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Radicalism in the church of Jesus Christ

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Nebuchadnezzar, My servant

Mr. Don Doezema

The Creator caring for His creatures

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Fundamental Reformed critique of premillennialism (3)

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Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta

Deal bountifully with Thy servant

Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

Psalm 119:17

The outstanding self-designation of the psalmist throughout Psalm 119 is the title “thy servant.” Thirteen times in this prayer to God he calls himself “thy servant.” That is the way we must ever see ourselves: as friend-servants of our covenant God. As His servants, our great desire is not to escape God’s law. Our great desire, like that of the psalmist, is to live and keep His Word. So, our prayer to God is, “Deal bountifully with thy servant.”

We want God to deal bountifully with us because, apart from His gracious goodness, we deserve to be cast out of His presence for our sins and sinfulness. By God’s grace, we have a great desire to live and to keep His Word. By God’s grace, we humbly pray to God because we understand that life can be found in Him alone through Jesus Christ. Wonderfully, our request to God indicates that He has already given us life and abundantly blessed us. So, in thankfulness for bounties past, we pray, “Deal bountifully with thy servant.”

We go to great lengths to keep ourselves alive. We eat healthy food and go to the doctor because we want to live long. In and of itself, that is not a wrong desire. The psalmist asks God to deal bountifully with him because he wants to live, and he knows that God is the Giver of life. But the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Why do I want to live?” Often we are motivated only to live for the wrong reasons. We seek the things here below and get caught up in so many byways. We need to be reminded that God did not place us here to live like brute beasts seeking only after earthly things.

Why does God give us life in this world? The psalmist was not interested in living for his own sake. But he understood that true life is inextricably bound up with keeping God’s Word. He wanted to live in order that he might keep God’s Word.

God’s Word is His revelation to us. His Word re-

veals His perfect righteousness and holiness. His Word points us to the glory and honor He deserves and how to direct our lives to that end. His Word is the means by which we cleanse our way. His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. His Word strengthens us when our souls melt for heaviness. His Word is full of promises to us that give us hope in a lost world. His Word comforts us in affliction. How sweet is God’s Word to our taste!

What does it mean that we want to keep God’s Word? To “keep” means to guard, to observe, to give attention to, or to watch something. With the psalmist we want to pay careful attention to God’s Word, including the obligations He sets before us in the covenant.

Why do we want to serve God? Why did the psalmist want to serve God? The psalmist was no legalist; he did not want to keep God’s Word in order to obtain life. Just the opposite: He wanted life in order that He might keep God’s Word. Keeping God’s Word is an expression of covenant fellowship with God. We want to keep His Word because He has graciously made us His friend-servants.

The psalmist had such a great desire for God’s Word that his soul was crushed in his longing. He wanted to walk in the right way of God’s commandments. But he knew he fell far short. So, his soul was worn down and languishing in his desire: “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (v. 20). His longing was not for a minute, or a day, or a week. Rather, he longed for God’s judgments “at all times.” He regularly thought about and yearned to know and sought to walk in God’s paths of righteousness to the glory of His name.

Such a prayer to God shows that He has humbled us to see our misery. He has humbled us to recognize that we are still sinners who fall far short of the holiness to which He calls us. We are blinded to so many wonderful things declared in God’s Word. We need our eyes opened up by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. We face reproach and contempt because of the wicked

world that surrounds us. We pray to God because we are needy people. The more God gives us to recognize that about ourselves, the more earnestly we will pray that God would deal bountifully with us. That is what the psalmist does in this section of the psalm.

When God has humbled us to see our great need, we will pray “Deal bountifully with thy servant.” When we see our great need for mercy, we do not want it in small drops; we want mercy to be poured out upon us so that our cup overflows. We will pray, “Deal *bountifully*....” Our prayer for God’s bounty is the prayer of those who have been humbled by God.

Secondly, our prayer manifests God’s work of humbling us in the fact that we see ourselves as God’s servants. God is not our servant; we are His servants. He does not exist for us; He created us for Himself. So we pray these things, but not for ourselves. We pray for God’s bountiful provision because we belong to Him body and soul, in life and in death. We pray for God’s bountiful dealing in order that we may serve Him more faithfully.

The psalmist continues to manifest his humility when he prays, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (v. 18). God’s law here is not merely the Ten Commandments; it is all of God’s teaching that gives direction to us. The psalmist’s humility comes through in his recognition that his eyes are still closed to many wondrous things in God’s Word. So often we read God’s Word and fail to see its wondrous truths. We read about God’s mighty power that created the world out of nothing. Or, we read about a mighty miracle of Jesus feeding five thousand. But we fail to see the wonder of these things. We read of Jesus’ promise to come again to receive us to Himself, but we are distracted with mundane thoughts. We have the wisdom of God revealed in the Scriptures, but we are captivated by the wisdom of the world. Our eyes are closed to so many wondrous things in God’s Word.

Like the psalmist, we need to be humbled so that we pray, “Open thou mine eyes.” We cannot open them ourselves. By nature, the way we are born into the human race, we are blinded and cannot see the light that shines out of God’s Word. We do not need simpler Bible translations; we need God to open our eyes to understand His Word. Only if God opens our eyes will we behold wondrous things in His law. Only then will we see the glory of God in His justice, and mercy, and compassion, and longsuffering, and abundant goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

The third petition in this section shows the psalmist’s humility when he prays, “Hide not thy commandments from me” (v. 19). When God humbles us in light of His

commandments, we will acknowledge our sinful natures. The psalmist recognizes that his own intelligence and wisdom are not enough to fathom the will of God as it applies to every area of life.

So often we cannot see the wisdom of God’s ways. We feel at home in this world. We are still blinded by the old man so that we imagine our abode is on the earth. We live as if this world was all that there is. When we forget we are strangers here, we do not see the joy in keeping God’s commandments. We need God to give us wisdom so that we see and humbly confess, “I am a stranger here.”

The fourth petition in this section of the Psalm that manifests the psalmist’s humility is, “Remove from me reproach and contempt” (v. 22). Reproach is the strong expression of disapproval and disappointment. The wicked world talks about us with reproach. Contempt is worse, as it expresses the attitude that someone is worthless and worse than useless. The world calls us bigoted and hateful.

Despite the experience of hatred and persecution, the psalmist desired to keep God’s testimonies in humble submission to God (v. 22). He did not keep them perfectly, but he regarded them highly, guarded them in his heart, and sought to obey them. He was determined to show his loyalty to God. Even when princes sat and spoke against him, he kept meditating on God’s statutes. Although we are willing to put up with reproach and contempt and even slander, we pray that God would remove them from us. Humbled by reproach and contempt, we see that our own attempts to stand up and clear ourselves will fail unless God renders His aid.

God certainly answers the humble prayer for His assistance.

The psalmist had prayed that God would deal bountifully with him. Indeed, before the words even came off his lips, God had already begun to answer his prayer. While he was yet speaking, God heard him (cf. Is. 65:24). That is the way God works. He answers our prayers even before we call because He Himself worked those prayers in us. He causes us to see our great misery. He reveals to us the only Deliverer. He gives us thankful hearts. Salvation is His work from beginning to end.

How do we know God answered the psalmist abundantly? The evidence is in the Psalm. The very fact that the psalmist wanted to keep God’s Word is evidence of God’s abundant work in him. The fact that he saw himself as a stranger in the earth; the fact that he longed greatly for God’s judgments; the fact that he was willing to be reproached and slandered even by rulers;

the fact that he meditated upon God's statutes; the fact that God's testimonies were his delight and counselors; the fact that he prayed, "Deal bountifully with thy servant"—all these things point to God's bountiful dealing in the heart of the psalmist even before he offered up the petition.

This is the gracious God who has made us His servants.

This is our gracious covenant God to whom we confidently pray, "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep thy word."



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Radicalism in the church of Jesus Christ

The Protestant Reformed Churches have been my ecclesiastical home from my birth. These churches have nurtured, fed, guided, and instructed me, and subsequently, my children and grandchildren. I love these churches and pray for them continually. It is out of love for these churches that I take up the pen and address a growing concern in my soul, namely, a spirit of radicalism in these churches.

Radicalism is difficult to define. It does not identify itself, nor even admit to being radical when so accused. Radicalism is not heresy as such, for it maintains the truth of Scripture and the confessions, even emphatically so. However, it goes beyond what Scripture allows. Radicalism demands what Scripture does not. In this way radicalism distorts God's truth and weakens the church's ability to stand for truth.

The point of this editorial is to examine the Protestant Reformed Churches with respect to radicalism. From the vantage point of many years of membership, and having had the privilege of teaching the history of the PRC many times in these churches' seminary, I think I may legitimately reflect a bit on the PRC. Reading articles in the *Standard Bearer* going back to its beginning, I have noted often that radicalism was present in the PRC from the start. Significantly, the radicalism was most often evident in *letters* to the editor, not in the *editorials*. Herman Hoeksema did not mince words or pull punches. He was sharp and precise in evaluating doctrinal error and condemning it. More than any other, the Christian Reformed Church, which had adopted common grace and deposed him, was the object of his editorial critiques. In no uncertain terms he both explained the truth and condemned and rejected the error in those churches. He did not, however, treat the CRC

as false church. He did not imply that the CRC men were not Christians.

Similarly, in the conflict with Klaas Schilder and the Liberated Churches over the doctrine of the covenant, Herman Hoeksema was clear and precise in his critique of their position, uncompromisingly rejecting conditions in the covenant. But he did not condemn the Liberated as false church. At Schilder's death, Hoeksema testified that he "esteemed him...above all, as a brother in Christ."

Reading the *SB* through the years, you will discover, I believe, the same spirit in the subsequent editors to the present day. A desire to set forth the truth, reject the error as clearly as possible, without a personal condemnation of all who are not Protestant Reformed, and without setting up the PRC as the only true church.

Nonetheless, the radicals have been in the PRC from the beginning. This is not surprising. The history of the church is a history of dealing with radicalism.

Martin Luther dealt with radicalism in Wittenberg. One of Luther's close associates early in the Reformation, a man named Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt, had stood boldly with Luther against the errors of Rome. But Carlstadt became radical. And when Luther was absent for some eleven months, Carlstadt led a radical movement that took over, and nearly destroyed, the Reformation in Wittenberg.

These radicals supported all that Luther had maintained but were dissatisfied with the progress of the Reformation under Luther, and they pressed for immediate changes. They rejected the manner in which the people had partaken of the Lord's Supper (all their lives) and pressured the people into new practices. The radicals closed the monasteries and nunneries, forcing out the

residents who had taken vows to remain in their orders. On their own authority they entered the city's churches, destroying pictures of saints and smashing images of Jesus. Based on the principle of the office of believer, and that all believers have the Spirit, they began closing the schools. What need was there of an education when the Spirit would give the proper understanding of God's will? Hearing of all this, Luther rushed back to Wittenberg to oppose and eventually to drive out the radicals.

Another form of radicalism subsequently reared its head in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Beholding with legitimate dismay the lack of godly living and the laxity in Reformed doctrine, some members formed conventicles in which they could meet with other 'truly saved, truly Reformed' believers. They felt quite capable of identifying those church members who were truly converted and those who were not. The Synod of Dordt (1618-19) rejected this radical spirit in the Canons III/IV, Article 15: "With respect to those who make an external profession of faith and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge in the most favorable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us."

The period of the Reformation was not the first time that radicalism made an appearance in the church. It manifest itself in the first disciples of the Lord. When the residents of a certain village in Samaria did not receive Jesus, His disciples James and John, filled with righteous indignation, cried, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" But Jesus "turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:54-55). Or, what of Peter's exalted opinion of *his* faithfulness to the Lord, above anyone else—"Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). Yes, even true disciples of Jesus can manifest a radical spirit, earning His disapproval and rebuke.

This radical spirit manifests itself today in the opinion that "our church" is the only true church, or virtually so. This reprehensible spirit is found in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Even though few would ever admit that they believe the PRC is the only true church, their actions and attitudes indicate that they consider all churches (other than the PRC and her sisters) to be false. They will associate only with Protestant Reformed members. Their children are not allowed to play with non-PRs. They will have no company with a family member who has left the PRC for another—even a Reformed—denomination. And perhaps even, they will cut off fellowship with members of the PRC who do have fellowship with non-PRs.

It is only a matter of time before radicals begin to look with suspicion about the Protestant Reformed Churches. Perhaps they judge their congregation to be orthodox, but more and more they wonder about other PR congregations. Eventually they start viewing other members of their own congregation with suspicion. Radicals have no doubt about themselves—they are pure. But they express doubt as to the faithfulness and commitment of other members.

At the same time, they are suspicious of the orthodoxy of certain ministers, perhaps their own. This is not because they have heard heresy preached. Yet they wonder whether he is truly and fully committed to the doctrine maintained by the PRC. Perhaps his condemnation of error is not harsh enough in their judgment. Perhaps he is too charitable to those who are "outside" the PRC.

Allow me to illustrate that my concerns are not hypothetical. One current member of the PRC, who for a time was under the influence of radicals, admitted, "I became convinced that our minister was not preaching the Reformed gospel," a conviction that he now repudiates. Again, years ago after I preached a sermon that proclaimed the truth of an unconditional covenant of grace, a radical confidently affirmed to me that "not all your colleagues in the seminary agree with that." (At that time, my colleagues were professors Decker, Engelsma, and Hanko, and I categorically rejected the insinuation, and still do today.)

Protestant Reformed ministers can contribute to a spirit of radical suspicion with extremely harsh language in preaching and writing. Now, let this be clear. Every Protestant Reformed minister *must* be *antithetical*—setting forth the truth over against the lie, which is to be condemned. Every Protestant Reformed minister *must* engage in *polemics*—demonstrating how a particular teaching is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. The Formula of Subscription requires it. Ministers, elders, deacons, and professors vow that they "are disposed to refute and contradict" errors, particularly those condemned in the Canons. The Protestant Reformed Seminary requires this of students in their exegesis and sermons. Elders must demand it of their ministers.

Nonetheless, ministers can contribute to the radical spirit in the congregation with a harsh, uncharitable attitude towards other Christians who hold to error. In addition, there is a line of argumentation that can contribute to radicalism. It runs something like this: "Teaching 'A' is an error. 'A' is *essentially* a teaching of doctrine 'B,' which is clearly heretical." The impression is left that a church which teaches 'A' is a heretical church, which is to say, a false church.

I say again, the problem is not polemics. Refutation and condemnation of error is necessary in order to teach and warn Protestant Reformed members. It is the proper way that the ministers “exert [themselves] in keeping the church free from such errors” (Formula of Subscription).

Rather, the problem is first the “broad brush,” so to speak, used to paint heretics. Second, it is the unspoken implication that since the PRC is the only church that condemns ‘A,’ the PRC is the only true church. That contributes powerfully to radicalism.

Another way that a Protestant Reformed minister can contribute to radicalism is by not saying enough. Take, for example, a sermon on Psalm 139:21-22, “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” This text gives important instruction in this age of “tolerance” and “love.” Believers need to know and appropriate the instruction of this text. However, a sermon on this text must also explain the relationship between this text and Jesus’ command, “Love your neighbor.” Failure to do so will leave many members confused, wondering how to love their neighbor and hate those who hate God. The radicals, however, will solve the problem easily with simple “logic.”

I must hate all those who hate God.
All unbelievers hate God.
Therefore, I may love only my *believing* neighbor.

Sermons that lack clarity or fail to explain such relationships feed the spirit of radicalism.

A Protestant Reformed minister may not take refuge in his being misunderstood. As churches, we strongly condemn preaching that sets forth many truths but fails to state the *whole* truth. For instance, we condemn preaching that proclaims the powerful love of God but fails to state that God’s love is particular, not for all, but only for God’s elect people. We condemn preaching of the cross that states many beautiful truths but fails to affirm clearly that Christ died only for those given Him by the Father, not for all. Such preaching is rightly to be condemned, for it fails to preach the whole truth. Similarly, a Protestant Reformed minister can be guilty of feeding radicalism by failing to preach the whole truth and failing to warn against a radical application of the text.

Probably every preacher is guilty of this at one time or another. Which preacher has not been accused of condemning to eternal perdition anyone who leaves the PRC, simply because he condemns such a departure? Which preacher has not been accused of teaching that

only PRs go to heaven, though he rejects such a teaching with all his heart? It happens. At the same time, we preachers must be crystal clear that sharp condemnation of an error is not the same as condemning all members of a church that holds to the error. It must be affirmed repeatedly that the condemnation of an error is not affirming that the PRC is the only true church.

Another warning about preaching and radicalism must be sounded, though from a different perspective. Preachers can contribute to radicalism by *failing* to be antithetical and polemical. If the Reformed truth is not set forth clearly and precisely, and the lie explicitly condemned, that feeds the suspicions of radicals. Thus, while a harsh and un-Christian polemic feeds radicalism, a lack of polemics also provides fodder for radicalism.

Again, the thrust and concern of this editorial must not be misunderstood. Just as this editorial is not advocating a muting of sharp antithetical preaching and writing, so it is not advocating that Protestant Reformed members no longer condemn and reject sin and error as they face it in their lives. As members, we must live consistent with our doctrine. Such consistency demands, for example, that we refuse to attend a wedding where the bride has been divorced (and her husband still lives). That is not radical; it is rather the required refusal to condone sin. It is a different matter, however, to refuse to attend a wedding of a PR and a good, non-PR Christian, simply because the bride is not Protestant Reformed.

Radicals are found in virtually all churches throughout the world. There are Baptists who will not speak to Reformed people, and Lutherans who will not talk to Calvinists. Sad to say, there are Protestant Reformed members who will not talk to Christian Reformed members, except to admonish them. It seems to me that the PRC have had more than their share of radicals. Calvinistic radicals seem drawn to the strong stands that the PRC rightly take for the truth and against the lie. Sadly, many such, after they have done severe damage to the reputation of the PRC, leave for yet another denomination. The PRC were not pure enough either.

Radicalism is rooted in pride, a “We are the people” attitude. There is a legitimate, good, and proper rejoicing in God for His goodness in giving to the PRC the glorious doctrines of sovereign, particular grace, of the unconditional covenant, of biblical insights into the antithesis, marriage, education, and so much more. We had better give God the glory and thank Him for preserving these beautiful doctrines and practices. But the radical goes beyond that and, like the Pharisee, prays, “God, I thank thee that we are not like other churches—

Arminian, teaching common grace, tolerating divorce and remarriage....” That, we all recognize, is nothing but pride.

That indicates the seriousness of this radical spirit. But there is more. The radical spirit that condemns (by word or deed) all but a select group of people is guilty in many instances of condemning those loved eternally by God and purchased by His Son’s blood.

And that brings us again to the matter of pride. Radicalism is fostered in the sphere of pride. Pride is found in every believer’s heart, and therefore, really none can point the finger at another. But make no mistake, the

Lord will not tolerate pride—not in individuals, not in families, not in churches. My fear is that if the PRC allow radicalism to thrive, God’s judgment will weaken the churches, making them unqualified for defending the truth and ineffective in witnessing to the truth

Let us turn from our pride and pray for forgiveness. Let us pray for wisdom and strength to maintain the truth of God without distortion. May God give us grace to reject and condemn the radical spirit—from the pulpit and in our personal lives. Then, with a pure motive—God’s glory alone, not ours—we may stand for God’s truth in these evil days.



All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

Evolution at the zoo, and The Bible vs. the Qur’an

Humans and chimps

On a Thursday afternoon at the John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids, Michigan something rather unexpected happened while observing the chimpanzees. It is not unexpected to find the promotion of evolutionary ideas that contradict Scripture at a zoo. Christians are used to being confronted with the reality that in public places they will find the assumption that the world is billions of years old and that human beings evolved from animals. So, to read plaques at a zoo that make such claims is unsurprising. But on this Thursday afternoon, while observing the chimpanzees, my family encountered a member of the zoo’s educational staff who was eager to share “facts” with us about the chimpanzees. He helpfully explained some of their habits and how the zoo cares for their needs. Then he asked the question that raised my suspicion, “How similar do you think chimpanzees are to humans?” “Guess,” he said, “give me a percentage.” He asked my unsuspecting children to throw out numbers, and some of the younger ones obliged (amusingly, our five-year old’s guess was over 100%).

Before the zoo’s employee answered his own question, I knew what was coming. In 2014 my family visited the Creation Museum in Kentucky, where the information about the origin of humans and animals is biblical and

more scientifically accurate than what one commonly finds in zoos and museums. During this visit I sat through a lecture by Dr. Georgia Purdom that dealt in part with popular (scientific?) claims about the similarity between human beings and chimpanzees (for me this was the highlight of the museum visit). She referenced Jane Goodall as the one who has popularized the idea that 98% of chimpanzee DNA is similar to human DNA. A search of Goodall’s website (janegoodall.ca) reveals that she continues to make this claim. On a page that shares “10 things you probably didn’t know about chimpanzees,” the number one heading is that they are “So like us.” Under this heading it is claimed, “Chimpanzees are our closest living non-human relatives. We share 98% of our DNA. As many experts say, we are 98% chimpanzee and chimpanzees are 98% human. This shared genetic make-up reveals itself in physiological and behavioral traits that give us an incredible look into human evolutionary history.”

Sure enough, the zoo employee shared the popular belief that chimpanzees and humans are similar and told us that there is only a 2% difference between us. Then, addressing mainly my young, impressionable children, he stated, “We are primates.” Well, that was enough for my wife and me. We moved our children along and explained to them that human beings are not primates! The relationship between us and animals is

that both are creatures of God. But human beings were uniquely created by God and are much different from chimpanzees.

I decided not to confront the zoo employee at that time. I thought about asking him how offended he would be if I walked around the zoo proclaiming the Bible's teaching about how God created animals and human beings. It struck me that in this age in which we live it is not permissible publicly to proclaim that God is the almighty Creator of all things in heaven and on earth, but it is permissible to stand in a public place and tell people to their faces that they are basically animals. So accepted is the lie that human beings are animals that this young man made this claim in such a matter-of-fact manner that I am certain he would have been shocked that anyone would disagree or be offended by it.

It has been demonstrated, scientifically, that the claim that human and chimp DNA are 98% similar is false. Dr. Purdom demonstrated this in the lecture I heard. She explained that the research the claim was based on is flawed and deceptive. Basically, she explained that researchers cherry-picked the DNA sequences that they had reason to believe would be similar to human DNA, ignoring the sequences that would have been dissimilar to human DNA, and then published their findings. I have not been able to find a transcript of that lecture. But there are other articles available on answersingenesis.org explaining that studies show there is a greater difference between the DNA of humans and chimps than is popularly claimed. One article explains on the basis of honest research that "genome-wide, only 70% of the chimpanzee DNA was similar to human under the *most optimal* sequence-slice conditions" (emphasis added). This means that "overall there is extreme DNA sequence discontinuity between the two [human and chimp] genomes." Scientific data does not support the "standard evolutionary time-scales and dogmatic presuppositions about a common ancestor." Science does not support the idea that humans are primates.

Not that we need science to tell us that humans are different from (not familial relatives of) chimpanzees, since we have the testimony of Scripture. God created the first primate. When we observe the chimpanzees and other marvelous animals at the zoo, we do well to think about the wisdom and power of their Creator. He also specially created the first human, Adam. We are descended from him and his wife Eve. Originally created in the image of God, elect human beings are now renewed in His image, through the wonder-work of His only begotten Son becoming a man to serve as our Mediator, something no primate could do.

Did I miss an opportunity by not speaking to the

young man that Thursday afternoon? Should I send a letter to the zoo? Should I go back, having had time to think things over, and seek out the young man to testify to him about the truth? I am not sure what the right answer is to these questions, but I know that these are things that I need to pray about, as I also pray that God will grant that my children, along with all the church's children, will be firmly established in the truth in these last days when the lie is so prevalent.

The Bible versus the Qur'an

Catechism students ask important questions. One of the most common questions I have been asked when discussing the doctrine of Scripture is, How do we know that the Bible is true and that the writings or books that other religions hold sacred are false? How can we know that the Bible is the Word of God? How do we know that the Book of Mormon is not? How do we know that the Qur'an is not? It is because of such questions that an article entitled "Differences Between the Qur'an and the Bible: An Introduction" by Eric Davis (so far the series consists of five articles) caught my attention. This article (and the rest of the series) provides an opportunity for us and our young people to think about and appreciate what a uniquely blessed people we are to have the true Word of God while so many others are deluded by lies.

Our conviction that the Bible is the Word of God is not based on empirical evidence or irrefutable logical arguments. As the Belgic Confession explains in Article 5, "We receive all these books [the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments], and these only, as holy and canonical...because...the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry evidence in themselves." The last phrase is of primary importance. God determines what is His Word. The Bible is the Word of God because God says so. Over against those who reject this as sufficient reason to accept the Bible as the Word of God, the Christian church believes that it is only right that a book written by God would include the self-testimony that it is *His* Word. So, the ground for believing that the Bible is God's Word is not scientific evidence or impeccable human reasoning, but the testimony of God Himself.

At the same time, the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is indispensable. Sinful man will not receive the testimony of God that the Bible is God's Word. The rejection of the Bible by man is not because there is insufficient reason to believe that the Bible is God's Word. God's testimony is better than any other testimony. God's testimony is the best reason for man to receive the Bible as His Word—and the reason why it is

damnably inexcusable for man to reject the Bible. Man refuses to acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God because he is morally corrupt. He hates God and His Word. The only remedy is for man to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit so that he will be able to know and believe the Bible is the Word of God. Without the testimony of the Spirit in a man's heart, he will not believe the Bible is the Word of God no matter how much scientific research is done to support the claims of the Bible. The believer both hears and believes God's testimony that the Bible is His Word because of the faith worked in his heart by the Spirit of God.

Because the believer receives the twofold testimony of the Bible and of the Holy Spirit, it is unnecessary for the believer to do a study of the Bible over against the "sacred" writings of other religions or cults to conclude that the Bible is true and the other writings are false. However, there is still some profit in comparing the Bible to the writings of other religions. While such a comparison is not necessary to convince believers, it can help increase our appreciation for the Bible and our conviction that it is indeed the very Word of God. In addition, it can serve to prepare us to witness intelligently to Muslims, if God should provide us with such an opportunity.

Because the believer receives the twofold testimony of the Bible and of the Holy Spirit, it is unnecessary for the believer to do a study of the Bible over against the "sacred" writings of other religions or cults to conclude that the Bible is true and the other writings are false.

Davis's first article compares the origins of the Bible and Qur'an. I leave it to those who are interested to read the article rather than summarize the points that Davis makes. His concluding analysis demonstrates what we would expect to be true, that the Bible is full of evidences that are consistent with its claim to be of divine origin, which evidences are entirely lacking in the Qur'an. He writes,

The 66 books of the Bible were inspired by the Spirit of God through about 40 different authors

from differing times and cultures over a time span of about 1500 years. The Qur'an came through one man, Muhammad, over about 20 years.

The most significant biblical events—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—were recorded by four separate witnesses. Following his resurrection, Christ was seen by over 500 individuals. These central events to the Christian faith were historical in that they occurred and were observed by many. Today, we have this inerrant, God-breathed text called the Bible.

Again, this is not the reason that we receive the Bible and reject the Qur'an. But it does confirm for us that the Bible's claim to be God's Word is true and that the Qur'an is simply the work of a fallible human being.



Search the Scriptures

Mr. Don Doezema, member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

Upon this rock (33)

Nebuchadnezzar, My servant

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2018, p. 346.

"Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live."

Jeremiah 27:12, 13

Hardly a popular course of action was that being advocated by the prophet Jeremiah. To submit meekly to foreign domination would strike the people as being so un-Jewish, so unpatriotic. There were, in fact, immediate attempts to discredit the message of God's

prophet. Of one of these attempts we read in chapter 28. Hananiah came to the people with what he claimed also to be the word of the Lord. "I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD's house.... And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah [Jehoiachin]...with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD" (Jer. 28:2-4).

Meanwhile, there were false prophets also in Babylon who were attempting to mislead the Jews who were already living in exile. Jeremiah, therefore, sent a letter to the captives (29:1), warning them against the prophets and diviners who deceived them, prophesying falsely in God's name (29:8, 9). In contrast to the false prophets who predicted speedy deliverance from captivity, Jeremiah advised the people not only to build houses and plant gardens in the land of their captivity (29:5) but actually to "seek the peace" of Babylon and to "pray unto the LORD for it" (29:7), for they could not expect to be allowed to return to Jerusalem till "after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon" (29:10).

It seems that Zedekiah, for the first years of his reign, had resisted pressure to join in any anti-Babylonian league. He must, in fact, have made every effort to court the favor of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he was indebted for his elevation to the throne in Jerusalem. Finally, however, as he became more secure in his position as king, as he was encouraged by the testimony of false prophets, as he was influenced by the desires of his princes, and as he was enticed by overtures from Egypt, Zedekiah joined in opposition against the power of Babylon. According to Ezekiel 17:15, he sent ambassadors to Egypt, requesting aid in the form of "horses and much people." And he did all this in spite of the oath with which he had promised to serve Nebuchadnezzar.

Angered by the repeated rebellion of the kings of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar determined to put it down once and for all. It seems that he led his army quickly to Riblah and set up his headquarters there (cf. II Kings 25:6). In a very short time Judea was overrun, and Nebuchadnezzar and his host were again outside the walls of Jerusalem.

When Zedekiah, in these dire straits, sent to inquire of the Lord through Jeremiah (Jer. 21:1, 2), the prophet predicted in no uncertain terms the complete destruction of the city (21:10). And, just as plainly, he advised surrender. "He that abideth in this city," he said, "shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live" (21:9).

As could be expected, his advice was not at all well received. The princes advocated holding out. And for a short time it seemed as if the princes had indeed given wise advice. For the army of Pharaoh came out to challenge the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, "departed from Jerusalem" (Jer. 37:5) to go and meet the Egyptians.

The message of Jeremiah, however, was increasingly emphatic. "Deceive not yourselves," he warned,

for the Egyptians will be forced to retreat, and the "Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire" (37:6-9). So certain was the destruction of Jerusalem, he insisted, that "though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire" (v. 10).

For one year and six months, the city withstood the siege. After that long a time, famine and pestilence must have become a way of life for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And yet they continued to despise the word of Jeremiah, and insisted on holding out to the bitter end. When it was apparent that the end had finally arrived, Zedekiah and the men of war sought safety in flight, under the cover of darkness (Jer. 39:4)—thus making one last, desperate attempt to avoid at least part of the consequences predicted by Jeremiah. But there was no escaping that word of prophecy. The Chaldeans pursued and overtook them in the plains of Jericho (39:5). It seems that Zedekiah's army scattered in every direction (II Kings 25:5), and the king and his household were taken captive to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters. After forcing Zedekiah to witness the death of his own sons (and perhaps of his nobles), Nebuchadnezzar "put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon" (39:6, 7). Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel, that God would "bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (Ezek. 12:13).

The city of Jerusalem still stood. But not for long. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, after he had received his orders from Nebuchadnezzar, proceeded to the systematic sacking and razing of the city (II Kings 25:8-17). He burned the palace and all the houses of the people. He tore down the mighty walls of the city. He stripped from the temple of God everything of value and then burned the building to the ground. The city, as Jeremiah had foretold, was leveled. And the inhabitants were carried to Babylon (Jer. 39:9). Nebuzaradan left only the "poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah" (v. 10) to till the land.

Next time: The land left desolate.



God's wondrous works

Rev. James Laning, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa

The Creator caring for His creatures

Having considered God's act of creating all things, we move on to the subject of providence. We are comforted knowing that the God who created all things has not forsaken His creatures, but continues to care for all that He has made. The Almighty King, who is also our faithful Father, continues to govern His creatures according to His will, directing all things to His glory and for our good. This ongoing activity of our God is what we refer to as His providence.

The English term "providence" is used in more than one sense. The term has the literal meaning of "fore-sight." A man praised for his providence is commended for looking ahead and providing or preparing for the future. In theology, however, the term is used for God's act of determining all that will happen and constantly directing all His creatures, upholding and governing them according to His will.

As one might expect, this subject is rather broad. Lord willing, the following will be treated in separate articles:

- The Creator upholds His creation, caring for all the living creatures and blessing specifically His people in Christ.
- God, before the foundation of the world, determined all that will happen in time, and He constantly directs all things to accomplish His goal.
- God not only permits evils but sends them, and He does so with a positive purpose.
- God is governing all things by Jesus Christ, who is sitting at His right hand executing His counsel.

We begin by considering the Creator's ongoing care for us and all His creatures.

Caring for the animals

That God upholds all things means, in the first place, that He causes them to continue to exist. God created all things by speaking His word, and He continues to uphold all things by the word of His power.

In the second place, that God upholds all things means that He provides His living creatures with what they need to continue to live. He provides food not only for man but also for the animals.

The vast multitude of animals all need to be fed each day, and Jehovah God is the One who feeds them. Our Lord tells us this repeatedly. He implies this in His question to Job: "Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God..." (Job 38:41a).

God desired Job to think about the answer to this question. We do well to think about the answer ourselves. Day after day it is the Almighty Creator who is continuing to provide all His living creatures with the food that they need.

The animals are fed by Him, and they look to Him for their food. That is what the Scriptures say in more than one place. We sing of this in the psalms: "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God" (Ps. 104:21). The lions, God says, seek their meat from Him. We confess this again when singing another psalm: "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:14-16). The same idea is expressed in yet another psalm: "These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good" (Ps. 104:27-28).

God would impress upon us the fact that He who made this world and is transcendent *above* it is also *in* this world providing for His creatures. Everywhere present is the living God, caring for the multitude of creatures He has made.

Giving the ungodly what they need to live

God gives food to the animals and also to human beings. He gives food even to the ungodly who blaspheme His name. The Creator is the one who "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). For as long as He wills that an unbeliever's bodily life continue, God will continue to give him the food and breath that he needs.

The unbeliever should thank God for the good things that God gives him, but he refuses to do so. The prophet Daniel rebuked the wicked king of Babylon for praising his false gods and refusing to praise the God who was

granting him the very breath he needed to live: “Thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified” (Dan. 5:23b). The unbeliever receives many good things from God and yet refuses to glorify Him. For that he is and will be justly punished.

Receiving these things in unbelief, the ungodly man does not profit from what he receives. He receives the material things, but he does not receive the word of God’s blessing that is necessary truly to profit from them.

God’s blessing is necessary to profit from the material things we receive. We believers recognize this and ask our heavenly Father to bless our food each day. The unthankful unbeliever, however, does not make this request. As a just judgment of God, his food is not blessed. Though he may have plenty to fill his body, he does not receive the gracious word of God’s blessing and remains unsatisfied in his soul.

Providing for us in both body and soul

Though God gives food and drink to all human beings, it is specifically His elect people whom He graciously upholds. Note how the following

verse speaks of God upholding only His people in Christ: “For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous” (Ps. 37:17). This same idea is found in the prophets: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Is. 41:10).

Unlike the unbelievers, we who trust in God have a twofold life, a bodily life and a spiritual life.¹ Having a twofold life, we require a twofold food: material food for our body and spiritual food (that is, God’s Word) for our soul. Our Father in heaven provides us with both, blessing our daily bread that He provides for us and granting us spiritual nourishment and strength for our soul.

¹ The unbelievers have no spiritual life. Their spiritual heart is dead.

In Scripture, God points us to His care for the animals and then assures us that He cares also and especially for us, His people. Life and everything we need to continue to live comes to us from our God. It is our Father in heaven who gave us life (our bodily life and our spiritual life), and all that we need continues to come to us from Him. There is nothing that we need that we can provide for ourselves. Every moment of every day His invisible hand is upholding us.

God cares for His creatures, and we His people are His creatures. Our Lord refers to Himself as the Creator of His people: “I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King” (Is. 43:15). He has also caused us to be new creatures in Christ: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (II Cor. 5:17). “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10a).

Having created us in Christ, He continues to provide us with all that we need. Though we sometimes doubt this, He is providing us what we need even during times of adversity. The truth of God’s providence gives us great comfort in such trials.

Cared for in the midst of dangers

We enjoy great comfort and peace when we meditate on the truth of God’s providence, though we are aware that we are

surrounded with dangers on every side. In a moment we could be hit by a car, could fall from a great height, be killed by a violent storm, or taken down by a deadly disease. Our fields may be destroyed by a flood, or our possessions stolen by an intruder. Yet we have comfort and peace in the midst of these dangers, knowing that our Father in heaven is in control of all of these things. We have no doubt that He will continue to care for us, averting the evil or turning it to our profit.

When meditating on God’s providence, we are not overwhelmed with fear and anxiety about what may happen. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil. God is with us, just as He promised that He would be. We have no doubt that He will care for us. He who loves us and sent His Son to die for us, will certainly remain with us, upholding us each day and granting us all we need.

In Scripture, God points us to His care for the animals and then assures us that He cares also and especially for us, His people. Life and everything we need to continue to live comes to us from our God. It is our Father in heaven who gave us life (our bodily life and our spiritual life), and all that we need continues to come to us from Him. There is nothing that we need that we can provide for ourselves. Every moment of every day His invisible hand is upholding us.



Things which must shortly come to pass

Prof. David Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Fundamental Reformed critique of premillennialism (3)

Previous article in this series: September 1 2018, p. 467.

“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.... In Isaac shall thy seed be called.... The children of the promise are counted for the seed...that the purpose of God according to election might stand...Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

Romans 9:6-13

Introduction

Dispensational premillennialism, which is false doctrine concerning the truth of the last things, or eschatology, is also heresy.

One element of its heresy is *its denial of Jesus Christ*, as the preceding article in this series demonstrated.

The other element, which is no less serious, is premillennialism’s *denial of God’s eternal election*.

I do not now refer to the denial of personal, unconditional election, accompanied by an eternal decree of the reprobation of others. Much of premillennialism is, in fact, guilty of denying the predestination confessed by the Canons of Dordt by virtue of its thoroughly Arminian theology as, for example, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, MI and Mars Hill in Grandville, MI. Preaching and teaching salvation by the free will of the sinner, much of premillennialism falls under the condemnation of the Belgic Confession of Faith:

We reject all that is taught repugnant to this [truth of man’s total depravity by nature—DJE] concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin; and has nothing of himself unless it is given him from heaven.... For there is no will nor understanding, conformable to the divine will and understanding, but what Christ hath wrought in man.¹

Explaining Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:37, “how often would I have gathered thy children together...and ye

would not,” of Jesus’ desire to make the Jews His earthly kingdom, Alva J. McClain quotes approvingly the explanation that affirms “the freedom of man’s will to resist the grace of God.”²

This Arminian, free-will theology, by itself, apart from the erroneous doctrine of the last things, exposes these churches and their gospel as false.

Nor do I refer to the denial of the effectual election of Israel of which the earliest, traditional theology of dispensational premillennialism was guilty. This was the teaching that during His earthly ministry Jesus, on behalf of God His Father and Sender, made a sincere, well-meant offer to the Jewish nation that they become the earthly, blessed, and saved kingdom of God on earth, as God had elected them to be. It was God’s desire that the nation accept His offer.³ The rejection of the offer by the Jews frustrated God’s plan, so that the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth had to be “postponed” until a later date. In response to the Jews’ rejection of God’s offer, God fell back on or came up with “plan B,” and began saving a church out of the nations. The saving of the church, on this view, is merely a “parenthesis” in God’s more important dealings with the Jews.⁴

Some contemporary, supposedly more “moderate” dispensationalists distance themselves from aspects of this original doctrine of dispensational premillennialists. But they do not condemn the teaching as a form of the heresy of salvation by the will of sinners and a denial of the sovereignty of divine grace in salvation. In fact, they excuse this miserable teaching of the original teachers.

2 Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1959), 361.

3 “The contingent offer of the Davidic kingdom by Jesus [to the Jews, at His first coming—DJE] was bona fide, and it was not a spiritual kingdom which He announced” (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1965], 175).

4 “The [present] age itself is a parenthesis in the divine program of God...an unexpected and unpredicted parenthesis as far as Old Testament prophecy is concerned” (John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 25).

1 Belgic Confession, Art. 14, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 399, 400.

Writing in the book that “moderates” the older, original dispensational theology in the interests of acceptance of the dispensational heresy by covenant theologians, Darrell L. Bock takes issue with the original dispensational doctrine that the Jews’ rejection of Christ’s offer of a carnal kingdom necessitated God’s “postponement” of the Jewish kingdom. This dispensational doctrine made, and makes, of the church age a mere “parenthesis” (as the older advocates of dispensational premillennialism did not hesitate to describe the present work of God of saving the church) in God’s saving dealings with humans. Bock seemingly pulls back from this audacious premillennial disparagement both of God’s sovereignty and of the grand work of the salvation of the church out of the nations. He recognizes the prophecy of Isaiah 53 that the Jewish nation would reject the Messiah. He adds that, despite the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, “the kingdom has come.”

But so firmly lodged in premillennial theology and thinking are the notions of the postponement of the kingdom and of the saving of the church as a mere “parenthesis,” to the disparagement of the sovereignty of God in the saving work of Jesus Christ, that Bock immediately adds that “the appearance of parenthesis could not be avoided.”⁵

Denial of eschatological election

When I here charge premillennialism with the denial of election, I refer to what I may describe as the *eschatological* aspect of election.

For dispensational premillennialism, that which determines true Israel, to and for whom is the promise of salvation, to and for whom is the promise of being the Messianic kingdom of God, and to and for whom are the promises of coming kingdom-power and kingdom-glory, is physical descent from Abraham—being racially and genetically Jews. For premillennialism, Israel of the end times is a large number of physical Jews. Physical descent and physical characteristics determine who and what Israel is.

This theology ignores and rejects divine election. A more serious doctrinal sin is difficult to imagine.

The truth of the gospel of grace is that divine election determines and forms the Israel of God. The source of Israel is not Jewish loins, but the eternal counsel of the triune God. Not physical descent from Abraham, but God’s decree of election determines what Israel is, and who belong to Israel.

5 Darrell L. Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 60.

This is the message of the apostle in Romans 9-11. Premillennialism may not explain Israel in chapter eleven, disregarding the apostle’s doctrine of election in chapter nine. Israel—the Israel to whom pertain the covenants and the promises—is not the Jews. It is possible to be “of Israel” (mere Jews) without being “Israel” (the Messianic kingdom of God; Rom. 9:6). Physical descent from Abraham does not determine the composition of Israel. What determines the make-up of Israel, and, therefore, the reality itself of Israel, is the promise of God. And this promise has its source in, and is governed by, divine election (Rom. 9:7-13).

The children of the flesh (of Abraham and his Jewish descendants) are not the Israelite children of God, but the spiritual children of the promise (Rom. 9:8).

Regardless that throughout Old Testament history the elect among the Jews were only a “remnant,” a despised, marginalized, and often persecuted minority, these elect were always God’s Israel. The vast majority, prominent, indeed dominant, though they were, never were Israel.

In Romans 11, Paul contends that the same was true in his day. It is a mistake on the part of premillennial expositors to explain Romans 11:1-10 as teaching merely that God was saving a few Jews when the majority were blinded and lost and, then, for these expositors to go on to explain the rest of Romans 11 as teaching that some day, in the future, God will save Israel by converting a majority of Jews.

God always saved Israel. He was saving Israel in Paul’s day. He is saving Israel in AD 2018. For the remnant according to the election of grace always was, and is today, the true Israel (Rom. 11:5). God had not cast away His people which He foreknew in the decree of election in the days of Elijah, when only seven thousand out of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, refused to worship Baal. God had not cast away His people which He foreknew in the days of the apostle, when the earthly nation of Israel and the vast majority of Jews rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has not cast away His people today, when the nation of Israel is godless and when the number of believing Jews seemingly is minuscule.

Always, God has preserved, saved, and blessed His Israel—not merely a few Jews, but *Israel*—because election determines Israel. Israel is always the elect Jews.

When premillennialists exclaim over Romans 11:26 (“and so all Israel shall be saved”), that the day is coming when finally God will save Israel, as though large numbers of Jews determine Israel, they reveal their ignorance and denial of election. They reveal that they have forgotten Romans 9: “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”; “they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God”; etc.

The error of dispensationalism regarding Romans 11:26 is not that it explains “all Israel” as referring to Jews. Throughout Romans 11, by “Israel” the apostle refers to Jews. But its error is that it refuses to identify the Jews who make up all Israel as *elect* Jews—the true seed of Abraham. With explicit reference to God’s “secret election,” Calvin identifies “his [God’s] people,” Israel, in Romans 11 as the “spiritual body of Christ”: “the visible body of the people was rejected in such a way that no member of the spiritual body of Christ was lost.” Commenting specifically on Romans 11:2, but explaining all of Romans 11, Calvin adds: “He [God] stands by His purpose not to reject the people whom He has foreknown [elected].”⁶

The condemnation of dispensational premillennialism, therefore, is not only, or even mainly, that premillennialism proposes and lives in the foolish hope of a bizarre, false eschatology—a rapture of the church; a carnal kingdom of the Jews for a thousand years of continuing history; and all that goes with these follies.

But the Reformed faith exposes premillennialism as heretical in its doctrine of election, as also in its doctrine of Jesus the Messiah.

Let the premillennialist who may be open to this critique consider the following truths.

First, the seed of Abraham, to whom are all the promises and in whom is the reality of all the promises, is Jesus Christ and all humans who are one with Him by a true faith, according to divine election (Gal. 3:16, 29). The “seed of Abraham” is not, and never was, the totality, or even a majority, of physical Jews.

Second, divine election, which is in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:4), determines, creates, and identifies the Israel of God (Rom. 11:4, 5).

Third, even though the number of Jews who are chosen and saved is small, indeed far fewer than the number of Jews who perish in unbelief, the elect constitute “all Israel” in Romans 11:26. “All Israel,” in Romans 11:26, are not multitudes of future Jewish converts. They are not a majority of Jews. They are the complete number of the elect Jews throughout the history of the new covenant. God’s people, Israel, were, are, and will be those, and those only, “which he foreknew,” that is, eternally knew in electing love (Rom. 11:2). “All Israel” are the Jews throughout the present age who are graciously exempt, by divine election, from the spiritual blindness that has happened, in the just judgment of God, to many Jews.

6 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, tr. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961), 239.

Anti-Semitism?

Against the explanation of Romans 11 that rejects the premillennial teaching that in the future God will save a vast majority of Jews and constitute them once again as His earthly kingdom for a thousand years, some advocates of dispensational premillennialism charge anti-Semitism. As though the Reformed faith is tainted with the monstrous wickedness of Adolf Hitler!

This is the charge by Barry E. Horner in his recent book advocating dispensationalism: *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*.⁷ Horner accuses Reformed amillennialism as being “arrogant anti-Judaism.”⁸

Herman Hoeksema exposed this charge as utterly false, long before Horner raised it. Preaching in the late 1930s, well aware of Hitler’s and Germany’s hatred and cruel treatment of the Jews, hatred in which many of the churches in Germany made themselves complicit, Hoeksema expressed touching, theological love for the Jews. He expressed this love in the midst of his explanation of Romans 11 denying the premillennial prediction of a Jewish kingdom of God in the last days.

What shall we say with regard to the Jews? Shall we despise them? Shall we hate them? Shall we help along with Hitler and the rest of the world in despising the Jews and casting them out?... The text [Romans 11] answers, “God forbid.” To the contrary, we shall pity them. Shall we not sympathize with them who bore the brunt of the battle all through the old dispensation in order to be the bearer of the Word of God? Shall we not sympathize with them who had to be hardened so that Christ might be crucified, so that salvation might be the inheritance of the Gentiles?⁹

Completely without biblical support

Unsupported by Revelation 20, Daniel 9, or Romans 11—the three main passages for dispensational premillennialism—as I have demonstrated in this series of articles, premillennialism falls.

The truth of the last things is as little that of premillennialism as it is that of postmillennialism.

Reformed amillennialism, which was set forth earlier in this series on the millennium, is God’s Word about

7 Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2007.

8 *Future Israel*, 188.

9 Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans* (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2002), 530. Every Reformed, indeed Protestant, believer confronted with the dispensational, premillennial doctrine, as also every premillennialist, ought to read Hoeksema’s commentary on Romans 9–11 in *Righteous by Faith Alone*.

the end. There will be no thousand-year period of peace and power for the church or for a Jewish nation restored as the earthly kingdom of God within history.

The hope of the church and of every believer is the second coming of Christ as the end—goal and termination—of history.

“Come, Lord Jesus; come, quickly!”



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdom, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

How many cups of coffee does a Young People’s Convention chaperone, steering committee member, or activities committee member drink in one week? Answer later in this column.

Young People’s convention recap

I am writing this recap in the evening of August 17. I returned home from the PR Young People’s Convention only hours ago, having served as a convention chaperone for the first time ever. My son and my granddaughter were conventioners. I can honestly say I have never experienced a week like this one in my life. And it was all good. I find no negative. I told some folks on the steering committee and sub-committees that I give the week an A+ in all areas! I found the eight young men under my care, my mixer-game team, my discussion-group members, and my team, the Shaggy Sheep, all to be a blessing to me and to one another. They are not perfect, but they were respectful, cheerful, and uplifting in every circumstance and situation. If the convention were held again tomorrow in the Lake Geneva Christian Center in Alexandria, Minnesota, I would be among the first to sign up as a chaperone.

Now for a few of the specifics of the week: The theme “Guided by God” was accurately punctuated by the theme song, Psalter #67, which was sung often. Speeches entitled “Guided by God,” “Delighting in God,” and “Drawing Near to God” were given by Revs. J. Engelsma, C. Griess, and A. Brummel. Highlights of the week were morning discussion groups and evening devotions conducted by chaperones in small groups. The campus itself was fantastic, with the worship center and dining hall being extremely large and nearly new buildings. The food was good, with four food lines to feed our 500 people in well less than an

hour. The “Boat Building” mixer was a great start and a big hit! And the team games were eagerly anticipated each day, which included “Iowa Fair” games involving the making of fresh lemonade and butter. The only minor injury I noted was my skinned knees from kneeling in the sand and digging for “Old McDonald” animals. The Minnesota state bird, the mosquito, was present but not overbearing, and it was fun to watch the bald eagles and pelicans gliding over.

A wonderful week with many tearful good-byes and the singing of “God be With You Til we Meet Again.” God was present, and God is good!

Missionary activities

This notice came from Rev. R. Smit on August 13 concerning conditions in the Philippines:

For your information, worship services were cancelled in the Berean PRC and the Provident Christian Church yesterday due to monsoon rains that the area received in the Lord’s providence from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. Rainfall accumulation (at the Kleyns’ rain gauge) was about 165mm (6 ½ inches) in about a 48 hour period. The average rainfall in August in the Manila area is usually about 392 mm (15.7 inches). We received 40% of the average August rainfall in the 2-day period.

Worship services at Maranatha PRC and First PRC-Bulacan were held as normal. Monsoon rains had affected the Leyte area earlier in the week, but not yesterday when Rev. Kleyn led the services and preached yesterday (in Tagalog). There was flooding in the Provident-Marikina and the Mayamot-Antipolo subdivisions where these two congregations have their worship buildings. PCC’s building had floodwater in the ground floor, and the Berean PRC’s parsonage had water in its ground floor. Roads to the church buildings were not passable by vehicles or pedestrians on Sunday. In the next couple of days, the congregations will be busy in the task of cleanup and restoration of the buildings, properties, and parsonage. Classes at both government and Christian schools, including Faith Academy, were cancelled in the metro Manila area today. We expect classes to resume on Tuesday morning, the Lord willing.

Denominational activities

The Synod of the PRCA reconvened August 28 at Byron Center, MI PRC. For more information on Synod 2018, visit prca.org.

Classis West of the PRCA met August 29 at Crete PRC, but was hosted by Peace PRC. Heritage PRC of Sioux Falls, SD will host the next meeting of Classis West on March 6, 2019, D.V.

PRC seminary news

The new season of instruction began on Wednesday, August 29. Besides our seniors (Matt Kortus and Jacob Maatman—internships), we have two other seminary students this year: third-year student Josiah Tan and first-year student Marcus Wee, both from our sister church in Singapore, Covenant ERC. In addition, four young men will be taking different levels of pre-seminary Greek at the seminary.

The seminary faculty along with Trinity PRC Evangelism Committee is working on plans for a Spring 2019 conference to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the great Synod of Dordt, 1618-19-2018-19. Visit the new website dordt400.org for details on this.

School activities

All were invited to join fellow friends, students, alumni, and staff of Eastside Christian School on Thursday, August 30, as they celebrated the beginning of a new school year with the annual “Picnic on the Patio.” Attendees enjoyed grilled hamburger, hotdogs, salads, and dessert on the lower level and patio of First PRC in Grand Rapids, compliments of the Eastside Christian School Foundation.

Heritage Christian School extended an invitation to eat at their full-service restaurant at the Hudsonville Fairgrounds, August 20-25! They served breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as desserts and snacks in the white building just inside the

north pedestrian gates of the fairgrounds. Their grandmas’ homemade pies and specialty desserts were available all day, every day! Takeout orders were filled to bring home or for lunch at work.

Young Adult activities

Lynden PR Church will host a young adults’ retreat July 1–5, 2019, at Mt. Baker Bibleway Camp. Check it out at <http://www.mtbakercamp.org/home.do>. Registration will open in February 2019. All young adults of post-high school age are encouraged to attend. Further details have been posted to Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat 2019 on Facebook. Request an invite to see the details or message the group if you have any questions.

Minister activities

Rev. Rodney Kleyn continued to consider the call to be minister-on-loan to the CERC in Singapore and was expected to answer on September 9.

Grandville, MI PRC, upon the emeritation of Rev. Ken Koole, formed a trio consisting of Revs. Nathan Decker (Trinity PRC of Hudsonville, MI), Joshua Engelsma (Doon, IA PRC), and Erik Guichelaar (Randolph, WI PRC). On August 26 the congregation voted to call Rev. N. Decker.

Trivia answer

How many cups of coffee in a Young People’s Convention week? Well, in my case, none. I am not a coffee drinker. But I can assure you the pots were perking throughout the week, beginning in early morning, as the days were long and the nights were short for those in many positions. Many thanks to all who planned and carried out the convention! What a great week!

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

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Announcements

Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Reformed Free Publishing Association ANNUAL MEETING

REV. ANGUS STEWART will speak on:
"The RFPA, the CPRC,
and the Spread of the Truth"

- ⇒ How does a typical professing Christian today need to be instructed in his thinking and living?
- ⇒ How does the RFPA help with this instruction?
- ⇒ How does the RFPA help the CPRC?
- ⇒ How do we know that the translations of the CPRC are accurate?

Date: September 27, 2018

Time: 7:30pm

Location: Grace Protestant Reformed Church



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