

The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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Jesus Is Alive and Well Reigning over Planet Earth

Thirty years ago a pastor in southern California wrote what has become a Christian best-seller: *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth*. Pastor Hal Lindsey's main point was that Satan is exercising his rule over our planet and his influence is growing by leaps and bounds. In a later book, *Planet Earth, 2000 A. D.*, Lindsey gave more evidence of Satan's rule on planet Earth: "cultural meltdown," "disrespect for military," "the abortion holocaust," "end of the family," "crime-the worldwide epidemic," "UFOs," "multiculturalism," etc. Satan, he said, is alive and well on planet Earth.

It certainly is true that the Bible refers to Satan as "the god of this age." But he is "god" with a small "g." Satan is a pretend god. He's a "wanna-be." He has no heavenly power. In fact, the Bible tells us Satan has been cast out of heaven. Yes, he's a powerful, fallen angel; but he's only an angel, a created being. He's not God!

This month the universal Church remembers and celebrates the ascension of Jesus into heaven and His being seated at the right hand of God the Father. The apostle Peter, speaking about the ascension to a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, ex-

claims, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Peter quotes David who once prophesied that the Lord God would tell "his [David's] Lord" to "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Acts 2:34-35).

In the ascension of Jesus, He is made Lord over all and has made His enemies a "footstool," a place to rest His feet. Over against Hal Lindsey and many fundamentalist Christians, we Reformed Christians proclaim that it is Jesus, not Satan, who is alive and well, and reigning over planet Earth.



Volume 52, No. 5 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

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The underlying problem in Lindsey's interpretation of the Bible is that he holds to dispensational theology. Dispensational theology teaches that God has designed one special plan for His national people, Israel, and another special plan for the Gentile Church. God's plan for Israel, they say, was to establish His kingdom on earth through biological Jews. But the Jews of Jesus' day refused to accept Him as their Messiah-King. They refused to enthrone Him in the city of Jerusalem. Instead, they killed their King.

So now what? Some dispensationalists call it "Plan B." God's "Plan B" was to make a detour around unbelieving Israel and start the "Church" for the Gentiles. Some earlier dispensationalists even claim that Jesus' death and the "Church" were not foretold in the Old Testament at all. "Plan B," the Gentile Church, was a complete "mystery" hidden for ages, until it was revealed to the apostle Paul.

Dispensationalists claim that during this present Church age the "prophecy clock" for national Israel has stopped. Only after the Church is "raptured" from off the planet will Jesus come down to Jerusalem to begin His kingdom reign, something He was prevented from doing the first time He came to earth.

Oh, what heresy! To suppose that Jesus is not reigning over His kingdom now! To teach people that the Church is an after-thought in God's mind, His back-up plan! And that now, in this present Church age, it is actually Satan who is alive and well, reigning over all! Tragically, many Christians accept this heresy.

Even in Reformed circles, many are buying a fictional retelling of Lindsay's vision in Tim La Haye's *Left Behind* books and videos.

And what is the result? Many Christians are becoming filled with despair about the present day and filled with fear of the future. Yes, there are some legitimate, biblical concerns for today and for tomorrow. As the nearly two-thousand-year-old "Christian consensus" in

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the western world breaks down and our civilizations move further away from biblical standards of morality, we see an overall increase in evil. And this may continue. Yet, in other lands, through the spread of the gospel and the building up of the Church, we see some new appreciation for biblical absolutes. But, overall, in many cultures, and surely in American culture, the moral trend today is downward.

We who celebrate Jesus' ascension and enthronement proclaim Him as Lord. Seated on heaven's throne, Jesus holds *all* power and authority. In the power of the Spirit, the Lord Jesus sends forth His servants to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and expect the growth of the Church in the nations of the

world. We, then, have no reason to be filled with despair or fear! If you follow Lindsey and the latest *Left Behind* book you will imagine that Satan is alive and well and reigning over the earth. Then, yes, you ought to throw up your hands in despair and be afraid. Hunker down in the trenches and prepare yourself for the secret rapture. But, if you truly believe that *Jesus* is alive and well, ascended into heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father with all power and authority, then, lift up your heart! Jesus is reigning on high!

In the ascension of Jesus, God has made Him to be Lord. The Lord over all lords. Lord even over Satan. And Lord over planet Earth. All the Lord's enemies, in league with Satan, have been and are being made into a footstool on which Jesus rests His holy feet. We don't have to wait for the beginning of a thousand-year era at which Jesus will begin to establish His kingdom in the Middle East, centered in the city of Jerusalem.

Who is now "alive and well" on our planet? Not Satan. Yes, he's alive, but he is surely *not* well. He knows his days are numbered. His defeat is certain. The lake of fire awaits him. In Jesus' ascension, He alone has been given the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession (Psalm 2:8). Jesus is the only One truly "alive and well." And He reigns right now over planet Earth. Let God's people rejoice!

Rev. Randal Lankheet is the pastor of the United Reformed Church of Chino, California.

Needs Which Our Wives Need Met at Home

Part I - Time

Some years ago one of the elderly members of our congregation shared with me the fact that he and his wife had been married for over 50 years and had never had a single argument. Although I am rather gullible and really quite naïve, I could still hardly believe what he had said! So, I asked him to please share with me the secret of their success. With a twinkle in his eye he said:

Well, Pastor, it actually began on our honeymoon when we were taking one of those mule rides down into the Grand Canyon. No sooner had the trail ride started than my wife's mule stopped dead in its tracks and wouldn't move! I heard my bride say quietly, "That's one." She then kicked her mule until it began moving, only to have it stop again several yards later. I heard her say softly, "That's two." She again kicked the mule and began heading down the trail. A third time the mule stopped and absolutely refused to move! To my utter shock and dismay, I watched as my wife pulled a pistol from her pocketbook and shot the mule dead, right

on the spot! I climbed off my mule, ran over to my wife and cried 'Honey, what in the world do you think you're doing?? Are you crazy!??' She looked me straight in the eye and replied softly, "That's one." And Pastor, I'm telling you we have not had a single argument ever since!

Whether this story is true or not, I strongly believe that when it comes to having a happy, healthy, mutually satisfying, God-glorifying marriage, God's Word has a far, far better way! That is why we need to look at God's Word concerning needs which our wives need met at home. These needs can be summarized very simply as follows: by the grace and mercy of God, each and every day, husbands need to give their wives healthy, God-honoring doses of TLC: Time; Love; and Communication.

This month, let us consider the first need our wives have: our time. Time which results in God-honoring, Christ-centered companionship and compatibility.

In Genesis 2:18-25 we read, The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper

suitable for him." Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping He took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Now notice that we read here that God had all the animals of His entire creation parade past Adam. I wouldn't be at all surprised if, as he beheld all of the animals, Adam was thinking to himself something along these lines: "No, no, the gi-

We need to look at God's Word concerning needs which our wives need met at home.



raffes and the orangutans and the lions and tigers and bears just don't meet my needs. I need a companion!" And so the Bible tells us: "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man and He brought her to the man."

Commenting on this portion of the text, biblical commentator Matthew Henry insightfully writes:

The woman was made from the rib God had taken out of the man; not made out of his head to rule over him nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.

Think of your wife as I think of mine: the perfect, God-ordained, God-created, God-designed companion, or help-meet, for you.

And notice! The above passage also teaches us: "For this reason a man will leave (someone has well defined 'leaving' as breaking the apron strings without breaking the heart strings) his father and mother and be united to (Hebrew: *dabag*; meaning to 'cling to', to 'cleave to') his wife and they will become one flesh."

The point here is that we are not supposed to "cleave to" our golf clubs or to our fishing poles nor to anyone or anything else other than our wives! In order for husbands to be cleaving to their wives, they have got to be spending significant amounts of TIME with them. In fact, in Song of Songs 2:15, the Lover exhorts his Beloved by saying, "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our

vineyards that are in bloom."

What are some of the "little foxes" that are ruining your vineyard or stealing, sabotaging the time which you should be spending with your wife? Too much time at the office, perhaps, or too much time sitting in front of the television set? All sorts of sports, hobbies, personal interests - which may be perfectly fine in and of themselves when kept in a proper perspective and assigned their proper place - but things which can so easily become "idols" in our

We are not supposed to "cleave to" our golf clubs or to our fishing poles nor to anyone or anything else other than our wives!

lives. Things which cause us to compromise the faithful stewardship of time which we should be committing to our wives.

In Ephesians 5:15-16, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write this: "Be very careful then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." The phrase "making the most of every opportunity" literally reads as "redeeming the time". Think about that! This clearly implies that Satan has seduced us into allowing extremely valuable and precious time - moments, hours and even entire days - to be taken away and stolen from us. The result is that we need to "buy back" that time

and consecrate it for holy, God-honoring, kingdom building, marriage and family strengthening purposes!

Allow me to illustrate. Several years ago there was a young couple in our congregation whom the Lord had recently blessed with their second child. The young husband and father had a very lucrative job on Wall Street in New York City where he was working somewhere between 100-110 hours per week. Shortly after their second child arrived, he sat down with his boss and said something to this effect: "Sir, my wife and I have just had another baby. As a Christian husband and father who is seeking to live according to God's Word, the Bible, I will gladly continue to be a faithful hard-working employee for you, but I simply cannot and should not continue to spend the kind of time which I have been spending here in the office. I need to be spending more time at home with my family."

In response, his boss looked him straight in the eye and said. "Listen, I don't care about your wife and I don't care about your family. You are here in order to make me money! If you don't like that, there is the door!"

Well, that young Christian father walked out that door that day and he never returned! In fact, he moved his family to Florida and began working for a company which paid him approximately one fourth of what he was making on Wall Street! But do you know what? He had his priorities right! He kept his family intact! He was prayerfully and sincerely seeking to honor the Lord by the way in which he cared for and tended to the pre-

cious family which the Lord our God had so graciously entrusted to him.

I respectfully, humbly, and sincerely give you this challenge today: Look at your own day-planners and appointment calendars. Consider your schedule. Look at your daily and weekly routines. Then, let each and every one of us honestly ask ourselves and sincerely seek to answer these kinds of questions: ‘How much time do I spend interacting with my wife? When was the last time I did something for her? Or with her? When was the last time we enjoyed a date together? Am I regularly and eagerly engaged in trying to lighten her load?’

These are extremely critical questions ! Why? Because TIME - resulting in God-honoring, Christ-centered companionship and compatibility - is one of the *Needs Which Our Wives Need Met At Home*.

Rev. Richard J. Kuiken is Senior Pastor, Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church.

Looking Back

A few words about preaching and praying within the worship service. There has been in the past, and still is today, a notion that sermons have to be long in order to be good. A long sermon is a mark of orthodoxy. This idea is especially found in more “conservative” churches, including the URCs and particularly among the younger ministers.

A preacher who knew the ropes in his day said a few things about the length of the sermon:

Be careful that you don’t make it too long. It becomes more and more clear to me that preachers soon make the sermon too long and very seldom too short, as long as that brevity is not the result of inadequate preparation.

There are a few hearers who desire a long sermon. They are the exceptions. By far the greatest part of the congregation appreciates a short sermon. And indeed it is a lot better for the preacher to preach with brevity than it is to drag his lecture out so long. It is absolutely not necessary either to preach so long. I have done it myself too on occasion but it is foolishness.

(Rev. D. Van Dijk in *Van Den Dienst Des Woords*).

A colleague once said to me, “The mind can only absorb what the seat can endure.” There is a good deal of truth to that. When it comes to preaching, the adage is apropos: Stand up, speak up, shut up.

What has been said of preaching can also be said of the congregational prayer. Listen to Spurgeon:

Prayer must not be transformed into “an oblique sermon.” It is little short of blasphemy to make devotion an occasion for display. Fine prayers are generally very wicked prayers. In the presence of the Lord of hosts it ill becomes a sinner to parade the feathers and finery of tawdry speech with the view of winning applause from his fellow mortals.

George Whitfield once said of a certain preacher “and if he had stopped there, it would have been very well; but he prayed me out of it again by keeping on.” The abundant long-suffering of God has been exemplified in His sparing some preachers, who have been great sinners in this direction. They have done much injury to the piety of

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God' people by their long-winded orations, and yet God, in His mercy, has permitted them still to officiate in the sanctuary. Alas! for those who have to listen to pastors who pray in public for five and twenty minutes, and then ask God to forgive their "shortcomings"! Do not be too long, for several reasons. First, because you weary yourselves and the people; and secondly, because being too long in prayer puts your people out of heart for hearing the sermon.

It is necessary in prayer to draw near unto God, but it is not required of you to prolong your speech till everyone is longing to hear the word "Amen."

One little hint I cannot withhold. Never appear to be closing and then start off again for another five minutes. When friends make up their minds that you are about to conclude, they cannot with a jerk proceed again in a devout spirit. I have known men to tantalize us with the hope that they were drawing to a close, and then take a fresh lease two or three times; this is most unwise and unpleasant.

Then, by way of negative canon, I should say, do not let your prayer be long. You cannot pray too long in private. The more you are on your knees alone the better. We are now speaking of those public prayers

which come before or after the sermon, and for these, ten minutes is a better limit than fifteen. Only one in a thousand would complain of you for being too short while scores will murmur at your being wearisome in length.

Note that Spurgeon warned against "blasphemy" in connection with prayer. And he said that "fine prayers are generally very wicked prayers."

Dr. J.K. Popma in his work on the Catechism said, in connection with L.D. 36 (3rd Commandment), that God's Name is misused more in church than anywhere else. Says Popma, "When I hear 'nice'

prayer. I say to myself: Stop swearing."

Kuyvenhoven says this in his *Daylight*:

God's name may not be used for the sake of solemnity at funerals and weddings where hired clergymen baptize unholy affairs with Bible texts.

When we attend worship services and use the name of God simply because "that's the thing to do," we use God's name in vain. When we conduct hymnsings where the most sacred words about God and His redemption serve no other purpose than "to show we can sing" or to "raise the roof" or "because it's such a pretty tune," we are using God's name in vain. It is the "sacrifice of fools" of which we read in Ecclesiastes 5.

Yet the intent of the commandment is not to hush up the name of our God. God's purpose is especially revealed in Jesus: Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is an emeritus pastor in the URC living in Lethbridge, Alberta.

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Constantine: Christian or Politician?

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Mark 8:36

The Emperor Constantine, being informed of Maxentius’ tyranny, set himself to free the Romans from their slavery under him, and began immediately to consider by what means he might overthrow the tyrant. Now, while his mind was full of this great objective, he debated within himself what god’s help he should invoke in the conduct of the war. He had reached the conclusion that Diocletian’s party had not profited at all from the pagan deities whom they had sought to propitiate, but that his own father Constantius, who had renounced the various religions of the Greeks, had passed through life far more prosperously than they. In this state of uncertainty, as he was marching at the head of his troops, a vision transcending all description appeared to him. He saw a pillar of light in the form of a cross on which was inscribed, ‘in this conquer’. The appearance of the sign struck him with amazement, and doubting his own eyes,

he asked those around him if they could see what he did, and, as they unanimously declared that they could, the emperor’s mind was strengthened by this divine and miraculous apparition. On the following night, while he slept, he saw Christ, who directed him to make a standard according to the pattern he had been shown, and to use it against his enemies as a guarantee of victory. Obedient to the divine command, he had a standard made in the form of a cross, which is preserved in the palace until this day.¹

Thus recorded fifth century historian Socrates concerning the conversion of Constantine to Christianity the night before the battle at Milvian Bridge. Eusebius, bishop under Constantine and author of *“The Life of Constantine”*, claimed that Constantine himself swore to the validity of his vision under oath and that Christ did indeed appear to the emperor in a dream. It is curious, however, that a vision as blatant as that of Paul in Acts 9, should not have the same impact upon the receiver of that

vision as it did for Paul in the New Testament. Paul, after all, renounced all his past ambitions and became a great missionary for Christ. Constantine, on the other hand, continued to pursue the title of Emperor and did not once represent himself as a servant of Christ.

Although it was said that Eusebius would never lie, except to promote the glory of God, those who wrote his biography claim he knew no bounds of exaggeration in praise of Constantine.² The familiar miracle which he and his followers recorded as actually happening to Constantine is very open to skeptical speculation. Even if Eusebius recorded it exactly as Constantine had related the vision to him under oath, it would still leave open the validity of Constantine’s oath. Further historical events proved Constantine’s oaths to be frivolous in that, among other things, he had his own brother-in-law murdered despite assurances given to the contrary under oath.

Puzzling also is the number of variations of the vision. Nazarius described an army of divine warriors who fell from heaven coming to assist Constantine. Described by him are their beauty, their spirit, their gigantic forms, and the stream of light which beamed from their celestial armor. Others claim the vision came at night, or that it was seen only by Constantine. Perhaps the latter was added because, if truly witnessed by Constantine’s 40,000 men, the true miracle would

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have been their unbroken silence afterwards. Paul spoke of his vision and dramatic conversion often and was consistent when speaking of the revelation. Constantine only mentions it for Eusebius to record twenty-six years later. By that time the legend could have grown so much that even Constantine believed it to be true.

Interesting, also, is that up until the battle at Milvian Bridge, Constantine had been making his presence felt in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire claiming Apollo-Sol as his god, and himself as “The Unconquered: Sol Invictus.” Apollo-Sol was the only god ever to be named on any of Constantine’s coinage. Instead of having Christ on the Arc of Constantine in Rome, sculpted into the Arc are Mars, Jupiter, and Hercules, with sacrifices being given to the sun-god.

Confusion arises as to whether that sun-god was Apollo or Christ. Both Christ and Apollo were claimed to be the source of all light. Constantine never took the trouble to mention which of the two gods he worshipped, referring only to his god as “He”. Both pagans and Christians could be content that Constantine’s “He” was the same god they worshipped. Conspicuously missing from the Arc is the sign of the cross which Constantine demanded his soldiers wear prior to engaging in battle.

Eusebius also wrote that, at the time of his vision in 312 AD, Constantine had no idea what the cross meant but had to have it explained to him in a vision that night by Christ. This cannot be true. Already one year earlier, in 311, Constantine had

stopped the persecution of Christians by permitting them to worship freely. In addition, he had watched the Great Persecution grow out of the allegation that the sign of the cross had been used as a magic sign to eradicate omens.

The purpose of Constantine’s sudden conversion has provided material for controversy and debate both in ancient and modern times. He has been viewed as a conscious and deliberate hypocrite by some and a political saint by others. But Constantine’s “choice” for Chris-

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tian liberty was not as sudden as Eusebius had lead his readers to believe.

The Edict of Toleration

Even while still devoted to Apollo, Constantine, exercising limited sovereignty over Gaul, protected the rights of his Christian subjects. In 311, Constantine, with two more of the four Augusti, signed the Edict of Toleration. This could well have been a political move, putting Maximian, the legitimate ruler in Rome, who did not agree with the edict, on the defensive side.

After the edict was signed, Constantine could not have helped but notice the moral nature of the

Christians:

The Christian community undertook everything. Not only did they provide for the expenses of their cult and the payment of its ministers, but they undertook the assistance of widows, of orphans, of sick, the aged, and the unemployed, and those who had been condemned for the cause of God. They took upon themselves the task of buying back the prisoners carried off by the Barbarians; they founded churches, took care of slaves, and buried the poor; they gave hospitality to their co-religionaries from abroad and collected subventions for poor or menaced communities.”³

In the Christians, Constantine recognized a cohesive force with which nothing else in the empire could compare. As a man whose desire was unity and peace, Constantine could well have understood that Christians, not the deteriorating pagan beliefs or customs, would enhance his future empire.

The Battle at Milvian Bridge

Just prior to the battle at Milvian Bridge, Constantine said, “I believe our actions are noblest and best when, before attempting, anything we provide as far as possible for a secure result.”⁴ Already Constantine had many spies in Rome reporting to him. These spies reported the great number of Christians in the capital and how Maxentius could not control them even while increasing their persecution. Constantine added these

reports to his knowledge that the pagans had tired of the persecution.

It would have been a great political move and a superb military strategy for Constantine to take up the sign of the cross. His own men would be more willing to enter battle knowing their leader had received an oracle assuring victory. In addition, the Christians on the opposing force would turn on their Pagan comrades opting for Constantine's victory and Christian freedom rather than Maxentius' victory and even more persecution. Already having been assured victory by Apollo, nothing could keep this charismatic leader from invoking assistance from the God of the Christians, for whom he had some respect, and claiming that victory had been assured him by their invisible God.

The ease of the victory at Milvian Bridge led Constantine to believe the God of the Christians was indeed one of great power. Within five months he united with Licinius to construct the Edict of Milan. This edict served the Christians well, returning property, building temples, and halting all persecution. Constantine hoped that the loyalty the Christians had to the church could be guided to become loyalty to the Empire as well. He did not, however, make Christianity the religion of the Empire, nor did he confess his own belief in it. During a visit to Autun, for example, the emperor consulted the oracle at Apollo's temple and left magnificent offerings for the god. Constantine openly worshipped Apollo and by 326 AD he insulted other pagan cults by refusing to partake in their rites.

Constantine's desire to worship

Apollo is understandable to a certain degree. Having once claimed to be guided by Apollo, he would, according to custom, become deified as those in the Imperial office before him had been deified. In hopes of establishing a sacred society, Diocletian, Constantine's predecessor, had reaffirmed that those in Imperial office were gods already. By being gods, emperors could enjoy privileges which would have been absurd if they were but mere men.

It would have been a great political move and a superb military strategy for Constantine to take up the sign of the cross.

Constantine did show great interest in the struggles of Christianity. Once Christianity became legal, it grew in leaps and bounds. What Constantine saw in Christianity was a display of virtue through which Rome would be assured of material prosperity such as official paganism had failed to give.

The Bishop's Bishop

Once Constantine became single emperor of the Roman Empire, he announced universal favor towards the Christians claiming it to be for the welfare of the whole world and the advantage of all humanity. Assured that the elevation of Constantine was due to divine providence, warm and active loyalty was exercised in Constantine's favor by the Christians.

Constantine was welcomed by bishops to enjoy most of the privileges of Christian communion without making any of the obligations required of a Christian.

Even without being baptized, Constantine was permitted to partake in the holy Eucharist. Constantine's Christian advisors and the Roman church were so dazzled by his friendship, and, perhaps, so afraid of his losing patience with them, that they often looked the other way.⁵

His involvement in the Christian church yielded Constantine the title as the bishop's bishop, the head of the church. He was declared the Viceroy of God. As far as the Christians were concerned these were not only acceptable titles for the emperor, but credible as well. Constantine had, after all, seen a vision and spoken to their Messiah.

The Arian Controversy

Many theologians have expressed surprise at Constantine's insight concerning the Arian controversy in Nicaea in 324 AD. One must take into account, however, that Hosius, the Special Vicarius in Ecclesiastical Affairs, did all of Constantine's religious leg work. He and Eusebius wrote most of Constantine's religious prayers and edicts. Both of them were very much in opposition to Arius. Even though he may have understood nothing of the details concerning the quarrel, in 324 Constantine declared Arius incorrect and accused him of being a heretic.

Later, when Arius received an audience with Constantine as a favor to Constantine's sister, the doctrine



was explained. Guglielmo Ferro writes:

In separating Christ from God and making Him merely one of God's emanations or manifestations, Arianism tacitly admitted that other emanations and manifestations might follow. Even as God had raised the Christ out of nothing and adopted Him, He might at His own will, raise up other redeemers out of nothing and adopt them.⁶

Upon hearing this, Constantine must have regretted his earlier decision of 324. Long ago Constantine had considered himself born to rule. Had he accepted Arian's teaching, he could also become deified as the adopted Christ was. Throughout his life Constantine would often change his mind concerning Arius, depending on his moods. Not until fifty years later, under Theodosius I, would Arianism be abolished completely

Constantinople

Christians of the fourth century believed that when Constantine built Constantinople, only after he claimed to have been told to do so in a vision, he was building a true Christian city. He made no such claim then, nor while destroying pagan temples to finance the city.

Citizens of the Empire had become accustomed through the centuries to the shows of splendor and spoils carried by conquering armies. As the unchallenged emperor, Constantine had little desire to expand his empire and even less desire to ransack cities in his own empire. To continue the shows of splendor, and to supply the treasury

with more money, Constantine chose to ransack the wealthy temples of the gods he believed would not seek revenge.

A statue that was erected in the middle of Constantinople had the body of Apollo and the head of Constantine. The city maintained temples for Christ, Apollo, and Constantine.

Throughout his life Constantine would often change his mind concerning Arius, depending on his moods.

Baptism

Not until just before his death, while ill, was Constantine reported to have received the Sacrament of Baptism from a bishop. While the account from Eusebius may be highly suspect as to accuracy, it is the only record available. Constantine is reported to have said:

The moment I have been waiting for so long, earnestly desiring and praying that in it I might receive the salvation of God, has come at last. Now I too may have the blessing of that seal which confers immortality: now I may receive it in the waters of the River Jordan, where our Savior is said to have been baptized as an example to us. But it pleases God-who knows what is best for

us - that I should receive it here.⁷

Constantine was then baptized. Even if Eusebius' record was correct, Constantine's motives may still have been somewhat political. In baptism the Church removed all sins which were committed prior to the emersion. By delaying his baptism, which could not be repeated, Constantine could freely indulge in his passions of the secular world while still retaining a means of sure and easy absolution.

Once baptized Constantine discarded his purple robes and on May 22, 337 AD, in the white clothes of an initiate of the church, he died. It could well have been that Constantine chose to be baptized because he had accepted Christ as his Savior. He also could have known he was dying and longed for the Christians to pray for him more incessantly just as Galerius, a former rival to Constantine, had halted persecuting Christians so they would pray for his healing.

Another reason may have been that as Emperor, he hoped his baptism would unite the empire towards Christianity, bringing peace. Christianity was also the only religion that could absolve past murders and oath-breaking; something not even Apollo could tolerate. It was Constantine's only hope for immortality.

There will always be doubt as to whether Constantine adopted the cross merely for expediency's sake, or, at least partly, because he believed in the power of Christ to help him overcome his enemies. One can be certain, however, that,

Christianity itself benefited greatly from his rule. Constantine introduced a new ideology by making worship safe for Christianity. While he may not have been able to save the Roman Empire from eventual destruction, his great reforms introduced the foundation of the Middle Ages, bringing new hope to a people seeking an escape from moral decadence. God's use of the pagan ruler brought belief in Him throughout all the known world; and, while the quality of Constantine and the Christianity of his followers may be questioned, the justice of God and the glory of His kingdom continued to develop under their reign.

Notes

- 1 John Holland Smith, *Constantine the Great* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).
- 2 For more on this read Edward Gibbon's book *History of Christianity* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1972)
- 3 Guglielmo Ferro, *The Ruin of Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity*, trans. The Hon. Lady Whitehead (New York: G. R. Putmans & Sons, 1921), p. 72. One cannot help but think of the impact Christianity would have today if we would better reflect the activities of the early church.
- 4 *Constantine the Great* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.), p. 110.
- 5 John Holland Smith writes that the church leaders often looked the other way when Constantine would behead or poison Christian colleagues that disagreed with him.
6. *The Ruin of Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity*, p. 166.
7. *Constantine the Great* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.), p. 292.

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Alleged Problems with a Literal Interpretation of the Creation Account

The most noteworthy difficulties with the historic, literal, six day interpretation of the creation account cited by those who hold opposing views can be summarized as follows:

1. The sun was not created until Day Four (Gen. 1:14-19). Since the sun is the instrument used for measuring "days" there was no way to measure the first three days, consequently they would not have been "ordinary" days.
2. On the Seventh Day God rested from creation. He has not created anything since then but has rather taken an eternal delight in his work (Heb. 4). Therefore it is held, the Seventh Day is an "eternal" day and not an "ordinary" day. If the Seventh Day was not an "ordinary" day, so it is claimed, then the possibility must exist that the other six days may also have been something other than "normal" days.
3. The greatest obstacle to reading Genesis 1 as being literally true according to the framework hypothesis is Genesis 2:5. According to those who hold this view, Genesis 2:5 teaches that ordinary providence was God's mode of operation during the days of creation. Beginning with that interpretation of Genesis 2:5, it is concluded that, since ordinary providence was God's mode of operation, the ar-

range of the six days of creation in Genesis 1 must be topical and not chronological.

In an effort to reconcile these alleged "difficulties", it is posited that the creation account of Genesis is not to be read literally; nor are the days to be understood as ordinary days; nor are we to understand that God's creative activity took place in the chronological order of six days. Rather, the creation account is to be understood as a "literary device" given to teach us **that** God is the Almighty Creator but it is not to be read as an account that tells us **how** God created. But that immediately confronts the church with two questions: 1) do these problems actually exist and, 2) is there hermeneutical and exegetical warrant to resolve the difficulties by way of the framework hypothesis approach?

Do These Problems Really Exist?

1. Can it be argued from Scripture that, since the sun was not created until the fourth Day, there was no way to measure the length of the first three days and therefore they may well have been something other than ordinary days? I think not. Although it is true that the first three days were without the sun, they were not without light. "*And God said let there be light and there was light.*" (Gen. 1:3). This light, whatever it was, was created on the first day. "*God called the*



light 'day' and the darkness He called 'night.'" (Gen. 1:5a).

It appears from this verse that the light which God had made functioned in a way similar to the sun, in that it was not always to be daytime. Also nighttime was to have its regular place. "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day," (Gen. 1:5b) that is, nighttime and daytime, making one day, separated by the light which God had made. The first day began in darkness with God's work of creation "in the beginning." This darkness was followed by the creation of light. The first day ended with the coming of evening, which was counted with the following day (Gen. 1:8; similarly with the other days, Cf. vv. 13, 19, 23, 31). In view of the way the first day was made, it is understandable that the Bible considers a day from evening to evening (e.g. Lev. 23:32;), but it is not legitimate to discount the first day as an ordinary day simply because the sun had not yet been created.

2. Can an argument be deduced from Scripture that since God's day of rest is "eternal" therefore the other six days could also have been something other than six ordinary days? I think not.

The Fourth Commandment is based on a literal understanding of the seven "days" of the creation week. If it weren't, the Fourth Commandment would make no sense at all. Would it be plausible to suggest that Moses uses "days" in two different senses here and is saying: "Six (normal) days you shall labor and do all your work, for in six (varying or undefined length) days the Lord made the heavens and the

earth...."? If the command to man to labor six days and rest one day refers to literal days, and no one disputes that it does, then it must follow that the days of the creation week, which were set forth as the basis for man's week, were also literal days. When Moses gave the law to the Israelites, they knew what "days" were. The Fourth Commandment obligated them to follow the pattern for labor that God Himself had established at the beginning. If the days of Genesis 1 are not ordinary days, then the Fourth Commandment makes no sense, either to Israel or to

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us. It is illegitimate to conclude that the day was not an ordinary day on the basis of God's eternal rest.

3. Can it be argued from Scripture, and especially from Gen. 2:5 that God's creative activity involved only "ordinary" providence? It is at this point that a major exegetical error is made by those who hold to longer time periods.

First of all, Gen. 2:5 follows Gen. 2:4 which begins with an "ELLEH TOLEDOTH," a phrase which is used no less than ten times throughout the book of Genesis. Each time it is used as an introduction to a *new* section of information which builds

on the previous information but is *not* a part of it. So too, in this instance. Gen.2:5 builds on Gen.1 but functions as an introduction to new information. Therefore to interject it back into Genesis 1 is illegitimate.

Secondly, "ELLEH TOLEDOTH" means literally "these are the generations of," meaning "this is the product of," *not* "this is the source of." The nature of "ELLEH TOLEDOTH" can be found in Gen. 5:1 where the names that follow are clearly given as the descendants and not the ancestors of Adam. Thus to interject the ELLEH TOLEDOTH of Gen. 2:4 back into Genesis Chapter 1 flies in the face of its own meaning. The Special Committee of the RCUS explains it this way:

All this is to say that Genesis 2:4ff. is not a second version of the creation narrative. The account of the creation of heaven and earth concludes with Genesis 2:3. Genesis 2:4 begins with the phrase "these are the generations". Many years ago, Dr. Young demonstrated that this phrase, which occurs several times in Genesis, always introduces the results of the previous section with a view toward analyzing some aspect in greater detail. Thus, Genesis 2:4 introduces a new section that concentrates on one part of the completed creation, namely the creation of man. It first considers the environment in which man would appear and then narrates the creation of man and his helper. Thus, Genesis 2:5 functions as a detailed description of an already

created world with specific information relating to man's place in that world. This being so, Genesis 2:5-7 anticipates the story that follows. Its function in the narrative is akin to the heading or subheadings of a newspaper article. That is, they provide the basic story, but the details of that story come in what follows afterward.

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Pastoring With A Purpose

You're on your way to make an elder's visit with a young man who was in your Sunday School class ten years ago. He was a bit of a discipline problem then, but you always were able to talk honestly with him. You warned him a couple of months ago about dating that girl who, he admitted, wasn't a Christian. But he didn't listen. Now she's pregnant. And you're the elder "on the bubble."

On the way in the car, you wonder about many things. "What am I doing here? What will I say? What approach should I take? Why bother? What's the use? What purpose does this visit have, now that the damage is already done?"

Throughout many years of writing, I have claimed that the work the Bible assigns to elders (and deacons, in another way) is primarily pastoral in character. I have taken the weight of my argument from Acts 20:17f and from I Peter 5. In both of these places, Scripture calls elders "pastors" ("shepherds"), and assigns to them the care of the flock, the sheep of God's fold. I've compared that shepherding model with the "administrative" character of the office as it is widely understood and practiced these days.

Whenever I've had opportunity to work with new elders and have opened Scripture to reveal this pastoral model for the office of elder, I meet with wide eyes and panic-stricken expressions. It's one thing to be elected to a board that meets the first and third Monday of the

month for a couple of hours. It's quite another thing to be expected to give pastoral care to a group of believers who aren't much different than yourself.

The only way an elder can keep his bearings is to keep his mind on his assigned purpose. Why must he do this work?

I've run across elders with a variety of approaches to this issue—some conscious, others subconsciously assumed. You may be quick to identify some people you work with (even yourself?) in these general descriptions, but please remember, I intend them only as generalizations for discussion purposes.

The "Dots and Crosses" Man

Inevitably, all who serve in Christ's church will run across an elder who is consumed with details. He is the one that is often assigned to be clerk of records because he's very fussy about "dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's" of membership records. When the eldership deals with a difficult pastoral case, he'll be the one who wonders aloud what formal step of discipline you are up to. In the example above, he'll be the elder who will view his purpose as that of explaining the church's "policy" regarding public sins. His intentions are honorable. He's not "cold"; he just wants to make sure things are done properly—"decently and in good order."

The Law and Order Man

There's another character-type of



elder in many churches today. He's the hard-nosed disciplinarian, more evident some years back, but still around (although much less vocal these days). His approach is simple: the elders are charged with preserving both the faith and the faithful. Since the devil tries to undermine both doctrine and lifestyle, the only defense against him is a frontal attack. This type of elder willingly goes on the tough calls, the calls to rebuke members who are living in sin, the confrontational visits. His approach to the young man in the example above would be simple: you sinned, you must confess your sin and find forgiveness. Period. He's not unloving, but he is tough. He believes love must be tough because sin is.

The Sympathizer

Another character-type often seen in the eldership is the sympathizer. His name comes from his remarkable ability to identify emotionally with the church member he is dealing with. If he's visiting someone suffering from depression, he is very sensitive to all the depressing details of the individual's life, and can understand why he or she is suffering. If he's dealing with an adulterer, the sympathizer will be most sensitive to the troubles at home that drove the man or woman out to look for support in the arms of another. In the example above, the sympathizer will be most understanding of the temptations young people face these days, and will feel the hurts that kids feel when they are scorned by relatives and friends because of an unwanted pregnancy. This elder isn't soft on sin, but seems obligated to focus on the sinner's hurts. He genuinely

understands and feels for the circumstances of the people caught up in the problems of life.

Purpose Determines Approach

"Okay," you say, "I've seen these character-types at work in the life of the church. Sometimes they run true to form; at other times they seem to be amalgams, with several different characteristics exhibited in one man. But what's your point?"

The point is that too often in the work of elders the principle question

Before you can answer the question of approach, you must face up to the question of purpose.

asked is the question of approach. You are sent to visit the young man in our example, and all you can think of is: "How should I approach him? What should I say? Should I be tough, or will that drive him out of the church? Should I be tender and compassionate, or will that be soft on sin? Should I be concerned about proper procedures, or will that look cold?"

Good questions, all! All represent legitimate concerns! It's appropriate to be concerned about proper procedure. It's good to face up to sin firmly. It's important to be sensitive and understanding. And it's

hard to know how to pastor with a proper balance of all three. But before you can answer the question of approach, you must face up to the question of purpose. Unless you are clear on your purpose as an elder, the secondary questions will frustrate you immeasurably.

The Purpose: Equipping for Service

Scripture is clear on the matter of pastoral purpose, even though many elders I have known aren't. The Bible says: "And He Himself (Christ) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4: 11-12 NKJV).

This important passage is often brought up to remove (rightly) the wall of separation between clergy and laymen, reminding us that all believers are to be "ministers" of God. That's valid. But what is often overlooked in the verse is that the word "pastors" here is the same word used to describe "elders" in Acts 20 and I Peter 5! It is not only seminary-trained "clergymen" who are to equip the saints for their service to God. It is the work of all the elders! I'll go so far as to identify this as the purpose of elder-pastoring: to care for God's people so that they are equipped to serve their Lord and minister to one another.

The purpose of an elder is never only to deal with an immediate problem, to come down hard on a specific sin, to lend a listening ear during a difficult time. The purpose is always greater than the immedi-

ate. It always includes the call to stimulate, encourage, or restore the brother or sister to positive and active service for Christ in his or her life! If the long-term purpose is hindered by a persistent sin, the elder must bring a stern rebuke followed by repeated calls to “check-up” on progress. If someone’s service to Christ and others is frustrated by loneliness, it will require a sensitive and listening ear wedded to the firm assurance of unfailing Christian love. That, in turn, will be evidenced through frequent visits. If, as in our earlier example, a young man’s life-long service to Christ is jeopardized by unwise and sinful behavior resulting in an unplanned pregnancy, the elders must not see only the growing abdomen and the broken commandment. The brother (and his wife, hopefully) must be restored to the loving service/ministry of Christ. That restoration must involve repentance and forgiveness, of course.

But it also demands acceptance by the body of believers who too often sit in harsh judgment, clucking tongues at this “immoral generation.” The elders must defend and protect and encourage the young couple with a special kind of love, assuring them of God’s forgiveness, of their welcome place among the forgiven church, and of the important work they must do for the Lord in their lives, starting with the nurture of their little one. In short, the elder becomes the living evidence of the forgiveness and love of the Savior, stubbornly refusing to throw a young couple on the trash heap of history because of one moment of passionate sin.

A Focus on Purpose Avoids Other Problems

Keeping the bigger purpose (the long-range goal) in mind saves the elders a lot of grief. In the first place, if you remember that the purpose is restoration and equipping unto service, you’ll view God’s people more lovingly. You’ll avoid viewing each member as a “problem” to be handled, and see them instead as one of the precious sheep of the Good Shepherd who has a special purpose for them.

The purpose of elder-pastoring: to care for God’s people so that they are equipped to serve.

Second, all your concerns about “approach” will be greatly simplified when you remember that the work of a pastoral elder is not a one-shot deal, but an ongoing process of loving care. Long-term care involves many approaches, ranging from stern rebuke to an emotional embrace, from stubborn arguing to patient listening, and some of these all at the same time! It is much like parenting: It requires hugs, scoldings, kisses, and spankings, and in no particular order.

And third, keeping your purpose in mind keeps you on task. You will avoid the frustrating analyses about approach: “dots and crosses,” “law and order,” “sensitive or soft.” Instead, you’ll maintain perspective:

first, where are we now, in this situation? Then, where must we aim, to be restored to Christ and His service fully? Then only the question that remains is: How can I help these people get there?

If you think of elder’s work in these categories and in this order of sequence, you’ll experience a sense of accomplishment and a genuine pastoral heart that will bring you great joy and blessing.

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The Testimony of a Converted Japanese

The first Protestant missionaries ever to come to Japan were mostly from the U.S.A. When they came to this strange land of Buddhists and sun-worshippers they found no Christians. Today, 100 years after their arrival, one out of every 200 persons is a Christian. I agree, one half of one per cent is a small amount. Now we must go to the remaining 199 who have never heard the name of Jesus, and lead them to the light. For we have the Great Commission given by Christ specifically demanding of us that we go and teach all nations regarding salvation through Him. This is a divine command and every Christian conscience ought to be quick to obey. Pagan life is not merely devoid of Christian morality. It is a life without peace, since the pagan is told that there is no reconciliation with the spirits and the gods. And awaiting him is death, which, he believes, at best can only obliterate him.

I would like to describe for you my past life as a Buddhist and Shintoist. My younger brother died when I was about six years of age. At his death-bed my grandmother said that somebody should keep a constant watch over the body because an evil spirit might steal his soul. I offered to stay with him. It was the first funeral ever to occur in our happy household. We were

religiously indifferent, happy and contented in a new house in a Tokyo suburb. I was the eldest son, ready to enter grade school I had three younger brothers, one three years of age and twin brothers still younger. It was one of the twins that had died. And then death came a second time into our family as another brother passed away.

Now departed souls came to exist in our family, called Japanese '*hotoke*'. The presence of *hotoke* meant that we must rely on Buddhism to worship them because, according to common Buddhist belief, failure to worship *hotoke* means that the souls of the departed will suffer in hell, and we will be cursed by them in this life.

Buddhist Worship of the Dead

So we bought an altar. It was a detailed model of the interior of a Buddhist temple which measured two feet wide, two feet deep, and three feet high. On its platform my mother placed an offering of a small bowl of rice, a glass of water, and two small candles, which were lit each morning. All of us sat before it and worshipped the *hotoke* who were supposed to be comforted by our prayers as we repeated them: "*Nam ami dabatsu...*" My father would read the Buddhist Canon, which appeased the *hokote*.

At festivals we went to the temple where our brothers were buried. We obtained fire from the candle at the tomb to light our candles, and brought them home with us in a lantern by bus and train. *Hotoke* was then supposed to have followed the fire from the cemetery above which they hovered since the festival started, to rest when they came home with us. Then we treated them with special offerings of fine dinners, sweets and attentions. We worshipped them clothed in our best apparel. I often placed on the altar my handicraft work or report cards from school so that my brothers could see them and gain a taste of the life they missed. My mother often addressed each one affectionately by name, and then burst afresh into tears.

Though for me there could hardly have been a sweeter home, yet our family had been irreparably broken into two parts: the living and the dead. According to common Buddhist teaching, these two stand in a cause and effect relationship. If the living ones worship *hotoke* they will be peaceful and happy and the spirits will bless the living. If not, then *hotoke* will fall into the torture of the fire, and they will seek revenge upon the living for that suffering. Thus the grim shadow of death followed every one of us and often overtook us to cast us into the terror of death. Fear of death was the compelling motive for worshipping *hotoke*. Death is the real theme of such religion. The chief purpose of

Pagan life is not merely devoid of Christian morality. It is a life without peace.

Buddhism is to further the happiness of the dead, and to enable its devotees to face death with a calm attitude.

Shinto Ideals

Before Buddhism had taken a very deep hold upon my mind I was in grade school. Religiously the Japanese grade schools, prior to World War II, were training grounds for Shintoism, which with Buddhism is one of Japan's major religions. Every morning all the pupils gathered in the school yard to listen to the principal speak to us on morals, current events, and the history of the Japanese people as descendants of the gods. We were taught that Japan was superior to all other nations. She was especially beloved of the gods, and her Emperor was a direct descendant of a goddess of the Sun. Japan had never been subjected to a foreign power because this goddess protected her. And now it was Japan's duty to protect the eastern Asiatic races from further colonization and save all Asiatics by the power of the Sun goddess, in order that they might be brought under her divine benevolence.

These doctrines were also taught in the classrooms. *Shushin*, or ethics, was a subject taught throughout grade school for one hour per week. In this course we learned about the world's greatest men of war, virtue, social reform, etc. We learned about George Washington and the cherry tree incident, and were admonished to imitate him. We learned about Abraham Lincoln and his noble achievements. But the core of true ethical behavior was represented as being something deeper. That was the Shinto belief in the divinity of the emperor,

the eternity of the soul which dies for the cause of the nation, and the loftiness of the ideal of the Eastern Asiatic Co-prosperity Sphere. In short, I was trained to be a rigid believer in a divine emperor, to be a thorough-going nationalist, and an idealist who would give up his life for the sake of the country.

Shattered Ideals

I need not explain how this false optimism was built up to a higher pitch by the deceitful propaganda of

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the militarists as the war progressed, nor how we steadfastly endured the hardships incurred by the carrying out of this allegedly holy war. When I was a 14-year-old boy the War came to an abrupt and unexpected end. I could see that we were on the verge of losing the war. But I could not understand why it had to end in our complete defeat. What had happened to the Sun goddess and to our thousands of war gods and our strong military forces under the protection of these divine powers?

And yet the reality of defeat was unmistakable, since the emperor himself, the voice of a living god, was heard by radio announcing our total defeat. The years following

were miserable. I have no heart nor pen to describe this misery. Scarcity of material things on the one hand and an unheard-of increase of spiritual and moral decay on the other were common features of that period. Worst of all, in our hearts was a great vacuum. We did not know what to believe, or what we might hope for. All our ideals were shattered.

New Ideas

It was in the midst of such a time that I heard my first Christian message. While taking a walk near my home I passed an old barrack which a farmer was using for some purpose. I heard singing. I went to see who was singing and discovered about a dozen people singing hymns. They invited me to enter. Since some of them were friends, I did go in. Soon I was listening to a Holiness preacher. He talked about the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of man. He stressed that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags compared to God's righteousness. He pointed out the necessity of obtaining righteousness to escape God's judgment and the impossibility of doing so by ourselves. That was about all I could get but it made a deep impression since it was entirely different from anything I had heard before.

First Hope

Mere curiosity drove me to this simple meeting place to hear Christians sing, talk, and preach. But in a short while it became evident that the claim of this God was greater than I had first thought. God was presented as the Righteous One who was at the same time merciful, and in His mercy He had made a great sacrifice in order to redeem



us from sin and misery. Jesus Christ was this sacrifice. I could not see how He could be the Son of God and at the same time be born of a woman. But I could see that God would accept a perfect Substitute in my place and that if our sins were forgiven we might be very happy now. That was all I could learn after six months in this mission chapel. You can be sure that I was very happy with that small amount of knowledge!

But in the strange providence of God, the Holiness mission station closed. I was then directed to a Kyodan church (Japan's largest Protestant denomination). This particular church was of very little help as far as my spiritual need was concerned, however.

Up to that time I owned a copy of the New Testament only. Now I obtained a copy of the entire Bible, and started reading it. That did not seem to help me much either. After about ten months I lost interest in church attendance. However, I did have a desire to learn more about Jesus Christ, and I tried to gain this knowledge at home by reading the Bible. But I had lost interest in church attendance, and gave my time to school work, hobbies, etc. The Bible was always on my desk, however, and I read it often. But I read it only as if it were just another "best seller."

Questions

But soon this book made me uneasy. I could not fully understand many things it said. And what I could understand I questioned. For example: The Bible says that there is only One who is God. Why should I not believe that there are

many more? About sin and judgment: What was wrong with Confucius and his moral teaching? About this Jesus: Why should I believe that He was something special as a man? Why should I believe that He is a Substitute indeed, and the only acceptable One with God? Basic to all these questions was this one: On what authority should I receive what the Bible declares? I was willing to accept the Bible and to pay far more serious consideration to its

Basic to all these questions was this one: On what authority should I receive what the Bible declares?

challenges if only I could be persuaded to do so by some authority. For I had accepted Buddhism upon the authority of my parents and Shintoism upon the authority of such superiors as my school teachers, the Emperor, etc.

In desperation I turned to the one place which I had been told was a source of authority in Christian doctrine - a nearby Franciscan monastery. There a monk undertook to instruct me, and I was soon taught to pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Quickly it dawned on me, however, that praying to Mary had no Biblical support. This raised the question, "What kind of authority is

it that dares to tell a poor, ignorant, wretched sinner to put his trust in something greater than the Bible itself?" I felt that this was not an answer to my search for an authority by which I could accept the Bible as God's Word to me. The result of this disappointment was so great that I seriously considered the awful possibility of suicide! For a number of months I was in deep depression, quite sure that there was no light to lead me out of my despair.

By way of a friend who himself did not follow any established religion I came to hear of Rev. Takeshi Matsuo of the Reformed Church of Japan. This friend presented me with a copy of a magazine related to that church, and I immediately sensed that I was now being led to the discovery of the answer to my soul's great difficulty. Near to my home was a congregation of the Reformed Church of Japan, and here I was taught that the Bible is God's Word, that He is its infallible author, and that He has by His own act of inspiration caused men to write that which is His own Word indeed.

Although I received this teaching with reluctance and in connection with a real struggle, I found that I now coveted salvation in Christ and yearned to be accounted as one of the people of God. The Bible became more precious to me because of its great message of salvation by faith in Christ. No longer did I read it with the eyes of the skeptic, for my heart was seeking help from this divine revelation and with a sense of deepest comfort I took note of its sweet words of invitation, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near."

Conversion

Burdens were lifted! New vistas of life opened up! Past things took on another meaning for me. For it was God who sought me, and not I who had sought him. He had guided me through all the difficult years of war and post-war distress. He had used a non-Christian friend to direct me to the Church. Receiving additional instruction I knew that I could no longer delay, and that I must believe the Gospel as presented in Scripture. Conviction of sin took hold of me, and I knew the sorrow after God for my sin. I was enabled to see that the life and death of Jesus was something of radical significance for me. For He is the Son of God, a unique person in history by the conception of the Holy Spirit born of a virgin, an unblemished sacrifice for sin made upon Cal-

vary. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for all our sins.

Six months after I started attending this church I was invited to make confession of faith, and on Easter of 1949 I was baptized. Thus I found the One whom I had sought for three years-or rather, I was found by the One who seeks the lost. What a joy it was, and what a joy it continues to be, being mortified with Christ in order to live for Him, to God's glory and honor!

Tell Others!

As I relate this to you as Christians living in a predominantly Christian country I would like to appeal to you to remember the people of other lands, those who do not know God

nor His Christ. Among them are missing sheep and erring prodigals whom God loves. And they must be gained by the way of the preaching of the glad tidings of the Gospel, that they may call upon Jesus Christ for their salvation, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." May we all have a share in this great work of evangelizing the world!

Cornelius K. Iida was a student at Calvin Theological Seminary when he wrote this article.

Reformed Evangelism

"Election and the 'Free Offer' of the Gospel"

Part Three

The Apostle Paul's Concern for His Countrymen

One biblical argument that relates to the question of the well-meant offer of the gospel is often neglected or overlooked: the apostle Paul's testimony at two key points in the argument of Romans (9:1-5; 10:1) that his heart's desire and prayer to God was for the salvation of his brethren, his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3). In the face of the unbelief of many of his contemporaries from among the children of Israel, the apostle declares in the strongest possible terms his own personal desire that they should come to faith in Christ and be saved.

The context for the apostle's expression of this concern for his countrymen is clear. Due to the unbelief of many of the children of Israel, they (though not all) have been cut off from the number of God's people. Though God's Word and "purpose of election" have not failed, only a "remnant chosen by grace" remains among those who were descended from the children of Israel (11:5; 9:6-13). In no respect, however, does this represent a failure of God's gracious purpose, since the hardening of many among the children of Israel has been the occasion within God's purpose to bring salvation to the Gentiles. Moreover, the salvation of the "full-

ness" of the Gentiles will provoke Israel to jealousy (11:11). Within the electing purpose of God, this will lead ultimately to the salvation of "all Israel" (11:26).¹

Within the context of his treatment of the problem of the apparent failure of God's Word with respect to the children of Israel, the apostle Paul's anguish of heart and prayer to God for the salvation of his countrymen strongly express a desire that they should be saved. To echo the language of the passages from Ezekiel that we have considered, as a servant of the Lord, Paul takes no delight in the death of his unbelieving countrymen. He wants them to believe, to call upon the name of the Lord in faith, and so be saved. He does not use language that

Cornel Venema



would restrict the scope of this desire to the elect among the children of Israel. Nor does he speak in any other capacity than as an apostle, commissioned by Christ and empowered by His Spirit to speak in His name. In conformity to Christ and as His apostle, Paul expresses a sincere desire for the salvation of the children of Israel.

2 Peter 3:9

The last passage we will consider in this brief survey is 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Does this passage teach that the Lord’s patience, which is manifest in this period of history prior to His coming in judgment at the end of age, expresses His goodwill toward sinners whom He wishes to come to repentance and so be saved? More particularly, does the Lord’s patience express His goodwill even toward sinners whom He may not have elected to save? Though this might appear to be the obvious force of the passage, some who reject the idea of a well-meant offer argue that there are reasons to restrict this text’s application to the elect.

Two reasons are offered why this text does not teach that the Lord desires the repentance and salvation of lost sinners, some of whom may not be elect. First, the context of the passage refers to the problem of the “delay” of the Lord’s coming and judgment. In the verses preceding and following verse 9 of 2 Peter 3, the apostle Peter is addressing those “mockers” who conclude from the fact that the Lord’s coming has not occurred that His prom-

ise cannot be trusted. The real interest of this passage, therefore, is not the salvation or non-salvation of sinners so much as it is the question of the delay of the Lord’s coming in judgment. Second, the language of this text, particularly when it is read in the context of the whole epistle, clearly restricts its reference to the elect, to the believing community or company of those whom the Lord has determined to save.² This passage does not speak of a general patience that the Lord exhibits toward all lost sinners, but a specific, saving patience that He exhibits to-

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ward His chosen people. This is evident from the language of the text itself, which speaks of God’s patience “toward you.”³

The first of these reasons can be dismissed rather quickly. Though it is true that the passage is especially interested in the question of the delay of God’s judgment, the whole point of 2 Peter 3:9 is that God, far from being “slow about His promise,” in His patience is providing an occasion for sinners to repent, “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” This sounds very much like a concern

that opportunity be given for some to repent and believe, and so be saved (not perish). Indeed, in verse 15 the apostle Peter calls the patience of the Lord “salvation” because it provides the occasion for some to turn to the Lord while it is still time.

The second of these reasons, however, is more substantial. It is true that Peter’s epistle addresses a particular group of people. In the opening salutation of the letter, Peter addresses “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (1:1). Moreover, in 2 Peter 3:9, the patience of the Lord is directed “toward *you*,” that is, the same persons whom the epistle as a whole addresses. This passage, then, may only be speaking of a patience that is directed toward the salvation of true believers, the elect who alone are the objects of God’s desire that they should not perish but come to repentance.

Though this is a possible reading of the text, there are two considerations that lead me to reject it. In the first place, even were this language reserved to the Lord’s patience toward the believing community to which Peter’s epistle is addressed, this does not warrant the conclusion that all those professing believers to whom Peter is speaking are elect. Among those to whom 2 Peter was first written—and, no doubt, among those churches composed of believers and their children to whom this letter continues to speak—there were (and are) some who need to repent lest they perish and come under judgment when the Lord returns

(cf. 1 Peter 4:17). There is nothing in this text or its context that warrants the claim that all those addressed are, head for head, elect persons. This claim is not born out of the language of the text but out of theological considerations, namely, the assumption that it is impossible that the Lord should desire the salvation of lost sinners whom He has not purposed to save. There is no reason to believe that Peter's audience, professing believers, did not include any reprobate persons who would not seize the opportunity given in the Lord's patience to repent. Furthermore, the language of the text is sufficiently indefinite and general to suggest that its reach extends beyond the company of professing believers. The Lord's patience reveals that He is "not wishing for *any* to perish but for *all* to come to repentance." Speaking of this language, John Murray remarks that it "most naturally refers to mankind as a whole as men are faced with the issues of death or life before the day of judgment comes."⁴

Conclusion

In the light of these kinds of biblical passages, the Reformed tradition has generally maintained that the call of the gospel expresses, both on the part of God and on the part of His ambassadors, a genuine desire that lost sinners be saved. The good news proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel includes a sincere summons to faith and repentance that is extended to all.

Now that we have considered the kinds of biblical evidence that support this view of the gospel call, we are in a position to take up the questions mentioned earlier: What evi-

dence is there that this is the predominant view of the Reformed tradition? Is the teaching of a well-meant gospel offer consistent with the teaching of unconditional election? And what implications precisely does this have with regard to the work of evangelism and missions? To these questions I will turn in my next article.

Endnotes

¹For a discussion of the meaning of this language, "all Israel," see my *The Promise of the Future* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), pp. 127-38.

²For a recent treatment of this text, which offers these two reasons as objections to the claim that it teaches a well-meant offer of the gospel, see James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom*, pp. 145-50. White's book is an excellent rebuttal of Geisler's Arminian view of election, but it betrays at times (as in this instance and the previous one mentioned [cf. Note 5]) a bit of overzealousness.

³There are two textual differences worth noting with respect to this verse. Some of the oldest manuscripts have the preposition "on account of" rather than "toward" before "you." Many later manuscripts have the pronoun "us" rather than "you" (plural). These textual differences do not substantially affect the meaning and implication of the text.

⁴John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, "The Free Offer of the Gospel"


(Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), IV:130: "The language in this part of the verse is so absolute that it is highly unnatural to envisage Peter as meaning merely that God does not wish that any believers should perish, but that he rather wishes that all believers who live laxly should repent of their sins. If they are believers, they have already come to repentance, entered upon life, and escaped destruction, even though the struggle against sin and turning from it must continue."

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

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* * * * *

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(continued from page 23)

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