something of their character as originally delivered. In recent years, there have been a number of joint declarations regarding the doctrine of justification by prominent representatives of the evangelical and Roman Catholic churches. Most recently, on October 31, 1999, the date commonly associated with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed a consensus declaration on the doctrine, declaring that the historic differences between Protestantism and Catholicism on this subject had been overcome. These developments make it a matter of some urgency, that Reformed believers take a fresh look at the doctrine of justification, lest our heritage in the Reformed faith and adherence to this most basic truth of the gospel be compromised. The following article, the first in this series, only aims to establish the

importance of the subject for the church today. It begins with a citation of a passage from Romans which provides a classic statement of the doctrine.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins

Cornelis P. Venema

previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as

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what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 3:19-4:5).

The "Main Hinge" of the Christian Religion

Ordinarily, when a speaker has been assigned a topic — as I've been assigned the subject of the doctrine of justification — he begins by defending the importance or significance of the subject.

From the vantage point of the history of the Reformed churches, this should not be necessary with the doctrine of justification. Calvin, no less than Luther at the time of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, was convinced that this doctrine was "the main hinge of the Christian religion" (*Institutes*, Book III). If we should become "unhinged" at this point, so to speak, then the whole of the Christian faith is in danger of being lost. The doctrine of justification by *grace alone* on account of *Christ alone* through *faith alone* — to state the doctrine in the most precise way is, as the Lutheran church has historically expressed it, the article of the standing and the falling of the church (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). For this doctrine, unlike any other, crystallizes the great "sola's" of the Reformation — *sola gratia* ("by grace alone"), *solo Christo* ("by Christ alone"), and *sola fide* ("by faith alone").

But it is not only the history of the Reformation that reminds us of the importance of this doctrine. Though we are apt to forget this, the doctrine of justification, as John Murray properly emphasizes in his lectures on this subject, answers the most basic of religious questions, namely, where do I stand with God? Even before Adam sinned and plunged the whole human race into sin — in the original state of man's integrity and sinlessness — the most important issue for him and for all men was the issue of their acceptability to God. There is no more pressing concern for any creature than the one expressed in the questions: What does God say

respecting me? Does He find me good and acceptable? Or is He against me? Are things right between us? What is my reputation with God?

No doubt, the reality of human sin and rebellion against God has greatly complicated the matter. Now that "there is none righteous, no, not one," the question of the sinner's standing before God has become the more urgent. Since "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory," the issue of the sinner's acceptability to and reputation with God has become most pressing.

For these reasons, the doctrine of justification is a most important doctrine indeed. Not only was it the focus of the great controversy in the church regarding the gospel in the sixteenth century, but it also answers the most basic question of life and of death — where do I stand with God, poor and needy sinner that I am?

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together"?

The importance of the doctrine of justification can be seen in terms of the history of the Reformation and in terms of its being the basic religious question. But it can also be seen today in the degree to which the doctrine of justification is becoming the subject of renewed discussion and debate. This renewed discussion has revealed a considerable neglect, and even ignorance of the doctrine among many Protestants and evangelicals. But perhaps more significantly, it has been marked by a series of important declarations, signed in some instances by evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics alike, that claim a new consensus is beginning to emerge on the doctrine.

I can remember several years ago reading Michael Horton's book, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*. As I was reading through the book, I was struck by a story he tells of a speaking engagement to which he was invited at a Christian high school. Horton recounts how he had the opportunity to speak to some

160 students on several different occasions throughout the day. During the course of the day, he queried the students about the doctrine of justification. He asked them to define "justification." What caught my attention while reading this account, was Horton's report that not one of those 160 students (and remember, these were students at a Christian, not a public, high school) could give him even a simple definition of the doctrine. Not one! Though this is only an anecdote, it is sufficiently striking to suggest that, among many evangelical Christians, the doctrine of justification is neither appreciated nor clearly understood.

But it is not only this general neglect of the doctrine that is instructive. There have also been over the course of the last twenty or thirty years, several rather high level discussions between representatives of the evangelical church, broadly conceived, and the Roman Catholic Church on the question, "Can we bridge the divisions between us? Can we overcome the divide between Protestant and Catholic? Is it really the case that this is a watershed issue between the 'true church,' which clings to the gospel of Christ, and the 'false church,' which submerges Christ under all manner of religious rites, ceremonies, and meritorious good works?"

For example, already in 1963, at the Helsinki Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (a representative group of world Lutheranism, the first branch, you might say, of the Reformation of the sixteenth century), the conclusion was reached, based upon a series of conferences with Catholic representatives, that there was really no longer any substantial difference between Rome and the Lutheran churches on the doctrine of justification. More recently, in 1985, a joint declaration of Lutheran and Catholic representatives, summarized its findings this way: "A fundamental consensus on the gospel is necessary to give credibility to our previously agreed statements on baptism, on the Eucharist, and on forms of church authority. We believe that we have

reached such a consensus."

More recently yet, in 1997, at the General Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which is a combination of a number of historic Lutheran denominations, a joint Lutheran and Roman Catholic statement was adopted, declaring that differences on justification by faith no longer need divide their communions. Now someone might respond to these developments by saying, "Well, that's true of representatives of rather broad, and in many ways latitudinarian, religious bodies of Lutherans and Catholics worldwide." That is to say, these developments are only occurring within a churchly context where the historic confessions and the teaching of Scripture have long since been abandoned on many important doctrines.

But in our own context in North America, we need to be aware of the fact that two very significant documents have in recent years been endorsed and signed by a number of representatives of both Catholic and evangelical persuasion. The first of these was produced in 1994, and bore the striking title, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." A number of very important and prominent representatives (both of the Catholic church, some bishops, some like Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things*; others in the evangelical world, men of great prominence and influence) affirmed together, on the doctrine of justification, that "we are justified by grace, through faith, because of Christ."²

What is remarkable about this joint affirmation is not so much that it was signed by evangelical and Catholic representatives, but that *it contains some noteworthy omissions. There are no sola's in this declaration!* So far as I can see, this statement is one that any signatory of the great Council of Trent of the Catholic counter reformation could readily sign. Roman Catholic teaching has always affirmed that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. However, our justification is not *solo Christo*, "by Christ alone." And because it is not by Christ alone, neither

is it *sola gratia*, "by grace alone," nor *sola fide*, "by faith alone."

Due partly to the weaknesses of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," a number of its signatories were responsible for the preparation of a sequel declaration. This declaration was published in 1997 and bears the title, "The Gift of Salvation." Written in order to clarify some of the issues that the first statement raised (and to assuage perhaps the fears and concerns of some that they should have signed that kind of an ambiguous, uncertain statement), the authors of this declaration attempted to offer a better, and in many ways apparently acceptable, statement on the doctrine of justification. This declaration says, regarding justification: "In justification God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends. And by virtue of his declaration it is so. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone." This statement, as it stands, is an improvement upon the earlier one. It is a statement which we could probably sign, were it to have been formulated in a different context and were it to acknowledge, in the latter part of the declaration, some troubling areas of continuing disagreement — including whether the righteousness, on account of which we are justified, is an "imputed" righteousness or not!

Now I mention these things to illustrate that we live in a day of great confusion and uncertainty regarding the doctrine of justification. This would not be so serious, were this doctrine not the article on which the church stands or falls, the "main hinge" of the Christian faith. Furthermore, because we live in a day when tolerance sometimes gets the best of us, some are apt to be swept along out of a desire to agree with others on this doctrine. And so it is all the more important, not only because of the essential and perpetual importance of this doctrine, but because of the way in which it is today the subject of so much uncertainty and confusion, that we give it our most careful attention. Nothing less than a proper understanding of the

gospel is at stake.

Footnotes

1 I would like to thank Virginia Eizenga, secretary at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, for undertaking and completing the rather tedious work of transcribing these addresses.

2 R. C. Sproul has done a fine service to the evangelical and Reformed churches by providing book-length treatments and evaluations of these two statements: *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); and *Getting the Gospel Straight: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). The second of these volumes includes an appendix that gives the complete text of a recent evangelical statement on the gospel, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration." This most recent statement attempts to resolve some of the differences that have emerged among evangelicals over the earlier documents, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," and "The Gift of Salvation."

Dr. Cornelis Venema, a contributing editor of The Outlook magazine, teaches Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

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Church & World Report of NAPARC 1999

Ron Potter

The fall scenery of the Blue Ridge Mountains of southwestern North Carolina with its resident stock of gray squirrels, provided the picturesque background for the 25th annual session of the North America Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Bonclarken, the beautiful conference grounds of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Flat Rock, NC, hosted representatives from 7 Reformed denominations gathered to report on the activities of their respective denominations. Represented at the Council table for meetings on November 16-17, 1999, were the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) - currently under suspension from NAPARC, the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA). Denominations who sent observers were the L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, the Presbyterian Reformed Church and the United Reformed Churches in North America.

The Interim Committee of NAPARC met in the morning of November 16 to set the agenda for the actual NAPARC meeting which began in the afternoon of the same day. Rev. Ron Potter chaired this meeting and also the main NAPARC meeting until the election of new officers. Dr. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk for the PCA, was elected Chairman, and Mr. Mark Bube of the OPC was elected Vice-Chairman. Rev. Donald Duff was re-elected to the office of Secretary, and Rev. Maynard Koerner was re-elected to the office of Treasurer.

At the 24th annual meeting of NAPARC (1998), the Interchurch Relations Committees of member

churches were asked to submit suggestions as to how NAPARC could fulfill its mandate as stated in Article 11 of its Constitution. That article, known as the *Basis of the Council*, affirms that the basis of NAPARC fellowship is to be the Word of God and the Reformed Creeds. It goes on to also state the following: "That the adopted basis of fellowship be regarded as warrant for the establishment of the formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the constituent churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability, and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice." As a result of input received from these Interchurch Committees in consultation with their assemblies or synods, NAPARC adopted the following action:

We are grateful for the bonds of the gospel and the Reformed Faith that unite us. In the light of the "*II Basis of the Council*" (Constitution of NAPARC) and in order that all NAPARC member churches may be more fully aware of the unique characteristics of each member church, we recommend that each member church discern and enumerate those issues of belief, practice, and government that to the best of their knowledge, distinguish them from other NAPARC churches, and submit a report to NAPARC, no later than October 3, 2000, so that NAPARC may evaluate the Biblical and confessional basis for such distinctive positions and the degree to which these issues necessitate continued separation.

The action taken here is significant. It is indicative of the fact that the NAPARC churches are willing to grapple with issues that one denomination may hold to but which

another may not. The goal is to promote greater spiritual unity among the churches by submitting these differences to biblical and confessional scrutiny by member churches of NAPARC and thus fulfill part of the reason for the formation of NAPARC in the first place. It is anticipated that because of these pending reports by member churches, more time will be needed for the next NAPARC meeting and accordingly, rather than adjourning at noon on the second day, the time for adjournment of the 26th meeting of NAPARC was extended to 9 P.M. instead.

In subsequent NAPARC business, churches studying the issue of Women in the Military were asked to "include in their study papers, a series of propositions to be considered for presentation to and adoption by, the NAPARC churches. A committee of two, Rev. Christopher Wisdom of the OPC and Rev. Ron Potter of the RCUS, was appointed to "coordinate and facilitate the interchange."

Again, this is a significant action. It means that NAPARC is earnestly considering the seriousness of the problem of women serving in the military in our nation, and that NAPARC churches have some preliminary desire to speak biblically as a body to the matter. The input of the various churches studying the matter will be considered and action recommended at the 2000 meeting of NAPARC.

A report was received by NAPARC from a committee appointed last year to bring recommendations on how to use funds raised several years ago to commemorate the Westminster Assembly. As a result of the committee's recommendations, one member being Rev. Paul Trieck of the RCUS, NAPARC determined, in cooperation with the den Dulk

Christian Foundation, to publish Rev. G.I. Williamson's book, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, into Spanish, and, if feasible, to include a harmony of the Reformed Confessions.

In one other major item of business, NAPARC determined to ask the Interim Committee to make recommendations to the Council on "how best to encourage and facilitate annual consultations, particularly with regard to those of Foreign Missions and Home Missions." Though not a part of NAPARC it has been normal practice for representatives from these two groups to meet in conjunction with NAPARC. Committee members from the host

church are responsible to convene such meetings. This year, because of communication problems, only one consultation was held, Foreign Missions. Rev. Maynard Koerner attended this consultation on behalf of the RCUS. It is hoped that this action taken by NAPARC will encourage and facilitate these meetings in the future.

Though the CRC was ordinarily the next in line of rotation to host NAPARC in the year 2000, the Council in its wisdom determined that, in light of the present suspension of the CRC over the matter of women serving in the church office, the invitation of the Korean American Presbyterian Church be

received. The next meeting of NAPARC will be in Los Angeles, CA, November 14-15, 2000.

One of the things which NAPARC facilitates that is not a part of the actual meetings, is informal contact between the Interchurch Relations Committees of churches in fraternal relations. This year the RCUS delegation met with their OPC counterparts to discuss some matters of concern to the RCUS. The IRC of the RCUS considered this meeting to be very profitable, as did the OPC. It is hoped that the meetings of NAPARC in the future will give our two committees other opportunities to
(continued on back page)

BOOK BRIEFS

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sharpen one another.

Not long after a fellowship lunch together following the adjournment of NAPARC, the Bonclarken Conference grounds became once more the domain of gray squirrels and falling leaves, as the various delegations one by one left to make their way back across the nation to their respective churches. But though the 25th meeting of NAPARC is history it is hoped that the work it set in motion will serve our Lord and His church well into the new millennium.

Rev. Potter is pastor of Covenant RCUS in Carbondale, PA, and Chairman of the Interchurch Relations Committee of his denomination.

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