

# THE Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense  
of the Reformed Faith*  
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## *Baggage, Blame and Burnout*



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## Baggage, Blame and Burnout

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**F**alse teaching has crept into the church today and is ruining churches, homes and lives. Even among our Christian and REFORMED circles, "Christianized psychology" is proclaimed to be the answer. Many have been vacuumed up by the "psychobabble" of the day. A few of the results of this "psychological" approach is *baggage, blame and burn-out*, all with which people excuse themselves from serving God. When we take a closer look at the false religion which precipitates even these few consequences, we can agree with Jeremiah in chapter 6:14: "They have also healed the hurt of my people SLIGHTLY, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when THERE IS NO PEACE."

To begin, let me explain to you that at the root of this false "healing" is the self esteem "religion." It is a religion which espouses that one can not become a productive, loving, satisfied person unless basic needs have been met; your physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belongingness needs, and self-esteem needs. This is the base of the problem in baggage, blame and burn-out.

Before we delve into the actual excuses of baggage, blame and burn-out, *we must examine that which lies at the base*, placing it under the microscope of God's Word: its direction and teaching. Is this "needs" religion true, wise, and pleasing to God? First and foremost, all ideas are to be scrutinized by the ultimate test - Scripture. If Scripture says that our lives cannot be what they should be *without all of our needs met*, then and only then, should we go along with this Christianized psychology.

### Scripture Tested Against the Self-esteem Religion

Let's first look at **Philippians 4:19**: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

WHO will give us what we need? GOD. WHO determines what we need? GOD. Can we not see that telling God *what* we need and *how* we are going to get it is like the people of Israel in the desert who complained that their needs were not being met, and threatened to go back to Egypt in order to satisfy their needs? We do the same thing! How many blessings from God's hand we are missing when we snatch from Him the responsibility of supplying our own needs! We would rather go back to Egypt! We can only *begin* to fathom how much greater HIS supplying our need would be than *our* feeble efforts to get what we THINK we need. We would settle for Egypt and slavery; God would give us a land flowing with milk and honey.

**Matthew 6:25-34**: "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

The question comes to us, are WE to worry about what we have or don't have? Will it stunt our Christian effectiveness as parents if we do not have these basic needs met? Not only will it NOT stunt our effectiveness, but it will deeply root our effectiveness as parents

to wholly depend on our heavenly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to meet all our needs.

**Matthew 22:39b**: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This is the verse that Christian self-esteem proponents use in order to say that we cannot possibly love our neighbor, whether it be our child, husband, friend, or *anyone* for that matter, unless we have first had our self-esteem needs met, and learned to LOVE OURSELVES. The question is this: Can you find anywhere in the Bible words which *command* us to love ourselves? The resounding answer? NO! We already do! (Ephesians 5:28,29)

**II Corinthians 4:8-10; 6:4-7**: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;...But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings..." Look at Paul! My, he did not have HIS basic needs met. I suppose he was not very productive, loving OR satisfied with his life! QUESTION: Is this "meeting of our needs" a prerequisite to our "totality as persons?" Or to our joy? Wasn't Paul burned out? Was Joseph unproductive because he had been so mistreated by his brothers, that it wasn't until his brothers were confronted and brought low that Joseph could live with the scars of the past? We must wake up to the lies of self-esteem religion.

**Matthew 6:33, 34**: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto

you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow..."

QUESTION: Is this "meeting of our needs" a prerequisite for our ability to love God and our neighbor? NO, and again I say NO. Our focus is misplaced when we are self-absorbed with *our needs*.

**II Corinthians 11:24 - 12:10:** "From the Jews I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils of the city, in perils of the wilderness, in perils of the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches...If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity...For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth...And lest I should be exalted above measure...a thorn in the flesh was given to me...lest I be exalted above measure. He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I most gladly boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

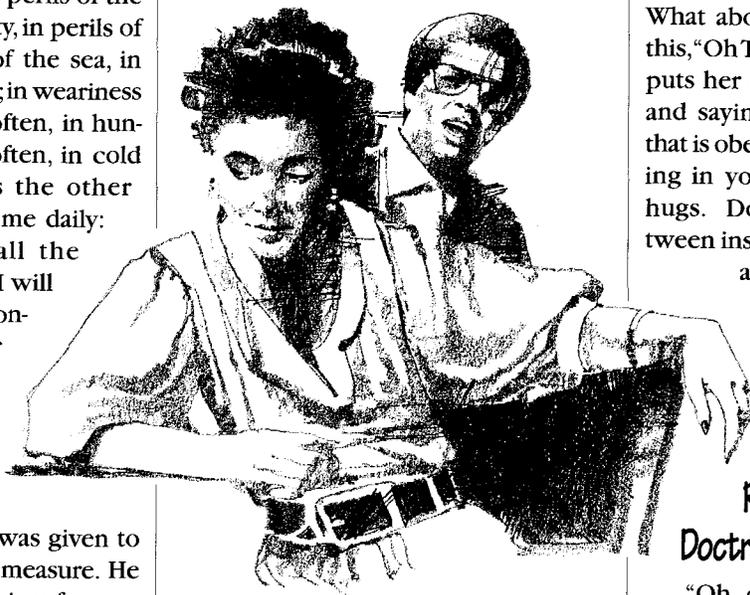
Do we not see that THIS is where God wants us: needy, depending on Him, and Him alone for ALL things?

**Romans 7:14-24:** "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin...For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells...For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice...Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of this body of death?"

There goes Paul again - such POOR self-esteem! Carnal, nothing good dwells in me, wretched!

**Philippians 3:4-7:** "We rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have **no confidence in the**

**flesh**, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he might have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have **counted loss** for Christ. Yet indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for Whom I have



**suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish**, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own right-eous-ness..."

Here we are as parents, teaching our children *to put their confidence in the flesh*. We are told that WE, as parents must instill a good self-esteem in our children for them to be productive adults. How does that mesh with Scripture when Paul, as our example, says to rejoice in Christ and to have *no confidence in the flesh*?

Let's take an example. Tommy has been told by Mother NOT to get into the cookie jar unless she gives permission. Mother heads for the kitchen and sees Tommy around the corner pulling the stool up to the counter. She stands back and watches. Tommy climbs the stool, pulls the cookie jar close to him, and opens the cookie jar. (Now this is where the illustration becomes a little unrealistic, but follow me here.) Mother sees

Tommy hesitate, shake his head, put the top back on the cookie jar, push the cookie jar back into the corner, climb down the stool, and put the stool away, with no cookie in hand. Now, in this day and age, we are taught to praise him, praise him, praise him. Tommy did something very good! "Oh..." mother would rush to him, put her arms around him, kissing him and saying, "You are such a good boy! You obeyed Mommy." Now THAT is putting confidence in the flesh. I don't doubt that he should be commended for his obedience, BUT we are Christian parents. What about God? What about praising Him? How about this, "Oh Tommy," mother rushes to him, puts her arms around him, kissing him and saying, "You obeyed Mommy, and that is obeying God! I can see Jesus working in your heart!" More kisses, more hugs. Do you see the difference between instilling confidence in the flesh, and instilling a confidence in our God?

### What Does the Self-esteem, Needs-oriented Religion Do to Our Doctrine?

"Oh, doctrine, that boring stuff. I don't want to hear this! All I need is the Bible." Please bear with me a while longer. Sound doctrine keeps us from being sucked up by the tornadoes of false prophets. Don't throw it out! Learning doctrine and not applying it is like making a nice Sunday roast and mashed potatoes, sitting at the table, looking at it and remarking, "Oh, that does look and smell wonderful!" Then, without taking a bite, getting up from the table and throwing it in the garbage disposal! Let's take one example: the doctrine of the creation of man in the image of God. Let's say we throw that out and we say that man evolved. If we destroy the doctrine, believe me, it will affect, and HAS affected our lives. Since man is not created in the image of God, abortion is fine! Euthanasia is acceptable! We are like any other animal! Now, let's take a good look at some of the doctrines "swept under the rug" by the wiles of the needs-oriented religion of

the day, leaving us with quicksand on which to stand.

## Doctrine of Man

First, look at the *doctrine of man*. Oh, sure we all know that. God is holy; man is sinful. Now take time to digest the following documents.

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 1; Q.A. 2

**Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort** (the comfort that Christ paid for my sins, set me free, watches over me, assures me of eternal life, and makes me willing to live for Him)?

A. Three things: "First how great my sin and misery are." This needs-oriented, self-esteem religion flies in the face of the doctrine of man. "Why, don't you understand?" say the psychologists. "Knowing your sin won't give you comfort! How silly to think that! We have to know how wonderful we are, of great worth! Once all our needs are met, then we will have comfort!"

THIS is the swamp land we are being sold. Don't be fooled! Look in the second beatitude, "Blessed are they who mourn (over their sin and poverty of spirit), for they shall be *comforted*."

Now let's take a look at another confession.

Westminster  
Confession of Faith:  
Chapter VI

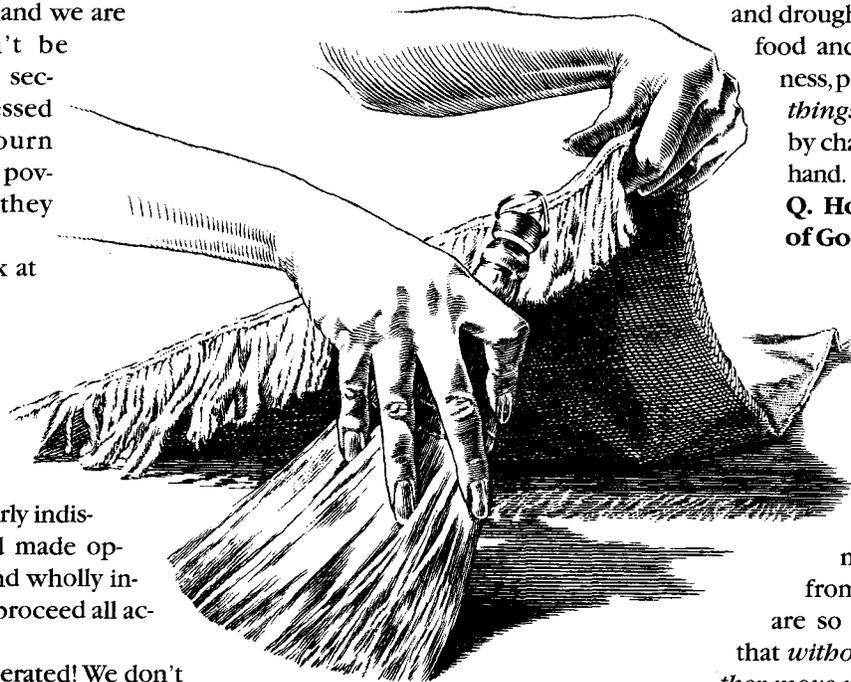
IV. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Oh there! We are regenerated! We don't have to worry about being disabled and wholly inclined to all evil. Oh, but keep reading!

V. This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin.

VI. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God...doth in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death....

Our comfort comes in knowing exactly who we are. If our doctor knew that we had cancer, but told us not to worry, for fear that the telling might hurt our self-image, would we say he was a good doctor? Are we good parents when we point out the good in our children and brush over the bad with a "naughty boy"? Our children must *know* what they have done wrong and how it has offended our Lord. This is the first step in helping them see that they need a Savior. If we gloss over our children's sin with a sigh and a "time-out," without pointing them to their sin, showing them their responsibility before God, and reminding them of forgiveness only in Christ Jesus, we are **HINDERING** their walk with the Lord! Say that Tommy *did*



take the cookie (which I suppose would be the more natural example), should Mother say, "Tommy, you naughty, bad boy! Go to your room!" Or should mother take the opportune time to present the gospel. "Tommy, Mommy told you not to take a cookie without getting permission. You have disobeyed me, and you have stolen. You have bro-

ken two commandments: 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Thou shalt not steal.' You have sinned against God. Let me tell you about Jesus, His sacrifice, and forgiveness through Him..."

Can we see how we have been deceived? Satan would have us believe that we should love ourselves **BEFORE** we can love others. God, on the other hand wants us to abhor ourselves, mortify ourselves, and look to *Jesus Christ as our only hope*.

## Providence of God

Second, let's look at the *providence of God*.

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 10; Q.A. 27, 28; Lord's Day 48; Q.A. 49, 50

**Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?**

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds, as with His hand, heaven, and earth, and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty - *all things*, in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.

**Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?**

A. We can be *patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well*, and for the future, we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from His love. All creatures are so completely in His hand that *without His will they can neither move nor be moved*.

The basis for the needs-oriented religion comes from the atheistic notion that all things come to us by chance and that we can change things! What a comfort it is to know that God has, out of His love, planned this trial for me (whether it be with my husband, my child, my mother, father, friend) and I can be patient, loving, serving, why yes, I CAN live a productive life in spite of



these trials  
BECAUSE I TRUST  
MY GOD!

**Q. What does the third request mean?**

A. "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" means, help us and all men to reject our own wills and to obey Your will without any backtalk. Your will alone is good. Help everyone to carry out the work he is called to as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.

In baggage, blame and burn-out,

- 1) Our wills MUST be REJECTED. We have been deceived in thinking that the fulfillment of our will is the only thing that will satisfy us.
- 2) God's will must be OBEYED. It is self-love and pride which holds on to our will.
- 3) We must constantly remind ourselves that God's will alone is GOOD. God's will - not our own.

**Q. What does the fourth request mean?**

A. "Give us this day our daily bread" means, Do take care of all of our physical needs so that we come to know that You are the *only source of everything good, and that neither our work and worry nor Your gifts can do us any good without Your blessing.*

Our physiological needs, safety and security needs, love and belongingness

needs, and self-esteem needs ALL might be met (by hard labor on our part and God's gifts), but none of it would do us any good WITHOUT GOD'S BLESSING.

**Perseverance of the Saints**

Third, the *perseverance of the saints* is one of the most comforting doctrines which Satan would love to snatch from us because it then would sap us of our hope.

Canons of Dort: Article 3

"By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and also because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end."

It is not what *we* do for ourselves that determines whether or not we will persevere, but rather what *God* does for us. He upholds us, gives us grace AND strength to face whatever He provides - storm or calm - in order that we might grow. If our child said to us that he couldn't go to school because a child was teasing him, would we pull our child out for the rest of the year? Would we demand that the principal place our child in a different class? No, we would direct our child in the ways of Scriptural responses, and he would learn a good lesson in "relational interaction." It is the same with us. Rather than hoping for, or seeking ways to RID ourselves of this terrible "thing" (situation, family member, or friend), we should beg the Lord NOT to take away the situation until it has done its complete, disciplinary or sanctifying work in us. What the doctrine of perseverance of the saints teaches us is that **we are to expect a richer blessing from sustaining grace than from the removal of the affliction.** I pray that we all keep this doctrine close to our hearts.

**Sovereignty of God**

Finally, in this section of doctrine let's see afresh the *sovereignty of God*, its riches and comforts, and not allow anyone or any other false religion, no matter how flattering it is, lure us away from

our sovereign God.

Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter III

I. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own free will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass....

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 48; Q.A. 123

**Q. What does the second request mean?**

A. Rule us by Your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to You.

God is ruler. When we say that God is our King, one of the things we are saying is that He has and will ordain whatever comes to pass. (a) God chooses the best time for correction, affliction or suffering [Isaiah 30:18; I Peter 5:6]. (b) God chooses the surest and gentlest means of correction, affliction or suffering.

In other words, whatever happens is the best way to achieve God's desired result. Our Lord is King of kings, and He decrees ONLY what is best for us. We can either pitch a fit (as a child having a tantrum), escape the trial prematurely by claiming burn-out, or another good modern tactic is to blame someone else for the trial. As Christians, though, the scales have fallen from our eyes, and we are able to see that our King is a gracious, loving king, and we can bend our knees in thankfulness that He will give us the grace and strength to endure.

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 39; Q.A. 104

**Q. What is God's will for us in the fifth commandment?**

A. That I honor, love and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish me; and also that I be patient with their failings — **FOR THROUGH THEM GOD CHOOSES TO RULE US.**

Please know and see with your hearts that it is out of God's *love* for us that this life is filled with trials. Whether these trials come by way of situations - situations, mind you, ALL under God's supreme rulership - or by way of other peoples' persecuting us, it doesn't mat-

ter. It is all brought to us to deepen our loyalty to our King.

Listen to what Samuel Rutherford has to say:

I find it most true, that the greatest temptation out of hell is to live without temptations. If my waters should stand, they would rot. Faith is the better of the free air, and of the sharp winter storm in its face. GRACE WITHERS WITHOUT ADVERSITY. The devil is but God's master fencer, to teach us to handle our weapons.

If we were to tell God how to rule us, would we *really* tell Him to "let our waters stand"? Would we *really* say that we don't want adversity, that we would rather rot? Would we take the modern-day "out" and in the middle of the fencing game with the devil, lay our weapons down, stomp out and exclaim, "Burn-out"? Oh, I am not saying that we pray for and revel in adversity. However, is it possible to see the beauty in adversity, and to depend wholly on our sovereign Lord to do what *His* kingship deems best, all the while, being willing to be designed inwardly by the Creator of all? *"O let my trembling soul be still And wait Thy wise, Thy holy will! I cannot, Lord, Thy purpose see, Yet all is well since ruled by Thee."*

Before I continue, I want to make it very clear that I DO NOT MEAN TO DIMINISH IN ANY WAY ANY HARDSHIP OR TRIAL BY BEING CALLOUSED. I am only trying to show how we are being deceived by others in the *managing of our hardships*.

Now, with the self-esteem religion exposed in the light of Scripture and doctrine, we have the backdrop for understanding the *deceptiveness* of baggage, blame and burn-out.

## Baggage

The first catch word we hear is BAGGAGE. From it, we picture pieces of luggage filled with clothes and necessities. Now, what does that have to do with our lives? What I mean by BAGGAGE is that we tend to carry around, neatly tucked and packed away, those things from the past, or even the present that have not been so pleasant, or that have been trying. We sometimes "unpack" those things, calling to mind the hurt

they caused, the sadness, and the intense trial. By dwelling on the unpacked baggage, it incapacitates us in the carrying out of the work to which we are called.

That work is spelled out in Scripture. As ladies, we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are called to love our husbands and to be submissive to them. We are called to teach the younger women and to be taught by older women. We are called to be an example of the believers to our children, and to train them in the admonition of the Lord. Our whole lives are to be a life of service to our Redeemer and King.

Sin then enters onstage. There may have been in the recent or distant past abuse, over-bearingness, an unloving example; the list goes on. 1) This is a perfect time for us, as Christians to rely solely on the sustaining grace of God, realizing that His grace is sufficient and that our strength is made perfect in weakness. 2) This is an excellent time to place our faith in the providential care of our heavenly Father. 3) This is the time when we can delve into the ever-healing attributes of God. 4) This is the time to obey God in all things, and to be still and see what God will do.

How many times I have heard how terrible this "disfunctional" home was, and that "disfunctional" family was. How many excuses I've heard over the years of "why I can't be any better because my Mom...or my Dad...or I was raised with thus and thus..." Enough with the excuses already! Remember the catechism? Lord's Day 39; Q.A.104:

That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother and all those in authority over me; that I obey and submit to them, as is proper, when they correct and punish me; and also that I be patient with their failings —FOR THROUGH THEM GOD CHOOSES TO RULE US.

"Oh, but you don't know what I had to endure..."

But what does God's Word say - Honor - Love - Be loyal - Obey - Submit - BE PATIENT! That's it.

"But you don't understand..."

Is God in control? Are you angry with God? Have you sought God through it all?

"But..."

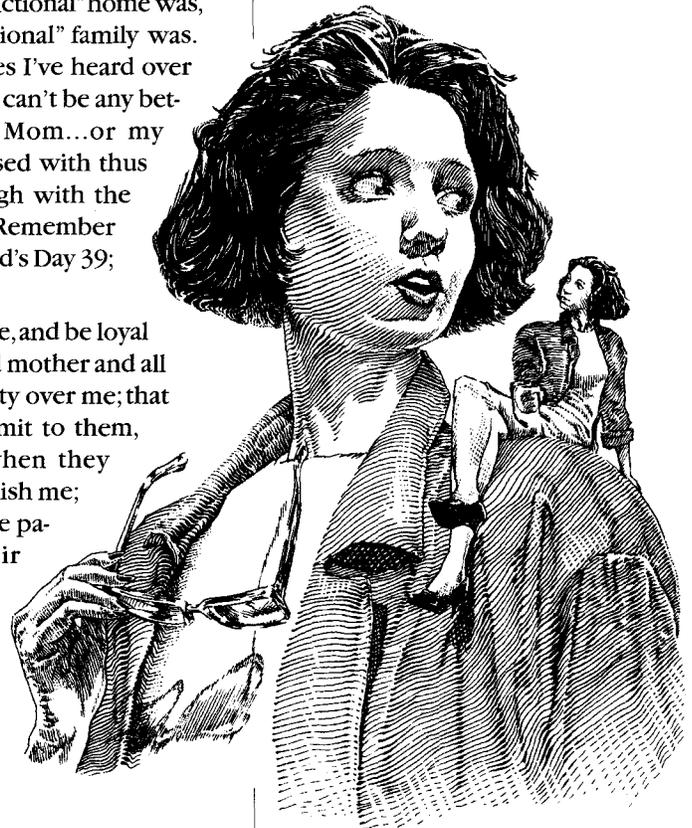
Have you found out if there is any sin in you? Have you done what God requires?

"You don't understand..."

Do you continually slander your family members for all the hurtful things that have been done to you? Are you allowing these hurtful things to incapacitate you, or is your faith being built up in and through these things which have happened?

"But my family was so disfunctional..."

(Get ready; this is going to be a difficult pill to swallow.) From Adam and Eve to the present day, there has not been one family that hasn't been, to some extent, some more than others, "disfunctional." The reason? SIN. We all



struggle with it, and we all commit it. God has planned to rule you through those He has placed in authority over you. Good or bad - God is still in control.

We are told today that it is only in having these unmet needs met that we will ever be able to be productive. *What a bold-faced lie.* It is only in our *wretchedness* and *helplessness* that we can see the One true Helper, the One true Redeemer. THAT is where our eyes need to be focused. Not on ourselves and our unmet needs, but on our Lord and Savior.

We do not need to have the baggage, unless it is a suitcase filled with testimony after testimony of God's grace in the middle of the storms of life. THAT is what we are to be unpacking. Fix your eyes on the grace of God, and your life will be much more productive in the BAGGAGE area.

*Not what I wish, but what I lack,  
Oh let Thy grace supply.  
The good, unasked, in mercy grant;  
The ill, though asked, deny."*

-William Cowper

## Blame

The next word, BLAME, we see happening all around us. It is a common, and in many cases, a quite acceptable response to life's trials. Blame someone else. It absolves us of our guilt, and relieves us of any shame. This plays so well into Satan's hand, as he does *not* want us to search our hearts to see if there is any evil way in us, repent of it, and follow Christ. What better way to devour families, marriages, friendships and the bride of Christ?

What I mean by blame is that I blame other people, circumstances, or situations beyond my control for my failures, my lack of carrying out my duty, or for my unhappiness or unfulfillment. In all of these examples, what is the singular constant? ME. I'm afraid the psychologists have blame all wrong. We do not have to find ways to live with so-and-so, nor do we have to find a way of controlling such and such situation. We have to deal with ME (sinful, self-centered, selfish ME)!

Why is there so much divorce in the church? "Oh, you know, he doesn't meet my needs anymore. I just fell out of love!"

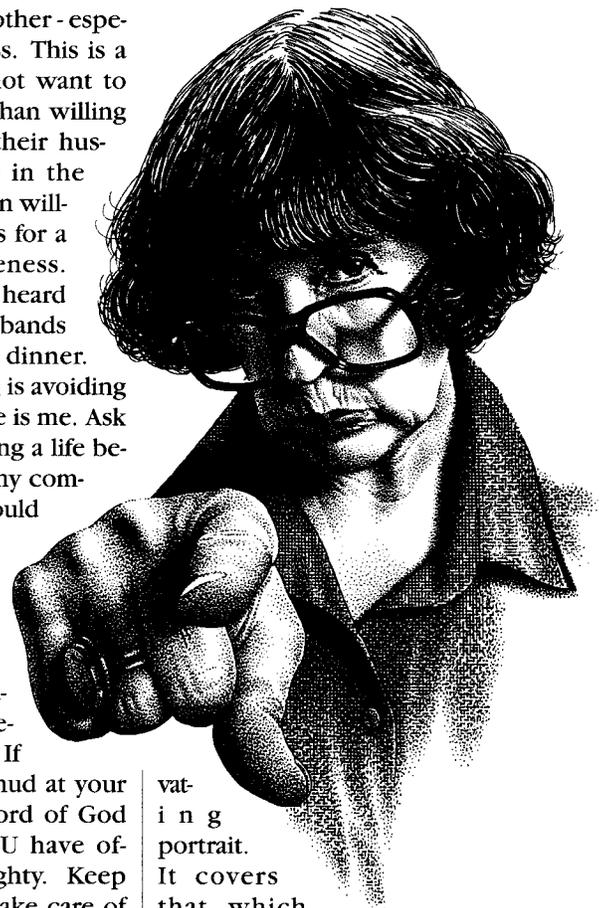
ME. We have been so caught up in ourselves, so caught up in pleasing our-

selves. It's easy to blame another - especially since no one is sinless. This is a subject many women do not want to discuss. Women are more than willing to discuss the failures of their husbands as spiritual leaders in the home. Women are more than willing to blame their husbands for a lack of love and attentiveness. Time and time again, I have heard women slaughter their husbands like a piece of meat over dinner. Now, we know that blaming is avoiding the real issue. That real issue is me. Ask these questions: 1) Am I living a life before the face of God? 2) Is my communion with God what it should be? 3) Am I the godly, submissive wife I know I should be? 4) Am I looking to God to meet my needs, or to my husband?

Why is there so much mudslinging in the homes? Because we are stuck on ME. If you find yourself slinging mud at your family, STOP. Open the Word of God and worry about how YOU have offended the holy God Almighty. Keep yourself in check; let God take care of the rest.

Yes, the people we love and care for ARE sinners. They are not perfect, sometimes FAR from perfect, but God WILL have His way. Rather than blaming others for your lack of spirituality, or for your inability to serve, MAKE USE of the trials which God brings your way. Grow in the knowledge of our Lord. Bask in the wonders of His attributes. Keep a journal of His grace to you day by day. Bend the knee to God in prayer: in confession and supplication. If there is a problem, submit to, help and honor your husband, honor your parents, love your enemy, esteem your fellow Christian better than yourself. Don't blame.

Blaming others only KEEPS us from a deeper knowledge of God's grace and mighty acts in our lives. It obstructs our view of ourselves before God and our view of His glorious attributes. It is as if God has painted a beautiful picture of our lives. There are some dark shades portraying the sin which needs to be confessed. There are some lighter shades depicting the light of God's grace, but all in all the painting is a masterpiece and intriguing to view. Every time we blame another person, it is as if we stroke at random a black blotch on the capti-



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portrait.  
It covers  
that which  
will enable us to

enjoy the painting all the more. Soon we will see little, or none of our sin. We will see little or none of God's glory. We only see that our lives are a black blotch, and that it is someone else's fault.

It is time to take our *doctrine* seriously. Know full well that it is because our God provides for us that "we can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well." It is time that we take our *Bibles* seriously and DO what it says to do, as it says in Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart." Notice it does *not* say that it is our job to humble someone else for their sin, but rather to humble ourselves before God. It is past time that we take our *relationship with our Lord* seriously. Christianity is not merely a convenience. Do we work on our offenses before God rather than worry about another's offenses against us?

Let's take the turpentine out and erase the black blotches that make us "feel better" about ourselves by covering our sin. Eradicate the blemishes which obscure the glory of our Heavenly Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Eliminate all blame of anyone or anything else in your life which

will cloak the true peace and comfort you can have.

## Burn-Out

Finally, let's look at BURN-OUT. The saying used to be for the Christian, "I'd rather burn-out for Christ than rust out." What a change of attitude we have had! Our thoughts once again have all been twisted and turned, as if we were being spun around blind-folded for a pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game. We now are taught to focus on OUR needs, OUR wants, OUR desires, rather than God's wants, God's desires, and the ways in which *He* wills to use us.

This is NOT to say that there are not periods of time when we are worn out and physically need rest. Christ, Himself, needed to leave the crowd and rest. If we look at Elijah's life in I Kings 19, we see that he needed rest and nourishment following God's Mount Carmel miracle. He was so burned-out that he wanted to die! Look what God does. He allows him repose under a broom tree. He provides sustenance, and more rest. Then Elijah makes clear his complaint and God makes very apparent to Elijah His inexhaustible power. Elijah still is not impressed and grumbles the same lament. What is God's cure for Elijah's burn-out? Put him to work. Serve. Do God's will. Obey. Yes, there are times when the body needs a rest from the stresses of those things to which God has called us, but we are not to terminate our service for Christ.

I have heard different descriptions of burn-out. When some describe it, the word "discontent" comes to my mind as an expression which could replace the word burn-out. Example:

*"I'm burned-out in this marriage.  
I've given all I can. I can't give any  
more."*

In other words, this person has abandoned all trust in a sovereign, providential, all-powerful God to do His perfect will in and through this marriage. Discontentment has taken root and choked all hope and trust in the Lord. That discontentment lies ultimately with the Lord *where* He has placed you, or *with whom* He has placed you, or in the *situation* He has placed you. You do not agree with the Lord, and you lay the blame on Him.

Now you are "burned-out," and because of your strangling discontentment with the Lord, you are like a withered

rose-bush, with little nourishment coursing through your shriveled veins. And each ray of sun, or blessing from our Lord which does reach you, scorches what little moisture is left. Yes, I suppose that would be a picture of "burn-out." BUT, my dear friends, the *only* answer in this case is to humbly deal with the *cause* of the withering, which is not the sun drying you out, or the lack of moisture.

In other words, it is NOT the daily blessings or trials of the Lord which He showers on you that is the cause of this withering. These blessings or trials are put into your life IN ORDER to cause you to seek His face in repentance and in gratefulness. So many a woman's answer to burn-out is, "Leave! Head for the hills! Take root in the shade! This trial is too steep. This sun is too hot!" No. Rather, take refuge in the ONLY ONE, your heavenly Father. "Seek Me and live." God promises to sustain you. Lean on Him.

Nor does the problem originate in that the Lord has not supplied enough water for you. Remember, He knows what your needs are and those needs will be met in Him. The problem is discontent and pride. You know better. You have a better idea HOW this marriage should be. SIN is at the root and it needs to be dug up in the light of God's Word, and destroyed by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

If you are a wife and a mother, and you find yourself in a period in which the undertoe is powerful, and you are struggling to keep your head above water, remember the well-loved hymn:

*Jesus, Savior, pilot me  
Over life's tempestuous sea;  
Unknown waves before me roll,  
Hiding rocks and treacherous shoal;  
Chart and compass come from Thee  
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.*

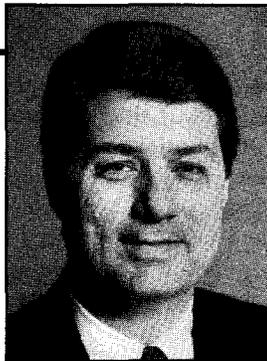
## Summary

In all, Satan would deceive us. Through this self-esteem, needs-oriented religion, he would

have us take our eyes off the sustaining grace of God to discourage us. He wants to conceal from us the truth of our sin and the truth of our God's attributes to deceive us. He wants to divert us *from* the path of fervent service to which God has called us, *to* the path of self-seeking destruction in order to hinder the work of the Lord. My plea to you is to understand the *destructiveness of the root cause of baggage, blame and burn-out*, and to keep a sharp eye out for the pitfalls which so easily tempt us. Remember the words of Paul in I Corinthians. Because of Christ, we will never be distressed, in despair, forsaken, or destroyed. God promises. Take comfort in your God who brings about all things for our good.

*Mrs. Arrick is the wife of Rev. Steve Arrick, pastor of Cornerstone Church in Hudsonville, MI. She is a graduate of Clearwater Christian College, Clearwater FL and homeschools her six children.*





## A Study of Worship

W. Robert Godfrey

The 1997 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted a new study on worship. This study, the product of a committee appointed by Synod 1994, sought to update and supplement the last CRC study on worship completed in 1968.

The study is about 50 pages long. It reflects wide reading on the current state of American culture and on contemporary worship. It is thoughtful and stimulating at several points, and is well worth reading. It seeks to be moderate, encouraging peace in the "worship wars" and seeking to avoid both the extreme of contemporary seeker services and the extreme of inflexible traditionalism. It contains a number of helpful, pastoral insights - likely to be ignored by both innovators and traditionalists.

The troubling dimension of the study is summarized in one of its principles of worship for the churches: "'Reformed' worship is not a unique form of Christian worship..." (*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 144). The study does not mean by this statement simply that Reformed worship shares a number of elements and attitudes with other forms of Christian worship. Rather it means that there is no distinctively Reformed vision, theology or practice of worship.

The study's failure to perceive a Reformed approach to worship rests on its

failure to think in a Reformed theological way. It affirms that "there should be integrity between what the church believes and how it worships" (p. 96). But it never specifically looks at the Bible as interpreted by the Reformed confessions



to inform its view of worship. For example, the study never refers to the Second Commandment or the *Heidelberg Catechism's* exposition of that commandment, even though that commandment has always been central to Reformed thought on worship.

gives "the raw material for making certain theological claims regarding worship" (p. 96). The Bible is no more specific for Christian worship than for any other form of Christian activity: "All conduct, including our communal acts of worship, is to be regulated by the principles of the Word of God" (p. 106). Such general statements may initially appear to be good, but their application in the report shows how dangerous they are.

The clearest example of such misapplication of general statements is the study's appeal to God's love of variety and creativity (pp. 116, 117, 118). God certainly does love variety and creativity and the Bible makes that clear. But does that love prove that God wants artists to

use their creativity to help produce worship that is "visual and sensory" (p. 121)? The study praises advent wreaths and banners; it also praises sculpture and "little wooden characters who represent all the characters of the Christmas story" (p. 121). Are we to use sculptured figures of Jesus in our worship? Is such a practice in harmony with the Bible and

the *Catechism*? Such a question never even seems to occur to the authors of the study.

This study of worship

seems to assume the basic legitimacy of almost everything that goes on in Christian Reformed churches today. The study offers no careful Biblical or theological analysis of CRC thinking or prac-

*"The study fails because it assumed what it concluded: that there is no such thing as Reformed worship. Certainly no Reformed worship can be defined after the distinctive dimensions of Reformed worship are ignored and eliminated."*

The study looks to the Bible only for quite general principles to guide worship: the Bible is the "church's basic orientation and authority in worship," and

tice. Even though new worship practices have arisen since 1968 - e.g., sculpture, dance, drama - these practices are given no careful, thorough examination. The study simply assumes their propriety.

In fact the study can conclude that there is no distinctive Reformed worship because it accepts and approves the steady erosion of Reformed worship that has been going on in the CRC for years. Reformed worship historically was characterized by a Word-centered simplicity, but the study praises the diversity and creativity of dance and drama and praise bands. Reformed worship historically used only the divinely instituted sacraments as visual aids for worship, but the study encourages the multiplication of visual aids including statues of Jesus. Reformed worship historically eliminated or severely restricted the church year to focus on the Lord's Day and the *Catechism*, but the study encourages the unbiblical elaboration of days such as advent and lent to heighten the drama of Christian worship. Reformed worship historically focused its praise on Psalm-singing, but the study while praising Psalm-singing does not effectively discourage the proliferation of shallow and banal praise songs. Reformed worship historically placed leadership of worship in the hands of men called by God, educated, and ordained for that work, but the study encourages movement away from ministerial leadership to broader congregational participation.

The study fails because it assumed what it concluded: that there is no such thing as Reformed worship. Certainly no Reformed worship can be defined after the distinctive dimensions of Reformed worship are ignored and eliminated.

In the last few years I have given a significant amount of time to studying and reflecting on aspects of historic Reformed worship. I have become more and more convinced that Reformed worship is Biblical and is what is needed in our individualistic, image-driven culture. We need worship that is simple, spiritual, focused on God through His Word and sacraments. As we depart from such worship, we move toward self-indulgence and an obsession with entertainment - some of the besetting sins of our time.

In the past few years I have also given a significant amount of time to studying developments in the CRC. I have concluded that the CRC has set itself on a course to dismantle and abandon its Reformed confessional heritage. This report on worship and its rapid and easy adoption by the CRC synod is the clearest testimony that we have to demonstrate that point. In approving the use of images of Jesus in worship, for example, the study violates the strong language of *Heidelberg Catechism*, questions 96, 97 and 98. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves of that confessional commitment that all officers of the CRC are sworn to uphold:

**96. What is God's will for us in the second commandment?**

That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word.

**97. May we then not make any image at all?**

God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way.

Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

**98. But may not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned?**

No, we shouldn't try to be wiser than God. He wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his Word—not by idols that cannot even talk.

Worship is certainly a "hot topic" in our time. We must not be satisfied with either incessant innovation or unthinking traditionalism. We must continue to study and learn about worship drawing on the wisdom of the confessions and of our forebears as we look into the Bible today. We must not abandon Reformed worship as the CRC has done. We must remember that theology and worship are inseparably linked. Where there is no Reformed worship there can be no Reformed theology.

*Dr. Godfrey, a contributing editor of The Outlook, is president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California and professor of Church History.*

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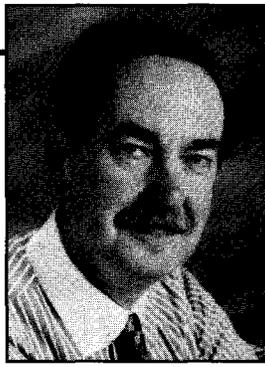
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## Adultery: The Next Moral Domino to Fall

Cal Thomas

Following the “normalization” of premarital sex, divorce and homosexuality, I have been wondering when and which of the few remaining dominoes dealing with personal morals would fall. It appears the next to go will be adultery.

Several press reports indicate the adultery domino is already teetering. The Air Force brought several charges, including adultery, against Lt. Kelly Flinn, the first female B-52 bomber pilot. Flinn admits to an affair with a married man.

*The New York*

*Times* characterized it as “violations of the heart.” Wrong organ. CBS’s Morley Safer rolled his eyes during a “60 Minutes” interview with Flinn, communicating his view that the idea of punishing adulterous behavior is a leftover relic from the era of witch trials in Salem.

Another press report tells of Army men visiting a brothel in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. A 33-year-old married soldier, who paid \$40 for five minutes of sex with a prostitute, explains, “Everyone is human, it’s going to happen,” as if “humanity” and its lower inclinations are the new standard. Would his wife agree? Would he feel the same about humanity if she was the cheating spouse?

Then there is the story of broadcaster Frank Gifford, who was caught on videotape by a supermarket tabloid, embracing a woman who is not Kathie Lee Gifford. Initial reaction was about entrapment and “press ethics,” not the damage adultery causes to the wife and kids.

Rushing to keep pace with the cultural decline are at least 40 member churches

of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which last week signed a “covenant of dissent” signaling their noncooperation with the denomination’s “fidelity and chastity” law. That law, soon to be adopted, requires church leaders not to engage in sex outside of a male-female marriage bond. If some churches start going wobbly on a central Biblical teaching, what are the rest of us to think?

Psychiatrist and family therapist Frank

lier manner? Today, adultery is largely regarded as less offensive than a politician’s broken promise. The breaking of a business contract is more universally condemned than the violation of a marriage contract. Yet, the consequences to a society which lowers its standards for such things is broken homes, broken children and, ultimately, broken society.

Infidelity is primarily about lying. That

is why it is incorrect to assert that a politician, or anyone else, can be one person in his

*“...punishing adulterous behavior is a leftover relic from the era of witch trials in Salem.”*

Pittman has written about adultery, calling it the “primary disrupter of families, the most dreaded and devastating experience in marriage. It is the most universally accepted justification for divorce. It is even a legally accepted justification for murder in some states and many societies.”

Indeed, the author of the Mosaic code deduced from the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery that people who committed it were to be stoned. Jesus said of the woman allegedly taken in adultery (which looked like a setup to entrap Him) that she should “go and sin no more.”

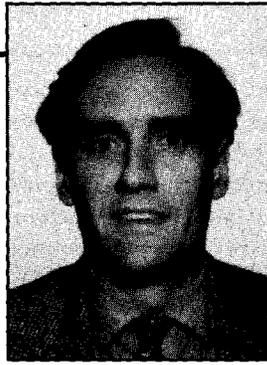
Adultery is about breaking an agreement – to forsake all others until death parts the agreeers. That some high-profile people, such as Donald Trump, Lt. Flinn and, apparently, Frank Gifford, engage in adultery does not repeal the law given for our individual and corporate benefit.

Why do we treat perhaps this most sacred of human contracts in such a cava-

or her “public life” and another person in private. If one lies about a marital promise, on what basis do we judge his standard for truth-telling elsewhere? Some politicians who promote themselves as favoring “women’s rights” see no inconsistency in violating their marriage contract through extramarital affairs, divorce or “annulments.” What about the tights of the woman who has been victimized by her predator husband, whose first responsibility is to preserve and protect his family?

Most states continue to treat adultery as a misdemeanor and everywhere it is grounds for divorce. But seeing the dominoes that have already fallen and the deaf ear we have turned to the seventh commandment (and all the others), give it time. It won’t be long before adultery is taught in our public schools as “normal,” “human,” even beneficial.

*Los Angeles Times Syndicate*



## J. Gresham Machen and the Purpose of Reformed Theological Education

Daryl Hart

In 1929 J. Gresham Machen wrote to his mother, "I hate this whole ecclesiastical business, for my part, with all my soul." The reason for his discouragement was Machen's imminent departure from Princeton, New Jersey, to nearby Philadelphia. And the reason for his sudden change of address was the founding of a new school of theological education, Westminster Seminary. If Machen had been on his own, he also wrote in the same letter, he would have kept out of the Presbyterian Church's controversy, "write conservative books and enjoy the plaudits, perhaps, of liberals and conservatives both." But Machen was haunted by the fear of being disloyal to Christ. "In my inmost soul," he confessed, "I should know that I had been unfaithful." According to Machen's understanding of Christianity, believers could not avoid contending for the faith "just because there are dangers to our souls in that contention."

When Machen left Princeton to start a new Reformed seminary he suffered a great personal loss. Princeton Seminary had been the place where he had resolved his own doubts about and deepened his understanding of the Christian faith so that he not only embraced fully the teachings of the *Westminster Standards* but also became one of the great defenders of historic Christianity in the United States. As the oldest Presbyterian theological institution - it was founded in 1812 - Princeton also possessed the resources, both financial and academic, to sponsor scholarship of a high caliber, the kind for which Machen was known. He also enjoyed the friendship of a number of his colleagues on Princeton's faculty, men with whom he had studied and who continued to provide intellectual and theological suste-

nance. To leave a place that he had called home for twenty-three years and to start all over again at the age of forty-nine was undoubtedly a great sacrifice.

But the conflict with liberalism would not allow Machen to sit on the sidelines. Most importantly, he believed that the situation demanded faithfulness. The Northern Presbyterian Church had compromised its witness precisely because other individuals, both officers and church members, had failed to object to the liberal drift of the denomination, preferring instead the comfort of inactivity. Machen also recognized the practical importance of having an institutional voice for conservatives within the church. To be sure, individuals were called to oppose error in all the assemblies of the church, no matter how much they might find themselves in the minority. But a seminary or periodical could speak to the whole denomination in a way that most individuals could not while also creating a network of camaraderie. A seminary was particularly important for training the next generation of ministers who would be courageous in their stand for the gospel. Consequently, the conflict with liberalism eventually drove Machen out of his comfortable surroundings in rural Princeton to a new seminary in downtown Philadelphia that he hoped would be dedicated both to the truth of the Reformed faith and to opposing liberalism within the church.

### The Danger of Denominational Seminaries

The history of Princeton Seminary proves the point that denominational agencies face the perennial problem of meddling church bureaucrats. Founded

in 1812 as the Presbyterian Church's first institution of theological training, Princeton remained throughout the nineteenth century the West Point of Calvinist orthodoxy among the United States's largest seminaries. Even into the 1920s, despite the presence on the faculty of moderate evangelicals, the seminary maintained a militantly Reformed outlook. But as an agency created by the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church, Princeton was also subject to the good will of the denomination at large. As such, the school could easily become a political football, tossed back and forth between shifting majorities of commissioners attending any one General Assembly. This was precisely what happened from 1925 until 1929 when the opposition Princeton faculty displayed toward liberalism - most visibly in Machen's incisive critiques - became a problem that denominational officials, concerned about the positive work and image of the church, needed to address.

At the 1926 General Assembly Machen experienced first hand the way that church politics can affect the life of a denominational seminary. He had been nominated to be promoted to the chair of apologetics at Princeton when William Brenton Greene, Jr., longtime member of the seminary's faculty, retired. In some ways Machen was an odd choice since his expertise was in the language and literature of the New Testament, a subject he loved to teach. But in other respects Machen was a natural selection by Princeton's board of directors. His first book, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) was a masterful and forthright defense of the historical truthfulness and supernaturalism of the New Testament. What is more, his critique of liberalism

in *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) was also an apology for the historic faith. And his sequel, *What is Faith?* (1925), attacked the liberal Protestant strategy of defending Christianity by separating the claims of faith from the findings of science. In other words, Machen was well-equipped to teach apologetics.

In the entire history of Princeton Seminary a nomination for a faculty post by the board of directors had never been denied. But a different outcome awaited Machen. The committee of the General Assembly assigned to oversee Presbyterian theological education heard reports from Machen's moderate evangelical colleagues on the faculty who believed his criticism of liberalism was dangerous and extreme, and that he was temperamentally defi-

cient and narrow. It did not help matters either that Machen had voted (by voice) against a resolution

adopted by his presbytery in New Jersey in support of the United States' policy of prohibiting the sale and distribution of alcohol. His opponents made a great deal of Machen's attitude toward the Eighteenth Amendment, suggesting that a professor who did not recognize the evils of drunkenness was not fit to teach apologetics and the related field of ethics. (For the record, Machen opposed drunkenness but also opposed the Eighteenth Amendment as an effective or prudent way of stopping it. He was especially concerned about adding to the size and power of the federal government and preferred that the regulation of alcohol be left to the individual states.)

To add insult to injury, not only did the 1926 General Assembly fail to ratify Machen's nomination for promotion to the chair of apologetics, but it also appointed a committee to investigate the affairs of Princeton Seminary. Some of the commissioners were not keen on witnessing antagonism develop between faculty on the denomination's premier seminary. So a committee conducted a series of interviews in 1926 and 1927 to determine the cause of controversy at

Princeton. The outcome was a report that blamed conservatives, especially Machen, for not trusting their colleagues – even though these colleagues openly promoted policies that Machen thought were destructive to the witness of the church. The report also recommended reorganization of the seminary's administration. It consolidated the two governing boards (one theological and one financial) into one board, with the conservatives on the old board of directors (theological affairs) going from a majority to a clear minority on the new board. In effect, the denominational hierarchy had silenced the only surviving voice of Calvinist theology within the Northern Presbyterian Church. After two years of protests, the General Assembly of 1929

*"In effect, the denominational hierarchy had silenced the only surviving voice of Calvinist theology within the Northern Presbyterian Church."*

finally approved the reorganization of Princeton Seminary.

That decision was the impetus for Machen's choice to found a new seminary, one like Princeton that was thoroughly Reformed in its instruction but also would not shrink from controversy. At the opening of Westminster in the fall of 1929 he outlined the new seminary's presuppositions: "first, that the Christian religion as it is set forth in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church is true; . . . second, that the Christian religion welcomes and is capable of scholarly defense; and . . . third, that the Christian religion should be proclaimed without fear or favor, and *in clear opposition to whatever opposes it, whether within or without the church*, as the only way of salvation for lost mankind." This adversarial posture meant that Westminster would be an independent seminary, free of the designs of church executives who were more often concerned with the denomination's corporate image than with the ministry of Word and sacrament in local congregations.

## A Very Practical Theology

But the new seminary that Machen led in founding was more than simply a political statement in the context of the Presbyterian controversy. As he also made clear in his address at Westminster's opening, the seminary was dedicated to training ministers of the gospel. This task required hard academic work that started with knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and culminated in the study of systematic theology, "the very center of the Seminary's course."

This educational mission made Westminster an anomaly in the context of American theological education. It stood between liberalism and fundamen-

talism, combining the best of both. With fundamentalists, Machen opposed liberalism and knew it was corrupting seminary

education, thus the necessity of founding a new school. But this did not mean that seminary education was useless or that the graduates of fundamentalist Bible institutes and colleges were adequate for ordained ministry. With liberals, Machen held a high view of the minister as a man of learning and believed that theological training should be academically rigorous. But this did not mean that a good education, leadership in community affairs, or promoting certain social reforms were worthwhile criteria for evaluating a minister. Machen wanted Westminster to be a place that would train pastors who possessed a good education and so could command the respect of church members and neighbors. He also wanted graduates, however, to be prepared to stand up for the cause of Christ even if that stand appeared to violate accepted standards of good taste.

Consequently, Westminster, like most Reformed seminaries, had the reputation for being overly intellectual, for making Christianity more a matter of the head and not of the heart. Similarly, the new seminary was criticized for not providing a practical theological education that equipped students with the skill necessary to be a pastor. But in Machen's mind nothing could have been more practi-

cal than a course of instruction that prepared students to preach and interpret the Word of God from a Reformed perspective. He believed the task of the church in modern times was the same as it always had been, namely, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Equipping students who would be able and willing to care for the souls of God's elect through the preaching of the Word, administering the sacraments, and through discipline was the most relevant form of theological education. As he told Westminster's graduating class of 1931, "Amid all the noise and shouting and power and machinery" of modern society were "hungry hearts - hearts thirsting for the living water, hearts hungry for the bread that is bread indeed." Only "ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ" could satisfy this hunger.

Machen's conclusion to this address underscored dramatically the close connection between the new seminary's arduous course of study and the weighty task of the ministry.

Remember this, at least - the things in which the world is now interested are the things that are seen; but the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal. You, as ministers of Christ, are called to deal with the unseen things. You are stewards of the mysteries of God. You alone can lead men, by the proclamation of God's Word, out of the crash and jazz and noise and rattle and smoke of this weary age into the green pastures and beside the still waters; you, alone, as ministers of reconciliation, can give what the world with all its boasting and pride can never give - the infinite sweetness of the communion of the redeemed soul with the living God.

This was the reason for Westminster's demanding education. It was not because Americans valued good education. Rather, it was because of the tremendous responsibility that ministers of the Word possessed, a responsibility that involved faithfulness not just in the study and pulpit, but also in the courts and assemblies of the church.

**D. G. Hart** is an elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the author of *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (1995).

## Christians must fight to preserve culture

Gary Cox

"Ellen" is out and the "culture war" is now full blown. The homosexual community, Planned Parenthood, much of the media, most of the entertainment industry, a vast array of those wearing the judicial robe and the politicians of social engineering are all arrayed against the Neanderthal and societally retarded right-wing radical Christians and moralists who dare to think that absolutes still exist in the universe.

As a pastor friend of mine wrote in the *Charlotte Observer*, "Make no mistake about their intention. It is an aggressive cultural agenda supported by varied special interest groups, like the homosexual community, that is absolutely committed to the total reconstruction of our culture." However, they must first "de-construct" the present culture and to do this they must first destroy the Judeo-Christian framework of ethical absolutes (which impact one's conduct), which has been the superstructure of America for two centuries and the basis of Western Civilization.

*Ethical absolutes* mean that there are certain things that are right and certain things that are wrong, but we now decide those kind of issues with the latest opinion poll. The shots are heard daily in this battle for the soul of our nation. Congress begins every day with prayer and the Ten Commandments are etched into the Supreme Court's building, but a judge in Alabama is ordered to remove those same "ethical absolutes" from the wall of his courtroom and forbidden to ask for divine guidance as he dispenses justice. In movies and on TV the conservative absolutists are portrayed as hypocritical villains who deserve our contempt and scorn.

Make no mistake, de-struction (a better word might be demolition) of our culture is taking place right under our noses, and our children are paying a high price for it in self-destructive lifestyles. We now have more rebellion, more drug use, more unwanted pregnancies, more gangs, more violence, more suicide, far more school problems and less respect for any authority than we have ever seen in America.

The Christian community must speak out with grace and compassion but with boldness. We don't have to be ugly in our approach, but we must be clear. We must stop using terms like the euphemistic "gay" word, and start calling a homosexual lifestyle exactly what it is - sodomy and morally deviant, which needs to be repented of instead of affirmed. It may well be an "alternative lifestyle," but it's a terribly destructive one. Stop being silenced with the threat of homophobia (literally "the fear of man" which is a ridiculous term) and start sensing some "theophobia" (my word meaning "the fear of God") because when you break God's law then God's law will eventually break you.

Majority rule has no impact upon the God of creation. When the Lord came to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, Lot couldn't scarf up even 10 votes in favor of God's standard. The public opinion poll was a landslide for the alternative lifestyle crowd so God took His brimstone and went home - right? You know as well as I do that the judgment came anyway for "whatever a man sows that will he also reap."

The good news is that the ground is level at the cross. Jesus said, "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That's true for sodomites, adulterers, liars, cheats and black-hearted sinners like me.

Anything less and we just become a spectator as America burns in more ways than one.

**Rev. Gary Cox** is minister of Meadowview Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA).

# Eastern Orthodoxy: The What and How of Salvation

David Van Drunen

*Last month the author discussed the Eastern Orthodox lack of emphasis on the guilt imposed on the human race due to Adam's sin, and the consequent lack of emphasis on the atonement inherent in Christ's redemptive sacrifice.*

## The What and How of Salvation

We move on now to examine Orthodox theology in its description of what "salvation" means for individuals and of the means by which individuals come to possess it. It is important to note at the outset that though Orthodox theologians do often speak of the incarnation as itself uniting the whole human race with God, they do not believe that salvation is therefore automatically a possession of everyone. Rather, people must respond in a certain way if they are to enjoy the blessings of salvation which have been made available to them through the incarnation. As we proceed, we will find again that there is much interesting, Biblical teaching in Orthodox theology on these matters, but that *there is also important Biblical material that is down played or ignored.*

In what, then, do the blessings of salvation consist in Orthodox theology? There is one concept which is of far greater importance than any other: salvation consists of the process of "theosis" (alternatively called "deification" or "divinization"), the process of human beings becoming "gods." As Athanasius famously exclaimed, "For he [Christ] became man that we might become divine."<sup>14</sup> Such language is likely to strike Protestants as the height of blasphemy. Yet Orthodox theologians should not be written off as New Age gurus advocating absorption into the One or some other monistic religious concept. Orthodoxy does not mean by this that we somehow become equal with God or a part of God. It means, as 14th century Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas explained, that we participate in the "energies" of God, though not in His "essence." There is, in fact, Biblical warrant for the language Orthodoxy uses. 2 Pe-

ter 1:4 says: "[H]e has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (NIV). Orthodox theologians place great stress upon the intimate fellowship with God to which people have been called. To be fully human is to enjoy our God in the closest conceivable communion. The blessings of being a child of God consist of more than simply receiving good gifts from Him and loving Him in return - it means a relationship with God, union with God. This is seen most fully in the union of human nature with the divine in Jesus incarnation, and we are called to attain something akin to this. To the Eastern Orthodox, this is truly what "salvation" refers to.

The reader may wonder what becomes of the concepts of justification, sanctification, glorification, and the like, which Reformed theology speaks of so often. Such terms are often not used at all in Orthodox theology. When they are, they are not defined very precisely and they are usually all included together within the process of theosis, without sharp distinctions made between them.

Theosis is not something which is fully attained here, but neither is it something wholly future. Contemporary Orthodox theologian Christoforos Stavropoulos has described theosis as "a journey, a road," something achieved "step-by-step." He writes:

The theosis of man, his perfect union with God made possible by grace, will be realized completely in the future age after the resurrection of the dead. However, beginning in this life, this union which divinizes people can be made more and more real. Our corrupt and weakened nature ought to be transformed little by little and adapted to eternal life.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Orthodox people will often refer to salvation as something which has been achieved in the past, is being achieved in the present, and will be finalized in the future. How, then, are people to attain this salvation of theosis?

There is no one short definition like we find in the Reformed faith, "by grace through faith." Orthodox theologians do stress that salvation is by grace, and ultimately not of human works. "Faith alone," however, is not a phrase one is likely to meet in Orthodoxy. Instead, salvation is attained as Christians do the range of activities which God has commanded of them. This statement by Timothy Ware is illustrative:

If someone asks, "How can I become god?" the answer is very simple: go to church, receive the sacraments regularly, pray to God "in spirit and in truth," read the Gospels, follow the commandments. The last of these items - "follow the commandments" - must never be forgotten.<sup>16</sup>

Faith, though absent from this statement by Ware, is also mentioned often by Orthodox theologians, though it is almost always considered as just one virtue among others. As there is little distinction made between the various aspects of salvation, such as justification and sanctification, there is also little distinction made between the roles played by things such as faith, works, and the sacraments.

Before analyzing Orthodox thinking on these points, it may be helpful to briefly pause and observe how Orthodox doctrine fits together on the matters we have been discussing. Before the fall, Adam was created in the image of God and called to grow in communion with God. But because of his sin, the image of God in him was damaged, and he was made unable to progress as he was commanded. Death and Satan held great sway over him and his posterity. When Christ came and assumed flesh, the image of God in human nature was restored to what it was originally called to be. Christ challenged that which stood in the way of man, namely, Death and Satan, and triumphed over them. Now, with these enemies conquered and his nature renewed, man is able again to ascend to God and commune with Him in intimate fellowship. And so he now takes up the task at

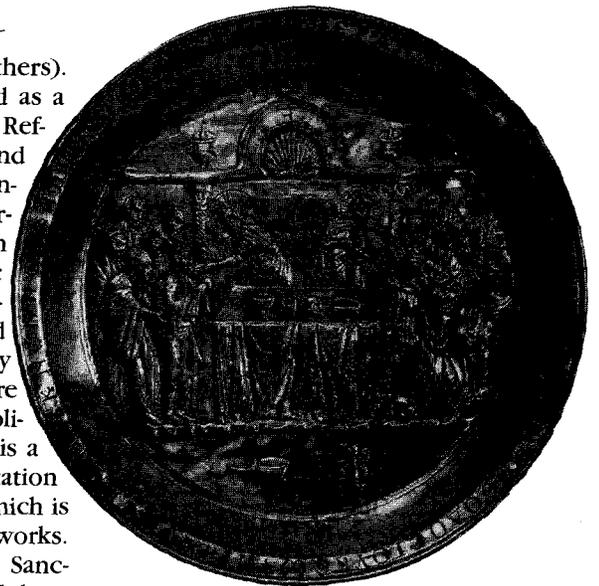
which Adam failed, and by sure and steady progress is "deified," until the fulness is realized in heaven itself. Notice the great measure of consistency here: The problems brought in by the fall were Death and Satan and estrangement of human nature from God; Jesus came to conquer these enemies and unite human nature to God once again; people now, with their enemies conquered and their nature reunited with God, are able to ascend to their calling of communion with the divine. One concept follows from the other. And because there is little concern about guilt in the fall, there is also little concern about Christ's taking away guilt and little concern about the specifics of how guilt is taken away in justification.

What are Reformed readers to make of this notion of salvation as theosis? It is certainly quite foreign to us in many ways. We are accustomed to thinking of the attainment of salvation as a series of rather distinct blessings, beginning with regeneration and continuing with justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification. Each term for us has quite a precise meaning, and it is bad theology to confuse one term with any other. But in Orthodox theology all these concepts are lumped together into one grand process, and precise distinctions between them are rarely made. There are certainly positive things which should be said for the Orthodox presentation. First, there is much Biblical warrant for the concepts employed. Not only does 2 Peter 1 refer to Christians partaking of the divine nature, but books such as the Gospel of John and many of the Pauline epistles are replete with references to our union with God or our life "in Christ." Second, it is almost surely true that union and communion with God is the greatest blessing that human beings can ever know. Our Lord Himself said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3)(NIV). The best of Reformed theology has not missed this. Indeed, the first question and answer of one of the great Reformed confessional statements, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, reads: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever."

There are, however, also points at which the Orthodox definition of salvation as theosis ought to be criticized. Orthodox thinkers are often quite proud of their aversion to making distinctions between the various aspects of salvation

(justification, sanctification and others). Yet, such a practice was viewed as a great danger by theologians of the Reformation. Men such as Luther and Calvin thought that such differentiation was critical to an understanding of Biblical soteriology. In their day, the Roman Catholic Church did not properly distinguish between justification and sanctification, and this led directly to their belief that good works were required for justification. The Biblical teaching is that justification is a judicial pardon of sin and imputation of the righteousness of Christ, which is attained only by faith, apart from works. It is a momentary decree of God. Sanctification, on the other hand, is a life-long process that follows justification and that very much involves good works.

Is it really important to make such distinctions? Absolutely! In Galatians 1:8 Paul wrote: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (NIV)! What was the problem Paul was here addressing? The churches in Galatia had perverted the doctrine of justification and confused the roles of faith and works. Far from being minor issues, *these matters were and are of the essence of the Gospel, as defined by no less an authority than the Apostle Paul!* Therefore, it is important for us, even as we acknowledge the many fine descriptions of salvation made by Orthodox theologians, that we call Orthodox people with whom we have contact to a new appreciation of these Biblical truths. We also should remember, however, that Eastern Orthodoxy has not *officially rejected* Protestant positions on issues of salvation, as the Roman Catholic Church has. Whereas the Roman church in the Council of Trent anathematized those believing that justification is by faith alone, the Eastern church has never officially defined its position on these matters. John Meyendorff made this interesting statement: "Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians."<sup>17</sup> Meyendorff apparently has no problem with the idea that there is a specific doctrine of justification in Paul's writings. He states only that Byzantine (that is, Orthodox) theology has not developed it. Therefore, we may perhaps hope that Orthodoxy will someday soon develop its theology in this area. It would not require a radical rejection of



**Foreshadowing Schism.** *On this sixth-century paten (used to hold Communion bread) from Constantinople, Christ gives the sacrament simultaneously to two groups of apostles. Though Christendom was still one at this point, Christians East and West were developing different traditions in worship and theology.*

their ecclesiastical creeds, as a similar move would for Roman Catholicism.

And there is precedent for sound thinking on subjects like justification among the Greek Fathers. John Chrysostom, for example, whom we met earlier, took justification very seriously. He clearly viewed it as a matter of a judicial decree rather than as a life-long process: he contrasted it with the condemnation that comes from sin and he used judicial analogies to illustrate the doctrine.<sup>18</sup> He also stated that justification was the purpose of Christ's death, consisting of a two-fold gift, forgiveness and righteousness. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of faith in the attainment of justification: justification comes "without needing works" and is by "faith only."<sup>19</sup> To be sure, John Chrysostom was not simply a crypto-Protestant born a millennium too soon, but his writings do suggest that there is much Reformational truth lying hidden in Eastern theology which is waiting to be developed. *(To be continued)*

## Footnotes

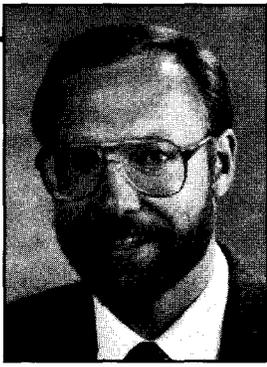
15 "Partakers of Divine Nature," in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 184, 188.

16 *The Orthodox Church*, 236.

17 *Byzantine Theology*, 160.

18 *Homilies*, 96, 153.

19 *Ibid.*, 115, 121, 149, 142-53, 308.



# What We Believe

## What About Revelation 20?: The Pre-millennialist Case (I)

Cornelis P. Venema

**N**o biblical treatment of the subject of the millennium can avoid directly addressing the teaching of Revelation 20:1-11, especially verses 1-6. This is the one passage in the Bible which explicitly speaks of the "millennium," using an expression which literally means a "thousand years" no less than six times.<sup>1</sup> George Eldon Ladd, an able proponent of the classical pre-millennialist view, has correctly noted that, though the Scriptures may not clearly teach a millennium in other passages, one passage that clearly teaches the millennial reign of Christ after His return at the end of the present age should be sufficient to establish the doctrine. Since he and other pre-millennialists are convinced that Revelation 20 is just such a clear passage of Scripture, my evaluation of pre-millennialism, whether of the historic or dispensational variety, would be incomplete and unconvincing without giving special attention to this passage of Scripture.

Thus far, our evaluation of the two pre-millennial views, historic and dispensational pre-millennialism, has been rather general. I have argued that the central tenet of all pre-millennialist views, that the return of Christ will come before or "pre-cede" the millennium, does not enjoy the support of the general teaching of Scripture. I have also evaluated more directly some of the features of dispensational pre-millennialism that are unscriptural. However, the key question that may be put to any millennial view remains to be answered: Does the view do justice to the teaching of Revelation 20? If I may borrow language from the arena of warfare, the primary "battle-ground" in the debates regarding the millennium is the vision of the apostle John recorded in Revelation 20.

Because of the importance of this passage to the debates regarding the millennium, and because there is a great deal of divergence of opinion regarding

its interpretation, my treatment of it will be divided into several parts.

In this introductory part of my treatment of this passage, I will only summarize the general understanding of this passage among pre-millennialists. Since this passage plays such a pivotal role in the case for pre-millennialism, it is important to begin with a clear statement of the case for this view so far as it is based upon this passage.

After this introduction and statement of the pre-millennialist case, I will take up in a subsequent article the question of the relation between Revelation 19 and 20. Since one of the aspects of the pre-millennialist case has to do with the relation between the visions of Revelation 19 and 20, this question is unavoidable. In this part of our study, I will give some of the reasons why the vision of Revelation 20 regarding the millennium should not be read as though it described events that will occur after the vision in Revelation 19:11-21 (which depicts the event of Christ's second coming and triumph over His enemies).

Only after dealing with these preliminary and introductory matters will I turn to the most important parts of our study of Revelation 20. The first of these will be a consideration of the opening section of the vision in Revelation 20, verses 1-3. This section describes the binding of Satan so as to prevent him from deceiving the nations for the period of the millennium. The second of these will be a consideration of the vision in Revelation 20, verses 4-6, which speaks of the saints who "came to life" and reign with Christ during the millennium. In this second section of the vision, reference is made to a "first resurrection" of the believing saints in distinction from an apparent "second resurrection" of the unbelieving at the end of the millennium. Because of the decisive role of this distinction between a "first" and presumably a "second" resurrection in the posi-

tion of pre-millennialism, this part of the vision will require special attention.

### THE PRE-MILLENNIALIST READING OF REVELATION 20

In order to introduce our consideration of Revelation 20, it is necessary to summarize the general pre-millennialist reading of this passage. Most pre-millennialists would maintain that Revelation 20 is the clearest, most comprehensive, and most direct passage in all of the Scriptures, when it comes to the subject of the millennium. In the view of historic and dispensational pre-millennialists, Revelation 20 constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to any non-premillennialist understanding of the millennium. Before examining this claim in the light of this passage, therefore, the main lines of the pre-millennial view needs to be set forth.

#### Revelation 20 describes events "after" the return of Christ

The starting point for the pre-millennialist understanding of Revelation 20 is the claim that the events depicted in the vision of Revelation 20 *follow in time* the events depicted in the vision of Revelation 19, especially verses 11-21. The sequence of visions in Revelation 19 and 20 should be, on this view, read as a *chronological sequence*. When read in this manner — the simplest and most straightforward reading according to the pre-millennialist — the visions in these chapters of Revelation describe a number of events in series. What the apostle John is, in effect, revealing in these chapters is on the order of a chronological tale of what will happen in the future. It is as though he were saying, "first this will occur ... then this ... then this."

The importance for pre-millennialism of this way of reading the relation between Revelation 19:11-21 and Revelation 20:1-11 becomes evident, when it is noted that most interpreters of the vision in Revelation 19:11-21 regard it to be a description of the *second coming of Christ*. Reading the vision in Revelation 19 as part of a "continuous narrative" of events in chronological sequence, means that the event of Christ's return *precedes* the events described in the vision of Revelation 20. Thus, the return of Christ, depicted at the close of Revelation 19, comes immediately before the events of Christ's binding of Satan and reign with His saints for a period of one thousand years. When read in this way, the pre-millennialist insistence that the return of Christ precedes the millennium seems indisputable.

Though I will return to this issue of the relation between Revelation 19 and 20 in my next article, it does seem true that the vision of Revelation 19:11-21 describes the second coming of Christ and His victory over all His enemies. There are several reasons for holding this view.

In the vision of Revelation 19:11-16, Christ is described as a Conqueror, as the divine Warrior who comes to vanquish all of His enemies. Christ is portrayed in these verses as riding upon a "white horse" and coming to judge and wage war in righteousness (v. 11). His name is called "The Word of God" (v. 13) and "on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of Kings, and Lord of Lords'" (v. 16). Furthermore, the weapon this glorious and conquering Christ uses to destroy and defeat the "nations" whom He rules with a rod of iron is a "sharp sword" protruding from His mouth (v. 15). The language used in these verses seems best suited as a description of the return of Christ at the end of the age, when He will destroy both His and His people's enemies (compare 2 Thess. 1:6-10). The weapon with which Christ will win this victory is not the weapon of the armies of this world, but the Word of God which is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12).

That this vision depicts the return of Christ is confirmed further by the references in Revelation 19 to the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:7-10) and the defeat of the "beast" and the "false prophet" (19:17-21). The "marriage supper of the Lamb" symbolizes the full and intimate communion between Christ, the Lamb, and His blood-bought bride,

the church, who will be united at His coming. The destruction of the beast and the false prophet represents the destruction of the "Antichrist" whose person and work were earlier described in Revelation 13 and 17. These events coincide with the return of Christ as the divine Warrior and symbolize His complete defeat of His enemies and establishment of His kingdom at His coming. Within the context of the visions of Revelation, it seems apparent that Revelation 19:11-21 constitutes a symbolic depiction of the second coming of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

If Revelation 19 is a description of the return of Christ, then it is apparent that much depends upon the relation between its vision and the vision of Revelation 20. On the pre-millennialist view that the vision of Revelation 20 *follows* the vision of Revelation 19, it seems quite natural to regard the sequence of events in the future as one in which the return of Christ will be followed by the millennium of Revelation 20. For this reason, I will return to this question in my next article in order to argue that there are good reasons to read these two visions as describing events that are *parallel* and not *successive* to each other.

#### The "binding" of Satan is complete

Within the context of this understanding of the relation between Revelation 19 and 20, pre-millennialists believe the description of the millennium in Revelation 20:1-6 clearly supports their position. In these verses, repeated reference is made to a period of "one thousand years" which commences with the "binding" of Satan. This period is a literal period during which Christ will reign with His saints upon the earth after His return at the end of the present age. Throughout this period, with the exception of Satan's "little season" of rebellion at its close, the nations will be subject to Christ's blessed reign and the fruits of His reign will be abundantly evident in the earth. The world will enjoy a period of unprecedented prosperity and peace under Christ's rule. The nations and peoples of the earth will be largely subject to Christ, and the rebellion and disobedience of the nations will be extinguished from the earth.<sup>3</sup>

In the opening verses of Revelation 20, the binding of Satan is described in this way:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and

Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

Pre-millennialists insist that this description means that, by contrast to his previous freedom to exercise influence and deceive the nations, the binding of Satan will not only *curtail* but *completely exclude* any active working of Satan among the peoples and nations of the earth. Christ and His people will enjoy, during the period of Satan's binding, an *unprecedented period* of relief from Satan's wiles and devices. Only at the close of the millennium will Satan be permitted a limited period of rebellion, during which he will once again gather the nations through his deception against Christ and the church.

According to the pre-millennialist, nothing less than this kind of literal millennium, during which Satan is completely bound and prevented from exercising any deceptive influence among the nations, could answer to the description of Revelation 20:1-3. Certainly, the a-millennialist view that the present age of the church coincides with this millennial period is unlikely, if not impossible. Satan enjoys at the present time far too much freedom and influence among the nations to permit this period of history to be identified with the millennial binding of Satan depicted in the vision of Revelation 20:1-3.<sup>4</sup>

#### The "first" and "second" resurrections

Perhaps the most vital part of the pre-millennialist argument from Revelation 20, however, is the reference to a "first resurrection" in this passage. Here pre-millennialists believe that they have a strong argument for their position on the millennium. In order to state their argument, I would like to begin by quoting verses 4-6 of this passage:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not

come to life until the thousand years were completed. *This is the first resurrection.* Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (emphasis mine).

For pre-millennialists, this description of the "coming to life" of believing saints who reign with Christ during the millennium is of decisive importance. Only believing saints are said to come to life in this way and thereby participate in the "first resurrection." By contrast, the "rest of the dead" remain in the grave and do not "come to life until the thousand years were completed." Unlike the saints who are not subject to the "second death," the unbelieving who do not enjoy this "first resurrection" will come to life only to be cast forever into the "lake of fire" with the beast and the false prophet (vv. 13-15). Since a close parallel is drawn between those who "come to life" in the "first resurrection," and those who "come to life" in the "second resurrection," the most obvious and plain reading of the text would be the one which takes both resurrections to be bodily resurrections, the one of believing saints *before* the millennium, the other of the unbelieving *after* the millennium. This is precisely the view of pre-millennialism.

The classic statement of the pre-millennialist argument at this point, and one that is almost invariably quoted in the literature, remains that of Henry Alford:

If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *psychai ezesan* [souls came to life] at the first, and the rest of the *nekroi ezesan* [dead came to life] only at the end of a specified period after the first,— if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave;— then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.<sup>5</sup>

As this statement of Alford shows, the pre-millennialist takes the language of this passage to support the teaching of two resurrections, both bodily in nature, though distinguished as to their timing (the first precedes, the second follows, the millennium) and benefit (the first grants millennial blessings and an immu-

nity from the second death, the second is unto judgment and death).

## Conclusion

When these various pieces of the pre-millennialist case are put together, a fairly clear picture emerges of its understanding of the vision of Revelation 20:1-6. After Christ returns and subdues the nations under His feet, Satan will be bound and the millennium will commence. The millennium will be a one thousand year period of unprecedented blessedness and well-being upon the earth. The nations and peoples of the earth will be united in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Coinciding with the binding of Satan, believing saints will be raised bodily and granted the privilege of reigning with Christ upon the earth for one thousand years. At the conclusion of the millennium and the little season of Satan's rebellion at its close, a second resurrection of the unbelieving will occur. The unbelieving will be raised to be judged by Christ and consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

Though the pre-millennialist understanding of Revelation 20 may seem to have a kind of initial plausibility, it will be the burden of my argument in subsequent articles on this passage to show that there is another, more biblically consistent, understanding of this passage. The first step in my argument will be a consideration of the relation between the visions of Revelation 19 and 20. Though pre-millennialists insist that these visions depict events that are in chronological sequence, *I will maintain in my next article that there are good reasons to read them as parallel descriptions of the same time period.* In subsequent articles, I will, God willing, also consider the two most important sections of the vision of Revelation 20, verses 1-3 and verses 4-6.

When this vision is read comparing Scripture with Scripture, I believe it will become apparent that there is a more biblically consistent and compelling understanding of the millennium than that proposed by pre-millennialists. This understanding is one which regards the binding of Satan to be a present reality, spanning the period from Christ's first to His second coming, during which the gospel of the kingdom is being preached to the ends of the earth. It is also an understanding which regards the first resurrection, not as a bodily resurrection of believing saints prior to the millennium, but as the spiritual resurrection of believers in union

with Christ who enjoy thereby victory over the "second death" and the benefit of reigning with Christ.

## Footnotes

- 1 Our English term, "millennium," is actually the Latin equivalent for the Greek expression used in Revelation 20, a compound word formed from the words for "one thousand" (*mille*) and "year" (*annus*) in Latin.
- 2 George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism" (in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. by Robert G. Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1977], p. 34, adds the consideration that were this vision not a reference to the second coming of Christ, the book of Revelation would contain no clear reference to this great event at the end of the age. It should also be noted here that many post-millennialists regard the vision of Revelation 19 to be a description of that *point in history* (realized suddenly or gradually over time) when Christ's kingdom will come to ascendancy in the earth, but not a description of Christ's physical return at the end of the age. These post-millennialist interpreters, therefore, agree that Revelation 19 and 20 should be read as chronologically successive, though they regard the "coming" of Christ in Revelation 19 to be something other than His second coming. See, for example: John Jefferson Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom: Postmillennialism Reconsidered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), pp. 92-93.
- 3 There are, of course, differences between a historic and a dispensational pre-millennialist understanding of this millennium, particularly in terms of its importance for God's peculiar purposes for Israel. Though most pre-millennialists believe in a future conversion of many of the children of Israel prior to the millennium, only dispensationalists insist that this represents *the resumption of God's distinctive program for His earthly people, Israel.*
- 4 It is ironic that many post-millennialists echo this criticism of a-millennialism. Many post-millennialists argue that the millennium of Revelation 20 is the "golden age" that will conclude the present period of history before Christ's return. Only an "unprecedented period" of Christ's kingly rule, to use a phrase of John Jefferson Davis, can answer to the language of Revelation 20 when it describes the binding of Satan. The alleged "pessimism" and minimal expectation for Christ's rule in the present age so often characteristic of a-millennialism can not, in the view of these post-millennialists, be found compatible with the millennium of Revelation 20. See: John Jefferson Davis, *Christ's Victorious Kingdom*, pp. 93-95.
- 5 *The Greek Testament* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), IV, p. 732. Alford does overstate the matter a bit when he says this passage mentions two resurrections. It should be noted that the passage explicitly speaks only of a "first resurrection," not of a "second resurrection." Though the idea of a second resurrection is certainly implied, a strict reading of the passage requires noting that what distinguishes the beneficiaries of the first resurrection or coming to life is that they are not subject to the "second death." Those who "come to life: at the end of the millennium are subject to the second death. Whether their coming to life is a "second resurrection" is not explicitly affirmed in the text.

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# The Shepherd's Staff

## The Ministry of Mercy, part 2:

THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE - A CATECHISM

John R. Sittema

**I**n the last article, I suggested a list of 8 propositions summarizing what Scripture said about the ministry of mercy. It was (and is) my hope that these propositions would find their way to a Deacon's Meeting table, and prompt careful Scriptural study and policy review and revision.

In this one, I wish to explore the whole matter of ministering mercy in an age of food stamps, a redesigned but still functioning welfare system and community Food Pantries. Let's tackle it in the form of a CATECHISM, a series of questions and answers.

**Question:** Do we even need deacons today? Isn't a church-based ministry of mercy unnecessary? Doesn't the existence of such federal and state government resources as described in the previous paragraph render obsolete the old-fashioned practice of diaconal "benevolence" (or, as the Bible calls it, "alms for the poor")? As one fellow once asked, "Why would I go to deacons and expose my financial crisis when I can go the government without embarrassment?"

**Answer:** Never forget that, in Scripture, the goal is never met merely by meeting physical needs, much less meeting those physical needs without embarrassment! Rather, the goal is to witness to the world the love of God, the grace that has been shown to you in Christ and is now shown through you to others. Deuteronomy 15:10-11 makes clear

that one of the reasons the "poor will always be with you" is so that the church might always have an opportunity to show what her faith is made of! To be sure, the church *COULD* refer all cases of poverty to government agencies. In fact, in many places she has become a "broker" of the various agencies, helping people use "the system" to its fullest extent and thus diverting all who come to her door, away from that door to other

this world!

**Question:** So you're saying the church ought to forbid people to accept government assistance of any kind?

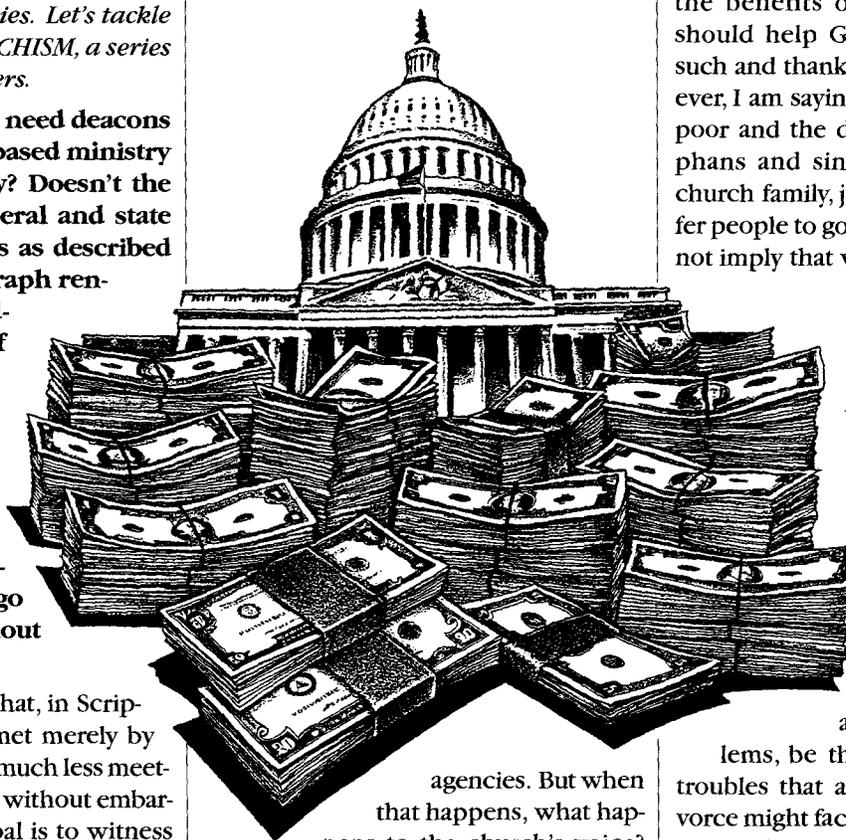
**Answer:** No, I'm not saying that. In fact, as citizens of the land who have paid taxes to our government to fund such programs as Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, or (in Canada) a comprehensive health care system we receive from God's hand when we properly use the benefits of such programs. We should help God's people recognize such and thank Him for His gifts! However, I am saying that in the care of the poor and the defenseless (widows, orphans and single moms) within the church family, just because we *CAN* refer people to government agencies does not imply that we *SHOULD*, at least not as the first course of action.

**Question:** Huh?

**Answer:** God's people (and those who represent God among them, i.e. the deacons) are not only to spring to action "when all else fails." They should be the *first* line of defense for the people of God. They should

anticipate financial problems,

be there at the first sign of troubles that a righteous victim of divorce might face, even going out of their way with generosity of time and money to help people avoid going on the public dole. They ought to do this *NOT* because the government is inherently evil and because "our local church can solve



agencies. But when that happens, what happens to the church's voice? Where is the church's witness? We would, in effect, be saying to the world that salvation is to be found, not in the kingdom of God, but in the kingdom of

all the ills in our society," but rather, because God is honored when we love one another. Aristides reported back to Emperor Hadrian about the Christians he had studied in the early church: "They love one another; they never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something they give freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger they take him home, and are happy as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God" (quoted by Chuck Colson, *Presenting Belief in an Age of Unbelief*, Victor Books, 1986, pp. 35-36). Remember what Jesus said: "The world will 'know we are Christians by our love!'" Not by our ability to use the welfare system.

**Question:** So, are we to use government assistance or not?

**Answer:** Right!

**Question:** Don't be cute!

**Answer:** I'm not. I mean it sincerely. As citizens of the land, we have rights by virtue of our citizenship, by virtue of our tax payments. And the government and its agencies are, after all, agents of God who put them in their positions of authority (Rom. 13:1-7). As citizens of the Kingdom of God, however, we have the blessed privilege of using God's generously provided resources to send a message of love, to witness to the Lord of grace. When the church won't help someone it should, it sends the wrong message loudly and clearly! While the church cannot hope to replace the entire governmental welfare system, it also should not be content to hoard its resources and refuse to help the poor merely because government programs exist. In other words, pick your opportunities wisely and strategically.

**Question:** What do you mean "strategically"?

**Answer:** I would not think it wise, for example, for a diaconate to decide that "in order to show the love of Christ to the Smith family, we will advise them not to avail themselves of Medicaid for the heart transplant Bill Smith so desperately needs." To be sure, the diaconate and the congregation must be there to assist the Smith family in many ways:

with prayer support, with transportation assistance to and from hospital, with help for the kids, dog sitting, and even financial assistance. At the same time, committing to underwrite such monumental costs as major surgery while refusing aid that appropriately belongs to the taxpayer seems to me to be strategically foolish. In so doing, you strip away your ability to help so many others, and perhaps limit yourselves for years to come. Instead, I suggest you strategically provide the aid that you can in this case and encourage the family to make grateful use of God's provision through other means. In another case, however, your strategy might be different. If you have a newly widowed woman in your congregation, one without sufficient finances and with no family support available, I believe it would be inappropriate for the local church to refer such a person to government assistance without first trying to meet her needs itself. Not for nothing does God identify Himself as the "God of the fatherless and the widow." Just because other assistance is available doesn't allow us to miss the opportunity to say something powerful about who our God is!

**Question:** So, let me get this straight. The church MUST help wherever the loving character of the Lord is on the line, as in the case of the widowed, the defenseless, the orphan - those that He specifically commands us to help.

**Answer:** I think so!

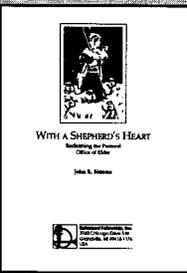
**Question:** And the church CAN help wherever and however its help will help to "put feet on the Gospel" so that the world knows what our God is like.

**Answer:** Right-o!

**Question:** Is there ever a time when the church SHOULD NOT help with resource assistance?

**Answer:** You bet. The church may not help, even if the government would, where by so doing it would foster the sins of others. For example, the church may not step in to help a widow without first confronting an unwilling family of its Biblical obligations. Paul writes to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:3-8) to "give proper recognition to widows who are really in need." He specifies what that involves, at least part of which is that she must be really alone, without the possibility of family assistance. The church violates this command when it underwrites a widow's needs without holding the family accountable first. Only in light of persistent and stubborn sin (and, I might add, sin which has incurred the discipline of the church!) on the part of the family, may the church replace it as God's agents. Another example would be the impropriety of the church providing assistance to an individual who will not work. (Note carefully: *WILL* not, not *CAN* not.) If able-bodied people are gripped in laziness, or believe that the world owes them a living, the church *AND* her diaconate may not encourage them in their sin. Better to cut them off, refuse their request in love, wait for them to fall on their noses, and then be there to pick them up with further rebuke, instruction, and assistance to find a job! Such is Biblical assistance.

*Dr. Sittema is pastor of Bethel CRC in Dallas, TX and contributing editor of The Outlook.*



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# Church in World

**COLORADO SPRINGS, CO** - The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) met at Village Seven Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs for its 25th General Assembly meeting June 9-13. This denomination was founded in December of 1973. It separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) in opposition to its long-developing theological liberalism. The PCA operates as a distinctively Reformed church in its doctrinal position, reflected by the emphasis on Biblically-based teaching and preaching and significant emphasis in evangelism, church planting and missions.

This year's General Assembly affirmed the unanimous recommendation of its advisory committee to "terminate our recognition of the Christian Reformed Church as a church in ecclesiastical fellowship immediately." This action came as a result of the failure of the CRC to rescind its 1995 decision allowing classes to ordain women as ministers and elders.

In its communication to the General Assembly, the Interchurch Relations Committee of the PCA reported that it had challenged the stand of the CRC which maintains that the Bible allows for opposite positions on the matter of the ordination of women to the special offices of the church. The IRC stated that "God is not divided on the matter." The IRC also noted that "sufficient numbers among you abandon the conviction of the inerrancy of the Scriptures" which renders the CRC defenseless against other issues. "We are afraid for you out of our great love for you. That is why we spoke as bluntly as we did."

Prior to the vote of the PCA General Assembly to terminate relations with the CRC, it heard from the CRC fraternal delegate, Dr David Engelhard, General Secretary of the Christian Reformed Church. Speaking abrasively and with passion, Dr Engelhard stated that the report [of the PCA IRC] has not treated the CRC very fairly... Engelhard maintained that the report was scandalous, contained factual errors and deliberate distortions of the truth. He maintained that "Christian charity, the command of love to believe all things, a concern for the effects of false accusations, (for the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity... and it is set on fire of hell), a recognition that the works of the flesh include contentions... dissensions, factions, and a reminder of the admonition to 'avoid foolish disputes... contentions... for they are unprofitable and useless, ought to have tempered our brothers' actions." Engelhard was the only fraternal delegate whose speech was received in total silence, no applause.

Former PCA Interchurch Relations chairman, Rev. Ric Perrin said in an interview, "We've come to the conclusion that the change in the position of women is symptomatic of a far greater change on Scripture that leaves the CRC very very vulnerable to other changes."

The General Assembly also instructed its Interchurch Relations Committee to "initiate discussions with the CRC with a view toward issuing a recommendation to the 26th General Assembly [1998] concerning the future relationship between the two denominations."

**BEAVER FALLS, PA** - The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the oldest and once closest sister church to the Christian Reformed Church, voted on June 10 at its General Assembly meeting to break fraternal relations with the CRC over the issue of the ordination of women. The 22,000 member denomination meeting at Geneva College, took about 12 hours over the span of two days to decide whether to break its 60-year long relationship with the CRC. While the OPC cited a number of reasons for concern in recent years, the formal motion adopted, cited only the CRC's 1995 decision to allow the ordination of women to the offices of minister, elder and evangelist. Rev. John Galbraith, this year's final OPC fraternal delegate to the CRC synod, expressed pain and sorrow at having to relay the message. After voting to break ties with the CRC, the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church voted to open "corresponding relations" with the largest group of churches seceding from the CRC, the United Reformed Churches, and voted to express "thankfulness to God for their love for the truth of God and the purity of the church of Jesus Christ, welcome them to the family of Reformed churches and pray for the blessing of God on their ministry."

*(In the September issue of The Outlook, we will publish an article written by J. Gresham Machen, the founder of the OPC, in which he rejoices at the newly formed ecclesiastical fellowship between the OPC and the CRC. The contrast between the CRC of sixty years ago and today is startling.*

*The Editors)*

The Reformed Fellowship, Inc.  
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GRAND RAPIDS, MI - After a year and a half of planning, East Side Christian School will emerge at 2800 Michigan Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI. This pre-K-9th grade facility will open its door for the first time in September at its temporary home, the lower level of the First Protestant Reformed Church. Mrs. Victoria DeKraeger will teach pre-K and kindergarten; Ruth Dykstra, grades 1-3; Mark Ondersma, grades 4-6 and Pete Adams, grades 7-9.

Miss Agatha Lubbers, having recently retired as a teacher and the administrator of Covenant Christian High School, will provide guidance and fulfill administrative responsibilities.

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Pilgrims Among Pagans  
(I Peter)

by Nelson Kloosterman

GRAND RAPIDS, MI - In its annual meeting at Grand Rapids, MI, June 16-21, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church made the following decisions:

- Synod defeated efforts by Classis of the Heartland to call Dr. Hessel Bouma to account for his view that "abortion is not the moral equivalent of murder" and "that under exceptional circumstances, abortion occasionally may be recommended, cooperated with, or tolerated," and that "the Synod 1976 decision supporting the Human Life Amendment to the US Constitution is an emotional response to the dramatic increase in abortions in the wake of Roe v. Wade, based on minimal Scripture exegesis." Synod did approve sending a communication to the President and Congress "lamenting the presidential veto of the ban on partial birth abortions and calling upon the government to enact legislation which would protect 'the unique value of all human life' and 'prohibit the wanton or arbitrary destruction of any human being at any stage in its development.'"
- Synod approved a new set of model articles of incorporation for CRC congregations specifying that the property of churches leaving the CRC belongs to the group or groups defined by classis as remaining "true to the purposes of this church as a member church" of the CRC (see the article of Dr. Cornelis Venema on this subject in the June issue of *The Outlook*). The CRC General Secretary, Dr. David Engelhard, indicated that all new churches joining the CRC will be required to adopt the articles of incorporation, as well as all existing churches receiving financial aid from the denomination. Self-supporting churches will be encouraged to change their articles of incorporation to follow the synodically-endorsed model.
- Synod rejected a proposal that theologically conservative churches be allowed to form four new classes which would allow them to remain members of the Christian Reformed Church but adopt a set of conservative theological affirmations on such subjects as gay marriage, women's ordination, worship and feminine language for God.
- Synod rejected calling God "Mother," "She," or other "feminine pronouns and other linguistic structures that imply personal gender."