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The Heritage of
the Reformation (2)

The earthen vessels of the Reformation

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

The Reformation and the nature of the church

Rev. Angus Stewart

The Reformation and missions

Rev. Daniel Holstege

The sixteenth-century reformation of the home

Rev. Andrew Lanning

Semper Reformanda

Prof. Barrett Gritters



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REFORMED
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Editor's notes

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Welcome to the second 2017 commemorative issue of the Reformation. Some 500 years ago, Luther posted his 95 theses for discussion and debate, and so began the great sixteenth-century Reformation. This was God's work of forming His seriously deformed church back to the Bible in doctrine, worship, church polity, and walk of life. As beneficiaries of that mighty work

of grace, we consider it sufficiently important to have two issues of the *Standard Bearer* commemorating it. We trust that in this issue you will find more fresh, researched, and currently applicable articles for the instruction and encouragement of Reformed believers and churches. And, above all, articles that ascribe all praise and thanks to God.



Rev. Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.

The earthen vessels of the Reformation

When you think about the Reformation, what comes to mind?

Perhaps your mind drifts to Germany and a humble monk, hammer in hand, pounding ninety-five theses into a church door. Or maybe you remember that same monk making a courageous cry before the Diet of Worms: "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

Perhaps your mind drifts south to the Swiss Alps and the great Reformer of Geneva, whose powerful preaching and voluminous writing did more to advance the cause of reform than the work of any other.

Perhaps your mind drifts across the Channel to where a steely-spined Scot thundered against false doctrine and refused to bend the knee to any, whether mighty king or manipulative queen.

The names of these Reformers are well-known to us: Luther, Calvin, and Knox. We are familiar with many of their co-laborers: Beza, Bucer, Bullinger, Farel, Latimer, Olevianus, Tyndale, Ursinus, Zwingli. Often when we think of the Reformation, we think of the men who brought about the reform.

And this is not altogether out of place. Without question, these men played a leading role in the reformation of the church. Their biographies are delightful, moving, and instructive. I hope in what follows to give a taste of what these men were like so that you will study their lives in greater detail.

But there is a danger in all this. The danger is that we fall into a kind of hero-worship of these men. We so emphasize their contributions and highlight their achievements that we view the Reformation as the work of highly-gifted men. This is ironic, in a way. Ironic that in the restoration and defense of the doctrines of grace, we would praise the works of men.

What we need to remember is that these men were tools in the hands of *the* Reformer of the church. They were earthen vessels formed on the wheel of the Potter. What follows, then, is not a list of their achievements or outstanding gifts. You can pick up a good biography to get that information. What follows are six things that reveal how God formed these men to carry out the work of reform, and how each reveals the glory of God.

1. The Reformers were weak men.

This means, in the first place, that the Reformers were men who experienced all the weaknesses and frailties of being human.

John Knox was described as a man "low in stature, and of a weakly constitution." When first asked to preach, "he burst forth in most abundant tears" and fled.

Calvin's reticence is well documented. When he came to Geneva for the first time, he hoped to pass through undetected, but was discovered and compelled to stay. In addition to his shy nature, Calvin was beset by con-

stant sickness and pain. He battled headaches, stomach cramps, asthma, kidney stones, and hemorrhoids, to name but a few infirmities.

Even bold Luther had times of weakness. There were times when he was completely overcome with doubts about his calling and about whether or not he was doing what was right.

The significance of their being human is, in the second place, that they were sinners.

This is so obvious a point that one example will suffice. Luther was a man of strong convictions, which certainly was a virtue. But that strength was also a weakness at times. Luther was so convicted of his position on the Lord's Supper that he vehemently condemned those who did not agree with him, including some of the Reformed brethren.

This is the great wonder of the Reformation—that God would use weak, sinful men to carry out the work of reform!

God's purpose in doing so was to establish beyond a shadow of a doubt that the work of the Reformation was His work. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty... that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:27, 29).

2. The Reformers were unique individuals.

When you evaluate the Reformers, there were many things that they had in common. They shared many of the same convictions, abilities, and even personality traits. But when you put them under the microscope and look more closely, you can see many differences between them.

The easiest way to see this is by comparing Luther and Calvin. The two were about as different as two individuals can be. Luther was German; Calvin was French. Luther was fiery and at times impulsive; Calvin was quiet and thoughtful. Luther spewed forth ideas like a volcano; Calvin was a clear, logical, systematic thinker. Luther has been compared to a strong, stubborn bull; Calvin has been compared to a wise, thoughtful owl.

No one man had all the gifts needed to carry out the work of reformation. Such a work could not rest on the shoulders of one man, no matter how gifted. God used many different men with many different gifts to accomplish the preservation of His church. Luther planted, Calvin watered, but God gave the increase.

This is important for ministers to remember. Remembering this, a minister does not get jealous of his colleagues who seem to be more gifted. Remembering this, a minister does not try to ape another man. Re-

membering this, a minister does not despair of his seemingly small place of labor but gives thanks that God is pleased to use him for the good of the church.

3. The Reformers were first partakers.

The Reformation was a restoration of the doctrines of grace. And for the Reformers this was no mere intellectual exercise. Having grown up in the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church, they knew from experience the dread terror of being locked into a system of works-righteousness. They knew from their own experiences the freedom of God's grace. Being themselves partakers of God's grace, the Reformers knew whereof they preached.

Luther is an outstanding example. Luther knew from his own experience his need of God's grace. For years as a Roman Catholic monk he lived in perpetual doubt about his salvation. He tried more than any other to earn his salvation, but he never found any peace. Only when he was led to understand the truth of justification by faith alone and to taste for himself of God's grace did he experience the comfort and assurance he so desperately craved. For the rest of his life Luther labored out of the knowledge of God's grace to him.

For us children of the Reformation, this must characterize our lives as well. This must be true of ministers. They must be first partakers of the fruit of their preaching. To preach grace, they themselves must taste that grace. And something similar is true for all believers. Our hearty defense of the Reformation and the doctrines of grace may be no intellectual exercise for us, but must arise out of the recognition of our own complete dependence upon God's grace.

4. The Reformers were powerful preachers.

The Reformers wore many hats. They were compassionate pastors who cared for the needs of their flocks. They were wise churchmen who gave direction to the churches. They were scholarly professors who lectured widely and trained others for the ministry. They were prolific writers who penned entire libraries of books. And the list goes on.

But at heart, the Reformers were preachers. Luther was a preacher. Calvin was a preacher. From Sunday to Sunday (and often many days during the week) they would mount the pulpit and expound to their congregations the Word of God. Their sermons were exegetically deep, doctrinally sound, homiletically clear, and pastorally wise.

This was the irrepressible power behind the whole Reformation—preaching. There were other, lesser

means that God used as well, but without the preaching there would have been no Reformation.

This too magnifies God. He not only uses weak, sinful men, but He is also pleased to have those men to preach Christ crucified, which to the world is foolishness (I Cor. 1:21, 23). Preaching is the power of God and the wisdom of God (v. 14).

This is the greatest power in all the world, greater than the destructive force of a Texas hurricane or of many North Korean bombs. This is the power of God to salvation. Nothing else in all the world has that kind of power. This is why we children of the Reformation love the preaching and maintain its primacy.

5. The Reformers were Christ-lovers.

The Reformers were characterized by that one essential qualification of an officebearer: they loved Christ. As they went about their work, this motivated them: love for Christ. When they were slandered and abused, this sustained them: love for Christ. When they were praised by others, this grounded them: love for Christ.

Their love for Christ also meant a love for the church of Christ. They exhausted themselves for the church because they treasured her as precious in Christ.

They were not motivated by love of self or a desire for the praise of their own name. They did not compete with their colleagues to win for themselves a higher standing in the church.

Take Calvin, for example. When as a young man he stopped in Geneva for a night, he was cornered by the fiery Reformer, William Farel, who pressed him to stay to reform their church there. Calvin refused. He wanted to hide away in some forsaken corner with his books. But he ultimately relented. Certainly not for his own glory. Not even because Farel was such a convincing

salesman. He did so because he loved Christ and loved Christ's church.

And later, when Calvin's enemies sought to smear him, they labeled him "that God-intoxicated man." But what they intended as criticism is his highest commendation. He lived for the glory of his God.

Would to God that all officebearers and church members today be known by their enemies as God-intoxicated men and women!

6. The Reformers were humble dependents.

In the work of reformation, the Reformers were consciously dependent upon God. They knew that the only explanation for what was taking place through them was the wonderwork of God. They heartily believed that the reformation of the church was a work that only God could perform. Yes, He used them as instruments in His hands. But the work was His, from beginning to end.

Listen to the inimitable Luther: "Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it." And then he added these words, "I did nothing; the Word did everything."

After 500 years, we give thanks to God for Luther and the others, and for the work God performed through them. But after 500 years, we remember that, in the end, Luther did nothing. God did everything. Which leads us to but one conclusion:

Glory to God. Alone.

Martin Luther on Reading Scripture

We should and must by all means read Scripture. For it was put into letters and was constantly preserved in the church through the special dispensation of God (and will also remain in the church until the end of the world) that we might read, learn, and constantly further and spread the Word on and on, to children's children. Now we at all times find disciples and pupils enough who read and study in the Scriptures and so grow in their understanding that in the course of time they are able also to instruct others from it. But the matter of greatest importance is that the readers of Scripture are not only diligent but also faithful. This is

what the Lord means here when He says: "How readest thou?" What do you learn? He says in effect: See to it that you by all means read Scripture faithfully and that you rightly divide the Word of truth, that is, that you look for nothing in it for your person except Me, without whom no one comes to the Father, and that from Scripture you teach this to others. For there are many who seek their personal interests in the Word, namely, how to obtain temporal goods and honor by it and how to enjoy a great reputation in the world, considering godliness a trade, as St. Paul says (I Tim. 6:5). But woe to these.



Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

The Reformation and the nature of the church

It is not claiming too much to say that the great Reformation of the church included a battle over the very nature of the church of Christ itself!¹

1) The battle against Rome

The Reformers fought against the false definition of the church that was deeply entrenched in the corrupt medieval church in Western Europe. According to Rome, the church is (well-nigh exclusively) an *institutional* church, that hierarchical organization with the pope as her visible head. Moreover, the church is not even her people but her “clergy”—priests, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals.

Besides defining the church institutionally, Rome proclaimed herself as the *only* true church. She drew the remorseless consequence: unless you are a member of the papal church, you are heretical or schismatic and headed to hell, for outside the *Roman* church there is no salvation!

Rome’s false and imperious ecclesiology functioned as a deliberate snare to keep her members inside her institution. You cannot leave her, for you will perish! You cannot organize a separate church, for Rome is the only institutional church!

So what were God-fearing people in the sixteenth-century church to do? The more they learned the truth of the Word and tested the Roman church by that standard, the more they understood how much she needed reform in doctrine, preaching, sacraments, discipline, government, and worship.

But how could one reform the papal church from within? The more people prayed and labored for its reformation, the more they learned from hard experience that there were many angry “laity” and powerful “clergy” in the ecclesiastical hierarchy (including the state!) who were vehemently opposed to significant reform. Indeed, a formidable section of the church held that, since Rome was, by definition, *the* true church, any reformation that includ-

ed anything beyond superficial matters was both doctrinally impossible and practically unnecessary. Thus it was reprehensible and dangerous even to talk about biblical and sweeping church reformation within the papal church.

Some, however, did seek reform from within, such as Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples in France; but they had minimal results. Others came to see, over a shorter or longer period of time, that reforming the Roman church from within was largely ineffective (for example, William Farel, a disciple of Lefèvre, who labored around Paris for several years), and/or impossible (for example, Martin Luther, who was excommunicated), and/or sinful (because she is a harlot church headed by the Antichrist).

Of immense help to all who broke with Rome and formed true churches outside her tyrannous dominion was the key ecclesiastical truth that the church, essentially and first of all, is the totality of all those eternally elected in Jesus Christ (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 54). The church, as the company of the predestinate, consists of all the elect now living, plus all those predestinated who have lived or will live. “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof” (Westminster Confession, 25:1).

It is clearly taught in Scripture that the church is “chosen [or elected]...in him [that is, Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Paul wrote to a true congregation in Macedonia, “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (I Thess. 1:4). Peter addressed believers in churches in what is now northern Turkey as “elect” (I Pet. 1:2).

The Reformation understood that the fountain or source of the church is God’s gracious election in Christ. It confessed predestination as the *cor ecclesiae*, a Latin phrase meaning “the heart of the church,” with “heart” here referring to origin or source (as in Prov. 4:23). Since the fountain or heart or origin of the church is sovereign election, the nature or essence of the church is the company of the predestinate.

Here the sixteenth-century Reformation reached back to Jan Hus, the fifteenth-century Bohemian

1 Out of the many sources that could be quoted, for the sake of space, we will confine ourselves to the opening sections of Westminster Confession, Chap. 25, a mid-seventeenth-century condensation of the Protestant doctrine of the church that fits well with the approach of this article.

pre-Reformer, who was greatly influenced by the fourteenth-century English pre-Reformer, John Wycliffe. All the Reformation and pre-Reformation worthies who understood the church as the company of the predestinate were echoing elements in the teaching of Augustine (AD 354-430), the great North African church father.

There is a vital connection between the Reformation's view of the nature of the church as the company of the predestinate and its doctrine of sovereign grace. Protestant soteriology (doctrine of salvation) leads to Protestant ecclesiology (doctrine of the church).

God's salvation of individual sinners is rooted in unconditional election, based upon Christ's redemption, and effected in the Spirit's regeneration, calling, sanctification, preservation and glorification. But what is the church if she is not the collective body of all individuals who are saved? Therefore, if every individual who will be in the new creation is elect, then the church is the company of the predestinate.

Protestantism's soteriology, in highlighting the invisible (for example, election, grace, and faith) and inward (for example, regeneration, calling, and sanctification), also emphasizes the church's spirituality and invisibility, as a body whose membership is only known fully by God, not man. On the other hand, Rome's soteriology, with its decisive elements being visible and external (for example, water baptism as regenerating, man's outward works, and so on), is in perfect accord with its institutional and hierarchical ecclesiology.

So what about the descendants of the Reformation in the twenty-first century? Sadly, most have never heard that the church is the company of the predestinate. Most Protestants, including most evangelicals, believe in man's free will, thereby denying God's unconditional election. According to the majority of Protestants, whether or not someone is truly in the church is determined by his/her own will, not Jehovah's will.

It is tragic that most Protestants today disagree with Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) and agree with the Roman church, which has always been the strongest advocate of man's free will. Because of their heretical doctrine of salvation by the will of man (contra Rom. 9:16), most Protestants today are actually against the Reformation—not only its soteriology but also its ecclesiology—in its crucial definition of the very nature of the church.

2) The battle against the fanatics

Besides Rome, the Reformers also had to fight against people whom they identified as fanatics. These folk included those who accepted some tenets of Reformation teaching, such as predestination and the church's invisibility, but rejected other truths, especially in the area of ecclesiology. These fanatics claimed that they

were eternally chosen by God, united to Jesus Christ, and filled with faith, hope, and love, and so had no real need of the local church, with its preaching, sacraments, discipline, worship, and fellowship. The Reformers accurately characterized such people as proud and foolish.

Over against the error of the fanatics, the Reformation maintained that the company of the predestinate *comes to manifestation* in local congregations, which serve the edification of the elect. The invisible church reveals itself in visible churches, where the true saints are built up. The organic church becomes evident in instituted churches, so that the means of grace in organized congregations are used by God to strengthen the spiritual lives of those eternally chosen in Christ.

This is the teaching of Acts 2: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (vv. 41, 47). The elect, who were brought to faith in Jesus the Messiah, were added to the visible, organized church with its officebearers (apostles), oversight, teaching, baptism, Lord's Supper, and public worship, including prayers (vv. 41-42).

It is lamentable that also in our day there are unstable souls who like Reformed soteriology, but reject the full biblical and Reformation ecclesiology. They sit loose to the church institute, reckoning that they do not need to join and/or attend a faithful congregation with the means of grace that Christ has placed there. After all, they are elect members of the invisible church! Often they seek to buttress themselves in their isolation by criticisms of sins and weaknesses in organized congregations and/or their members that are accurate or exaggerated or imaginary.

The Westminster Confession, after speaking of the church as the company of the predestinate (25:1), refers to the institute church to which "Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God" (25:3) as "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (25:2).

Protestantism opposes isolationist fanaticism by insisting that it is precisely *because* we are members of the elect, invisible church that we *must* join an instituted congregation bearing the three marks of a true church: faithful preaching, sacramental administration, and discipline (Belgic Confession, Arts. 27-29).

3) The battle against the anabaptists

Over against the Anabaptists, the Reformation maintained that visible, instituted churches must include not only believers but also their children (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 74).

The Scriptures teach that believers' children are in God's kingdom (Mark 10:14) and church (Eph. 1:1-14; 6:1-3), as those who receive the Spirit of Christ (Is. 59:20-21) and the promise of salvation (Acts 2:39). Four times in Genesis 17:7, God states that the children of believers are included in His covenant of grace: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and *thy seed after thee in their generations* for an *everlasting* covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to *thy seed after thee*."

This was the teaching of all the Reformers, bar none. This was the doctrine of all the Reformation creeds, whether Lutheran or Reformed or Anglican or Presbyterian, in their treatment of the members of the church and/or the subjects of baptism. As the Westminster Confession declares, "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel, (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all these throughout the world that profess the true religion, *together with their children*" (25:2; cf. 29:4-6).

Today, many Protestant congregations deny this Reformation teaching on the inclusion of the children of believers in the church. On the one hand, many congregations that baptize children and include them in their membership administer the sacrament to the children of *manifest unbelievers*. On the other hand, in baptis-

tic churches, the children of believers are not members of the congregation (unless and until, later in life, they make a profession of faith). As if the Bible did not call the seed of believers "holy" (I Cor. 7:14) or promise them God's Spirit and blessing (Is. 44:3)!

The Reformed also stressed that not all the children of believers are elect members of the invisible church: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13). But not all professing members of the church institute are part of the church organic either (Ps. 73:1; Rom. 9:6). Thus church discipline must be exercised upon all impenitent members, whether baptized or confessing.

A full treatment of the Reformation doctrine of the church is, of course, impossible in an article of this length. Yet one can see how this foundational matter of the church's nature as the company of the predestinate, which comes to manifestation in instituted congregations consisting of believers and their seed, leads us into and helps us to understand the election, gathering, and preservation of the church; the church latent, militant, and triumphant; the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church; the church's preaching, sacraments, and worship; the authority, offices, government, and discipline of the church; and the church's distinguishing marks or characteristics; and the true church versus the false church.



Rev. Griess, pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

How is Christ present in worship?

Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.

Romans 10:6-8

Christ's presence in worship

In Zechariah 2:4, the prophet prophesies to Israel of a time when "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein." This prophesy is ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament age when the Jerusalem of the church is enlarged beyond the borders of any city and is gathered

from every nation, tribe, and tongue. In the next verse God tells the church that, since she will have no physical walls and no physical temple at that time, her protection, and indeed her glory, will be His own presence in a greater way than she had it before. "For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her" (v. 5).

The Lord Jesus told us this presence of God in His church as a wall and as her glory is known in the New Testament especially when that church—wherever she is on earth—is gathered for worship. Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This is the heart of the church's protection, glory, and joy on earth, that in worship God dwells with His church in a unique way.

Rome would not have agreed with this then, and does not now. The question that divided the church concerning worship at the time of the Reformation, and that still divides her today, was the question “how.” How does God dwell with His people in worship?

Rome’s view of how Christ is present in worship

“Going to church before the Reformation was a sensuous experience.”¹ [“Sensuous” here and throughout the article meaning “appealing to the *senses*.”]

Imagine it. The stained-glass windows depicting the lives of the saints and especially the life of Christ. The sculptures of the virgin Mary, other saints, and at least on the high altar, the great statue of Christ on the cross. Most likely a saint would have been buried underneath that altar, and whatever relics could be afforded would be promoted in or around the same. Paintings and frescoes on the wall and the high ceilings would call one’s attention, at least until the gilded priests and deacons brought the eucharistic elements by procession into the nave. Then there were the bells and the Latin incantations, mesmerizing in their drones, until the all-important words—the only words one would recognize—would shake a person out of a trance-like state, *hoc est corpus meum*: “This is my body.” There was the smell of smoke, of beeswax, and the incense from the censer. And finally, the taste of the wafer mixed with smoke as the priest put into the mouth what the worshiper believed was the very body of God’s Son.

One can feel the mystery, the wonder, the attraction. If not for grace, Calvin would be describing *us* when he said, “under the pretense of holy zeal, superstitious men give way to the indulgences of the flesh; and Satan baits his fictitious modes of worship with such attractions, that they are willingly and eagerly caught hold of and obstinately retained.”²

Rome’s attempt in worship was, and is, to ascend up to heaven and force Christ back down into the worship service in a way that would indulge the flesh. She is an example of those who in Romans 10:6 have said in their heart, “Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down from above”). In her great cathedrals with their high ceilings depicting the life of heaven; in her hierarchical pyramid of power that climbed up and up to the pope who was the supposed vicar of Christ on earth; in her high church ritual; and chiefly in her idols set on high before the eyes of men, Rome tried to climb up to heaven to pull Christ’s presence down into the worship of the church in a way that would appeal to the sensuous nature of men.

All idolatry is an attempt to make the high and holy, invisible God come down to men in a way that they can see, handle, manipulate, and control. Rome’s idolatry was, and is, no different. She led and continues to lead men to believe they have the presence of God in images; that they have torn Christ out of heaven and have His attention under the power of their hands and in view of their eyes in the crucifix. And she teaches explicitly that her priests have torn Christ out of heaven in the mass, sacrificed Him again, and placed Him in the realm of the sensuous by transubstantiation. Calvin was thinking of Rome’s worship when he said, “When men attempt to attach God to their inventions and to *make him, as it were, descend from heaven*, then a pure fiction is substituted in his place.... Averse to seeking God in a spiritual manner, they therefore *pull him down from his throne, and place him under inanimate things*.”³

Christ’s presence in the Word

So, pretend you lived in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and you were a Reformer. You see that Rome’s idolatries are wrong and do not bring Christ’s presence to the church as they claim and as it sometimes even feels to many people to be. But what does?

Because as a Reformer your first principle for everything is *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone as the authority for the faith and life of the church), you would turn to Scripture to find out. What does God Himself say is the means by which His presence is known in His church in worship as her protection and glory and joy? And you would discover that His presence is known, not by dumb images, but by the Spirit working through the Word.

Romans 10 is concerned with the *how* of the presence of Christ in the church. And it not only tells the church in verse 7 not to say in her heart that she can ascend to heaven and bring Christ down to her sensuous desires by her own inventions. It also positively tells how Christ *is* present with His people in verse 8, “But what saith it?” (That is, what does the Old Testament say about how Christ is present?) “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” The passage then goes on in verses 14 and 15 to give the well-known teaching about the importance of the faithful preaching of the Word.

Your reform of worship then would be, first of all, to have *the Word* be the heart and, therefore, the power of every aspect of worship. You would have Christ speak in His Word to the church. You would want to have the word sung, prayed, read, and especially expound-

1 Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual* (London: Routledge, 1997), accessed September 5, 2017.

2 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 346.

3 *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 350-51. (Emphasis added)

ed faithfully according to the original intention of the Spirit. You would ensure that the Word come out of the mouths and hearts of the ministers and the people. You would remember that Christ said, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst,” and you would know that Christ’s name is all the truth about Him in His Word.

When it came time in your reforming work to ask the question, “What kinds of elements of worship should there be and should there not be in worship?” you would already be a long way, because you know the elements have to be means by which the Word is brought into worship. And then, because your first principle is *sola scriptura*, you would go to the Word itself and see that God Himself tells us concerning what elements are to be there, and that those elements do bring the Word. You would see that, though there is no book of Leviticus for the New Testament, yet there is something similar in Acts 2:42, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” And you would see that God ordains there the basic elements of worship for His New Testament church.

This process of reforming worship would all be common spiritual sense to you, for you are convinced that God governs the entire life of His church by His Word. And, therefore, you would agree with and promote the truth that Christ is present in worship as walls and glory of the church the way your fellow Reformer John Calvin wrote He is: “Let us know and be fully persuaded, that wherever the faithful, who worship him purely and in due form, *according to the appointment of his word*, are assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, *he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them.*”⁴

The practical effect of your reforming of worship with Calvin and the rest, so that the Word is the heart and soul of worship, would be to bring worship back to “the grave and godly face of the primitive church” (John Knox). That is, to strip away all the man-made additions to biblical worship, bringing it back to the way it was at the time of the apostles. The Reformers were not, as they were often accused, interested in destroying the pure tradition of the church. They were interested in going back to the legitimate and biblical tradition of the church. They wanted to ask for the old paths that were older than those from the time that Rome began to leave the Word of God. They believed that Reformed worship was God’s idea, not theirs, and that God’s idea for worship was recorded in the inspired tradition, the New Testament Scriptures.

Evangelicalism’s view of how Christ is present in worship

I asked us earlier to pretend we were Reformers. Now I ask us not to pretend but rather to *be* them in whatever way we can. The Reformation must be carried on today in so many areas in the churches, also in worship. Rome continues her attempt to bring Christ down from above to the sensuous nature of men. But not only that, Evangelicalism is prone today to attempt to bring Christ’s presence to the church the other way condemned in Romans 10:7. “Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)” If Rome attempts to bring Christ down from above in man-made ways, a good portion of evangelical worship attempts to descend into the grave of our dead culture to bring Christ up from below.

Going to church in many Protestant churches today is a sensuous experience. If you would enter into a good portion of evangelical worship services, the goal would be to make you feel Christ’s presence, not so much through the Word, but through sensuous appeal. From the dead culture below is brought up entertainment styles and hype. From the dead culture is borrowed a love for the emotional above anything of substance. From the dead culture is borrowed a rejection of word, and a love for visual and sensuous. And the attempt is made to raise Christ up out of this spiritually dead culture and bring His presence into the worship of the church. Again, to make Him submissive to the sensuous, to be present the way sensual man wants Him to be present. But the attempt fails. To whatever extent the Word is absent, to that extent He is not present in worship. For, “what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach” (Rom. 10:8).

There is a power in the Word to bring Christ’s presence to His people. And when it does, there is an experience that takes place. A powerful experience. An experience that is deep and rich, and that even can be, yes, emotional. Where the Word is not the heart of worship the experience is counterfeit, shallow, and leaves the church lagging behind its forefathers in spiritual growth and experience.⁵ By being (and appreciat-

5 What Owen said is true in our age as well as his own, “The principle that the church hath power to institute any thing or ceremony belonging to the worship of God, either as to matter or manner, beyond the observance of such circumstances as necessarily attend such ordinances as Christ Himself instituted, lies at the bottom of all the horrible superstition and idolatry and confusion...that have for so long a season spread themselves over the face of the Christian world.” John Owen, quoted in William Cunningham’s, “The Reformers and the Regulative Principle,” in *The Reformation of the Church*, ed. Ian H. Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 40-41.

4 *Psalms*, Vol. 1, 122.

ing being) spiritual heirs of the Reformation in worship, may God enable us in whatever small way to witness

for Him for the strengthening of His church and for the glory of His name.



Rev. Daniel Holstege, a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines.

The Reformation and missions

We miss in the Reformers not only missionary action, but even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them today.

Gustav Warneck¹

Instead of saying ‘We ought to have missions, and we will have them, as soon as the Lord opens the door,’ the Protestants tended to say ‘Missions are neither obligatory nor desirable, and our lack of them cannot be held against us as blindness or unfaithfulness.

Stephen Neill²

One would naturally expect that the spiritual forces released by the Reformation would have prompted the Protestant churches of Europe to take the gospel to the ends of the earth during the period of world exploration and colonization which began about 1500. But such was not the case.

J. Herbert Kane³

The year is 1557.

The place is Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

A young Frenchman is in the forest, talking to the heathen Tupinambas, and he captures our attention.

1 Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, 1906. Quoted by Dr. Elias Medeiros, a native Brazilian and professor of missions at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS, in his as yet unpublished PhD dissertation, *The Reformers’ Commitment to the Propagation of the Gospel to All Nations from 1555 to 1654*, 2009 (used with permission from the author). Gustav Warneck is widely considered to be the “father of Protestant missiology.” According to Dr. Medeiros, Warneck is the one who really started the claim that we do not find missionary *action* or even the *idea* of missions in the Reformers. Dr. Medeiros demonstrates that other mission historians have simply followed Warneck with little serious investigation into the validity of the claim. This has led to the commonly held, but false, opinion today that the Reformers were not interested in missions. A hearty thanks to Dr. Medeiros for sending me his dissertation and giving permission to refer to it in this article.

2 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 222.

3 J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 73.

Jean de Léry was not yet an ordained minister of the gospel. He was a shoemaker and student of theology in Geneva. But in 1556 he set sail from France with a group of French Protestants, including two Reformed ministers of the Word. The church in Geneva, with the support of John Calvin, sent them on the first Protestant mission to Brazil, where the French were attempting to establish a colony. Having survived the long voyage across the ocean, de Léry is now in the forests near Rio de Janeiro interacting with the native people and making observations about their beliefs and customs.

It is evening. Time for supper. De Léry and his companions take off their hats, and one of them offers a prayer to the Lord. The natives watch with great curiosity. One of them asks, and someone translates to the French, “Why do you take off your hats before and after you eat your meal? To whom are you speaking? And what is the meaning of the words?” De Léry immediately sees an opportunity to declare Jehovah’s glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people. He is ready to give an answer concerning the hope that is in him. He tells those lost souls about the true and living God whom no man has seen nor can see, and he testifies that He is the one who created this world in the beginning. He declares that those who believe in God do not need to fear Aygnan, the chief of the evil spirits, not in this life or in the next. And he makes known that if they repent of their cannibalism, as well as of their other sins, they too will experience the blessing of God. De Léry spoke to them for two hours!⁴

Do we indeed miss in the Reformers the very idea of missions?

Do we miss in them any missionary action?

4 R. Pierce Beaver, “The Genevan Mission to Brazil,” in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973). Beaver tells the fascinating story of the Genevan mission to Brazil. His primary source of information is the book of Jean de Léry himself, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 1578.

In those days of the sixteenth century, Spain and Portugal controlled the seas. It was not until the seventeenth century that England and the Netherlands became powerful forces in the oceans of the world. Therefore, it was not until then that Protestants had much opportunity for world missions. In 1493 the pope divided the world into two spheres, giving one to Spain and the other to Portugal. Those two Roman Catholic powers were busy throughout the era of the Reformation conquering heathen lands, seizing their riches, and bringing the missionaries of the pope, who were for the most part unordained Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian monks. The most famous of all Roman Catholic missionaries, Francis Xavier, brought the Romish gospel to India in 1542, to Southeast Asia in 1546, and to Japan in 1549. Another famous Roman Catholic missionary, Matthew Ricci, taught the Romish gospel in China beginning in 1582. Roman Catholic monks travelling with Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors successfully brought Brazil, Mexico, and all of Latin America into the fold of the pope. Meanwhile, back in Europe, the zealous soldiers of the pope hunted and killed the Protestant heretics. Protestants were tortured and burned at the stake at home and barred from the ships sailing abroad to heathen lands. Clearly, they had little opportunity to bring the truth of the gospel to the outside world during that century.

But the mission of Rome brought another gospel.

The mission of the church, from the day our risen Lord sent the apostles until the day He returns in glory, is to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all nations, baptizing believers and their seed in the name of the triune God, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has taught us. Thus, if there is no gospel, there is no mission. But in the many centuries of history prior to the Reformation, the gospel was corrupted, buried, and lost by the rulers of the darkness of this world, by spiritual wickedness in high places. Then, in the sixteenth century, that false church sent out missionaries into all the world to preach another gospel, which is not another, to the lost souls of India, the Philippines, Brazil, and elsewhere. In that same century, our Lord again commanded the light to shine in the darkness to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ through Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, and the other Reformers. Through the Reformation in Europe, the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, who shed His blood for us once and for all on the cross, was recovered. The mission was thus renewed.

The devil was not happy.

But he must have been content to see the success of Roman Catholic missions.

For example, in the 1560s, the foot soldiers of Rome sailed with Spanish imperialists and marched into a group of some seven thousand tropical islands on the western rim of the Pacific. Spain conquered the islands swiftly and named them after their king, Philip II, “the Philippines.” Soon the armies of the pope flooded the islands, teaching the corrupted gospel and the accursed idolatry of the mass, entangling the native people in a new yoke of bondage. Soon the whole archipelago became Roman Catholic, except for the southernmost island, which belonged to Islam. Still today, over a hundred years after the departure of Spain, about eighty percent of the population of the Philippines is Roman Catholic. Yet the truth of the gospel is coming to this nation. The Reformation is taking place here. The word of grace is being preached. Christ is commanding the light of the gospel to shine in the darkness. There are many Filipinos who are eager to learn the Reformed faith and to testify of the truth of the gospel to their families and friends. We Reformed missionaries in the Philippines rejoice in God to see the Reformation growing in this land, in which the missionaries of Rome arrived first.

For we who are Reformed today, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, have a vital interest in missions.

The Reformers achieved extremely significant things in regard to missions. We might say that, like Abel, they offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Rome, by the which they obtained witness that they were righteous, God testifying of their gifts, and by it they being dead yet speak (Heb. 11:4). Many of them were ruthlessly murdered, like Abel, because of their faith in Christ. But they, being dead, yet speak to millions throughout the world. For first of all, they were the ones who insisted that the Bible must be translated into the languages of the people. Thus, being dead, their influence still speaks in the hundreds of translations of the Bible through which the Word of God now speaks to millions of people, on every continent of the earth, and in all the major languages. Secondly, they wrote commentaries and books of theology that have also been translated and have travelled throughout the world, on ships and planes, in the bags and boxes of Reformed missionaries, for hundreds of years. Being dead, they yet speak through those books which help the Reformed missionary preach the truth of the gospel in all lands. Thirdly, they set the church on a firm foundation by writing or helping to write the Reformed confessions. So in that respect too, being dead, they yet speak through the creeds that summarize the truth

of the Word of God. Fourthly, they had a vital interest in missions as such. They had a variety of opinions on the progress of the gospel into all the world and the nearness of the coming of Christ. But they all believed and taught that the gospel must be preached in all the world before Christ returns. Calvin too, who vigorously taught the truth of predestination, also vigorously taught the truth that God uses the preaching of the gospel as the means to save His elect.

Are you, Reformed believer, also vitally interested in the preaching of the gospel in all the world? Are you also zealous for the coming of the kingdom of God in all nations? Are you also passionate for the gathering of the elect out of heathen darkness into God's marvelous light? Do you also adamantly reject the lie that the truth of predestination makes missions unimportant or unnecessary?

Christ intends and herewith commands that such preaching [of repentance and forgiveness of sins] should not be made known in a corner or to a special few alone, and not only to his Jews or few other nations. Instead, it should be preached in the whole wide world or, as he says, "among all nations" and again "to all creatures,"

said Martin Luther on Luke 24:47.⁵

And, wrote Calvin on Matthew 28:19:

Teach all nations. Here Christ, by removing the distinction, makes the Gentiles equal to the Jews, and admits both, indiscriminately to a participation in the covenant. Such is also the import of the term: go *out*; for the prophets under the law had limits assigned to them, but now, the wall of partition having been broken down, (Eph. 2:14) the Lord commands the ministers of the gospel to go to a distance, in order to spread the doctrine of salvation in every part of the world.⁶

But what about missionary action by the Reformers?

Shall we return to the story of a certain voyage to Brazil?

In 1555, the French tried to start a colony in Brazil. By 1560 it was all over. But no one knew that in 1556. In that year, Calvin and the church in Geneva were asked a question that would produce a deeply revealing answer: Will you send ministers of the Word of God and others well-instructed in the Christian religion to Brazil to reform our French colonists and bring the knowledge of salvation to the heathen? Now the church in Geneva, and Calvin himself, faced the question of world missions. What would they say? No, we cannot spare any men for

that enterprise? No, we have no interest in preaching the gospel to the heathen? No, the return of Christ is so near that it is not worth our time? No, God will save His elect so we do not have to bother? That is not how they responded. But this way, according to de Léry: "Upon receiving these letters and hearing this news, the church of Geneva at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation entirely without knowledge of the true God."

Two ministers of the Word were chosen and examined, Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier. They were sent to preach the gospel not only to the French colonists but also to the heathen Tupinambas. De Léry went on the voyage too. So did a number of others from Geneva. They joined a few hundred Huguenots aboard three ships and set sail for Brazil late in 1556. They arrived in early 1557 and soon began Reformed worship services in the colony. Not long after, efforts were made to reach the heathen Tupinambas. At first the two ministers were discouraged by the difficulties, because the people spoke a strange language, they were cannibals, and they were totally ignorant of God. But they were resolved to learn the language and wait patiently for the Lord to open the door for the preaching of the gospel.

De Léry, who was later ordained as a Reformed minister, took an active approach. On one occasion, he was walking through the forest with four native Brazilians. He looked around at the magnificent trees and beautiful flowers and listened to the warbling birds. Suddenly, he was overcome with wonder at the glory of God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and he began to sing praise to Him in the words of Psalm 104. The natives listened intently to the strange song, and were deeply impressed by it. They wanted to know the meaning of the words. So the young man, seeing another opportunity to be a witness of his God, seized the opportunity to tell them about the one true God who created all things, whose prophet first sang that psalm ten thousand moons ago. Later, the remark was made that they might have seen the conversion of those native people, if they had had more time to work among them.

But that was not the will of God. Soon the French leader of the colony apostatized from the Reformed faith, back to Roman Catholicism. He rejected the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper and denounced Calvin, whom he formerly praised, as a heretic. At one point de Léry and others were put in irons. Finally, in 1558, the Protestants fled from the colony by ship. But they ran into perilous seas. Five of them returned by boat to the colony. Three of the five were strangled and thrown into the sea because of their Reformed faith.

5 *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission*, ed. Volker Stolle (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 32.

6 *Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 384.

Only two years later, in 1560, the Portuguese snuffed out the French colony, and Roman Catholicism became the dominant religion of Brazil.

J. Herbert Kane writes,

The earliest attempt [of Protestant missions] was made in Brazil, when Calvin in 1555 sent four clergymen [actually only two—DJH] and a group of French Huguenots to found a colony for persecuted Protestants on the Bay of Rio de Janeiro. Desultory attempts were made to Christianize the Indians, but without success. Later their leader, Villegagnon, turned traitor and abandoned the colony to the tender mercies of the

Portuguese, who proceeded to destroy it. The few survivors were later killed by the Jesuits.⁷

We beg to differ. The Calvinists seized the opportunity to preach the gospel to the heathen. They rejoiced and thanked God for the opportunity. They put forth effort. But after only one year of labor, they were betrayed, persecuted, and forced to leave or die. These men are heroes who inspire us by their love of the truth of the gospel, their willingness to leave their homeland and to suffer great things, and their interest in spreading the doctrine of salvation among the heathen. May we who carry the torch of the Reformed faith today be zealous to do the same.

7 Kane, *A Concise History*, 75-76.



Rev. Kenneth Koole, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

The Reformation and the restoration of the office of all believers

Our title could just as well have been “The Restoration of the *Priesthood* of All Believers.” It was this gift that the church of Rome, the church as she went apostate, stole from her members and placed in the hands of a select few, namely, the church’s clergy—priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes.

And it was this that God used the Reformation and the Reformers to restore to the common, unordained members of the church.

The common, unordained members of Christ’s church were, as labeled by Rome, just the ‘laity.’ And by ‘laity’ Rome’s prelates were telling her members that they were not really what comprised Christ’s church. The church was in essence her clergy, because it was the clergy through the ‘sacrament’ of ordination who alone received the fullness of the Spirit of Christ with respect to knowledge and spirituality. And it was the clergy alone who could then in their ‘priesthood’ serve in the New Testament age as prophets, priests, and kings, as teaching, mediating, and ruling in Christ’s church.

As for the unordained?

Basically, it was this: come to Rome’s liturgies, sit down, be quiet, observe the ritual, open your mouth for the ‘holy wafer,’ chew, swallow, and then leave—though not without contributing generously to the church’s coffers in exchange for the church’s grace, of course.

Rome’s members, when it came to worship, were expected to be passive observers. The most voice the ‘laity’ had in Rome’s church was to recite some liturgical phrases in response to the presiding priest’s promptings—so many “Hail Marys” and Lord’s Prayers as required. They were even excluded from singing. That was done by trained monkish choirs.

When it came to the government of the ‘The Church,’ the laity had no say-so in its local parishes (congregations), to say nothing of denominational policies and affairs.

And, when it came to prayer, they were expected to rely on the absolution granted by the ordained, human intermediators (the parish priests) if their prayers were eventually to reach the ears of Christ Jesus and of God Triune.

To be a ‘mere’ believer in the apostate Romish church of Luther’s and Calvin’s day, was an impoverished business, to say the least.

What the Reformation was for believers in the sixteenth century amounted almost to a new ‘Pentecost,’ when all was said and done.

This is not to say that the believers of that day, prior to Luther’s challenging of and breaking with Rome’s hierarchical institution, were devoid of the Spirit and His life.

Without the Spirit there would not have been even a remnant of believers left.

But Rome had all but quenched His operations. She had seen to it that her members were denied access to the Holy Scriptures, the apostolic Word. And where there is no Word, or a scarcity thereof, there will be a scarcity of the Spirit's activities and motions. The Holy Spirit binds Himself, when it comes to the fullness and richness of His operations, to the Word—to the Word in its written form as it has at its core the revelation of God through Christ Jesus incarnate, crucified, and risen from the dead.

Steal that Word from God's people, or thoroughly corrupt that Word, and that which fuels the operations of Spirit in the hearts of believers diminishes. The fire of faith and knowledge burns low, very low. It is as if the fuel and oxygen that feeds the warming, illuminating fire of the Spirit has been taken away.

One is reminded of the account of the travelers on the road to Emmaus as found in Luke's gospel account (24:13ff). After the risen Lord had made Himself known to them and as they were hastening back to Jerusalem, we read "And they said one to another, did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (v. 32).

Their hearts 'burned' within them. This was so because the Spirit used the Christ's explanation of Moses and the prophets concerning Himself (v. 27) as fuel to illuminate their understanding and their faith. They, by the Spirit's use of the Word, achieved a spiritual maturity they had not known to this point. The opening of the eyes of their understanding was a foretaste of the outpouring of the Spirit that lay but fifty days in the future, which anointing by the Spirit would so illuminate all 120 souls in the upper room—the beginning of the New Testament age and of the New Testament church.

Pentecost was the beginning of what is called "the priesthood of all believers." With Christ at God's right hand pouring out His Holy Spirit, the Old Testament priesthood was finished, fulfilled. And the words of Exodus 19:6 came to pass, where God through Moses pointed Israel to a coming day in which "...ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

This reality the church of Rome in her devilry did all in her power to steal from the people of God.

She did this, first, by denying her members access to the Holy Scriptures.

Rome has denied this, claiming the reason there were so few Bibles in existence, and those that were to be found were chained to podiums and desks, was not because she did not want her members reading God's Word, but because, prior to the Reformation, there were

no printing presses. So, Rome could not encourage Bible distribution because they were a precious commodity, all having to be copied laboriously by hand.

This is subterfuge.

The historical reality is that, printing presses or no printing presses, Rome forbade the translating and printing of Bibles in the 'vulgar' tongue of the people upon pain of death. The list of those involved in Bible translation and its publication and who then paid for it with their lives, beginning with William Tyndale, is a long and honorable list. Those printers who were found to have assisted in this 'heretical' work paid a steep price as well, losing their livelihood, if not their lives. Believers found to have Bibles in their homes were arrested, their families driven out onto the streets.

Rome wanted an ignorant 'laity,' not one steeped in biblical knowledge.

Rome's justification for this devilry was her insistence that the unordained lacked the 'unction' of the Holy Spirit, without which they could not possibly understand and explain biblical truth properly. Such was the proper domain only of the clergy.

To the common believer the Scriptures were, said Rome, a great mystery and an obscure book, which in the hands of the uninitiated could only lead astray.

To such a 'spirit' Luther and the Reformers stood flatly opposed.

Over against Rome the Reformers maintained two related truths—the perspicuity of the Scriptures and the office of all believer.

A. Skevington Wood puts it well:

Luther's conception of the place occupied by Scripture in revelation was allied to his unrelenting emphasis on what he called its perspicuity. He held that the Bible is luminously clear in its meaning as befits the chosen medium of God's own self-disclosure. He rebuked Erasmus for inclining to "that impudent and blasphemous saying, 'the scriptures are obscure.' They who deny the all-clearness and all-plainness of the Scriptures, leave us nothing else but darkness," he complained. "Moreover, I declare against you concerning the whole of the Scripture that I will have no one part of it called obscure," he continued, "and to support me stands that which I have brought forth out of Peter, that the Word of God is to us a 'lamp shining in a dark place' (II Pet. 1:19).¹

Notice that Luther speaks of perspicuity in terms of "the word of God *to us*."

¹ A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), 135.

To us, as believers.

Why to us, as believers?

Because, as Luther set forth in his pamphlet “Address to the German Nobility,” to every believer has been given the ‘unction,’ the anointing of the Spirit of the ascended Christ. And that Holy Spirit gives believers the ability to read and understand Scripture. To be sure, unbelievers, devoid of the Spirit when it comes to the Scriptures, will “wrest [them] to their own destruction,” but to the believer the Spirit gives clarity of understanding.

This ties in with the prophetic aspect of the office that the Spirit bestows upon believers. Recognizing this, the Reformers insisted on putting the Bible in every believer’s home and hands.

As well, the Reformers restored the kingly aspect of our office.

This was to come to expression in two ways.

First, those holding office in the church, the clergy in particular, are not, for a believer, automatically the final arbitrators of truth. Believers do not maintain and confess things simply because ‘my church says so.’

That was Rome. “We are The Church, duly appointed by Christ. What we say Scripture says and teaches, is what it teaches. You, as mere members, have neither the right nor the ability to dissent or protest. We, as Church, have final authority in doctrine and life.”

Not so, said the Reformers. Scripture is the supreme authority, and the believer has the ability and right to test by God’s Word even what God-ordained officebearers decide and declare. One has the kingly right to challenge officebearers’ decisions through protest and appeal. And one had the right and even calling to judge it time for one’s self and family to part ways with a church if it goes heretically astray.

These were not rights Rome would recognize. But the Reformers recognized this was something Scripture and the Spirit grants to believers.

And second, as kings, believers have a say in church government.

Male confessing members have the right and calling to vote on various issues. Female confessing members have a ‘right of say’ by expressing their tacit approval of decisions made by the church, or by going to the elders with grounds for their disapproval. And from the male confessing members comes those who can hold the special offices themselves—the Spirit qualifying the ‘common’ believing member to have a rule in Christ’s church, enabling him to assess the truthfulness of the preaching, of doctrine, and even of each other.

And then too, there is the priestly aspect of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ that the Reformation restored.

Rome had essentially led the church back into the Old Testament age. There was a reason her clergy were called ‘priests’ and not ‘preachers.’

Rome insisted that her priests were the intermediators necessary for the people if they were going to enter into the presence of God and be heard.

Christ Jesus, the great High Priest and Mediator, did the believer little good unless Rome’s priests daily offered anew the sacrifice of the mass. It was only through a confessional with Rome’s priests declaring “I absolve you” and being directed by these ‘Reverend Fathers’ to call upon Christ Himself by appealing to various dead saints, starting with Mother Mary, that the believers’ petitions could be brought to God and have hope of being heard.

Rome sought to rehang the great veil that stood between the people and the thrice holy God and His mercy seat. If He was their Father, He was yet hidden, remote, and austere.

But then the Holy Spirit opened Luther’s eyes to the gospel of Christ Jesus as the one, God-provided Mediator between Himself and men, and it was as if the veil was rent in twain again, the earth shook under his feet, and the gates of heaven were opened to him in the name of Jesus, that most merciful High Priest revealing God’s own fatherly heart.

The repenting, confessing, believing sinner regained direct access into the presence of God. All need for any special earthly priesthood to make ongoing sacrifices and intercession ended.

And because of this biblical, Spirit-led insight, Rome’s whole sacerdotal system came crashing down.

The priesthood of every believer was restored.

And the truth of Christ Jesus’ sympathetic High-Priesthood was restored to the church’s understanding as well.

A most precious truth and New Testament reality, indeed.

What is lamentable is that today Protestant theologians are trying to reimpose upon the common, unschooled believer that from which the Reformers five-hundred years ago liberated the saints, namely, a group of men placing themselves between believers and God’s Word.

Only now, not that of an ordained priesthood, but that of Bible scholars.

Many a highly educated scholar is skeptical of the ordinary believer’s ability properly to interpret Scripture. Such, they maintain, is the proper domain of those of us who have been schooled in the original languages and the ancient cultures (the milieu!) in which the prophecies and epistles were written.

Without such a degree you cannot understand what

to take literally, what is figurative, what is mere speculation, and what has the ‘kernel’ of truth in it for all age. Leave it to the biblical and archaeological scholars. The Scriptures are too nuanced to expect the mere believer to understand them properly. That must be left to the new ‘priesthood of academic scholars’ to sort out.

“You will just have to trust us. Apart from our expertise, the Spirit dwelling in you cannot be trusted to lead you to discern the truth.”

It is arrogance beyond all words. But such is the religious spirit of our age.

A new hierarchy of proud men seek to impoverish the

priesthood of believers and their (our) ability to know what Scripture’s truth is.

The evils of Rome are being exhumed to haunt the church again.

But God be thanked, the Spirit, using the Reformation to restore Scripture to the ‘simple,’ has enriched the office of all believers again and enabled even the school boy behind the plow (as Tyndale phrased it) to know more than the ‘learned.’

We have been re-educated to know that by true faith we have direct access to the throne of grace in time of need.



Rev. Andrew Lanning, pastor of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore.

The sixteenth-century reformation of the family

God wills the family. By creation, commandment, and covenant, God declares that His will for humans is family life. *Creation:* The first human institution God created was the family, making Eve from the rib of Adam and bringing the woman to the man in the first wedding and marriage. *Commandment:* God’s law addresses spouses, that they commit no adultery. God’s law addresses children, that they honor father and mother. God’s law addresses generations, that God will show His mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments. *Covenant:* God’s covenant promise, oft repeated, is that He will be the God of His people and their seed after them in their generations. God wills the family.

The devil despises the family. By the serpent, seduction, and society, the devil announces his hatred for the family. *Serpent:* Satan’s first assault against humanity was an assault on the family. Before he ever opened his mouth to discuss the trees, Satan targeted Eve the rib, rather than Adam the head, thus declaring his hatred for God’s marriage ordinance. *Seduction:* Through temptations of pride, lust, deceit, disobedience, and many more, Satan drives wedges between husbands and wives, parents and children, so that families are torn by sin, and sometimes torn apart by sin. *Society:* Through pressures from the ungodly world, Satan seeks to remove the covenant seed from their godly homes,

to shape their hearts according to a godless worldview, and to cut off the seed in its generations. The devil despises the family.

God wills the family. The devil despises the family. It is no surprise then that the home and the family is a prominent spiritual battlefield. So it is today, and so it was in the sixteenth century. In the years leading up to the great sixteenth-century Reformation, the devil, using the Roman Catholic Church as his antichristian instrument, debased and destroyed covenant family life. God, using Martin Luther, John Calvin, and many others as His holy instruments of the gospel, restored and refreshed covenant family life. The sixteenth-century reformation of the church was not only a return to the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, but it was also a return to biblical sanctification in the life of the family.

Rome vs. home

By the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church had thoroughly corrupted every aspect of family life. The challenge for the student of the Reformation is not to find examples of such corruption, but to know when to stop cataloging them for their multitude.

A quarter of the population had taken vows of celibacy; a utilitarian philosophy of marriage had dampened

love; destructive premarital practices compromised the purity of the younger generation; women were deprived of marriage and motherhood in sterile institutional life; fathers neglected their family shepherding responsibilities; church discipline was absent even in the face of adultery. Family life was on the rocks.¹

Over against all of these abuses, God raised up men to reform the family. In the colorful, confident, candid style of men earnestly serving their Lord, the Reformers brought Scripture to bear on every aspect of family life.

The reform of marriage, or, depriving “asses of their lion’s skin”

At the heart of the papal assault on the family was Rome’s godless and cruel doctrine of marriage. According to Rome, marriage is a sacrament, to be administered by the church as a means of grace to God’s people. Because marriage is a sacrament, according to Rome, the church claimed “exclusive legal jurisdiction over marriage.”² In this scheme, the question of who may marry, when they may marry, and how they may marry was to be decided entirely by the church. Rome brooked no opposition to its authority over marriage: not the local civil authorities; not even the parents of the impetuous boy and smitten girl, who, caught in the throes of youthful passion, hastily wed in a flurry of private, secret, and often empty promises. Over against the righteous objection of the parents, Rome permitted and recognized such unions. Among all of the sixteenth-century laments about the sorry state of marriage, perhaps the most common was that the pope allowed, and thus even encouraged, young people to flaunt the will of their parents and marry in clandestine ceremonies. In all matters of marriage, a so-called sacrament of the church, Rome maintained absolute authority.

Rome’s doctrine of marriage was godless because it claimed for marriage a role that the Lord of marriage had never given nor intended. Marriage is not a sacrament. Marriage is not an official means of grace to be administered under the sole jurisdiction of the church. Rather, marriage is a creation ordinance, an institution of God that belongs to the realm of human society. Civil authorities have a say in the marriage of their citi-

zens. Especially parents have a say in the marriage of their children. With pointed wit, John Calvin exposed Rome’s sacramental folly:

[W]hile all admit [marriage] to be an institution of God, no man ever saw [it] to be a sacrament, until the time of Gregory. And would it ever have occurred to the mind of any sober man? It is a good and holy ordinance of God. And agriculture, architecture, shoemaking, and shaving are lawful ordinances of God; but they are not sacraments (*Institutes* IV, xix, 34).

Not only was Rome’s doctrine of marriage godless, but it was cruel to honest men and women. Rome introduced a host of complicated, arbitrary, man-made laws into the solemnizing of marriage. Virtuous men and women with a natural and godly desire to be married were prevented from their desire by some obscure papal precept that they allegedly violated. Violations could be forgiven, but only for a fee, of course. By obstructing lawful unions, the Roman Catholic Church drove people into the temptation of illicit secret sins, tormented their consciences with accusations of violating a multitude of human inventions, and impoverished them with the payment of fees to make everything right with the church.

The Reformers restored marriage to its God-given place as “a good and holy ordinance of God,” not as a sacrament under the sole authority of the church. In doing so, the Reformers exposed the folly of Rome’s cruel marriage laws. Calvin concluded his exposé of Rome’s marriage doctrine, “Methinks...that much has been gained if I have, in some measure, deprived these asses of their lion’s skin” (*Institutes*, IV, xix, 37). Calvin’s reference was to one of Aesop’s fables, *The Ass in the Lion’s Skin*. In that fable, a donkey discovers a lion’s skin left in the forest by a hunter. The donkey dons the pelt and amuses himself for an afternoon by jumping out of a thicket and scaring the other creatures. Excited and pleased by their fear of him, the donkey cannot help but let out a great bray just as a fox comes by. The fox recognizes the donkey for what he is: not the lion he pretended, but just a silly old ass after all. Through its false doctrine of marriage as a sacrament, Rome had donned a lion’s skin and terrorized God’s people. When the Reformers came along and recognized the bray of the Antichrist in Rome’s voice, her reign of terror was over. Underneath its false doctrine of marriage, Rome was just a silly old ass after all.

The reform of single life, or, “The lamentations of seven pious but disconsolate priests whom no one can comfort”

Perhaps the most pitiful aspect of family life in the

1 Scott T. Brown, *Family Reformation: The Legacy of *Sola Scriptura* in Calvin’s Geneva* (Wake Forest, NC: Merchant Adventurers, 2009), Kindle, Ch. 2, Sec. “A House of Inventions.”

2 Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28.

sixteenth century was the sad lot of singles. Single life is not sad in itself, but blessed, for God declares that single life is good. “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (I Cor. 7:1). Through His single apostle, God declares, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I” (I Cor. 7:8). However, Rome took God’s good gift of single life and turned it into a miserable, unhappy, and unnatural bondage.

Rome’s first error regarding single life was to teach that virginity and sexual abstinence is always holier than married life and sexual intercourse. Single life was held up as the holy ideal toward which all should strive, while marriage was viewed as a concession to the flesh for weaker Christians. Even though marriage was a sacrament for Rome, single life was supposedly holier. Rome’s second error regarding single life was to force many men and women into a cloistered life, without any hope for a spouse, a home, and a family. The monks in their monasteries and the nuns in their convents swore oaths of life-long celibacy. In the years leading up to the Reformation, as much as a quarter of the population had sworn such oaths.

Rome’s ideal of singleness and celibacy was unbiblical. Although single life is a good gift, God does not give that gift to everyone. To many, even to most, God gives the good gift of marriage. Marriage is not a lesser state. Marriage is not a concession to a supposed weakness of the flesh. Rather, marriage is good and holy. Marriage was given to mankind even in his state of perfection, as God brought Eve to Adam in marriage. All of the Reformers insisted on the goodness of marriage. For example, Luther wrote: “Marriage is not only an honorable but a necessary state. It is earnestly commanded by God that in every condition and station in life men and women, who were created for it, should be found in this estate.”³

Rome’s false doctrine of single life was also cruel. Man’s desire for sexual intimacy is given to him by God Himself. God created man male and female. Male, with male appetites. Female, with female desires. These appetites and desires are not intrinsically evil, but are natural and proper, and may be exercised with clear conscience in the God-ordained sphere of marriage. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:1). When Rome compelled men and women to forego marriage and live in single life, it violated their nature as male and female, plagued their consciences by leaving them no lawful

way to satisfy their God-given desires, and exposed them to grievous temptation as their natural drive asserted itself. For those who fell into that temptation, all could be absolved by the church, but for a fee, of course.

Because of Rome’s false doctrine of single life, the sixteenth-century monastic system was filled with sexual predators and gross immorality, much as it is today. One Lutheran pamphleteer captured the horrors of the monastic system under the memorable title, “The Lamentations of Seven Pious but Disconsolate Priests Whom No One Can Comfort.”⁴ The pamphlet is a fictional conversation between seven priests, lamenting the burden that Rome’s cruel laws had inflicted on their tormented consciences. The first priest complains of the evils of monastic celibacy and recounts in graphic detail the many depraved ways that he had broken his vows. His account climaxes with the priest leading worship on Sunday, while a married woman whom he had seduced and his many illegitimate children stare back at him from the pews.

Over against these evils, the Reformers encouraged men and women to marry. They even insisted that monks and nuns should break their vows of celibacy, for God’s creation of male and female took precedence over their vows. Said Luther again, “Priests, monks, and nuns are duty-bound to forsake their vows whenever they find that God’s ordinance to produce seed and to multiply is powerful and strong within them. They have no power by any authority, law, command, or vow to hinder this which God has created within them.”⁵ The converted monk Martin Luther practiced what he preached, marrying the converted nun Katherine von Bora.

Single life is a good gift of God, but it is a gift with an important qualification: It is for those who can contain. That is, for those who have a special gift of control over their God-given natural appetites and desires. For those who can contain, it is good for them to remain single. For everyone else who cannot contain, “it is better to marry than to burn” in lust (I Cor. 7:9). By encouraging and requiring those who cannot contain to remain single, Rome bound them in wretched slavery to their lust. By restoring single life and married life respectively to those for whom it was intended, the Reformers liberated men and women from Rome’s bondage.

3 Quoted in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 215.

4 Cited in Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), Kindle, Ch. 1, Sec. “Celibacy and Marriage.”

5 *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1955–1973), 45:19.

The Reformed family

More chapters could be written regarding other aspects of family life that were reformed in the sixteenth century, including the reform of biblical manhood with the man as the spiritual head and leader of the home, the reform of biblical womanhood in the sphere of the home and family, the reform of childbearing, and the reform of childrearing. Every aspect of covenant home

life was brought back to biblical foundations during the Reformation.

God wills the family. The devil despises the family. In the sixteenth-century reformation of the church, God restored family life, according to His promise, “At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:1).



Prof. Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Semper Reformanda “Reformed and always being reformed”

One of the less familiar treasures—and yet a great treasure—of our Reformation heritage is expressed in the theme, “Reformed and always being reformed.” Abbreviated in Latin, the expression is *Semper Reformanda*.¹ Even if it is less familiar than some other themes like *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Gratia*, “Always being reformed” is a *fundamental* aspect of our Reformation heritage. But the expression is less familiar because it did not develop until after the Reformation. Yet, without it we are not fully or genuinely Reformed.

The historical origin of the motto is unclear. An otherwise obscure preacher, the Dutchman Jocus van Lodenstein, is thought to be the first to have used it. Van Lodenstein was a “Second Reformation” preacher whose emphasis was on the reformation of *personal piety*. This “Second Reformation” (from about the time of the Synod of Dordt till about 1750) is sometimes referred to as the “Further Reformation” because it was an effort to apply the principles of the sixteenth-century Reformation *further*—now to the personal lives of the church members. The Reformation went far, these leaders believed, but not far enough. The *church* was reformed; now Christian lives must be reformed. Emphasis must be given to piety. According to one view,

then, “always reforming” refers to the progress Christians must make in personal sanctification.

Important as private piety is, “always being reformed” refers not to personal reform but to *church* reformation. The expression, which was not popularized until the 1900s, has come to be phrased: *the Reformed church must continue to be re-formed by the Word of God*. Not necessarily to the extent of the sixteenth-century Reformation in which wholesale changes were required and radical reforms took place. But reformation where necessary.

And Reformed believers agree that reformation is *always* necessary. *Always* in Latin is *semper*. Over the course of generations, there is always *deformation*, which calls for constant *reformation*. Agreeing with this enables one to say that, if a church is unwilling to subject herself to *reform*—that is, examine herself constantly according to the Word of God, and regularly conform her faith and life to that Word; that is, always “be re-formed”—she is unworthy of the name Reformed.

A mandate from where?

Interestingly, the church receives no explicit warrant for constant reformation from the *confessions*. Indeed, in the confessions is repeated exhortation to *personal* reformation, correction, and change that must always be “more and more.” But the confessions do not call the *church* to a constant self-examination and correction according to the Scripture. At least not explicitly as we might want. Which makes sense, because the

¹ The reader will notice that, in this article, I use *Reformed* with a capital “R” to give a name to churches of a particular heritage; and *reformed* with a lower case “r” to refer to an action performed upon that church. Thus, “Reformed and always being reformed” means: a Reformed church must always submit herself to reform. To make this clear, at times I will hyphenate the word *re-formed* to emphasize the action performed upon a church.

confessions are not a reflection on the *process* of church reformation.

Yet the *biblical* warrant for such activity is clear.

Bible history is unmistakable: the natural inclination of the church was to depart, decline, degenerate, apostatize, become unfaithful. Usually this took place gradually; at times in only a generation or two, as in the days of the judges. But the cycle is clear: a generation arose that knew not the Lord; the Lord sent His judgments to chasten the church; the Lord sent a deliverer to restore and reform them. So it went in the days of Israel's kings. And so it was in the days of the Lord's earthly ministry. The church had once more deformed. So Jesus battled His entire ministry against the Pharisees, who had so badly corrupted the church that she was hardly recognizable. And so it went in the time of the Middle Ages, until the Roman Catholic Church had become the false church and reformation was again necessary.

Jesus' letters to the churches in the book of Revelation remind us of this tendency to atrophy. Sardis, "the dead church with the dead minister" as Herman Hoeksema described it, is but one of seven churches whose letters give strong warning about church deformation. The weaknesses and departures of these churches are found in every generation.

Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 5:20-22) can be read with this in mind. The King James Version reads: "Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil." A legitimate way to interpret the passage is to paraphrase it thus: "Do not despise *all* preaching ('prophesyings') because of error in *some* of it. Rather, test ('prove') all of the preaching by the Word of God. Hold fast to what is truth in it. Reject ('abstain from') every form ('appearance') of evil in it."

What Paul mandates in Thessalonians is what we understand by the expression *Semper Reformanda*. The church always engages in self-examination in the light of Scripture. As she does, she holds fast to her confessions, practices, and traditions that are biblical, and corrects and changes what has become corrupt. Only, of course, according to the infallible standard of Holy Scripture. Thus, the Reformation theme *Sola Scriptura*.

Resisting reformation

Because of our sinful tendencies, we do not like to examine ourselves ecclesiastically any more than a husband likes to examine himself with regard to his care of his wife. And if *husbands* bristle when a suggestion for correction and improvement is made, it is not surprising that churches, especially church leaders, become

angry when confronted with the possibility that they have failed or must be corrected.

But also that is the story of church history. What age *ever* underwent reformation without greatest struggle? Who *ever* was able to be God's instrument of reform except he was resisted, at times violently? Think of the times of the judges and of the kings. What happened to the prophets who called for reform? Observe Jesus' ministry among the Pharisees, the 'conservatives' in His day. Remember the threats against Luther. *Violence* exalts itself against this reforming work of God (see the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48).

But rather than looking outward at this point, wondering who out there will resist our efforts to reform *them*, let us ask ourselves whether we are willing and able to engage in this important exercise of self-examination according to God's Word. Are we willing to submit to painful corrections? If we are not willing, then someday 95 theses may be nailed on our church door, or someone may enter our sanctuary and turn our tables upside down. Will we be like the masses who considered Luther and Calvin innovators, but were completely unaware that innovations had been taking place incrementally in their own church for generations, and that Luther and Calvin were God's instruments to bring the church *back* to her origins?

So what unhealthy signs may be found among us? Are we offended when even a *question* is asked about current practices? Is it thought a sign of impiety or weakness to scrutinize any tradition for correction or improvement? Is *all* change considered departure? A proposal that in a certain area of teaching or practice there could be improvement, even correction, is met with what kind of angry resistance? Let us examine ourselves regarding a *willingness* to be reformed. *Semper Reformanda*.

Always changing?

How the resistance appears is predictable: "You only want change. You always want change! You are tempting the church to abandon the traditions and walk on new paths. You are leading the church astray."

Of course, this response carries some weight in our hearts because there is another danger churches face—the sentiment in the church that always craves change and fancies change for the sake of change. The church must *not* always want change.

At this point, the full expression of the slogan *Semper Reformanda* helps. "The church that *is* Reformed is always in need of being re-formed according to the Word of God." The believer starts with *being* Reformed. The right to the name *Reformed* belongs to those holding the historic Reformed confessions, maintaining histor-

ic Reformed church government, Reformation worship practices, and the old Reformed view of the Christian life. *Being* Reformed is to start with the traditions and to resist the penchant to start from scratch in every new generation. *Being* Reformed is to battle those spirits who ignore the foundations built by our fathers. We start there. Reformed with a capital “R.”

Never changing? (We are not ‘conservatives’!)

We start with *being* Reformed. But we do not *stop* there. And there is the problem for the others. They want to stop with what we have, are satisfied with the status quo.

So pastors and elders must teach their flocks that not every change is the first step to complete apostasy. They must train a generation of young people not to assume that, with the first hint of change, the sky must be falling. The healthy generation is *wary* of change, but not unwilling to reform. We must raise a company of believers willing to do the hard work of examining the church, in every generation, to see if there be “any wicked way in her.” We pray for a generation with a discerning eye, able to distinguish between biblical tradition and mere custom. They must be able to know the difference between the old paths as Jeremiah called us to walk in, and old paths that are not so old after all, but a digression from the right way that started, maybe, a hundred or so years ago.

If the Lord does not give us such a generation of Reformed believers, the church will slowly lose the Reformation motto *Semper Reformanda* and adopt, without thinking, the Roman Catholic motto *Semper Eadem*—*always the same*—a motto not only erroneous, but ruinous. The poor people in the Roman Catholic Church! They naively supposed that Rome was the same as she had always been from the apostolic age. They trusted their leaders who were “conservative.” But they were conserving the wrong traditions.

We do not want to be known as ‘conservatives.’ Remember the old wit who said, “The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected.” We are not Conservatives. We are, and want to be known as, *Reformed*. *Semper Reformanda*.

Read history

The remedy for the unwillingness to be re-formed is the knowledge of history. And not only knowledge of history, but interest in studying history. And not merely the history of the last two generations, or of one’s own denomination, but of the catholic Christian church world-wide for the last 2,000 years.

The generation that arose in the days of the judges did not know the Lord because they did not know history, that is, “the works which he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). The followers of the Scribes and Pharisees did not know history, so had to learn from Jesus that “from the *beginning* it was not so.” When God used Luther and Calvin to reform the church, He did so by leading these men to history, to the sources, *ad fontes*! Their knowledge of the church fathers, their appeals to Augustine and others in the ancient church, were powerful weapons in their struggle for reformation.

The church today ought to be profoundly thankful for every faithful school teacher of church history, who not only teaches the young people the facts of history, but instills in them a hunger for reading and studying.

Then, some day, when these knowledgeable and, by then, mature adults examine our church with the Word of God, and conclude that they must propose correction, improvement, development, change, we meet them not with an alarmist fear, but a sober desire to follow the good old tradition of a willingness to be *re-formed*. “Reformed and always being re-formed.” *Semper Reformanda*.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

How many living original (1924) members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America are there in our churches today? Answer later in this column...or not?

Sister-church activities

Prof. D. Engelsma lectured in Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Ballymena, Northern Ireland October 21st on “Martin Luther: Theologian of the

Glory of God” (11 A.M.) and “Justification in Paul and James” (1 P.M.); October 27th on “Martin Luther: Man of Conviction” and on November 3 on “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Covenant.” For those unable to attend, the speeches were streamed live on CPRC’s website and recorded (audio and video). Prof. Engelsma also planned to preach in Ballymena on October 22 and 29 and on the 5th of November, D.V. Rev. Angus Stewart planned to preach in Limerick on October 29 and November 5 while Rev. M. McGeown was in the USA from October 24 to November 8. While he is in the USA, Rev. McGeown was scheduled to participate in two Reformation conferences, speaking on “The Reformation’s Recovery of Right Worship” in Faith PRC (Jenison, MI) on October 28 and in Loveland PRC (Colorado) on November 4. I think we have that all right!

From the bulletin of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore:

The Lord’s Day! A day to make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. The Sabbath! A day to serve the LORD with gladness and come before His presence with singing. The day of rest! A day to enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. The first day of the week, on which our Lord arose! A day to be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. In our Lord’s mercy to us, He has given us an entire day of rest in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Laying aside our earthly labours for the entire day, we devote ourselves to the worship of our risen Saviour and our heavenly Father. A significant portion of our day will be spent in the church building together. The highlight of our time in church will be the two worship services. There, God Himself comes to meet with His church, drawing us to Himself by His Word and Spirit, speaking His good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and receiving the worship of our believing hearts in praise and thanksgiving. A blessed, holy meeting between our God and His people!

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Crete, IL PRC sponsored a lecture by their pastor, Rev. Nathan Langerak on October 31. The theme, “Martin Luther, A Christian’s Quest for Assurance,” focused first on Luther’s struggle to find confidence in his salvation in the Roman Catholic Church, which taught salvation by works. It was demonstrated that salvation by works does not lead to assurance but that only justification by grace can do that. The lecture was live-streamed and can now be viewed on Sermonaudio.com.

Denominational activities

Classis West of the PRCA met September 27 in the Hull, IA PRC. We are thankful to note that Pastor-elect Matthew De Boer passed his examination with unanimous approval, becoming the first of the seminary class of 2017 to be examined by a classis. His ordination took place September 29 in Edgerton, MN PRC. Rev. Joshua Engelsma was elected to a three-year term as Stated Clerk of Classis West. And a request for emeritation by Lynden PRC on behalf of her pastor, Rev. Ron Hanko, was approved. We thank God for Rev. Hanko’s 38-plus years of service to our churches and wish him well in the future! The next *regular* meeting of Classis West is scheduled for March 7, 2018 in Loveland, CO.

Classis East held a special meeting at Georgetown PRC on October 18 in order to examine Pastor-elect Justin Smidstra (First PRC-Holland, MI) and Pastor-elect Joseph Holstege (Zion PRC-Hudsonville, MI).

Minister activities

On September 10 it was announced that Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI called Candidate Stephan Regnerus to be her pastor.

Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada called Candidate Brian Feenstra and he accepted her call on October 1.

Byron Center MI PRC called Rev. A. Lanning (Singapore) to be her next pastor.

With the emeritation of Rev. Ron Hanko on October 15, Lynden, WA PRC announced the trio of Rev. B. Huizinga, J. Mahtani, and Candidate Stephan Regnerus, with Cand. Regnerus receiving this call on October 8.

On October 1 Rev. Richard Smit announced his acceptance of the call from Doon, IA PRC to be the third missionary to the Philippines. May God bless the Smit family as they make plans to depart for their former home across the ocean!

Seminary activities

The Protestant Reformed Seminary sponsored a conference commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The conference theme was: “Here We Stand!” and was held at Faith PRC on October 27 and 28. Six speeches were given by three of the professors along with Rev. S. Key (Loveland PRC), Rev. M. McGeown from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, and Rev. D. Torlach from the EPC of Australia.

News from our churches continued

Trivia answer

The answer to the question about how many surviving original members of the PRCA there are is...unknown. Today that would mean those who were infants or toddlers and PRCA members by virtue of their parents' memberships. In 1999, the 75th anniversary of our denomination, a list was compiled and published in the back of the commemorative booklet that was printed. Efforts are being made to create a new list. Each church

has been contacted and results of the survey are coming in. This is a friendly reminder to those churches who have not yet sent in their specific results. Hopefully we can answer this question for you in the not-too-distant future! More trivia next time.

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC, Redlands, extends its Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Buiter and family, Mrs. Laurie Jabaay and family, and Bill Buiter, following the death of their beloved mother and grandmother, **Mrs. Joan Buiter**. May we find comfort from Romans 14:8, “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”
Beth Potjer, Secretary

Teachers needed

The Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School in Doon, IA, is seeking a teacher for grades 3 and 4 for the 2018-2019 school year as well as an Administrator. For more information or to apply please contact Brent Wynia—712-470-2757, brentwynia@hotmail.com or Joey Mantel—712-470-6493, jsmantel@outlook.com.

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The *Standard Bearer* digital index (Volumes 1-93) is now available for purchase. The cost is \$10.00. To order, visit www.rfpa.org.

Change of address

Rev. Ron and Nancy Hanco:
13823 S. Clear Lake Rd.
Medical Lake, WA 99022
Phone: (360) 527-6633

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- Nov. 5 “Abounding in Love” I Thess. 3:11-13
- Nov. 12 “Abounding in Love” (cont.) I Thess. 3:11-13
- Nov. 19 “Thanks Be to God” II Cor. 9:15
- Nov. 26 “Called Unto Holiness” I Thess. 4:3-5, 7, 8