

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • November 1, 2015

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Pre-Reformation Light in the Dark Ages

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Confessio Prolixior

Excerpts from the Longer Confession

I believe and also confess that although Thou hadst foreknown before the ages all things future, whether good or evil; that Thou hast predestinated only the good. The good, however, has been predestinated by Thee in two ways, yea from Thy revelation it is evident that it is so composed, that is, in benefits of grace and judgments of justice. Of this the Psalmist gives clearest proof: "Thou Lord lovest both mercy and judgment" (Ps. 33:5). And so Thou hast graciously predestinated life eternal for all Thy elect, and them, without any merit, to eternal glory. For it would have been in vain that Thou hadst predestinated life for them, unless Thou hadst also predestinated them for it.

So also in nearly the same way Thou hast predestinated lasting merited punishment for the devil and his angels, and for all reprobate men, as also Thou hast predestinated them for punishment. Undoubtedly it would have been without cause that Thou hadst predestinated them for the punishment of eternal death unless Thou hadst also predestinated them for it. For they would not go to it unless destined, neither would they have

been destined unless predestined. Indeed, if even one of the reprobate (which is impossible) had been destined thither, who had not been predestinated, then Thou, Who before all ages hast been He Who is not able even for a moment to be changeable, shouldest have now have been shown to be changed.

Therefore, because Thou, Lord, alone art who Thou art (Ex. 3:4), even as Thou Thyself hast testified; and as David likewise says to Thee: "Thou Thyself art forever the same" (Ps. 102:27), and as another also says: "Thou art, Lord, and changest not" (Mal. 3:1); and as Thy distinguished preacher, Paul asserts: "Thou alone hast immortality" (I Tim. 6:16), that is, unchangeableness; "with whom" (and that is said of no one else by the Apostle) "is no variableness neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17): from this it is manifest very clearly; and should be clear enough to anyone of sober wisdom, that Thou hast foreknown and predestinated already, before the ages, without any interval, at the same time and together, the whole as well as each one of Thy works. Indeed this parity is spoken of by Isaiah: "I have done those things which are yet to be" (Is. 45:1)....

And so it is with a view to the elect and reprobate, double predestination is called twofold; for while it is one, it is yet double, even as charity and love are frequently

This powerful confession was penned by Gottschalk about AD 849-850 while he was in prison. Translation by Rev. Ronald Hanko published in the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal, vol. 12:1 (slightly edited).

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

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Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
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spoken of as double both by Augustine and by certain other fathers. For though they are not two but one, yet with a view to God and the neighbor are double. And thus when it is said by the father, Augustine, that the works of God are twofold, he clearly wishes to indicate double: and also that the world is said to be of four parts, and yet not four but one. And that a continent is made of five parts does not mean that he teaches that it is five, but one. Hence, also a double knowledge of the Jews is spoken of by holy Gregory and yet though it be double, it is known to be one....

Neither ought it be thought absurd by anyone reasonably and piously wise, if double predestination is believed and known and said without doubting to be a fact, like as Thou, our Lord, by nature art one, but at the same time art also personally triune: who certainly according to this Thy double predestination art good in blessing of some,

just in punishing others (as Thy Augustine sincerely believes and faithfully asserts). And moreover, as he subsequently confesses, Thou art good in all things, seeing that it is good when a debt is paid; and just in all seeing that it is just when a debt is pardoned without defrauding anyone. All these things and also this (grace be to Thee) I both believe and confess according as Thou dost liberally grant Thy grace to me. And because by hard work, even by Thy grace, I find these things which Thou hast said expounded in Thy books and in the books of Thy ministers, so I dare not contradict that very perspicuous truth, since I am truly afraid of being denied by Thee as Thou has threatened; and also that oft-repeated sentence of Paul I fear greatly: "If any preach to you any thing else than what ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). 

EDITOR'S NOTE

What comes to mind with the term "Middle Ages"? Perhaps dark and dreary lives. Perhaps castles and knights. Perhaps crusades.

For church history, what may come to mind is a seemingly endless parade of corrupt popes. Surely all Reformed readers think of the apostasy and corruption in the church that required the most significant Reformation the church has ever had—1517, and Martin Luther. There is, however, more to the Middle Ages than immediately meets the eye.

The goal of this special issue is to introduce some key church figures of the Middle Ages. Though the age was indeed one of astounding ignorance, wickedness, and apos-

tasy, God preserved His church, and God preserved the church's foundation, that is, His truth as it centers in Jesus Christ. This issue will bring to light some of the men and movements that God used for His sovereign purposes to that end. Most readers are aware of the noteworthy pre-reformers—Wycliffe and Hus. We invite you to learn about a few others.

Be instructed, be encouraged, and give thanks for the evidence that the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world gathers, defends, and preserves His church, and that He did so also in the Middle Ages.

— RJD

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Learning from the Medieval Church's History

Since this issue of the *Standard Bearer* concerns itself with church reformers in the medieval church, it will be helpful to gather a bit of information about the period. The Middle Ages covers the period from Pope Gregory I

(AD 590) to the Reformation (AD 1517). Let us recall the character of this age.

This era is often described as the *dark ages* due to the decline in education and culture. While it is true that education and the knowledge

of the classics declined considerably, it is also true that the church maintained schools throughout this period. Universities also trace their beginning to the Middle Ages. Even so, only a small number in the general population received any school-

ing and ignorance was widespread, even, sad to say, among the clergy.

This was also an age of *faith*. The majority of the population in both the eastern branch of the empire (Byzantium) and the western branch (Rome) were members of the church. Parents normally submitted their children for baptism. They lived in fear of church discipline. They brought their tithes and offerings to the church, making possible the erection of huge, beautiful cathedrals and basilicas.

The Middle Ages witnessed monumental *battles* between the powers of the church (bishops and popes) and the powers of the kingdoms (kings and nobles). The almost unending struggles were over money and power.

In addition, this was a time of dreadful *apostasy* and astounding ecclesiastical corruption—so deep and pervasive that the only remedy was a re-forming of the church. The Middle Ages concluded when Christ called His people out of the vile and murderous whore that the church on earth had become, and led them to begin the church anew.

That history is ours, believers, as part of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a history recorded for our instruction and warning. What then ought we to learn from the history of the church in the Middle Ages? Of the many lessons, we select eight.

The Leaven of False Doctrine

At the dawn of the era, most of the church followed Augustine's sound instruction on the doctrines of sovereign grace, rejecting Pela-

gius and his blatant denial of total depravity. However, some were inclined to a Semi-Pelagian notion that fallen man is spiritually sick, but not dead. Related to that, the church had some ascetic notions that extreme physical self denial was spiritually profitable and even praiseworthy.

Over the next 1,000 years, those defects in theology developed into the heresies of the free will of fallen man, work-righteousness, and justification by faith and works. It spawned thousands of monasteries, where men imagined they were living on a higher moral plane than most and earning their way to heaven. The error destroyed assurance and produced the horrible doctrine of purgatory. It led to laws requiring clerical celibacy and the resulting cesspool of sexual sins. The false doctrine spread like a cancer that corrupted the entire body of truth, until the church completely denied Christ and taught the people doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1).

Learn the lesson! False doctrine spreads and grows relentlessly. Error corrupts and destroys the foundations until the church crumbles to the ground.

Worship

From the medieval church we receive strong warnings against desecrating worship. This age reveals that man by nature desires worship that excites the senses. Spiritual worship is very difficult to maintain. In the Middle Ages, the church sought to please men. She included more and more that appealed to the senses—vestments, candles, glorious

cathedrals, the mass (a one-man drama intended to depict the suffering of the Lord), and especially, the idols. The sermon, and Christ crucified, were lost. God will be worshiped as He determines, not as we like. Resist the temptation toward externalism in worship.

Church Government

The one only God-appointed Head of the church is Jesus Christ. He cares for His church on earth through the offices of elder, minister, and deacon. The medieval church forgot this. She first elevated the clergy above the believers, and then the clergy raised up a complex hierarchy. This culminated in a man (the pope) boldly claiming that he was the vicar of Christ, and head of the church on this earth. Another denial of the Lord. We learn that Reformed (biblical) church polity is vital for the church.

Love of Money

If ever a history demonstrated the truth that the love of money is the root of all evil, it is this period. The Middle Ages saw the church become filthy rich. Wealthy men gave lands and property on which to build churches and monasteries. The lands produced more wealth, and the clergy enjoyed the fruit in lives of luxury. That in turn produced envy in evil men who sought the church offices for the sake of filthy lucre. Lucrative positions were sold to the highest bidder (simony). The peasants were taxed and pressed for money, even threatened with eternal destruction if they did not produce sufficiently, while the priests lacked

nothing. This, in turn, led to lascivious and profligate lifestyles, too evil to describe.

Beware the love of money. Well does the Spirit warn the church against appointing to office men who are “greedy of filthy lucre.”

Unholy Wars

Some of the most grotesque “memories” of the Middle Ages are the crusades. The popes crisscrossed Europe exhorting, cajoling, and bribing (forgiving earthly debt and promising eternal blessing) the people to rescue the “holy lands” from the infidels. Fathers forsook their poverty-stricken families and left them to fend for themselves. Children streamed off to slavery, or death. Horrible atrocities were perpetrated against fellow Christians as well as Muslims. The crusades were about money and power—particularly, for the pope. Crusades were an abomination to the God of heaven and His Son.

We learn that the “holy lands” have no significance for the church in the new dispensation. And the cause of Christ is never, ever advanced by the sword. The crusades remain a deserved reproach on the church headed by the pope in Rome.

Separation of Church and State

The fiercest and most prolonged battle of the entire medieval age was between the church on the one hand and the rulers on the other. The investiture controversies involved the question of who may appoint the clergy at all levels. The pope

insisted that only the church has this right. The rulers objected that these men are also rulers in the land. As part of the feudal system, bishops were often magistrates over a sizable portion of land. They made laws, collected taxes, raised armies, and administered justice. The kings, with some justification, insisted that such men must be loyal to them, and thus kings must appoint the clergy. On the other side, popes thought they had authority from Christ over the earthly rulers. In addition, the church often refused to allow clergy to be tried in the courts of the land—only the church might try them.

Let us learn from this calamitous history. The church must do the spiritual work of the church of Christ and stay out of the affairs of government as much as possible.¹ And she must not allow the government to intrude into her affairs.

Pictures of the Antichrist

The medieval church is a harbinger of the final kingdom of antichrist. That kingdom will have a political side that exists in perfect harmony with a religious side. The head of that coming kingdom will oppose and exalt “himself above all that is called God, or is to be worshipped; so that he as God [will sit] in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (II Thess. 2:4).

The pope of the Middle Ages was the prefiguration of that man. He made himself the head of the

church. He claimed authority over all the world. In 1303, Pope Boniface VIII issued the Bull “Unam Sanctum” [i.e., One Holy (Church)] which concluded, “We declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”²

And that is not all. Judging from the history of the pope, we can see that the antichrist will be proud, vile, greedy, and bloody. The pope “fulfilled” the prophecies of the yet-to-come antichrist by making “war with the saints” (Rev. 13). Untold thousands of saints died a martyr’s death at the command or approval of the pope. Examine the medieval pope and his vile “kingdom” and you will see the harbinger of the final antichristian kingdom of man.

God is Faithful

Through it all, God preserved His church. Through false doctrine, idolatry, and unspeakable corruption, the remnant of His people was preserved. In spite of dishonest, greedy clergy that fleeced and oppressed the flock; in spite of persecution, and every opposition to the truth, the church of Jesus Christ endured. The only possible explanation for this is the sovereign grace of God—ironically, the very grace denied and virtually obscured by the church in the end of that era. God is faithful. He has promised that He will never leave or forsake His church (Heb. 13:5). He has prom-

¹ The Church Order of Dordt, Art. 30 reflects the experience of the church: “In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner.”


² *Church and State Through the Centuries*. Translated and edited by Ehler, Sidney E., and Morrall, John B. (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1954), 90.

ised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16:18). A faithful church will serve Him to the end of the world.

What a comfort for the church today! We stand near the end. The false church steadily becomes more powerful and more corrupt. The world powers inch toward political

unity. The one worldwide kingdom of man will bring persecution such as the church has never experienced (Matt. 24:21). But God will preserve His church. When the Lord Jesus appears on the clouds of glory, those believers who “are alive and remain shall be caught up...to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thess. 4:17). No matter what happens to me, to

you, or to the church institute that we love, God will preserve a faithful remnant who will refuse to accept the mark of the beast.

Let the history of the medieval church, then, give confidence and comfort as it manifests above all the unfailing faithfulness of Jehovah God. 

REV. RONALD HANKO

God's Servant: Gottschalk of Orbais Double Predestinarian and Martyr

The Man

Gottschalk's name means “Servant of God,” and as a servant of God's truth he lived and died. To suffer as he did for the doctrine of sovereign double predestination, he had not only in name but also in heart to be God's servant.

Born around 803,¹ Gottschalk anticipated Calvin's teaching by 750 years with his emphasis on the doctrines we know as limited atonement and double predestination. He also, though not alone, believed a symbolic or figurative presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, a view that would be lost in Romish theology and would only be revived by the Swiss Reformers.

He is known as Gottschalk of Orbais (a commune in northeastern France) only because he spent part of his adult life in a monastery there. He was German by birth, though the place of his birth is also not certain. His father was a nobleman from Saxony in eastern Germany.

He was given by his parents, probably around age 10, to the Benedictine monastery of Fulda in western Germany. The Fulda monastery was an important educational center at that time. There Gottschalk would have learned Latin and would have studied in Latin the Bible, the fa-

thers, and the classics. Perhaps it was there he first came into contact with Augustine's view of predestination.

In any case, Gottschalk sought to be released from his monastic obligations and obtained release in 829 at the Synod of Mainz. By 835, however, Gottschalk was a monk again, now in Orbais. Schaff suggests that this came about through the machinations of the Abbott of Fulda, Rabanus Maurus, though Gottschalk did not return to Fulda but transferred to Orbais. Rabanus Maurus would become one of his chief opponents and, as Schaff suggests, the enmity of Rabanus Maurus toward Gottschalk seems to date from this period.²

At Orbais Gottschalk became “an enthusiastic defender of the doctrine of double predestination...in the joyous conviction that it was in accordance with the doctrine of the church.”³ He promoted his views both in writing and in the course of several missions to Italy and to the Balkans. Thus he brought down on himself the wrath of Rabanus Maurus, then Archbishop of Mainz.

Through the influence of Rabanus Maurus, Gottschalk's teaching was condemned at the Synod of Mainz in 848 and he was whipped, made to swear he would not return to the area, and sent to Reims and to his ecclesi-

¹ The year of his birth is given variously from 800 to 808.

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² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 4:525.

³ J. H. Kurtz, *Church History* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1888), 1:546, 547.

astical superiors. There another of his enemies, Hincmar of Reims, had him condemned at the Synod of Chiersy in 849, where he was deposed from the priesthood, whipped again, compelled to burn his written self-defense, and imprisoned.

However, there were those who supported him, and much controversy swirled around his views. Gottschalk himself continued to write from prison, defending himself especially in his Shorter and Longer Confessions. Whether his principal theological work, *On Predestination*, was written during this time is uncertain, but in all three works he unashamedly defends the biblical and Augustinian view of predestination.

All his efforts to clear himself were in vain and Gottschalk died, still in prison, in 868. He was buried without last rites in unconsecrated ground, a martyr for the truth. His enemies spread many lies about him, including the charge that he was demon-possessed. Many of those lies persist in the available information concerning Gottschalk, but he stands to be judged now only by God Himself, a good and faithful servant of God and of God's truth.

For many years, except for a few fragments, only his Shorter and Longer Confessions were known, but in 1931 other of his writings were discovered and are now available in translation.⁴ His most important works besides the two confessions are his *Reply to Rabanus Maurus*, *Confession of Faith at Mainz*, *Tome to Gislemar*, *Answers to Various Questions*, *On Predestination*, *On Different Ways of Speaking About Redemption*, and *Another Treatise on Predestination*.

The Controversy

Though Gottschalk's views of the Lord's Supper also anticipated the teaching of the Protestant Reformation, he is remembered especially for his doctrine of predestination, in particular his teaching that predestination is double, including not only the election of some but the reprobation of others. He says:

Just as God, by free grace has unchangeably predestinated all His elect to life eternal, so likewise the same unchangeable God, by a just judgment has unchangeably predesti-

nated all the reprobate, who in the day of judgment are damned on account of their evil merits, to merited eternal death.⁵

His views anticipate those of John Calvin and those who agree with him, and are a remarkable testimony against the prevailing and pernicious idea that the doctrine of sovereign, double predestination was an invention of the Protestant Reformers and their successors, especially of Theodore Beza, the English and Dutch high Calvinists and the Synod Dordt. Gottschalk learned what he believed from the writings of Augustine, and is an important link between that esteemed father and the Reformers, as well as those who hold the biblical doctrine of predestination today.

The controversy then as now was especially over the doctrine of reprobation, that is, whether God sovereignly and unconditionally decrees not only the eternal salvation of some but also the eternal damnation of others. Gottschalk was not alone in teaching double predestination, but he was less speculative, being more biblical and more forthright than others, and the only one who suffered for his belief.

In defending the doctrine of double predestination, Gottschalk, like those who followed in his steps, appeals not only to the fathers but to Scripture. He says:

But now it is time, Lord, to be subject to the truthful testimony of the divine books in which it is taught without reservation and declared without ambiguity, that the reprobate are predestinated to the torment of eternal fire. And so I resolve first of all to speak the truth by setting forth the testimony of Thy invincible truth, O Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

In this, too, he was a forerunner of the great Protestant Reformation and its return to the Word of God.

Notable in his defense of the doctrine of predestination, particularly the doctrine of reprobation, is his careful avoidance of any suggestion or language that would make God the author of sin. Though he is not always as clear as he might be concerning the relationship between reprobation and sin, he repeatedly insists that the reprobate are "damned on account of their evil merits, to mer-

⁴ Gottschalk, *Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated from the Latin*, trans. and ed. V. Genke and F. Gumerlock (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010).

⁵ Gottschalk, "Fragmenta Omnia" in Jean P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus..., Patrum Latinorum* (Paris: Petit-Montrouse, 1852), 121:368 (translation mine).

⁶ Gottschalk, *Long Confession* in Migne, 351 (translation mine).

ited eternal death.”⁷ That is what the Canons of Dordt stated 750 years later:

And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof (I, 15).

Equally notable is His rejection of the idea that there are two wills in God, one for the salvation of the elect only and another for the salvation of everyone:

All whom God will to be saved, without doubt are saved: neither are any able to be saved, except those whom God wills to be saved: neither is there anyone whom God wishes to save and who is not saved, because our God has done whatsoever He has willed.⁸

Belief in sovereign reprobation cannot be reconciled with a will of God toward the salvation of all, and Gottschalk is proof of that some 750 years before the Reformation.

Believing in double predestination, Gottschalk followed that doctrine through to its logical and biblical conclusions, rejecting the Pelagian doctrine of free-will and holding the doctrine of limited atonement. In reference to the latter, he says:

All those wicked and sinners for whom the Son of God did not assume either body or language, and for whom He did not shed His blood; neither has He been crucified for them in any sense.⁹

⁷ Gottschalk, “*Fragments*” in Migne, 368 (translation mine)

⁸ Gottschalk, “*Fragments*” in Migne, 366 (translation mine).

⁹ Gottschalk, “*Fragments*” in Migne, 367 (translation mine).

Any high Calvinist must love the man for his clear teaching and for his willingness to stand for the truth and suffer for his stand; but he is important too—important as one through whom God preserved the truth in a time of spiritual darkness. Wycliffe is called the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” and perhaps Gottschalk lived too long before the Reformation to deserve that name. But he is all the more remarkable for being a shining light in the darkest hours of the long night that preceded the morning of the Reformation. What a testimony he is to God’s faithfulness and abiding love for His church!

Gottschalk was largely forgotten in the centuries that would follow, and his writings disappeared until recent times. Bishop James Ussher would publish his two confessions in the 1600s, but his treatises on predestination were lost until the 1900s. Calvin, to the best of my knowledge, makes no reference to Gottschalk, though he derived his views of predestination from the same source at Gottschalk. Nevertheless, he stands in a long line of those for whom the teaching of God’s Word was all-important, even though the majority thought otherwise.

Servant of the truth, he truly was a servant of God, and should not be forgotten by those who serve God and God’s truth today. As one who loved the truth, Gottschalk fits the description of I Corinthians 13:7, for such love “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” And, like Abel, “he being dead, yet speaketh.” ☞

REV. CORY GRIESS

Thomas Bradwardine: Defender of God’s Sovereignty

It is always a wonderful thing to find another who loves the sovereignty of God as the truth of God revealed in Scripture. It is especially

wonderful to find such in the Middle Ages. Thomas Bradwardine, though little known, is such a man. If Gottschalk is rightly remembered in particular for his defense of sovereign predestination in the Middle Ages, Bradwardine ought to be remembered for his

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defense of the absolute sovereignty of God during the same era.¹

Bradwardine was born in England sometime around AD 1290. He was a brilliant man, earning him the nickname “The Profound Doctor.” He produced accomplished works in many areas of study, including logic, geometry, and physics, and some of his works are still required reading for advanced research in math and science today.

But his main contribution was in theology, which he studied and later taught at Oxford. His great work as a theologian is *De Causa Dei* (The Cause of God), which was written against the Pelagians prevalent in his time. The title helps us know not only the content of the book, but also Bradwardine’s own view of his role in God’s kingdom in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Bradwardine rightly viewed himself as a defender of the sovereignty and supremacy of God in the midst of a philosophical climate that exalted man and dethroned God. Gordon Leff describes Bradwardine’s purpose with the book and his life: He was “concerned to cut, root and branch, at that outlook which started from men, not from God...to rebut the consequences which flowed from such a wrong attitude and to win back all attention to God.”²

The philosophical climate in which Bradwardine’s book appeared was thoroughly Pelagian. And although such Pelagianism in the fourteenth century arose out of a different source than the Pelagianism of Augustine’s day, it was, at the end of the day, the same Pelagianism theologically: the fall did not affect man, his will is free, God is not sovereign, and salvation can be merited by man apart from grace or with assisting grace. The fourteenth century saw a battle between faith in God’s Word and faith in man’s reason apart from God’s Word, a battle that is constant in the history of the church. Many philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries placed man’s reason above the Word of God as the source for truth. They argued that the Scriptures were subject to the same limitations they were: the minds of the men who wrote them could not get above what they sensed. Further, since man’s reason can only firmly grasp what can be received by the senses, and since God cannot be

grasped by the senses, there arose a certain skepticism concerning who God is and what could be known about Him from the minds of the men who wrote Scripture or from their own minds now. His existence was not denied, but man’s ability to know about Him with certainty was questioned. The only thing reason could independently arrive at concerning God was that He was powerful. And since He was powerful, they thought, He could do whatever He wanted, including go against what the men who wrote Scripture thought He was going to do. In fact, some went so far as to say God could commit what the Bible calls sin.³

In such a philosophical setting, of course, the teaching of man’s free will and natural ability found fertile soil. To the point that it influenced the teaching of many in the church to return to the Pelagian, man-exalting errors that had already been condemned in the past. So much so, that Bradwardine’s experience in his university days was, “I rarely heard anything of grace said in the lectures of the philosophers...but every day I heard them teach that we are masters of our own free acts, and that it stands in our power to do either good or evil, to be either virtuous or vicious, and such like.”⁴ So much was Bradwardine under the spell of this man-exalting philosophy that he says, “When I heard now and then in church a passage read from the apostle which exalted grace and humbled free will, such as Romans 9:16, ‘Therefore it is not in him that willeth nor in him that runneth, but in God that showeth mercy,’ I had no liking for such teaching.”⁵

But the fact that he did not simply dismiss such Scriptures (read as part of the liturgy of the church) but fixated upon them, even if in repulsion, was itself a sign of God’s working in this man. Before too long, he could not resist the truth of God’s sovereignty anymore as revealed in His Word, and God humbled him especially through that verse he once despised, Romans 9:16. “But afterwards, the truth before mentioned, struck upon me like a beam of grace. It seemed to me as if I beheld in the distance, under a transparent image of truth the grace of God as it is prevenient both in time and nature to all good works.”⁶

Luther was led to the truth of justification by faith

¹ Something Gottschalk, of course, also defended.

² Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 5:11.

³ Leff, *Bradwardine*, 160.

⁴ Quoted in Leff, 14.

⁵ Leff, 14.

⁶ Leff, 14.

alone, burdened as he was by the fact that he could not live up to God's standard of righteousness. Bradwardine was led to find and bow before the absolute sovereignty of God, burdened as he was by his own finitude.

After this deep work of God in his soul, Bradwardine was zealous to defend at any cost the truth of God's sovereignty he found in Scripture.

I burn with ardor for God's cause, knowing that I thrust my hand into a terrible flame, for I am not unaware how the pestilential Pelagians are wont to harass an agitated mind with tumult and abuse, and how they will strive to tear this small treatise [only 900 pages] with their savage teeth.⁷

Hence, the title of his book, *The Cause of God*.

Bradwardine taught that God was in absolute control over all that happened in time. He left no room for man's will to be free in any sense. There are no equivocations, no points where Bradwardine backs down. God is in absolute and determinate control of all. His eternal will particularly, Bradwardine taught, determined all that would happen in time. That will, he believed from Scripture, was free from any influence other than His own holy character.⁸ Out of this, Bradwardine concludes that nothing can move without God, and that only God can be the direct mover upon any creature. God is the cause, the preserver, and even the chief co-actor in every movement of His creation. In fact, Bradwardine would not even abide the language of permission with respect to the will of God: "It would not be enough for God to permit them to do wrong (*speaking of Lucifer and Judas*) for His will is active, and regulates all that happens among His creatures."⁹

From that starting point Bradwardine went on to dismiss any notion of independence or merit in man's works. He taught in accord with Scripture that man was not only under God's total control, but also that man after the Fall was so totally depraved he could not even have a good intention apart from grace.¹⁰ Significantly, Bradwardine went on to teach that since there is no good in the infidel, and

God's grace does not come to the infidel, "he cannot carry out a good action, and all the works of infidels are sinful."¹¹ Whereas the Pelagians taught that the Fall had no effect upon man, so that man could will the good and merit salvation by his freedom, Bradwardine taught that man's will is enslaved to sin, so that man can do nothing to lead God to turn a sympathetic eye to him as a worthy object of grace.

So depraved is man and so reliant is man on grace for anything good to come from him, Bradwardine taught, that even the good works *the Christian does* cannot be attributed to him ultimately, but to God who works in him to produce that work. Bradwardine explains that in any good work, God directly moves the will to desire to do the work, and then takes the will by the hand, as it were, and leads it to do the work. "He operates that we should wish; when we so wish...He cooperates that we should perfect our wish."¹²

Consequently, over against Pelagianism, Bradwardine also taught that justification was by grace alone through faith alone, and not by works. "Faith alone can make us justified: works have no part to play in achieving that which comes from Him alone."¹³ If every work that man does is a result of God's predetermined will, how could man merit anything with God by what he does? And if every good work performed by one predestined to glory is a result of God's sovereign grace in him, how could such a work merit justification? Bradwardine does speak of the works of those in whom God operates by His grace as meriting other rewards, but he explains these as rewards grace has produced.

Bradwardine taught that the objects of God's favorable will were those whom He had chosen from eternity to glory. And he taught that God actively determined from eternity the destruction of the reprobate. He also taught that the ground for God's choice of one unto eternal life as opposed to eternal death was nothing in man, for man could do nothing to set himself apart as a worthy choice. "God does not predestine an individual because He foresees that he will make good use of this free will, for this would make God's knowledge passive, and His actions subsequent to those of His creatures."¹⁴

⁷ Leff, *Bradwardine*, 14.

⁸ Bradwardine uses the illustration of an architect who sees and determines something in his mind, and then by means of his will and word brings it to pass precisely as he had determined.

⁹ Leff, 46. He did, however, carefully defend the notion that God is not the author of sin, even as he maintained this strong position regarding God's sovereignty. See Leff, 58-64.

¹⁰ Leff, 94.

¹¹ Leff, 155.

¹² Quoted in Leff, 150.

¹³ Leff, 83.

¹⁴ Leff, 45.

And again, Leff informs us that Bradwardine believes, “It would be absurd to think that justification and reprobation depend upon anything temporal.”¹⁵


The basis for all Bradwardine’s theology is the Word of God. He went against the spirit of his age and stood instead solely on the Word of God. As far as man’s reason is concerned, Bradwardine taught that the proper relationship between reason and faith was that reason is God’s gift to understand the Word of God believed *a priori* by faith. Thus, the mind of God in Scripture is always foremost, while the purpose of the mind of man is—enlightened by the Spirit—to enter into the mind of God in revelation.¹⁶

That does not mean, however, that Bradwardine dismissed other illuminated human minds that understood God’s mind in Scripture, as God has given those minds to the church down through the ages. Bradwardine had respect for the history of the church; only he dismissed the teaching that set man’s mind above the clear Word of God. Chiefly, Bradwardine built upon the theological thought of Augustine, who better than anyone in the

¹⁵ Leff, *Bradwardine*, 79.

¹⁶ Leff, 33-34.

early church understood the theology of the New Testament. In fact, Bradwardine viewed himself as something of a new Augustine, fighting Augustine’s battles over again. He, like Augustine, once believed in the free will of man. And he, like Augustine, was drawn by the Spirit to understand the sovereignty of God, and defend it.¹⁷

Although in God’s providence Bradwardine was not used to start a great reformation of the church, his work did influence the later pre-Reformers and the Reformers themselves. He certainly anticipated Luther’s *Bondage of the Will* and Calvin’s defense of the sovereignty of God. And there is good reason to think that his influence went beyond the Reformation into the sixteenth and seventeenth-century battle against Arminianism.¹⁸ His most immediate influence was on Wycliffe, however, who is reported to have viewed Bradwardine as his spiritual father.¹⁹ It is to this man that this special issue of the *Standard Bearer* turns next. 

¹⁷ Leff, 66.

¹⁸ See Dykstra, Russell. “Thomas Bradwardine: Forgotten Medieval Augustinian (3),” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 35.1 (November 2001). This article may be found online at www.prca.org/prtj.

¹⁹ The reporter is Augustus Toplady.

REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMAS

The Gospel Doctor: Wycliffe and the Word

Not least art thou, thou little Bethlehem
In Judah, for in thee the Lord was born;
Nor thou in Britain, little Lutterworth,
Least, for in thee the word was born again.

Alfred Tennyson,
“Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham” (1880)

This verse, penned by the famed Alfred Lord Tennyson, captures the significance of the “Gospel Doctor,” John Wycliffe, and one of his most important contributions to the church. Just as it was in a little village in Judea that the eternal Word became flesh, so also was it in a small town in England (Lutterworth) that Wycliffe and his followers produced the first English Bible.

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But Wycliffe’s Bible is not the focus here. Instead, we dig deeper to expose his view of the Bible itself, his theology of Scripture. It was his understanding of the nature of the Bible that was the impetus for his translation into the language of the people. And it was the rich fountain from which flowed all his other work as a pre-Reformer.

But, first, who was this man?

His Life

John was born either in the year 1324 or 1330 to parents of some social standing who held property near the town of Wycliffe-on-Tees. His childhood years are shrouded in the impenetrable mists of history. One of the few tidbits of information that has survived is the fact that the Wycliffe family manor was under the control of John of Gaunt, third son of King Edward III. How much interaction young Wycliffe had with the prince is unknown,

but later he owed his life to the protection provided by the prince.

John was a precocious lad, and about the time he turned fifteen he enrolled in the illustrious University of Oxford to study theology. There, in addition to his studies, two important events helped mold him. First, he came under the influence of Thomas Bradwardine, a renowned Oxford master. Bradwardine was a staunch Augustinian and had a great impact on the younger scholar, so much so that he was been called Wycliffe's "spiritual father."¹ The second event was the onslaught of the Black Death which ravaged England and brought his "father" to the grave. Witnessing death on every side, Wycliffe became much more serious-minded.

Although he received his B.A. in 1356, Wycliffe did not leave Oxford. He continued his studies, earning two more degrees, while he also gradually transitioned into the role of professor. Wycliffe was primarily a scholar, but he did preach from time to time in various parishes, including Lutterworth, as a way of funding his studies.

Wycliffe burst on to the public scene in the late 1360s in a political capacity. War with France had recently been renewed, and the English found themselves in dire financial straits. The English clergy were exceedingly wealthy, but were protected from taxation. In addition, much of England's money was siphoned out of the country to the pope, who at that time resided amongst the hated French. With a reputation for being the Oxford scholar *par excellence*, Wycliffe was called upon by the higher powers to argue the case against the pope and his underlings.

Doing so landed him in hot water. In 1377, he was hauled before William Courtenay, bishop of London, to give an account of his teachings. At the trial, he was ably defended by his patron, John of Gaunt, and he walked free.

It was at this time that a subtle but important shift took place in Wycliffe's labors. No longer was he concerned with politics, but he launched into doctrinal reform. He would spend the next six years writing voluminously to correct the doctrinal errors in the papacy.

¹ Augustus Toplady, quoted in Russell J. Dykstra, "Thomas Bradwardine: Forgotten Medieval Augustinian (3)," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 35.1 (November 2001):25.

At first he was able to do so from the safe confines of his beloved Oxford. But Courtenay, now the Archbishop of Canterbury, convoked a Synod to examine him again. During the course of the Synod an earthquake shook the building where they were meeting. Courtenay interpreted the rumbling as the earth relieving herself of Wycliffe's errors: "This earthquake portends the purging of the kingdom from heresies."² Wycliffe saw it differently. He read it as a sign of God's judgment upon the Roman Catholic Church.

The end result of the "Earthquake Synod" was the condemnation of Wycliffe and his views, but no attempt was made on his life. They did, however, take what was dear to his heart: his position at Oxford. Wycliffe was expelled and forced to retreat to Lutterworth. Wycliffe, on receiving the news, was unapologetic: "With whom, think you, you are contending? With an old man on the brink of the grave? No, with truth. Truth which is stronger than you and will overcome you."³

Wycliffe was on the brink of the grave. He had a stroke around that time, although he recovered sufficiently to carry on his work. But he was laid low two years later by another stroke while in the pulpit. He died a few days later, on December 31, 1384.

So great was his influence that Wycliffe's enemies did not cease to attack him after his death. In 1415, the Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe as a "notorious heretic" and ordered his body to be exhumed and burned. The order was finally carried out on October 8, 1427, and his ashes were strewn over the River Swift.

They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus this brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wicliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed the world over.⁴

His Doctrine of Scripture

Just prior to Wycliffe's death, the first edition of his English translation of the Bible was sent out from Lutterworth. Although others were involved in its produc-

² Courtenay, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 39.

³ Wycliffe, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 42.

⁴ Thomas Fuller, quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 6:325.

tion, it was largely the work of the “Gospel Doctor” and was grounded in his understanding of the Bible itself.

First, Wycliffe taught the supreme authority of the Bible (*sola Scriptura*). According to one historian, Wycliffe’s “chief service to the people...was his assertion of the supreme authority of the Bible for clergy and laymen alike.”⁵ “As the person of one author is to another,” Wycliffe wrote, “so is the merit of one book compared to another; now it is a doctrine of the faith that Christ is infinitely superior to every other man, and therefore His book, or Holy Scripture...stands in a similar relation to every other writing which can be named.”⁶

This was a controversial position. Rome taught that the Scriptures have authority, but at best an authority on par with the authority of popes, church councils, and tradition. Wycliffe disagreed. The highest authority for the child of God is the Bible. It is the ultimate standard for faith and life. “Men ought to desire only the truth and freedom of the holy Gospel, and to accept man’s Law and ordinances only in as much as they have been grounded in holy Scriptures.”⁷

The Bible has this kind of authority because it is God’s book, and therefore has the authority of God Himself. To put it differently, Wycliffe believed the authority of the Scriptures because he believed that they are divinely and infallibly inspired. “And, since these words are God’s words,” he wrote, “they should be taken as believed.”⁸ Elsewhere he said, “It is impossible for any part of the Holy Scriptures to be wrong. In Holy Scripture is all the truth.”⁹ Because the Scriptures are God’s infallible word to His people, they bear supreme authority.

Second, Wycliffe believed that the Scriptures are clear or perspicuous. This too flew in the face of current Romish doctrine. Rome held that the Scriptures are difficult to understand, particularly for the laity who are dependent upon the clergy to understand the Bible. But Wycliffe taught that the Scriptures are generally clear and easily understood, not just for the men of the cloth but for the men and women of the pew also. The Scriptures

are “open to understanding of simple men, as to the points that have been most needful to salvation.”¹⁰ There are certainly difficult passages, but the main points of salvation are clear.

This has important implications for how the Bible is interpreted. Because the Bible is generally clear and understandable, those passages that are more difficult have to be interpreted in the light of the whole of Scripture and those passages that are more easily understood. Wycliffe advanced the reformation principle of *Scriptura Scripturae interpres*: “In Holy Scripture is all the truth; one part of Scripture explains another.”¹¹

Third, Wycliffe taught the necessity of the Bible. In order for a man to be saved, he must know God. And in order to know God, the Scriptures are absolutely necessary. Apart from it there is no knowledge and no salvation. “To be ignorant of the Scripture is the same thing as to be ignorant of Christ. In the Bible is the salvation of men contained.”¹²

Fourth, Wycliffe believed the sufficiency of the Bible. The Scriptures are sufficient for salvation, without all the external rituals of the church. God has revealed enough in His Word for us to be saved and to live a life that is pleasing to Him. The words of God “will quicken man, give them life, new life, more than other words.”¹³ “O marvelous power of the Divine Seed! which overpowers strong men in arms, softens hard hearts, and renews and changes into divine men, men who had been brutalized by sins, and departed infinitely far from God.”¹⁴

Wycliffe’s view of Scripture had immediate and powerful effects. Not only did it prompt him to translate the Bible into the vernacular so that the common people could read it; it was also the impetus for him to send out a band of itinerant preachers (Lollards) who went up and down the countryside proclaiming the Word of God. In addition, his understanding of the Bible formed the basis for a number of important doctrinal positions that he took. He taught that the church is the company of the

⁵ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 6:338.

⁶ Wycliffe, quoted in Steven J. Lawson, *Pillars of Grace* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 362.

⁷ Wycliffe, quoted in Donald L. Brake, *A Visual History of the English Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 50.

⁸ Wycliffe, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 63.

⁹ Wycliffe, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 48.

¹⁰ Wycliffe, quoted in Brake, *English Bible*, 50.

¹¹ Wycliffe, quoted in Lawson, *Pillars*, 362.

¹² Wycliffe, quoted in Ronald L. Cammenga, “Ere Many Years, the Boy that Driveth the Plow...: The History of the King James Version,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 45.1 (November 2011):40.

¹³ Wycliffe, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 63.


¹⁴ Wycliffe, quoted in Fountain, *Wycliffe*, 63-64.

elect, rejected transubstantiation, and opposed the authority of the papacy, to name a few.

His Significance

Wycliffe was a monumental figure in the history of the church, and his work was used by God to prepare the way for the Reformation. Because of this influence, Wycliffe has been called the “Morning Star of the Reformation” and the “Grandfather of the Reformation.” This is the case because Wycliffe was concerned not merely with practical reforms in the church, but with doctrinal reforms. And this was based on his view of the Scriptures, a view which became one of the fundamental principles of the Reformation 150 years later.

The significance of Wycliffe and his teachings is seen in an old Reformation woodcut. In it the artist carved the figures of three men. The first man sparks a fire, the second man fans the flame, and the third man carries the torch. The three men are John Wycliffe, John Hus, and Martin Luther. A direct line can be traced from Wycliffe, across the English Channel to Bohemia and Hus, and from there to Germany and Luther and the Reformation. Wycliffe sparked the Reformation, Hus fanned the flames, and Luther carried the torch.

As those called today to carry that torch, we give thanks to God for the man He used to provide the spark. And may He give to us today the same commitment to and love for the Word. 

REV. ERIK GUICHELAAR

The Life and Martyrdom of John Huss

We are sometimes inclined to think of the Protestant Reformation as something that came out of nowhere. However, long before Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, there were already men whom God was using to prepare the way. One of those men was John Wycliffe. Another was John Huss.

Who was John Huss? (Also referred to as Jan Hus.) John Huss was a man of God. John Huss was a *preacher*. And John Huss was a man who paid the ultimate sacrifice for confessing the truths of the gospel. And, in a display of God’s glorious providence, God would use the events of John Huss’ life, and his writings, to encourage the young Martin Luther in his own stand for the truth. Only three years into the Protestant Reformation, the young Martin Luther would declare, “All this time, I was a Hussite, without even knowing it!” About John Huss,

Luther would go so far as to say this: “Oh, that my name were worthy to be associated with such a man.”

His Life

Born about 1369 in Husinec, Bohemia (which today is part of the Czech Republic), John Huss was truly born into a dark age. Among the church leaders there was rampant immorality, appalling illiteracy, and political corruption. The knowledge of the Scriptures was practically non-existent among the priests, and the *preaching* of the Scriptures even more so. The church leaders oppressed the common folk with such heavy taxes that the church leaders were very wealthy, while the vast majority of lay persons were poverty-stricken peasants.

In God’s providence, Huss was not born into a family that had connections to church leaders. Rather, Huss was born into a peasant’s family. As such, Huss was also born into a class of people that was growing more and more upset with the gross immorality and hypocrisy of a church hierarchy that was placing huge financial burdens upon them.

In 1398, after paying his own way through university

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at the University of Prague, Huss began lecturing at the university. It appears that at this point in his life, Huss was immersing himself in the writings of John Wycliffe. From Wycliffe, Huss was learning more about the biblical doctrine of the church—the church as the company of the elect.

In 1401 Huss was ordained as a priest, and in 1402 he began preaching at Bethlehem Chapel. It was here in his preaching at the Bethlehem Chapel that Huss really began to show that he not only had a knowledge of the gospel, but also a love for the gospel. Bethlehem Chapel was a unique church in all of Prague, for this church had been built by two men for the express purpose of preaching the Scriptures in the common language of the people (which was very rare). And that is exactly why Huss accepted the offer to serve as pastor in this church. Huss loved the gospel and he wanted to preach the gospel. And Huss wanted the peasants to have the gospel preached to them in a language they could understand. It did not take long for the people to realize that Huss was not an ordinary, ignorant, immoral priest, but rather a gifted, godly, devoted young preacher. And it did not take long for Bethlehem Chapel to become the second largest religious center in the entire city of Prague.

As he started to preach the gospel, Huss also began to preach against the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church and the immorality of his fellow-priests. Huss called for a complete reformation of the lifestyles of the clergy. As a result, two things happened: Huss soon found himself at the head of a popular reform movement; and he soon found himself in disfavor with the Roman Catholic Church.

In the next stage of Huss' life, there were two main events that shaped how he was going to die. First, around 1403 there was a push in the theological school in Prague to ban the reading and teaching of Wycliffe's writings. This was, no doubt, due to the fact that Huss had started to teach and preach what Wycliffe had written. As a true servant of God, Huss responded by saying to himself, "The Scriptures *need* to be preached! The people need to hear the truth! I ought to obey God rather than man!" And so Huss started to focus more and more of his preaching on the doctrine of the church. He started preaching that the church is the company of the elect, the company of the predestinated. The people loved him for

it, but Huss became a marked man by the religious authorities. In 1410, Bethlehem Chapel was forced to close down, and all the books and tracts of Wycliffe had to be handed over to the church to be burned. That same year, Huss was excommunicated.

The second thing that shaped Huss's life was this: In 1412, the King of Bohemia made a deal with the pope that allowed the pope to sell indulgences in Bohemia. Indulgences were little pieces of paper issued by the church that certified that because you gave a certain amount of money to the church, a measure of your sins was forgiven, and your time in purgatory was shortened. Huss could not allow his beloved people to be taken advantage of in such a way. He began nailing posters to doors in Prague, challenging anyone who would publicly debate him on the topic of indulgences. Soon enough, the ban was placed on Huss.

The ban involved the following, among other things: that everyone had to avoid contact with the cursed individual, that they could not offer him food or drink, that he could not be offered sanctuary.... Furthermore, a reward was offered to anyone delivering the heretic—dead or alive....¹

Because of the ban, Huss went into exile. During the next two years, hiding in castles, Huss worked on a translation of the Bible into the vernacular. He also wrote his most important work, *On the Church*.

In 1414, the Roman Catholic Church summoned the Council of Constance. At this Council, among other things, the church was going to deal with this so-called heretic, John Huss. Huss was invited to the Council, and King Sigismund promised him a safe passage to the Council and a safe passage back home. Huss accepted the invitation, thinking in all likelihood that attending the Council would give him an opportunity to defend the gospel.

The king's promise of safety meant nothing. Soon after his arrival, Huss was seized and thrown into prison. After six months, Huss was given the option of either recanting all his views or being burned at the stake. Huss' response was this: "I will repeal anything and everything that I have

¹ B.J. Van der Walt, "John Hus: A Reformer in His Own Right," in *Our Reformational Tradition: A Rich Heritage and Lasting Vocation*, Institute for Reformational Studies (Silverton, South Africa: Promedia Publications, 1984), 42.

taught, so long as the Council first proves that what I have taught is contrary to the Scriptures.” This, however, was something the Council was not concerned about doing, and Huss was given four more weeks in prison to consider his options. But four more weeks in prison would not change Huss’ mind. Huss would stand faithfully for the truths of the gospel, even unto death. On Sunday July 6, 1415, Huss was burned at the stake, dying a martyr’s death, confessing the name of Jesus Christ with his last breaths.

His Emphases

Why? Why was John Huss willing to be burned at the stake? Why did the Roman Catholic Church want to get rid of Huss so badly? The answer is this: because of two central doctrines that Huss always emphasized in his preaching.

First, Huss emphasized the scriptural doctrine of the church. This is perhaps what Huss is best known for. In his most significant work, *On the Church*, Huss defines the church as follows: “...the holy catholic—that is, universal—church is the totality of the predestinate... or, all the predestinate, present, past, and future. This definition follows St. Augustine.”² After quoting from Augustine, Huss says:

From this statement it appears that the holy universal church is one, the church which is the totality of the predestinate, including all, from the first righteous man to the last one to be saved in the future. And it includes all who are to be saved who make up the number.... For the omniscient God, who has given to all things their weight, measure and number...has foredetermined how many shall ultimately be saved.³


This is the exact same doctrine of election and predestination that the apostle Paul had taught, that Augustine had taught, that Gottschalk of Orbais had taught, that Thomas Bradwardine had taught, and that John Wycliffe had taught. And now Huss had been given the eyes to see it too.

But the Roman Catholic Church hated this teaching. It hated this teaching because this teaching threatened the control that the Roman Catholic Church had over the ignorant people. The Roman Catholic Church

taught that simply by being a member in good standing of the Roman Catholic Church, you will certainly go to heaven; but as soon as you fall out of the good graces of the Roman Catholic Church, you will automatically go to hell. You can see how that would have kept the ignorant people in fear and under the oppressive control of the Roman Catholic Church. But Huss said, “No! It is not the Roman Catholic Church that determines your salvation; it is *God* who saves, and who saves according to His own sovereign decree and His own particular and irresistible grace. And,” Huss added, “those who *are* elect, those who *are* the true children of God, will be those who are characterized by godliness, and not by the gross immorality and rampant corruption that characterizes so many of the priests.”

The second doctrine Huss emphasized (and the *chief* doctrine he emphasized) was this: the absolute authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Huss emphasized the Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith and conduct. Whatever decisions men might make, whatever decisions the church fathers might have come to, whatever decisions the church councils might have made, whatever the pope might say, it is the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone which are the infallible, authoritative rule for all thinking and for all living. This is how Huss was truly a pre-Reformer. This explains why Luther, over a hundred years later, would say, “All this time I was a Hussite without even knowing it!” And this is ultimately why, in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, Huss needed to be put to death. And it is for this reason Huss was willing to die.

Ultimately, the question John Huss raised was this: “Who is the Lord of the church? Who is Lord? The Roman Catholic Church? Or Jesus Christ as He has spoken through His Word?”

John Huss was used by God to begin a reformation in Bohemia that would last all the way to the Protestant Reformation, and beyond. If Huss had been given more time to develop his thinking on other points of doctrine, and if the people actually had access to their own copy of the Scriptures, who knows how far Huss’ reformation would have spread. In God’s perfect timing, however, that would have to wait until over a hundred years later, when God would raise up such men as Luther, Calvin, and others. 

² *De Ecclesia*, 3.

³ As quoted in Victor Budgen, *On Fire for God: The Story of John Hus* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1983), 196.

Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples: Pioneer of French Reform

As his name would indicate, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455-1536) was a Frenchman from Étaples, a coastal town south of Calais, in Picardy. His surname is sometimes given as Fabry or Fabri, and he is also known by the Latin form of his name: Jacobus Faber Stapulensis. Although this sounds complicated, it is worth bearing in mind if you look him up online or in books and articles dealing with the Reformation, along with the men and ideas that prepared the way for it.

Unlike the other individuals treated in this special Reformation Day issue of the *SB*, Jacques Lefèvre lived to see the sixteenth-century Reformation. However, unlike the Waldensians, the other party treated in this issue, and the Hussites, the followers of John Hus, Lefèvre did not join the Reformation. Indeed, he died in the Roman Catholic Church in France. This makes him somewhat harder for us to categorize and understand. So why is he included in this special edition of the *SB*? Read on!

The fundamental difficulty for English-speakers is that the primary sources, Lefèvre's own writings, are in Latin and French, and have not been translated into our native tongue. Moreover, much of the secondary literature is not in English either.

A second issue is the different modern evaluations of the French scholar. Writing in 1892, in his eight-volume *History of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff states,

[The Reformer, William Farel's] principal teacher [at the University of Paris], Jacques Le Fèvre d'Étaples (Faber Stapulensis, 1455-1536), the pioneer of the Reformation

in France and translator of the Scriptures, introduced him into the knowledge of Paul's Epistles and the doctrine of justification by faith, and prophetically told him, already in 1512: "My son, God will renew the world, and you will witness it."¹

This view of Lefèvre as a precursor or pioneer of the Reformation is representative of historic Protestant evaluations. However, in recent decades the Picard scholar's Reformed teaching and influence have been downplayed by some in the Protestant tradition. Likewise, as Romanism becomes more ecumenical, Roman Catholic authorities speak less of what they used to refer to as his "heresies" and, instead, they tone down his doctrines and applaud his efforts towards "renewal" within their institution.

However, the fullest portrait in English, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes' *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (1984), bucks the recent trend.² Hughes traces the intellectual and spiritual development of this many-sided priest, university lecturer, and author from his earlier studies in philosophy and mysticism (1-51) to his later work as a Bible translator, Scripture commentator, and reforming theologian (53-197).

Sola Scriptura

Both in the eyes of others and himself, 1509 marked a turning point in Lefèvre's career, for that year saw the publication of his Latin *Fivefold Psalter*, marking the beginning of his major biblical and theological studies (xiii, 53-54). In connection with this key work, Lefèvre speaks

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), vol. 8, 239.

² Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984). Hereafter, page numbers in this article refer to this book.

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of his fresh, personal experience of tasting the “sacred utterances” from “the mouth of God” as “the true food of the soul.” The inspired Word, he declares, is “majestic” and “wonderful” in its “light” and “sweetness” (54).

Disregarding the allegorical, tropological, and analogical understandings of scholastic traditionalism, Lefèvre held that the literal meaning was now primary, and that it was to be understood in the light of “the harmony of the Scriptures” (56), with Jesus Christ being the focus of God’s Word (58-59).

For him, the all-sufficient Bible is the supreme authority over all human beings, ecclesiastical writings, and church councils (155; cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 7). In keeping with his conviction of the supremacy of God’s Word, Lefèvre commented on most of the New Testament in Latin. Since he desired the common man to have access to the Word of God, the Picard scholar also translated into French first various parts of the Bible and, then, the whole of it.

At the same time, Lefèvre and his colleagues realized that the Word must also be *preached* in French. To this end, they published *The Epistles and Gospels for the Fifty-Two Sundays of the Year* in 1525, designed for regular use in the parish ministry in the diocese of Meaux, twenty miles east of Paris, where Lefèvre and his disciples were engaging in reformatory labors. These homilies and exhortations, explains Hughes, were “brief, simple, practical, and evangelical in tone” (164).

In Lefèvre’s doctrine and experience of *sola Scriptura*, his hermeneutics, his labors as a Bible commentator and translator, and his promotion of expository preaching through producing a postil, there is considerable similarity with other Reformers, especially Martin Luther.

Other “Solus”

Flowing from his confession of the truth of Scripture alone, the French theologian confessed salvation and justification by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone to the glory of God alone—the remaining four “solus” or “onlys” of the Reformation.

Lefèvre proclaims antithetically that it is by “faith” in “Christ alone,” the “sole Lord,” and by His “grace,” not “through his works or through any creature,” that man is saved:

Whoever looks for true salvation through his works

or through any creature otherwise than through Jesus Christ alone is saying, “Jesus is anathema,” which is to call him accursed, and does not have the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit gives a man a living and sure knowledge through faith that Jesus Christ is his sole Lord, and that man gratefully acknowledges that it is through his grace that he has everything he has in this world and everything he will have in the world to come (85-86).

Since we are saved and justified by faith through “grace alone,” with both grace and faith being “God’s gift” to us, all glory belongs to “God’s grace and mercy alone” and not to ourselves or our works. Thus Lefèvre comments on Ephesians 2:8-10:

By grace alone [*per solam gratiam*] can we be saved.... For we are saved by his grace through faith—saved not because of ourselves, but by God’s grace. For grace is a gift, not a work. And lest we should think that the faith by means of which we are justified is ours, even this is God’s gift. Therefore we should attribute everything to God and nothing to ourselves, and so we should glory neither in ourselves nor in works, but in God’s grace and mercy alone (85).

For Lefèvre, all glory is due to “God alone” for on Christ alone was laid “the iniquity of us all,” so that “righteousness and justification,” pardon and peace, are “of faith and grace” and not from one’s own works (76). Opposing Rome’s number one argument against justification by faith alone by its misinterpretation of the second half of James 2, the Picard theologian gives the correct and Protestant understanding of the relationship between Paul and James (77; cf. 78). Lefèvre also teaches that the good works performed by God’s people are wholly of divine grace (Phil. 2:13) and that believers “persevere to the end” (Phil. 1:6) (86; cf. 192).

It was no wonder that die-hard Romanists in France condemned and persecuted Lefèvre, burned his books (163-165) and denounced him as “an antichrist” (130). Some even called him one of the four precursors of the Antichrist (presumably Luther) or one of the four antichrists then on earth (along with Luther) (131).

Influence on Reformers

Whether or not Lefèvre was a cowardly and overly optimistic Nicodemite in staying in the early sixteenth-century Roman Church in France in the hopes of reforming it—a proper examination of this would involve too many

historical factors for one article—we can acknowledge his role as a pioneer in French reform, both in terms of doctrinal progress and influence on the Reformers.

Not only did Lefèvre's teaching on gracious justification help prepare the way for the reception of Martin Luther's great doctrinal breakthrough, but the Frenchman also had a significant hermeneutical influence on the German Reformer, as Hughes explains:


One of the first to discover and appropriate Lefèvre's hermeneutical principles was Martin Luther (1483-1546), while he was still an unknown monk. In 1885 a copy of the first edition of the *Fivefold Psalter* was found in the library of Dresden with its margins profusely annotated in the handwriting of Luther. Obviously the young German scholar had studied it with great care (60).

Out of all the Reformers, it is especially the Frenchman William Farel (1489-1565), a founder of the Reformed churches in the cantons of Neuchâtel, Berne, Geneva, and Vaud in Switzerland, who was most influenced by Lefèvre (95-96). However, Lefèvre would later be surpassed in his grasp of biblical and Reformation principles by his younger, bolder countryman, John Calvin.

Through his work of translating the Scriptures, Lefèvre had a massive influence on the French Bible of his student, Pierre Robert Olivétan (c. 1506-1538),

who also translated the Scriptures from the Hebrew and Greek originals. The Olivétan Bible was published in 1535 with a Latin preface by Pierre's cousin, John Calvin (1509-1564). Since the Olivétan Bible is foundational to subsequent French translations and was essentially a revision of Lefèvre's work (196), the scholar from Étaples occupies a similar place regarding the French Bible to that of William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536) and the English Bible.

Calvin was also aware of Lefèvre's Latin translation of the New Testament (73), and even visited the aged scholar in 1534 (196-197). According to Theodore Beza (1519-1605) in his life of Calvin, the old Picard from Étaples told the young Picard from Noyon that he would be used of God as an instrument in establishing Christ's kingdom in France (196).

Further proof, if it is needed, of Lefèvre's interest in and support of the Reformation is seen in a 1524 letter to Farel, then in Basel: "O gracious God, how great is my joy to see this grace of the pure knowledge of Christ now spreading through so much of Europe!" (136). Those were wonderful days and, in God's providence, Lefèvre's work helped usher them in!³ 

³ A much longer form of this article is available on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/lefevre.html).

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

The Waldenses: Pre-Reformation Witnesses

The Waldenses were living proof that Christ has never been without His true church, not even in the Middle Ages, when the church institute was apostate and corrupt beyond description.

In every age Christ builds His church and keeps His own. The 'sect' known as the Waldenses are proof of this truth.

We generally associate the Waldenses with the great slaughter of these humble believers that took place in

the Alpine valleys that lie on the border between France and Italy, a slaughter that began on April 24, 1655 and continued for many days.

On that fateful Saturday, a day that lives on in infamy, papal soldiers under the command of the Duke of Savoy—soldiers who had been housed in Waldensian homes for a week with the assurance that the army came only to track a few fugitives and would leave once these were apprehended—rose up at a prearranged trumpet signal, hauled men, women, and children from their own homes, and began to slaughter these families without mercy, often abusing the women and children as their families watched, before put-

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ting them to death in the cruelest ways imaginable. This went on for days. The mutilated bodies were left to lie in the streets and open fields without burial, food for every predator and carrion bird.

The corpses numbered in the thousands.

The reports of the brutality and the scale of the slaughter in the Piedmont valleys, along with its treachery, swept through Northern Europe, outraging the sensibilities even of those who had little sympathy for the Protestant religion. Could human beings be so diabolical as to outdo even the brute beasts? Rome's outrages in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrate they can be, and that in the name of Christianity and of their own Christ.

The slaughter of the Waldenses is immortalized, as most know, in Milton's poem entitled *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont* (Sonnet 18).

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold,
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipp'd stocks and stones;
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that roll'd
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubl'd to the hills, and they
To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundred-fold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Moving, to say the least. Indeed, as the blood of Abel cried to God for vengeance, so does the blood of these Waldenian martyrs to this present day.

But the history of the Waldenses does not begin in the 1600s. This ancient 'sect' traces its beginnings back some 500 years prior to the great massacre in the Piedmonts.

Those whom we remember as the 'Waldenses' find their origin in a man whom we know as Peter Waldo, who lived in the twelfth century (c. 1140-c. 1218). In his hometown of Lyon, France, his family name was Valdes, or Vaudois in its Latin version. Others would label those who followed his teachings as 'the Vaudois,' which the English has transposed to 'Waldenses.'

Valdes' followers, however, called themselves 'The Poor of Christ' as well as 'The Poor of Lyon.' In other

words, they were not the followers of a man, the earmark of a sect. Rather they were those who were returning to the teachings of Christ and the apostles and of the early Christian church, when the believers had all things in common and bore witness to all and sundry of the salvation found in Christ Jesus.

Little is known about Peter Valdes' life. His contemporaries wrote no biography; he left behind no writings. What historians have gathered is that he came from a wealthy family, was himself a successful, well-known businessman and a good son of Rome, one to whom Christianity was for the most part ritual and formality, but who, like Luther later, would undergo a powerful change of heart and perspective on life, especially as it pertained to the (un)spiritual condition of the church of his age.

What is known is that, mid-life, Valdes came under a spiritual conviction and determined to give all that he had to the poor and go out and preach to all and sundry, teaching them what true Christian discipleship was all about.

Traditions vary as to what brought this about. One tradition maintains that he read the gospel record of the rich young ruler and Christ's stinging admonition to this young man, exhorting him to sell all that he had, give the proceeds to the poor, and then to take up his cross and follow Christ. Valdes identified himself with that rich young ruler, one who, when it came to the kingdom of heaven, was so close, and yet, so far away.

Another tradition is that a close friend died at a banquet in which wine flowed freely, giving Valdes occasion to ask, "What if death were to take me in like manner? What would be the end of my journey?"

Perhaps Valdes' dramatic change of heart was occasioned by a combination of these two events. Whatever it was, Valdes sold all that he had, saw to it that his wife was taken care of, and gave the rest to the poor. He remained married, but his life was now dedicated to preaching the Word to others, calling them to do as he had done. He assured those who did so that those to whom they preached would provide for them, just as was true of the apostles of old.

In time, this requirement of selling all that one had was relaxed, but in the beginning many heard Valdes' message, took it to heart, and did precisely that. They

became, for all intents and purposes, a mendicant group (like monks taking a vow of poverty), except they did not promote celibacy over marriage nor retire to some monastic separation from the world. Rather, they remained 'in the world' so they could preach Christ and teach the biblical life.

Exactly because Rome's crass materialism and sexual corruption—especially amongst her prelates and priest—were so transparent and well known, this return to renouncing the things of this world and seeking first the things of heaven and its righteousness had such an appeal to the spiritual of those days. This was the authentic Christian life, not what the majority of Rome's worldly-minded clergy promoted and practiced.

The number of adherents to Valdes' preaching swelled remarkably and began to spread, so much so that the Romish prelates of southeast France could not ignore it. They reacted with vigor, petitioning the pope to label these Waldenses as a sect promoting heresy. This would mean, of course, excommunication of all who practiced this new 'heresy', giving the prelates the right to turn them over to the inquisitors to perform their evils. It was crystal clear to Rome's prelates that the poverty and piety of this new movement stood as a public condemnation of their greed, opulence, and perversions.

At that time Valdes and his followers also petitioned Pope Alexander III to give papal approval of their movement and recognize them as a preaching order. Alexander refused this petition, but neither was he willing at this point to declare them heretics, not as long as they preached against the Cathari, a growing heretical movement troubling southern Europe at that time. Catharism (known also as Albigensianism) essentially was a revival of the old Manichean error that posited two forces of equal power in this world, the force of light and the force of darkness. Physical reality was inherently of darkness and evil, and so believers were called to practice a strict asceticism if the spiritual was to prevail. The Cathari went so far as to identify the God of the New Testament with light and good, and the God of the Old Testament with darkness and evil, one represented by Satan himself. It was a heresy that not even Rome could allow.

As long as Valdes and his followers joined Rome in condemning the Cathari, Alexander was willing to let them exist unmolested, though not as an officially recog-

nized order. As a result, the Waldensian movement was given time to grow.

This all changed in 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council under a new and ambitious pope, Innocent III, categorized the Waldenses with the Cathari, making them an heretical sect. This meant they were to cease their preaching on pains of arrest, loss of property, and death.

The response of Valdes (who would die three years later, in 1218) and his followers was "We must obey God rather than men." They refused to recant or to cease preaching. From that point on persecution and its threat became the looming reality of their lives. It also explains their gradual migration into the Alpine mountains and the remote valleys of the Piedmonts in the interests of survival.

Rome justified her charging the Waldenses with heresy by arguing that they allowed all to preach, none of whom was ordained. Surely this was contrary to Scripture's clear teaching that only those ordained by Christ's church might preach! "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:15).

Technically, Rome was correct. However, the reality is, extraordinary times in the church call for extraordinary measures. Consider the record of Deborah the prophetess in the days of the judges.

Rome's real issue with the Waldenses was not that unordained men and women were 'preaching.' Their issue, like that of the Pharisees with John the Baptist, was *what* they preached, a word that exposed them in their immoralities and gross materialism, and, as time went on, challenged Rome's great doctrinal errors as well.

Significantly, historical evidence is that when Valdes began to preach to the multitudes, he carried with him his own translation of the Gospels, foreshadowing the Reformers and their insistence on the importance of giving God's people God's Word in their native tongue. As time went on, copies of this translation could be found in the homes of his followers. Over time translations of other books, such as Paul's epistles, were added.

It was this growing familiarity with the Scriptures that led the Waldenses to doctrinal stances that anticipated the Reformation itself.

In time, the Waldenses denied such doctrines as purgatory and the penance connected with it, the effectiveness of prayers to the saints, as well as elevating the Virgin

Mary to that of a co-mediatrix. Eventually they even challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation, so crucial to Rome's sacerdotal system and her tyranny over the conscience.

A report filed by an inquisitor in 1320 reads:

Question addressed to the [Waldensian] elder: If, according to their custom, he could not consecrate the bread and wine, could he bless the bread and wine, if not in the sense of accomplishing a sacrifice or offering, [then] in the sense of a memorial of the blessing of the bread and wine which Jesus gave when he transformed the bread and wine into his body and blood. He answered that he could not do it....

[Rather, the leader] sits at the table with the others. Then taking the bread, fish and wine, he blesses them, not as an offering or sacrifice [!], but as a remembrance of the first supper.¹

This confession, of course, served to establish the 'guilt' of the accused beyond all question.

It was these doctrinal developments that incurred the on-going wrath of Rome, and prompted her edicts across the pre-Reformation centuries to stamp out those pestiferous Waldensians.

A study of the history of the Waldenses reveals that their preaching zeal and observable piety served to gain adherents across Northern Europe through the centuries preceding the Reformation. But once the gathering of new Waldensian adherents was brought to the attention of the Romish prelates, they pressured the princes to forbid such gatherings and to extinguish this 'heresy' from their realm. As a result of the vigorous and relentless suppression, when the Reformation broke out across Europe in the 1500s, those still carrying the name 'Waldenses' were confined mainly to the Alpine mountain strongholds of the Piedmont region. The rest had been pursued and executed to extinction.

In time, the writings and teachings of the Reformers reached the mountain strongholds of the Waldenses, where many adopted them as biblical truth. With some exceptions, the Waldenses identified themselves with the Reformation movement.

Significantly, the Reformers of both the Lutheran and Calvinistic camps acknowledged the Waldenses (togeth-

er with the Hussites) as forerunners of their own break with Rome and return to the teachings of Scripture. When the Waldenses drew up a more complete translation of the Scriptures in the 1530s, Calvin reviewed it and wrote its preface.²


But identifying themselves with the Reformers came at a fearsome price. Rome's counter-Reformation came into existence in the later 1500s, and the Waldenses of the Piedmont region were identified as one of the rebellious 'sects' to be exterminated once and for all. Whoever rid the land of the Waldenses would earn the special dispensation of the Papal See.

A series of assaults were made upon the humble but doughty Waldenses, only to be thrown back a number of times. It was in 1655 that the Papal See found its zealot, the Duke of Savoy, who, like Doeg the Edomite who slaughtered the priests and families of the house of Ahimelech, slaughtered the families of the Waldenses without mercy and with Herodian venom.

The pope said those who rendered him such service would, for their zeal, be spared the fires of purgatory. Something we do not dispute. But the fires of hell? Another matter entirely.

Those who remained of the Waldenses were scattered to the corners of Europe. Those of a Calvinistic persuasion would be absorbed into the Reformed community, their separate identity coming to an end.

But the testimony of these pious, stalwart, humble folk remains with us to this present day. Surely they are numbered with those spoken of in Hebrews 11:37, 38, "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword,...afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy...)."

Surely, as Christ in His grace enabled the Waldenses to persevere across centuries of abuse and yet keep the faith, He shall sustain His present church, upon whom the end of the age quickly comes. 

¹ Giorgio Tourn, *You Are My Witnesses: The Waldensians Across 800 Years* (Cincinnati, OH: Friendship Press, 1989), 41.

² Cf. J.A. Wylie, *History of The Waldenses* (Gallatin, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1985), 62.

On September 30, 2015, Classis West held its fall meeting in Edgerton, MN.

The meeting was preceded by an officebearers' conference the previous day on the topic "The Local Church and Missions." In his keynote speech, Rev. J. Slopsema emphasized first that every local church has the calling before God to do mission work. The church should not think this is optional for her; she also should view it as a privilege, not a burden. The second part of his speech explained that some of the work of missions becomes the work of the denomination, and laid out guidelines for how and when a congregation would turn to the denomination for help. The fourth presentation of the day supplemented this instruction; members of the Domestic Mission Committee spoke on "Promoting Mission Outreach by the Local Congregation." The other two presentations were by members of Hope PRC and Georgetown PRC, giving overviews of Hope's work with Rev. Titus in Myanmar, and Georgetown's work with the Protestant Reformed Church of Vellore, India.

The presentations were informative, and I personally found them encouraging. A hearty thanks to Revs. Griess and Kleyn for organizing the conference, and to those who came from Michigan to take part in it.

After Rev. R. Hanko opened the meeting with an edifying devotional on Zechariah 1:8, Rev. B. Huizinga capably chaired this meeting for the first time in his ministry.

The highlight of the meeting of Classis was the examination of Mr. Ryan Barnhill, who has accepted the call to serve as pastor of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL. The evening prior to Classis, the delegates of Classis and synodical deputies from Classis East gathered in the sanctuary of Edgerton PRC for an official worship service, at which Mr. Barnhill preached his specimen sermon on Psalm 25:14. Both in his preaching as well as in the rest of the exam, Mr. Barnhill gave good account of his natural and spiritual gifts for the ministry of the Word. With joy, Classis approved his exam and advised Peace PRC to proceed with his ordination. With this decision, the synodical deputies concurred.

Also on the agenda was an appeal of a brother from Peace PRC against a decision of his consistory. Peace PRC

was unable to find pulpit supply for its worship services on December 31, 2014 and January 1, 2015. The consistory decided, with the approval of Crete PRC's consistory, to hold a combined worship service with Crete, under the supervision of both consistories. The brother presented his consistory with several reasons why he considered this decision to be an error and, not satisfied with his consistory's response, appealed the matter to Classis. Classis decided not to sustain the brother's appeal for five reasons. Of those five, the first two regard significant principles of the Church Order, and the last three regard matters that were specific to the appellant's wording in stating his case. The first two may be summarized as follows. First, Classis pointed out that at this combined service, the elders of Peace PRC did not relinquish their responsibilities toward their congregation, but rather called the congregation to worship, and were able to oversee both the attendance of the members of Peace PRC as well as the preaching that the members received. In this way they fulfilled the mandate of Scripture in I Peter 5:2-3. Second, Classis declared that in so doing both consistories adhered to Article 67 of our Church Order, namely, that Peace PRC did not relinquish their autonomy, and that Crete PRC did not lord it over Peace PRC (something which Article 84 of our Church Order specifies may not happen).

The consistory of Covenant of Grace PRC requested an additional subsidy of \$4,000 for 2015 and \$12,000 for 2016. The reason for this request is that Rev. and Mrs. R. Kleyn decided to enroll their children in a different school than they had been using since moving to Spokane, which school had significantly higher tuition. Classis granted these requests and forwarded them to the synodical finance committee.

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$9,362.36. Classis is scheduled to meet next in Crete PRC on March 2, 2016.

The fellowship was again enjoyable. God is to be thanked for giving us the freedom to hold such assemblies claiming the protection of the authorities, and for giving the delegates to this particular meeting safety in travel and freedom to speak the convictions of their heart in love for the churches.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Providence PRC extends Christian sympathy to our pastor and his wife, Rev. Heath and Deb Bleyenbergh, on the death of his grandmother,

MARIE BRUMMEL.

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Tom Bergman, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of the Kalamazoo PRC extends its Christian sympathy to the Kalamazoo congregation in the passing away of our dear friend and fellow saint,

MILDRED FOSTER.

May we find comfort in God's Word in 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."

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Dan Kiel, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The congregation and Council of Loveland PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Elder Victor Solanyk, Jr. and wife Gina; Eric and Stacey Solanyk and family; Darren and Karyn Solanyk and family; and Chad Solanyk in the death of their father, grandfather, and great grandfather,

VICTOR SOLANYK, SR.

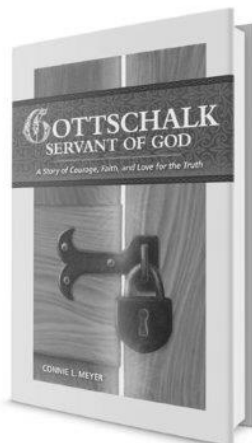
"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Rev. Steven Key, Pastor
Robert Bos, General Adjunct

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Reformed Witness Hour November 2015

Date	Topic	Text
November 1	"The Defiance of Foolish Dreamers"	Jude 8-10
November 8	"Spots in the Church's Love"	Jude 11-13
November 15	"God's Judgment on Ungodly Sinners"	Jude 14-16
November 22	"Jehovah Builds His Church"	Psalm 147:1-3
November 29	"Remembering the Spoken Word"	Jude 17-19

Notice

■ The digital *Standard Bearer* Index for volumes 1-91 is now available for \$10.00 at www.rfpa.org.