

The Standard Bearer

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Two Professions of Faith in Jesus Christ

Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Acts 8:13

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

Acts 8:36

In God's providence, two prominent men heard the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ as it was proclaimed by Philip the evangelist. One of them, Simon the sorcerer, was an influential man in Samaria, who had bewitched the people and made himself out to be some great one. The other man was a eunuch of great authority, having charge over all the treasure of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. Both men made a profession of faith in Jesus and both were baptized; but only one of them was a true child of God. While God's grace gripped the heart of the eunuch, the sorcerer remained in the bond of iniquity. Born from above, the eunuch sought after

Christ and found Him; Simon, however, was a natural man, driven only by selfish ambition.

In one sense, we are all like Simon the sorcerer because we all have the old man of sin. But, by God's grace, we are also like the eunuch, because God has given us the new man and has begun to renew us in the image of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should not be surprised when we see a struggle between the old man of sin and the new man in Christ. When we see the old man acting out of selfish motives, our calling is to repent of our wickedness and turn to Christ for forgiveness. On the other hand, when we see in ourselves a rejoicing in Jesus Christ for our righteousness, we ought to give thanks to God for His gracious salvation.

Although the gospel seed is spread in different soils and even appears to sprout, only those whose hearts God has sovereignly plowed will receive the word and bear fruit. The reprobate will bear the fruit of bitterness. The elect of God, redeemed by grace and regenerated by the Spirit of Christ, will bear the fruit of rejoicing.



Before we can receive the gospel seed, God must prepare the soil of our hearts. That is because, by nature,

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we hate the things of the kingdom of God. By nature, we want only to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. We want the glory, riches, and pleasures this world has to offer. By ourselves, we never could bear any fruit unto God. The sovereign Christ alone is able to prepare the soil of the heart in which the gospel seed bears fruit. The heart of Simon the sorcerer was left to itself, while the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch was plowed and prepared by God.

Contrary to Arminian theology, God does not give grace to every heart that hears the gospel message. Simon the sorcerer is a case in point. Although some of his actions might be interpreted positively, in light of his whole testimony they indicate that the world still had a grip on his heart. True, Simon took an interest in Philip's ministry; but it seems that was because of the miracles that Philip performed as well as the fact that many of the Samaritans were following Philip. If we had to make a classification, Simon seems to fit the category of a thorny-soil hearer: the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked the gospel seed in his heart, even as he professed his faith and followed after Philip.

But when God sovereignly works salvation in us, He prepares our hearts to receive the word, just as the Ethiopian eunuch received the word.

The first sign that God was preparing the eunuch's heart was his trip to Jerusalem. He did not come to seek after earthly riches; he already had great earthly riches, as evidenced by his position. Rather, he came to worship God (cf. Acts 8:27). Such was his interest in the things of God, that on his way back to Ethiopia he wanted to read the Scriptures. When Philip found him on the road to Gaza, the eunuch was reading aloud from the book of Isaiah (cf. Acts 8:30). His interest in the things of God is evidence that Jesus Christ was working in his heart.

Do you and I have such an interest in the things of God? Have our hearts been softened by the plowing of

the sovereign Lord? When we recognize the rocky soil of our hearts and the thorns that choke spiritual growth, do we repent and seek forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ? Do we want to know more of the free gift of salvation in Christ? Do we want to know about Him who was led as a sacrificial "sheep to the slaughter" to satisfy God's justice for our sins? Do we want to learn about the Savior who was silent at His trial, like "a lamb dumb before his shearer" (cf. Acts 8:32)? That kind of interest in the things of God points to the work of the sovereign Savior plowing up the soil of our hearts, giving us a hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ.



If the sovereign Lord has plowed our hearts and caused the gospel seed to be scattered there, He will also cause those seeds to spring up and bear fruit.

When the seed came to Simon the sorcerer and to the Ethiopian eunuch, it seemed to spring up in both of them, giving the impression that they might bear spiritual fruit. Both of them essentially professed, "I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior." Both of them received the sign of baptism, which points to the washing away of sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. Both of them joined the church; but one of them had "neither part nor lot" in the matter of salvation (cf. Acts 8:21).

How necessary, then, that we be sure our profession of faith is not merely acting out the motions of a formal religion. The fruit that Simon and the eunuch

bore gives testimony to the condition of their hearts. Simon, on the one hand, showed himself to be an unbelieving child of the devil. The eunuch showed himself to be a regenerated child of God.

If our faith in Jesus Christ is a true faith, we will rejoice, and not in a salvation that we can earn. Nor in a salvation we can pay for. But in the full and free salvation that is ours by grace alone.

It is true, the text says, "Then Simon himself believed

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also" (Acts 8:13). But, saying he "believed" does not mean he was saved. James tells us, "The devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). A careful reading shows that Simon's faith was based upon the miracles that had so amazed him. We know that his faith was false because he thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. He saw Peter laying hands upon the saints so that they received the special gift of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. When Simon offered Peter money so that he could do likewise, Peter responded, "Thy money perish with thee." Simon's proposal opened a window into his heart and showed that he didn't know what salvation by grace was all about. Why did Simon make a profession of faith? Why was he baptized? For selfish reasons: likely he wanted to salvage the power and prestige he once had among the Samaritans.

Many hypocrites make a profession of their faith in Christ only because it provides some tangible benefit. Maybe it keeps the family from disowning them, or furthers their chances of marrying the man or woman of their dreams. Perhaps it brings a certain level of respectability, or makes good business sense. There are any number of reasons for a false profession.

The eunuch, on the other hand, was not trying to salvage his career. He wasn't looking for earthly riches and power. God had already prepared his heart and showed him his sins and sinfulness. By a work of God's grace, he saw his need of salvation and was looking for a Savior. When God works His work of grace in our hearts, He will cause us to hunger and thirst for salvation.

Significantly, the eunuch was reading a passage in the book of Isaiah that begins this way:

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider (Is. 52:13-15).

The eunuch was reading because he had keen interest in knowing about the Servant of Jehovah, who would deal prudently and sprinkle many nations so as to cleanse them and save them. As he continued, he came upon the portion quoted in Acts 8:32-33: "He was led as a sheep


to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth." Providentially directed by God, Philip approached the chariot just at that time and asked, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" To which the eunuch replied, "How can I except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30, 31). Oh, how the eunuch wanted to understand the gospel message!

Beginning at that very passage, Philip showed the eunuch the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus was that sacrificial Sheep led away to be slaughtered at the cross. Jesus was that Lamb silent before His shearer, in love willingly giving Himself over to the suffering that awaited Him. Jesus is the One who humbled Himself to the utter injustice of the cross in order to satisfy God's justice for us. What glorious news to the eunuch: There is salvation in Jesus Christ! With that, the eunuch spied some water and wanted immediately to receive the sign that pictures the washing away of sins by the precious blood of Jesus. When the eunuch was baptized, Philip disappeared, and the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

What a contrast with Simon who remained in the gall of bitterness, still in bondage to sin and to Satan! While the eunuch rejoiced in forgiveness, it seems that Simon wanted nothing to do with it. Peter called upon him to repent and pray to God "if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." But Simon refused to pray for himself, instead saying to Peter and John, "Pray ye for me." Simon remained in bondage.



The explanation for the difference between the eunuch and the sorcerer is to be found in Christ's work of softening the heart of one and hardening the heart of the other. Do we see our sins and sinfulness? Do we see our desperate need of a Savior? Do we see the Lamb whose body was broken and blood poured out for us? That is the inevitable fruit of the work of Christ in our hearts. He not only plows the heart; He also plants the seed and waters it and causes it to bear fruit. When Christ works in our hearts, we will seek for and find all our salvation in Him. And doing so, we will go on our way rejoicing.

Is Jesus Christ our rejoicing? May God grant us to see this glorious fruit of Christ's work in our hearts. 

What It Means To Be Reformed (3)

COVENANTAL—Implications

From God's covenant flows everything!

If God's covenant is the heart of the Christian faith and life, as well as the heart of what it means to be Reformed, one would expect that from this central truth come many other truths. As a matter of fact, from the covenant comes everything. This first "C" in our five identifying characteristics of a Reformed church leads to everything else in the Christian and Reformed faith. In the effort to clarify what is Reformed, we can say "covenant" is the heading under which all else is subsumed, in the same way that "theology" is the heading under which all the other chapters of Reformed *doctrine* are subsumed. Thus, everything about being Reformed is an implication of covenant.

Yet there are four rather *direct* implications of covenant that ought to be mentioned (before moving on to the next "C") in our efforts to identify comprehensively as well as succinctly what it means to be a Reformed church. Characteristic of

Reformed churches that understand the covenant is an emphasis on 1) covenantal worship, 2) the Christian Sabbath, 3) covenant children of believers, and 4) the defense of God-honoring marriage. Each of these is a direct application of our Reformed covenantal identity.

—WIMTBR—
***COVENANTAL**
Implications*
 CALVINISTIC
 CHURCH
 CONFESSIONAL
 CHRISTIAN LIFE

Covenantal Worship

We begin with worship because worship is the supreme activity of God's friends as they relate to Him. Worship is the friends of God coming into the presence of God in order to fellowship with God. The matter of *proper* worship is also a hallmark of the Reformed faith. That, God willing, we will treat under the "C" of "Church." Here, we treat the more basic truth that the covenant friends of God will worship God, will live in His presence as Adam and Eve did when God first created them for fellowship.

We speak mostly of the public, communal worship of the congregation.

The Reformed Christian *wants* to worship. He does not come to God because of a command as much as because of a desire. He does not worship because it is required as much as because it is the happiest activity of his life: "With joy and gladness in my soul, I hear the call to prayer. Let us go up to God's own house and bow before Him there" (Psalm 122 versified). Worship is part of a believer's new nature, which is why it is not first a command that produces worship, but regeneration—he lives the life of his Friend. Commanding a Christian to worship is something like commanding a human to breathe. God (re-)made us for fellowship with and worship of Himself! Our joy, comfort, and satisfaction are in Him and before His face. We mean it when we say, "The loving kindness of my God is more than life to me." And, "O Lord, my God, most earnestly my heart would seek Thy face, Within Thy holy house once more, To see Thy glorious grace. Apart from Thee I long and thirst, And nought can satisfy..." (Psalm 63 versified).

As we saw last time, since mar-

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riage is the best illustration of covenant, a Christian wife in a good marriage understands the believer's longing to be in God's presence. If her marriage is healthy, no one needs to command her to be with her man. If the biblical doctrine of covenant actually lives in us, it is love for God and not a command that will carry us to church on Sunday. A good dose of self-analysis is in order for all believers—why do I attend church?

Worship as an implication of covenant means also that the activity of worship is conversation, and joy in one another's company, not entertainment. God speaks; His covenant friends respond. God is central and His voice is prominent, but the believers' voices are heard, too. Which means that the common distinction between "worship/praise" and "preaching" is improper. Mention "worship" today and most think praise bands and singing, but usually not preaching. By "worship" we mean the meeting of the covenant people with God in which they both speak and sing but also hear.

But preaching has prominence because in preaching it is God who is speaking (I Thess. 2:13). That is, pride of place is given to preaching that is careful exposition and application of God's Word. We want to be "more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools," and to "let our words be few" (Eccl. 5:1, 2). Even when we speak, sing, and pray in *response* to God's speech, as good conversations go, God's voice must remain prominent. And I wonder, very cautiously, whether our sin-

ful tendency is always to get that balance wrong in both the reality of covenant life with God, and in the covenant's best illustration of

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is Jesus Christ,
because Christ is God's
greatest work!*

marriage. Think about it. That's humbling, and I do not mean for wives.

If Reformed worship must make sure that conversation is empha-

sized, it is just as important to emphasize that God must determine the subject of conversation. Reformed sermons are not about what makes us happy or gives us a pleasant and satisfying life, but about the great works God has performed (compare Psalm 77:11ff., and Acts 2:11). The subject of preaching and the center of conversation is Jesus Christ, because Christ is God's greatest work! Jesus Christ is our covenant God's mighty hand and stretched out arm that gave us redemption and covenant salvation. He is the covenant's Mediator and Head. Access to God is through Him. Who is so great a God as our God?

The Heidelberg Catechism points in this direction, and not subtly either. The student of the Catechism must not be distracted by its beautiful explanation of *proper* worship, but first focus on the bigger picture of worship itself. The very structure of this Reformed creed is covenantal: how we, created in the image of our Father, now fallen out of fellowship with God, are miserable (the First Part). How we, by grace and through faith in Christ can be restored to the fellowship of the One to whom we belong (the Second Part). And how we may respond to this gracious reconciliation and restoration (the Third Part). A covenantal framework. Now the *response* of redeemed believers (the Third Part) is striking: "Love the One who loved us!" This is what obedience to the commandments is: love Him! "And then speak to Him in prayer." The conclusion of the Catechism is

exposition of the Lord's Prayer. It's all covenant!

Although we emphasize public worship, not to be forgotten is the Reformed tradition of daily, covenantal, family and personal worship, which flow out of the public worship of God. Threatened in every generation, but more so today by the busyness of society, regular family and private worship are also inevitable expressions of Reformed believers' love for their Friend.

The Covenantal Sabbath

The second great implication of covenant and fellowship is Sabbath observance. The covenantal Sabbath. Reformed churches have long maintained the Sabbath as a "perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages," as "one day in seven...to be kept holy unto him" (Westminster Confession of Faith XXI:7).

Sabbath observance, even tenacious defense of Sabbath observance, is not narrow Puritanism, but Reformed. The Reformed faith has always seen the importance of preserving the entire first day of the week for this covenantal worship and rest. This is the teaching of our Presbyterian relatives in their Westminster standards, and of our Heidelberg Catechism in LD 38. Sabbath observance then is not legalism, but gratitude, as its placement in the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us. We call the Sabbath a delight (Is. 58:13) because God designed the day for our time of special fellowship with Him. Lose the day and we damage our friendship. Keep the day and we grow

in our marriage-relationship with Him.

Too many Reformed churches have shot themselves in the foot (heart, really) by calling attention to the Catechism's "*all* the days of my life ceasing from my evil works," in order to eliminate the *weekly* Sabbath.¹ God forbid! Reformed churches keep the weekly Sabbath as the token of the eternal Sabbath, and as a day in which, as we remember both our good creation (Ex. 20:11) and our gracious redemption (Deut. 5:15), we find strength to live the rest of the week, yielding ourselves to the Lord and beginning already in this life the eternal Sabbath (HC 38). Sabbath rest, covenant friendship. A day together in God's courts is better than a thousand....

The Church's Covenant Youth

Third, how beautiful the Reformed teaching that the arms of God's covenant love reach around believers' children too! Thus, Reformed churches have not only put the sign of the covenant upon the infants (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 27), but also devoted their lives and energy to these baptized, covenant children in amazing ways. It is genuinely and uniquely Reformed to lavish attention on the covenant seed. Not because we believe God loves all the children of believers. We know well enough that God's covenant embrace of children is

¹ Right along with this is an appeal to an old claim that there has always been a diversity of opinion between a "Continental" and a "Puritan" view of Sabbath-keeping.

limited to "as many as the Lord our God shall call" from among them (Acts 2:39). But we lavish attention on them in obedience to God's command to leave a spiritual inheritance to our children and their children (Prov. 13:22) and to teach them in the way that they should go (Prov. 22:6). Then we leave it to the Lord to reveal to us if some of the precious sons and daughters are not truly His. But Reformed believers treat their children as God's children.

Although I mention infant baptism almost in passing because of the nature of these editorials, infant baptism is not of passing importance. The Reformed creeds demand infant baptism. To be Reformed is to require members of the church to baptize their infants. This is a friendly but sharp message to those churches or seminaries who befriend Calvinistic Baptists to such a degree that they forget the great chasm between Reformed and those who refuse to be "baby sprinklers," as one man pejoratively referred to me recently. It must be said, even if some take offense at it: with a proper definition of "Reformed," the name "Reformed Baptist" is an oxymoron. Reformed churches understand the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant.

The lavishing of care on covenant seed starts in the covenant home and family where mothers are "keepers at home" (Titus 2:5) and fathers come home to make their household a refuge from the wicked world and a happy dwelling of love and peace. Teaching and playing and conversation and discipline—the ordered but

happy home life of covenant fellowship.

Covenant life with children continues in the Christian day school, God permitting, where Christian parents band together to do their best with the rearing of God's children. The covenant demands good rearing; the covenant demands that we do our utmost for these children of whom we parents are stewards. Where it is feasible, therefore, Reformed covenant communities have established institutions where trained Reformed teachers stand in the place of Reformed parents to teach Reformed children covenant life in the church and world. With mammoth and costly efforts, the covenant people exert themselves to think and work together for the covenant seed.

Although these Christian schools are parental and not parochial, the church does more than passively observe these parental covenant efforts. The *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Art. 21) has consistories actively "seeing to it" that there are good Christian schools in which parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the *covenant*.

But the church does not end her efforts in the home and school. Reformed churches understand the glorious history of officebearers, especially pastors, giving catechism instruction to the covenant youth, from kindergarten until their confession of faith, and perhaps beyond. So important is this focus on the children that when our Reformed Church Order mandates

Church Visitation (Art. 44), the church visitors must "take heed whether the...consistory... properly promote[s]...the upbuilding of the congregation, *in particular of the youth*" (emphasis mine).

The Covenant of Marriage

Finally, a Reformed church will be a church that defends the precious institution of marriage. If marriage is the preeminent biblical illustration of God's covenant with His elect, what better way for the covenant seed to learn about covenant than by observing good marriages! If one were an enemy of God's church, one of the main bulwarks he would assail—with mortar after mortar and one battering ram after another—would be the bulwark of Christian marriage. Thus, the institution we must earnestly defend is the institution of marriage.

No one can write such words in AD 2015 without feeling a great sense of sadness, and a good deal of righteous anger, that the devil has made such headway in his battle against the covenant by ruining so many marriages. No one can think about the importance of marriages for the covenant seed without his heart breaking for the dear children whose parents have either divorced or are not living in love and peace. God hates putting away. For the sake of a "godly seed" God made two to be one (Mal. 2:15). Nor may any be deaf to the righteous anger in God's voice through Malachi as He rebukes Israel for the wickedness of their "marriage problems."

By a wonder of grace, may God preserve these children. I would

give all my possessions to see one particular miracle performed today. And my choice of miracles would not be a blind man receiving his sight or a crippled child made to walk, even though such miracles would bring me tears of joy. I would give my right arm if doing so would preserve one child from the terrible damage done when their church-going parents allow their marriages to deteriorate and die.

But we must not desire to give our right arms. Reformed believers must give their entire life and all their energy, working and praying that God preserve our marriages. We must preach and preach, and teach and teach, and then preach and teach some more, the biblical doctrine of marriage—preach that God "hates putting away;" preach that, even if marriage is only temporal, it is still one of the most important temporal institutions God created in the beginning for the preservation of His covenant people.

May our merciful and good God spare Reformed churches, in their generations, by preserving in them good marriages. By leading young people to marry only in the Lord (I Cor. 7:39), to walk in marriage only with those with whom they are agreed (Amos 3:3), and to live chastely and temperately whether in holy wedlock or in single life (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 41). And may our gracious God forgive (and correct) what sins He may be judging in churches where the covenant perhaps is accurately taught but not truly lived, one of the most flagrant ways to offend the covenant God.



■ The Millennials Are Leaving!

“Like some reverse Paul Revere, many ride through the fiber optics of the Internet and into church basements shouting, ‘The millennials are leaving! Watch out for the rise of the nones!’ Simply put, millennial anxiety—a concern shared by both mainline and evangelical churches—is the fear that those between ages 18 and 25 have little interest in the church, and that the church has failed to convince them to stay”¹.

The churches in western Christendom are concerned about the millennials. That is clear from the title of the featured article in the January/February 2015 issue of *Christianity Today*, quoted above, “Stop Worrying about the Millennials.” The word “millennials” is a demographic term that refers to all those in the western world who were born sometime between the early 1980s and the late 1990s. The generation preceding them, known as Generation X, consists of those born from the early 1960s up to the early 1980s. Before them are the Baby Boomers, those born right after World War II, sometime between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s. Since about the year 2000, we millennials have been reaching adulthood and today there are an estimated 80 million of us in the United States. A 2012 study of the Pew Research Center concluded that “32 percent of Americans ages 18 to 29 are religiously unaffiliated. This was an 11 percent increase over any other age group that year, and a 7 percent jump from the 25 percent of young people who responded this way in 2007” (34). The millennials are leaving! They are leaving both the mainline and evangelical churches! More and more of them are abandoning religion altogether and are known as “the nones”! The churches in western Christendom are anxious about this, searching for explanations, and scrambling for ways to stop it.

Of course, concern about keeping the young people has been around for a while. So-called “youth ministry in North America became full blown after a youth consumer

culture emerged in the 1950s, and took shape in response to the mid-’60s youth countercultural movement” (35). Youth ministry has attempted to keep young people by accommodating to them. One thinks of the emergence of Christian contemporary music, less preaching, and more entertainment in the churches today. Apparently, these accommodations have been successful in capturing the 12 to 17-year olds. But once they reach the ages of 18 to 25, they leave.

The author does rightly put his finger on the problem: “...youth ministry today often puts theology on a back burner” (35). He quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who endeavored to reach the youth of Germany in the days when Adolph Hitler successfully wooed many of them to the Nazi cause. “It is the task of youth,” wrote Bonhoeffer, “not to reshape the church, but rather to listen to the Word of God; it is the task of the church not to capture the youth, but to teach and proclaim the Word of God” (35). The millennials are leaving because they are not being taught the Word of God. They are not being fed the rich theology of the Bible. Their churches are not giving them any solid reason to stay. But, although the author puts his finger on the problem, he is not emphatic enough about it. Theology, solid Reformed theology that is,² must be kept on the front burner in our ministry to the young people. The millennials, and the generation to follow, will not stay in the church if we downplay or eliminate sound doctrine. But the opposite is also true: they will stay, God willing, if we show them the truth of the Word of God in all its beautiful fullness and comfort.

What about the millennials of the Protestant Reformed Churches? Being one myself, I could not help but ruminate.... So there is a growing exodus of millennials from the churches “all around us.” Are the millennials “among us” also leaving? The truth is that many of them have left the PRC. It is also a heartbreaking fact that some have utterly apostatized and joined the ranks of “the nones.” Many Protestant Reformed people can echo

¹ Andrew Root, “Stop Worrying about the Millennials,” *Christianity Today*, January/February 2015, 32.

Rev. Holstege is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

² The author of this article is an associate professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary, one of the eight seminaries of the very liberal and apostate Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

the words of Paul who wrote with heaviness of heart, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed..." (II Tim. 4:10). We are not unaffected by what may very well be the last great apostasy (II Thess. 2:3). But it is also true that many, if not a large majority, of the millennials are staying in the PRC. Whether their reasons are good or bad, whether as a group they are spiritually strong or weak, most seem to be staying.

One wonders why. One could argue that there are social reasons. They were born and raised in the PRC. And since, by the grace of God, we have maintained a firm stand against divorce (except for adultery) and re-marriage after divorce (in all cases), most PR marriages last until death. Hence, family units become closely knit together and bonds become strong. Is this perhaps the reason our young people want to stay in the churches with their families and friends? There is nothing wrong with that, unless it is *the* reason for staying.

But there are more significant reasons. One of them is the existence of and zeal for good Christian schools in our midst. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). The millennials leaving the churches of western Christendom are being trained up by and large in the public schools, which are dominated by secularism. Is it any surprise that they are leaving? The millennials in the PRC received their education by and large from Protestant Reformed schools. They were well-grounded in the Word of God, taught how to look at the world from the viewpoint of faith in Jesus Christ and the "spectacles of Scripture." They formed friendships there with those of "like precious faith" (II Pet. 1:1). Many have even met their future husband or wife there. The Christian school is one of the main ways God is working in our youth to keep them in the faith.

But the chief means God is using to preserve our youth is the teaching and preaching of His Word in the pulpit and catechism room. These are the means of grace whereby God works faith in us. Sound doctrine. Solid Reformed theology. Our Protestant Reformed heritage! These must never be slid to the back burner, as many churches have done and are doing in their attempt to keep the millennials. But the preaching and teaching of God's Word must be kept on the front burner! The

millennials in the PRC have been taught the Word of God. They have been shown the unity of the truth and the worldview of God's Word. They have been warned against the lies of all would-be challengers, including secular atheism and postmodernism, which confront us daily in this information age. Systematic, antithetical instruction, which is also deeply spiritual and eminently practical, must continue among us. Then our youth will be well prepared for the spiritual assault that will confront them as they come to the age of discretion. Then they will be led to Christ and, beholding the beauty of the cross, will be moved to follow Him in every sphere of life in this world.

When this is so, and trusting in God's blessing, we need not worry about the millennials. Or the generation that follows them, if the Lord tarries. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Ps. 48:12-14).

■ Evangelicals Are Weakening on Homosexual Marriage!

At least according to Elizabeth Dias in her January 26, 2015 *Time* magazine article. We cannot deny, and have known for some time, that "mainline Protestant denominations, including Episcopalians and Presbyterians,³ routinely ordain gay ministers and marry gay couples. Methodist ministers are breaking rank to celebrate gay weddings. The overall public has favored gay marriage for three years" (45). But Dias makes a claim designed to grab our attention: "...evangelical churches and their congregations typically remain opposed, though that opposition is weakening. Support for gay marriage across all age groups of white evangelicals has increased by double digits over the past decade, according to the Public Religion Research Institute.... The fastest change can be found among younger evangelicals..." (46).

The point about younger evangelicals is emphasized. One section of the article is entitled "A Youth-Led-

³ That is, The Episcopal Church and The Presbyterian Church (USA). We could add The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ. These are a few of the large "mainline" Protestant denominations, the liberal and apostate ones, which have upwards of or well over a million members each.

Revolution.” The millennials, considered above, are allegedly leading the way. Dias mentions three young activists: Matthew Vines (age 24), Brandon Robertson (age 22), and Justin Lee (age 37). Does the name Matthew Vines ring a bell?⁴ He appears with Robertson in a prominent photograph at the beginning of the article. He is a “gay evangelical activist” behind the “Reformation Project” of Wichita, Kansas, who is seeking “to raise up LGBT-affirming voices in *every evangelical church in the country...*” (46, emphasis mine). Brandon Robertson is the national spokesperson of “Evangelicals for Marriage Equality” in Washington D.C. He intends to push his immoral agenda for homosexual marriage at Christian colleges this year by attempting to persuade young Christians. Justin Lee is with “The Gay Christian Network,” and is working with “The Colossian Forum” in Grand Rapids, MI “to help evangelicals warm to the gay conversation.” In addition to these three, Dias cites what she considers a large amount of evidence that evangelical churches are weakening in their stand against homosexual marriage.

But David Murray, a Free Reformed Church pastor and professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, calls her bluff. He says Dias

is attempting to pull off [a] sneaky ruse on Evangelical Christians...one of the oldest political tricks in the book. Create such an impression of momentum behind a certain candidate or policy that everyone else jumps on board to avoid being left out or left behind. It's a deception that plays on common human weaknesses; the desire to be on the winning side, the fear of being on the “outside,” the instinct to avoid unpopularity, and the yearning for approval.... Elizabeth Dias...marshals multiple pieces of “evidence” for this revolution in Evangelical morals and ethics.... So, what's the evidence for this unstoppable tsunami of change among evangelicals?

Murray says it amounts to

one poll, one megachurch, unnamed leaders, two congregational discussions, two meetings with LGBTQ's, one college hire, one gay dancer, and three gay activists. That's Dias's strongest case for this alleged bandwagon of evangelical change. Rather unimpressive bandwagon isn't it? I don't buy it, and neither should you. Yes, there

⁴ If not, reread the “All Around Us” article entitled “Crept In Unawares” by Rev. Martyn McGeown in the January 1, 2014 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

are some worrying signs here and there of evangelical capitulation. No doubt, some evangelical leaders will jump the shark to maintain popularity with the world. However, don't fall for this trick of “Everybody's doing it (or thinking it).” We don't let our children off with such arguments, especially when the evidence is so flimsy. So let's not allow this childish case to shake our commitment to biblical morality. Not now. Not ever.”⁵

Murray may be correct in his assessment. He is certainly correct that we must not let articles like this play on our human weaknesses: a desire to be on the winning side, a fear of being unpopular, or a yearning for approval. At the same time, Dias' contention that millennials are more open to and easily influenced on homosexual marriage is likely very close to the truth.

For the winds of change are in the air. And not for the better. According to a January 16, 2015 article in *The Washington Post*, the U.S. Supreme Court is set to hear a case this April and make a decision by the end of June whether homosexual marriage should be legalized nationwide.⁶ The highest court of our land ordered the parties involved, one of which is the State of Michigan, to face two questions: First, does the Constitution require states to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples? And second, are states required to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states? Remember, same-sex marriage was illegal in every state until only eleven years ago. But as of today 37 out of 50 states have legalized homosexual marriage. We who oppose homosexuality as a vile sin and an evidence of the judgment of God on a society (cf. the clear teaching of God's Word in Gen. 19:4-7; Rom. 1:24-28; I Cor. 6:9) are becoming a smaller and smaller minority.


But we must not look to false churches for support. This past November Pope Francis hosted a high-profile marriage conference in the Vatican at which church leaders like Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention, Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, and Anglican bishop N. T. Wright, joined hands with Roman Catholics and Mormons in the fight for traditional marriage.⁷ Behold, the sin of Jehoshaphat all over again (II Chr. 18:1, 19:2)! We must not

⁵ <http://headhearthand.org/blog/2015/01/19/time-magazine-pulls-the-oldest-trick-in-the-book/>.

⁶ http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/supreme-court-agrees-to-hear-gay-marriage-issue/2015/01/16/.

⁷ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/november/pope-francis-rick-warren-russell-moore-n-t-wright-marriage.html>.

make affinity with Rome, as Jehoshaphat did with Ahab. We must bear witness to the truth of marriage without becoming unequally yoked with or touching the unclean things of the false church (II Cor. 6:14, 17). How can two walk together except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3).

One thing that Dias says in her article is certainly true: “For many evangelicals, the marriage debate isn’t really about marriage or families or sex—it is about the Bible itself. And that makes many evangelicals all the more uncompromising” (47). 

Chapter Five

Premillennialism (5):

Its Explanation of Revelation 20

Introduction

Every doctrine of the last things—eschatology—must take Revelation 20:1-10 into account, prove itself the truth according to the teaching of the passage, defend itself in light of the passage, and offer an explanation of the passage in its entirety. This is true even though a particular doctrine of the end does not take its lead from Revelation 20 or base itself mainly on this passage. This is true even though a particular doctrine of the end declares that it is not mainly about Revelation 20.

Every doctrine of the last things must reckon with Revelation 20, not only because it is the one passage of Scripture that mentions the thousand-year period (millennium) of the end-time, but also because the passage refers to events that are plainly fundamental to the biblical truth of the last days. Included are the binding of Satan, to prevent him from deceiving the nations (vv. 2, 3); the loosing of Satan for a little season, after the thousand years have ended, so that he carries out his purpose of deceiving the nations (vv. 3, 7-9); the living and reigning of martyred saints with Christ for the thousand-year period (vv. 4-6); the war of Satan’s deceived hordes, called Gog and Magog, against the saints and the beloved city (vv. 8, 9); the miraculous destruction of the satanic army

by God Himself, thus delivering the saints (v. 9); and the casting of Satan into hell forever (v. 10).

That the revelation of these events pertains to the last things, indeed, culminates in the world’s last day and history’s conclusion is evident from the complete destruction of all the wicked of the world and from the casting of the devil into hell. In addition, the defeat and final destruction of Satan and his hordes are immediately followed by the judgment of the “great white throne” (vv. 11-15), involving the disappearing of the present earth and heaven (v. 11).

The chapter that follows, Revelation 21, introduces the new creation as the locale of the glorious city of God; the home of the Lamb and His bride, the church; and the site of the tabernacle of God with the new human race.

Plainly, the events prophesied in Revelation 20 culminate in the renewed world, where is no devil, where are no sinful humans (Rev. 21:8), and where are no “death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:4). The absence of death, sorrow, crying, and pain implies, as does the new creation itself, that there is no sin, or any possibility of sin, for sin is the source and cause of all death, sorrow, crying, and pain.

The human race in this new creation has been saved by the sacrifice of the Lamb and by His sanctifying Spirit. In this new and better Garden of Eden is the throne, not of some merely earthly Adam, but of “God

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and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:3). And the great Serpent can never intrude into this garden, for he is forever consigned to hell (Rev. 20:10).

Regardless that an eschatological doctrine may claim that its origin and basis, and even its main interest, are elsewhere than in Revelation 20 (and this is the claim of premillennialism, which is founded on a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy about Israel), Revelation 20 is fundamental to all eschatology. If a doctrine of the last things is exposed as erroneous by Revelation 20, that doctrine is thereby shown to be false doctrine.

Premillennial Doctrine

This is the case with that doctrine of the last things known as premillennialism. The name describes this doctrine as teaching that Jesus will return to the earth with a visible, bodily coming *before* the establishment on the earth of a millennium (thousand-year period) of the flourishing, earthly kingdom of God, namely, Israel.

Coming to the biblical text with its basic error of dispensations, at the heart of which is its essential and everlasting differentiation of the Old Testament nation of Israel from the New Testament church, premillennialism explains Revelation 20 as prophecy concerning *Israel*, prophecy concerning the *earthly nation* of Israel, of which physical Jews are the citizens.

According to the explanation of premillennialism, Revelation 20 prophesies the future glories of Israel in a millennial kingdom on earth, while history continues to run its course to the end.

Premillennialist Erich Sauer, by no means the most radical member of his tribe, expressed the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 as the forecasting of an earthly world-kingdom of Israel, that is, a restored Jewish nation.

Here there is mention of a Millennial kingdom which is placed *after* the return of Christ in glory and *before* the destruction of the universe...which therefore...will be set up in the End time as an *intermediate* kingdom, *between* the parousia and world transfiguration, and on the theatre of this old earth.

According to Sauer, the “millennial kingdom” of Revelation 20 will be a “visible earthly kingdom...of Israel.”¹

¹ Erich Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity: An Outline of Divine Purposes*, tr. G. H. Lang (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 5th

C. I. Scofield’s brief explanation of Revelation 20 is that the chapter predicts Christ’s “reign over restored Israel and over the earth for one thousand years. This is the period commonly called the Millennium. The seat of His power will be Jerusalem.”² According to Scofield, one of the fathers of dispensational premillennialism, the power and glory of the millennium will belong to Israel, not to the church: “The Church will be taken away from the earth entirely, but restored Israel is yet to have her greatest earthly splendor and power.”³

That the millennium of Revelation 20 is a time of (earthly) Israel’s (earthly) power and (earthly) glory is also the (earthly) doctrine of John F. Walvoord: “a period of time in which Israel is in prominence and blessing... Israel as a nation will be exalted.”⁴

Preliminaries to the Millennium

Preliminary to the relating of the glories of a restored nation of Israel, which Revelation 20 is supposed to be, are other important events—events that set the stage for the emerging once again of the Old Testament Israel of the halcyon days of David and Solomon.

Seven years prior to the binding of Satan, which binding is recorded in Revelation 20:1-3, Satan has brought the Antichrist onto the stage of world history to become ruler of the world.

At this time, Jesus Christ returns to the earth, or part of the way to the earth, in order to whisk all true Christian believers into the air in the secret rapture. The rapture includes the bodily resurrection of all the dead Christians. This gets the church out of the way, so that God can finally realize His main purpose with history: the establishment on earth of the restored, earthly nation of Israel.

Here already are exposed the fundamental errors of premillennialism: viewing Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church as two, essentially and everlastingly, different peoples, and regarding God’s ways with Israel as the main purpose of God in history.

Of late, certain dispensational theologians have presented themselves as moderating the extremism of the

printing 1966), 193.

² C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 13th printing 1979), 303.

fathers of dispensationalism. They prefer to be known as “progressive” dispensationalists. But for all their tinkering with the theology of their fathers (and tinker is all they do; they never renounce the false teachings of their fathers), they retain these fundamental errors of premillennialism. For the moderates and progressives too, as was the case with Darby and Scofield before them, Israel and the church are two, different peoples of God, and Israel remains the center and main purpose of God’s decree and government of history.

Antichrist, against the Jews

For seven years, the biblical Antichrist pays special attention to the Jews in Palestine—the restored nation of Israel. For three and a half years of the seven, Antichrist favors Israel. But then he turns on the nation, troubling the nation and persecuting its citizens severely. This future persecution of the Jews is supposed to be the “great tribulation” forecast by Jesus in Matthew 24:21, 22.

Let every Reformed, indeed Protestant, reader take note that premillennialism has the coming great tribulation fall upon the Jews. We Christians will be exempt, for we, of course, are supposed to be in the air somewhere or other while the tribulation rages. All Christians will have been raptured before Antichrist rampages on the stage of world history.

The Antichrist of Scripture and his threat are not the concern of the church or believer. “The church is in no way involved in this time of future trouble, [that is, in] the Great Tribulation.” “The church is nowhere found in the tribulation.” “The church will not go through the Tribulation.” “The purpose of the Tribulation is to purge and judge Israel and to punish and destroy Gentile power.”⁵

This exemption of the church and the Christian from the persecution of Antichrist is an outstanding sin of premillennial doctrine. The sin is eminently practi-

cal. Premillennialism does not prepare God’s people for the looming threat of persecution for Christ’s sake at the hands of the antichristian world-power. In this

respect, premillennialism is one with postmillennialism. Both of the millennial errors assure the church of the 21st century that she has nothing to fear, or prepare for, with regard to suffering the great tribulation. Premillennialism tells the church that she will be raptured prior to Antichrist’s raging in the world, and that the object of his hatred will be the Jews. Postmillennialism preaches to the church that, whoever

the Antichrist was and whenever he carried out his antichristian work, Antichrist and his fulminations are safely in the past.

Exempting the church from the persecution by Antichrist helps explain the popularity of the two millennial errors. Humans shrink from persecution, especially from that persecution about which our Lord said, “such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

Nevertheless, this is altogether the wrong attitude of Reformed Christians with regard to the coming persecution. The believer should regard it an unspeakably great privilege to be counted worthy by the Savior to confess that Jesus is Lord in the face of the greatest attack on God and His Anointed in all history, and to seal this confession with his suffering and even with his blood. And the divine reward for this spiritual battle against the beast and this faithfulness to Jesus will be correspondingly great. This reward is described in Revelation 20:4-6: resurrection in the soul at the moment of death into the life and glory of heaven, where they reign with Christ.

An old believer entertains a certain sorrow as he realizes that he will very likely not be among those who confess that Jesus is Lord in the face of the beast and his false prophet, thus contending for the faith in the last and greatest battle of the host of the Lord God (see Revelation 13).

*Here already
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errors of premillennialism:
viewing Old Testament Israel
and the New Testament church as two,
essentially and everlastingly,
different peoples....*

⁵ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 46, 47; 59-68.

“Let No Man Deceive You” (II Thess. 2:3)

In contrast to both of the millennial errors, amillennialism forewarns the church and the believer: be prepared for the coming tribulation! It will fall upon the church and the believer on account of their confession that Jesus is Lord and on account of their holy life, which includes that they refuse to worship the beast (Rev. 13). Be prepared to sign your confession with your life's blood that God's man, Jesus, is Lord, not Satan's man.

Contending with Jesus' greatest human enemy and, in him, with God's fiercest foe—Satan—will be the privilege of the true church and of the believer in the last days.

Exactly with regard to the “man of sin”—the Antichrist—II Thessalonians 2:3 admonishes, not the Jews, but the brothers and sisters of the church, that we not be deceived about the coming of the day of Christ as though this day will come before the man of sin is revealed. The implication of the appearing of Antichrist is not that the church can relax in the assurance that she will be raptured out of the world before Antichrist attacks the Jews. But the implication of the reality of Antichrist is that the members of the Christian church must “stand fast, and hold the traditions” (II Thess. 2:15), in the confidence of “obtaining...the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” in the way of resisting the man of sin (II Thess. 2:14).

Nor is this final, fiercest, and supreme battle of the church against God's and her enemy far distant. When the amillennialist notices that the government of the United States sanctions and promotes sodomy and lesbianism as lawful forms of holy marriage; that many churches cravenly and despicably approve this perversion; and that the citizenry of the country increasingly rage against condemnation of the “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (I Cor. 6:9-11)—impenitent homosexuals—the amillennial Christian recognizes that the great tribulation of genuine Christians in Western civilization (barbarism, really, although many barbarians, having only natural light, shame Western civilization by condemning homosexuality) is not far off.

In the face of this coming warfare, the most intense, fierce, and significant warfare in all the history of the battling church of Jesus in the world, premillennialism has the church relax with a view to convenient flight into the air, thus escaping the war. Instead of preparing the saints for the last battle, premillennialism has the church

lay down her arms. Antichrist is not her foe. Antichrist is no concern of the church. He will persecute the Jews.

Whereas amillennialism, with the Bible everywhere, calls the church to fight in this, as in all the great battles of the Lord, premillennialism offers the church the soporific of cowardly flight from the final and greatest battle.

Restoration of the Earthly Kingdom of Israel

The result, astonishingly, of the great tribulation of the Jews by Antichrist, according to premillennialism, will be the conversion and salvation of the vast majority of Jews, if not every last Jewish man and woman, and the transformation of the earthly nation of Israel into the kingdom of God, with headquarters in the old Jerusalem.

At the very end of the three and a half years of Antichrist's assault on the Jews, Jesus Christ will return to the earth, visibly in the body. This coming of Jesus to the earth is known by premillennialism as the “revelation” (in distinction from his half-way coming seven years earlier, which is known as the “rapture.”) Jesus will come, not to deliver His church (for the church will have been raptured some seven years earlier), but to rescue the nation of Israel in its dire extremity, as Antichrist is about to destroy the nation.

At this coming on behalf of Israel, Jesus will destroy Antichrist. This is the premillennial explanation of II Thessalonians 2:8: “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” This coming of Jesus will not put an end to history and inaugurate the everlasting future of a renewed creation and its transformed elect inhabitants.

Not at all!

History continues for another thousand years.

Rather, the coming of Jesus will signal the end of the church age on earth (which ended, in fact, at the rapture seven years earlier) and the onset of the “golden age” of the Jews.

The coming of Jesus, visibly, in the body, will represent the beginning of the earthly millennial kingdom—supposedly God's main purpose with all of history.

And this earthly kingdom is primarily, if not strictly, a Jewish business.

... to be continued. 

Protestant Reformed Missions

Small Beginnings: Mission Methods Established (1925-1931)

Three faithful ministers of the gospel banded together, forsaken and alone. We can only imagine what the Reverends Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, and George Ophoff felt when the decisions made by Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed Church (December 12, 1924) and Classis Grand Rapids West CRC (January 22, 1925) stripped them of office in the Christian Reformed Church. Out of 247 ministers in the Christian Reformed denomination,¹ only these three men with the majority of their elders and congregations had boldly maintained the truth of sovereign, particular grace over against the error of common grace.

One is reminded of what transpired in the very early history of the Christian church when a church father named Athanasius made a bold stand over against the error of Arianism. Out of hundreds of bishops he stood virtually alone defending the truth of the eternal Sonship of Christ as set forth in the Nicene Creed. For his stand Athanasius was stripped of his position as bishop of Alexandria and exiled. Like Athanasius, these three men in 1924 made a bold stand against the Arminianism of the doctrine of God's well-meant offer of salvation to every man through the preaching. They too were stripped of their place in the church they had loved and faithfully served.

¹ *Yearbook of the Christian Reformed Church in America, 1924, 22.*

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It is hard to believe that out of 256 congregations in this large denomination of over 100,000 souls² only three congregations—Eastern Avenue CRC, Hope CRC, and Kalamazoo I CRC (all in Michigan) staunchly defended the five points of Calvinism, all of which are denied in the error of the well-meant offer. Talk about small beginnings! It is true that Eastern Avenue CRC had 450 families that followed after the truth together with their minister and elders, but the few that were exiled from the Christian Reformed Church were at best so meager that they did not even make a dent in the CRC denomination. D. H. Kromminga, when later writing a brief history of the Christian Reformed Church, gave this commentary on what took place in 1924: “What strikes one in these heresy trials (see footnote—W.G.B.) is the fact that everyone found a settlement in a relatively short time without seriously disrupting the church.”³ The controversy surrounding the error of common grace caused a large stir in the CRC for a couple of years, but in the end it did not “seriously disrupt” this large denomination with its seemingly disinterested clergy.

Certainly, three congregations were not enough to form a denomination of churches. At least two of them (Eastern Ave. and Kalamazoo I) could have become grand, independent mega-churches, as is the order of our day. But these men were Reformed. They saw the

² Ibid.

³ D.H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition: From the Reformation to the Present*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1943). 147. I find it striking that Prof. Kromminga in this statement labels the doctrine of sovereign grace in opposition to common grace *a heresy!* He lists it among other actual heresies that went on trial before the CRC synods.

need to belong to a denomination of churches. But three churches? How long would they be able to exist?

A short time later these three men sat together around a table with the officebearers that also had been deposed for their support of their ministers. It was January 29, 1925. The purpose of the meeting was to form some kind of union among the three churches. What *kind* of union this would be had to be determined, so a committee was appointed to come with recommendations to a second meeting to be held on March 6. This second meeting marks the small beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches. For almost the next two years these meetings would continue, with minutes recorded in the Dutch language. They have been passed down to us as the minutes of the combined consistories of the "Protesting Christian Reformed Churches." This was the name adopted by these three churches at that meeting of March 6. An "Act of Agreement" was also drafted and signed by those attending this meeting. The "Act" bound these three churches and consistories together in common cause.

There is no need to record here the entire "Act of Agreement" since it already can be found in a number of other publications;⁴ but there is a particular point in the "Act" that needs mentioning, since it has to do with the mission work of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is stated that one of the purposes for uniting together as consistories was "to decide in all matters that pertain to the furnishing of information and advice to others, outside of our own congregations."⁵ No sooner was the "Act of Agreement" adopted than the men turned their attention to this matter of mission work. The following was recommended by the committee for immediate approval:

The Consistories of Kalamazoo I, Mich., Hope, Mich., and Eastern Ave., Grand Rapids, Mich., at their combined meeting held on March 6, 1925 at Grand Rapids, Mich., having heard of the various invitations that came to them from Hull, Iowa, to hold a lecture there concerning the present controversy, has decided to send one of its minis-

ters, Rev. H. Hoeksema, to Iowa, Wisconsin and Chicago, for the following purpose:

I. To give information concerning the things that have taken place among us of late, and also to present our position in regard to those matters in the form of lecture for our people.

II. To inform those who are interested of our actions, and if that is desired, to allow them to read our "Resolution of Agreement."

III. If it should prove that the interest is of such a nature, that the interested parties desire organization, then to serve them with advice how to proceed.

IV. And further to give to Rev. Hoeksema the authority to deal with every situation according to his best judgment.⁶

The combined consistories adopted this advice with different wording in Article 5:

Article 5. Thereupon the proposed trip of Rev. Hoeksema was discussed (see Supp., p. 5). The following motion was proposed: "That this combined consistory meeting sends out Rev. H. Hoeksema to the West, occasioned by the many requests for this, to inform those interested of our action and also to allow them to examine our Act of Agreement, and, if it should prove that the interest is of such a nature that those interested should desire to organize, then to serve them with advice, and, in one word, authorize Rev. H. Hoeksema to carry out the matters mentioned above."⁷

From the minutes of the combined consistories between the dates of March 26, 1925 to November 26, 1926 several churches were planted by the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches during this period of time. Bear in mind that most of these churches were organized by Rev. Hoeksema between the meetings of the combined consistories. These newly organized churches were: Hull, Iowa (by April 21, 1925); Waupun, Wisconsin (by August 5, 1925); Byron Center, Michigan (by November 3, 1925); Doon, Iowa (by February 3, 1926); Roosevelt Park (Grandville Ave.), Grand Rapids, Michigan; Hudsonville, Michigan; and Munster, Indiana (by November 26, 1926).

During the August, 1925 meeting of the consistories

⁴ It is recorded in the 1947 second edition of *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, written by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1947), 256-257. It can also be found in *A Watered Garden* by Gertrude Hoeksema, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1992), 355-356.

⁵ Articles 2 and 3 of the Minutes of the Combined Consistories held on March 6, 1925.

⁶ The advice regarding missions given in Supplement 5 of March 6, 1925 meeting.

⁷ The adoption of the above advice made in Article 5 of the minutes of March 6, 1925.

Kalamazoo proposed “that it would be a good plan to appoint an extra minister for the now existing churches, who can take the place of one of the other ministers who then would have a free hand to preach in other places.”⁸ This motion was defeated, but it was decided at the same meeting to make Ralph Danhof (a nephew of Rev. Henry Danhof), a *candidate* in the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches, just such a man: one who could preach in our churches in order that our ministers could be given free hand to preach in other places. The combined consistories decided to pay Candidate Danhof a salary and send him to work in a congregation (or congregations) where he was needed. This was done despite the fact that there were several vacant congregations looking for a minister. Though Hull consistory urged the combined consistories that it was proper to *ordain* Danhof into office in order to do this work, this advice was never taken. It is hard to judge the reasoning behind this decision of the combined consistories, since at that time grounds or reasons for decisions were seldom recorded. One reason that perhaps might justify this decision is the urgent need to spread the truth to others, while yet fulfilling the needs of our own congregations.

In November of 1925 Cand. R. Danhof reported to the combined consistories his labors during the past three months and was reappointed (still as a candidate) to preach and perform other duties in vacant churches and wherever work was being done to establish congregations. At that meeting it was also decided that a committee (the seeds of a mission committee?—WGB) be appointed to oversee the labors of Cand. R. Danhof. Three months later Danhof gave another lengthy report of his labors in Doon, IA and Waupun, WI to the February, 1926 meeting. He also visited contacts in Pella, IA and Fulton, Illinois. In May of that year R. Danhof was appointed once again for three months as an assistant to the other ministers, while they preached on mission fields, or to do this work himself where necessary. But by November of 1926 Cand. Danhof had resigned from the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches due to personal disagreements and left our fellowship. It is striking, however, that for a period of over one year Cand. Danhof served in the capacity of a roving “minister” (of sorts)

⁸ Minutes of the Combined Consistories, Article 8, August 5, 1925.

under the jurisdiction of an appointed committee for the purpose of assisting in the church extension work of our churches.

There were now enough churches in the small denomination to form a broader assembly. At the November 26, 1926 meeting of the combined consistories it was decided that from this point on delegates from each consistory would be sent to represent them at a meeting of *Classis*. A new name was also adopted: “the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.” The method of establishing new churches, however, remained much the same. The small number of ministers in our denomination gave themselves and their time to planting new churches. None labored harder in this cause than Rev. H. Hoeksema. In the twenty-fifth anniversary booklet of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. Bernard Kok acknowledged:


All of our limited strength and resources were used to labor in the erring churches which had cast us out, in order to show them the error of their ways, and to call them to repentance.... During the first years this work was performed almost single handedly by the Rev. H. Hoeksema, who very significantly began his labors in Eastern Ave. Christian Reformed Church, where he was also deposed... With well nigh superhuman strength he labored. Besides ministering the Word to a large congregation three times a Sunday, editing the *Standard Bearer*, teaching at the Seminary, it was largely through his efforts that our churches grew from 3 congregations to 19 congregations within ten years.⁹

Between the years 1927 and 1931, by means of lectures and preaching, several more churches were added to the denomination. In 1927, Sioux Center, Iowa and Oak Lawn, Illinois joined the federation. In 1928, Kalamazoo, Michigan was again added. (Rev. H. Danhof with his congregation left the Protestant Reformed denomination in early 1926. A few members remained faithful to the PRCA and were reconstituted into a congregation at this time.) Also in 1928, Pella, Iowa and Oskaloosa, Iowa were organized. Finally, 1929 saw the organization of Holland, Michigan. No new churches were added in 1930 and 1931. Through the work of planting churches

⁹ *The Protestant Reformed Churches: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary (1925-1950)*, 47.

the Protestant Reformed denomination grew from 3 congregations to 16 in six-years time.

There is one more important development that took place between 1928 and 1931 to which we must direct

our attention before summarizing and evaluating the mission methods of this early part of our history. This we consider in our next article. 

ALL THY WORKS SHALL PRAISE THEE

MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD

Our Dependence on Life-giving Breath

From the moment we are born till the day God calls us to our eternal home, we are in need of a constant supply of oxygen. The cells of our bodies depend on it—so much so that, under normal circumstances, we cannot live for much more than five minutes without oxygen. In the providence of God, we are supplied the necessary oxygen every moment of the day through complex processes, as seen in our previous article. However, there are many inhaled substances and many external circumstances that can disrupt these processes and affect the ability of our bodies to acquire oxygen. Some of these disrupt the supply of oxygen to the lungs, while others disrupt the supply of oxygen from the lungs to the cells of the body. To grow in our appreciation of how dependent we are on life-giving oxygen, it is profitable for us to examine briefly some of the circumstances that can make it difficult for one to breathe. Through this study we will also consider how God provides for us spiritually, in and through all the circumstances of our lives as we are spiritually upheld by His life-giving Spirit.

Impairments to Inhalation

For oxygen to be used by the cells of the body, it must first enter the lungs and then be absorbed into the bloodstream. Certain common illnesses can interfere with the lungs' ability to get oxygen. For example, during the past winter season some experienced bronchitis—an inflam-

mation of the lining of the respiratory system, often due to an infection. In addition, little children contracted RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)—a respiratory illness that is characterized by wheezing and rapid, short, and shallow breaths.

Also, in the coming months, there will be an abundance of pollen in the air from a variety of trees and grasses. The immune system of some 35 million Americans (about one in ten) is easily triggered by pollen. This leads to an immune response that includes, to one degree or another, itchy eyes, runny nose, and a narrowing of the respiratory tubes—all of which are attempts of the body to rid itself of 'invading' pollen.

And finally, throughout the year, others will suffer from asthma—an extraordinary sensitivity to allergens, like pollen, though also triggered by exercise and stress. Asthmatic attacks involve a constriction of airways and excess mucus production, resulting in wheezing, tightness in the chest, and breathlessness.

In all of these illnesses, there is an underlying issue—the respiratory lining and tubes become irritated or infected, which causes them to constrict and produce excess mucus, further narrowing the respiratory pathway. The end result is less oxygen delivered to the lungs, and consequently, to the cells of the body that need life-giving oxygen. Without oxygen, cells die rapidly. Nerve cells, in particular, die within a minute or two without oxygen. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that we have a constant supply of oxygen.

Disruptions in Getting Oxygen to the Cells

Another major difficulty that is encountered in the

Mr. Minderhoud is a science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2015, p. 257.

body is the hindered ability of oxygen to pass from the lungs to the red blood cells in the bloodstream. As we explained in our previous article, oxygen diffuses into the bloodstream via the alveoli, which are the tiny air sacs at the end of the respiratory tubes in the lungs. It is the hemoglobin molecules of the red blood cells that pick up the oxygen molecules as they pass by the alveoli. Because each red blood cell can carry approximately 250 million hemoglobin molecules, and each of the latter allows up to four oxygen molecules to attach to it, every red blood cell that passes by the alveoli of the lungs is capable of carrying about one billion oxygen molecule passengers! Normally, therefore, the lungs together with the red blood cells make astonishing provision for the satisfying of the body's need for oxygen.

However, there are substances that disrupt the diffusion of oxygen from the lung tissue to the many red blood cells. Cigarette smoke is one such substance. Cigarette smoke contains tar—a mixture of toxic, cancer-causing chemicals produced from the burning of tobacco. This tar accumulates and coats the lungs—ultimately damaging them in at least two ways. First, the tar damages the alveoli so that scar tissue develops that will decrease the rate of diffusion of oxygen into the bloodstream. Secondly, the tar causes an incurable disease called emphysema. In this serious disease, tar breaks down some of the inner walls of the alveoli, reducing the total surface area of the alveoli. This reduced surface area decreases the amount of oxygen that diffuses into

the bloodstream. In addition, and perhaps most serious, the tar causes the elastin in the walls of the alveoli to be so damaged that the alveoli cannot recoil and expel the harmful carbon-dioxide produced by the body. This loss of the elasticity of the lungs makes it extremely difficult to breathe.

Besides the damage to the alveoli that affects how much oxygen can get to the red blood cells, there are toxins and poisons that can disrupt the bonding process of oxygen with the red blood cells. Carbon monoxide is a common example of such a toxin. Some common sources of carbon monoxide include automobile exhaust, furnace exhaust, and tobacco smoke. What makes carbon monoxide such a dangerous and poisonous gas is the way in which it bonds to the hemoglobin molecules of the red blood cells. The carbon monoxide bond to hemoglobin molecules is more than 200 times stronger than the bond between oxygen and hemoglobin. Therefore, the presence of carbon monoxide in the lungs will adversely affect how much oxygen gets to the cells of the body. This is because the carbon monoxide will also diffuse into the bloodstream and compete with the oxygen molecules for a place on the hemoglobin molecule. The more hemoglobin molecules occupied with carbon monoxide molecules, the less are available to transport oxygen to the cells. Sensitive organs, such as the brain and heart, suffer quickly when there is a

sustained lack of oxygen. Thus, carbon monoxide poisoning, even at relatively low levels, can be harmful.

*Most of us are able to rise
from our beds each morning
and go about our tasks
with very little difficulty
obtaining life-giving oxygen.
However, under certain circumstances
there are challenges and difficulties
in obtaining necessary oxygen.
We ought not take for granted
the ability to breathe easily,
nor take lightly the trials
of those who cannot.
When we observe the challenges
some face to obtain sufficient oxygen
each day, then especially
we note our complete dependence
on our every breath.
Thanks be to God for the ability
to breathe and for the good gift
of fresh, clean air!*

Dependence on Life-Giving Breath

Most of us are able to rise from our beds each morning and go about our tasks with very little difficulty obtaining life-giving oxygen. However, under certain circumstances there are challenges and difficulties in obtaining necessary oxygen. We ought not take for granted the ability to breathe easily, nor take lightly the trials of those who cannot. When we observe the challenges some face to obtain sufficient oxygen each day, then especially we note our complete dependence on our every breath. Thanks be to God for the ability to breathe and for the good gift of fresh, clean air!

Our complete dependence on each life-giving breath of air for our physical existence is a picture of our complete dependence on the Spirit of Christ—the Breath of God—for our entire spiritual life. The Holy Spirit regenerated us (John 3:3-8), giving us our spiritual life (Ezek. 37:9). He continues to sanctify us each day (II Thess. 2:13), making us a partaker of Christ and all His benefits (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 53). By the work of the Holy Spirit we are also able to comprehend and believe the Holy Scriptures, which feed and nourish our hungry souls, thereby strengthening our faith (Canons 3/4, Art. 11, 17 and I John 2:20-21, 27). The Holy Spirit, the Breath of God proceeding from God the Father and God the Son in the communion life of the Trinity, is also the source and fountain of the communion among believers in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:18-19; II Cor. 13:14).¹ We cannot live without the air we breathe. Nor can we live without the Holy Spirit!

Just as we find in our physical life that there are things that hinder our ability to obtain life-giving breath, leading to physical weaknesses and perhaps even death, so it is in our spiritual life. There are all sorts of distractions that can interfere with our enjoyment of the spiritual benefits of the Life-giving Breath of God. Though God does not completely remove His Spirit from us, and though we cannot lose the salvation Christ has earned for us, we can have times in which we do not as fully experience the work of the Spirit in our lives and are weakened spiritually (Canons 5, Arts. 4, 6, 8).

Therefore, we must be faithful in the use of the means

¹ See Prof. David J. Engelsma's *Trinity and Covenant: God as Holy Family*, (Jenison, MI: RFP A 2006), 73-74, 101, 105, for more on this.

of grace that God has given us. We need to hear the preaching of the gospel regularly and be “constant in watching and prayer,” that we be not led into temptation. “When these are neglected, [we] are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world, and the flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these evils” (Canons 5, Art. 4). We must be on guard against the many attacks of our threefold enemy. These attacks, in their various forms, threaten to distract us from our callings in this life. They seek to lull us to sleep, depriving us of our Life-giving Breath, so that we slowly suffocate. As foolish as it is to deprive our physical bodies of the necessary life-giving oxygen by a deliberate action on our part, all the more foolish it is to starve our souls of the necessary spiritual nourishment found in the chief means of grace—the preaching of the gospel.

Thanks be to God, who provides not only for all of our physical needs in life but also for our every spiritual need. This is God's promise to us in the familiar 23rd Psalm.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over (Ps. 23:4-5).

Our confidence in the midst of all the spiritual trials and afflictions we face in this earthly life is that “[our] God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Sometimes the temptations we face are very severe. But the promise of the gospel is that “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). The devil may seek to destroy God's people (Rev. 12:13, 14), but God will feed and nourish His people by His Spirit and Word.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:20-21).



Congregational Activities

On February 8 the Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, MI implemented a valet service for members of their congregation who wished to make use of this provision.

On February 13 the Young Adults Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, AB, Canada held a fundraiser for a retreat to be held August 4-7, 2015. This activity was entitled "Piece of Cake Fundraiser." Those who were interested could submit a sponge cake to the competition for an entry fee of \$5 and prizes were awarded. There was also a silent auction of desserts the same evening.

Advance Notice: The Spring Sprint 5K and 1 mile walk/run is scheduled for Saturday, May 16 at Crete PRC, D.V. Registration opened March 2. Start getting those legs in shape!

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, IN hosted a spaghetti supper on Saturday, February 7 in the school gym. Parents and supporters were invited to come and enjoy good food and fellowship while encouraging their young people.

The Young People's Society of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD

held a singspiration for the five Siouxland area churches on February 15, with proceeds aiding their young people's attendance at the convention this summer. With no school the next day due to President's Day, singers of all ages turned out in droves! One commented that maybe the roof was raised a little by the spirited singing there on 15th Street. While that might be a bit of an exaggeration, certainly a joyful noise was made! God be praised! Makes one look forward to the next area singspiration!

School Activities

The board of Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI gave advance notice of a special school society meeting scheduled for March 9 at the church to vote on a proposal to add the ninth grade in the 2017-2018 school year, and to add one grade each of the three years following that.

Mission Activities

In addition to preaching in Bacolod City on the third Sunday of each month and conducting a Bible study there, our foreign missionaries to the Philippines also conduct SNO pastors' training on the island of Southern Negros Occidental on the third Tuesday of the month. The last pastors' training for Rev. Richard Smit took place on February 17. With the Smit family planning to leave the Philippines in mid-March, some changes will be taking place, though the work

in the Philippines will continue as usual as much as possible. Rev. Kleyn will conduct the monthly Bible study and the SNO classes, teaching Dogmatics on the topic of Anthropology next. Rev. Kleyn will take over the work Rev. Smit was doing in the Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela, preaching there one Sunday a month (instead of the usual two) and assisting with the work of the consistory. He will no longer be preaching in the PRC of Bulacan but will still attend and assist with their monthly consistory meetings. Preaching, teaching, and catechism classes will continue in Provident Christian Church of Marikina. 7M classes will carry on, with some adjustments to Rev. Kleyn's schedule to make all this work out. There is much work to be done on this field, including some new requests for preaching and teaching the Reformed faith. We are certainly blessed to be provided with so many opportunities and open doors in the Metro Manila area! May the Lord of the harvest, in His counsel, grant another missionary to labor here soon! And may He bless the Kleyns, who are already very busy—soon to be busier still.

The Pittsburgh, PA Protestant Reformed Fellowship sponsored a family retreat on February 6 and 7. The topic of the seminar was "The Christian's Need of Discipline" with speeches given by missionary pastor Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma and by Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, pas-

Mr. Van Edgom is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa.

tor at Grace PRC, Standale, MI. Speeches were entitled “Discipline of Self” and “Discipline by Others.” The weekend provided a time of wonderful instruction and fellowship, good food, and good company. It was enjoyed by many.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of Calvary PRC, Hull, IA had two announcements on a recent bulletin. First, they produced bookmarks following the “5C’s” from Prof. B. Gritter’s Reformation Day speech titled “What it Means to Be Reformed.” They encouraged all persons of the congregation, including the children, to take one to share and to use as a witness to others. The Committee also announced that the pamphlet of the month was available. This month’s pamphlet is “The Prohibition of the Remarriage of the Innocent Party” by Prof. David Engelsma, a new publication of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. All were encouraged to read the pamphlet and share it with others.

Minister Activities


The calling church for the Philippine mission field (Doon PRC) announced a new trio from which to call a minister to replace Rev. Richard Smit, who will soon be taking up his labors in First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI. The trio included Rev. Allen Brummel (Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD), Rev. Nathan Decker (Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI), and Rev. Daniel Holstege (First PRC, Holland, MI). On February 15 the call was extended to Rev. Holstege. We pray that the King of the church grants to Rev. Holstege a clear indication of His will in consideration of this call.

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, Covenant of Grace PRC, Spokane, WA, had been considering the call from Peace PRC in Lansing, IL to come over and help them as their next undershepherd. On February 15 Rev. Kleyn announced that he was led to decline this call from Peace and to remain in Spokane to labor in God’s vineyard there. We are confident, with the congregation of Peace PRC, that God will provide

their next minister in His perfect time.

School Activities

On February 13 the Special Education Committee of the Protestant Reformed Christian School/Heritage Christian High School in Dyer, IN held an enjoyable fundraiser they entitled “The Taste.” The gym of Heritage was “tastefully” decorated with attractive dimly-lit white lights and centerpieces. A large variety of appetizers and desserts taken from the area’s “Prized Recipe” cookbook were prepared and featured. The main entrée was pork tenderloin sliders, with an open-house style so guests could come and leave as necessary. We are told that the evening was very enjoyable, well done, and something different than most were accustomed to. Sounds like a delicious and delightful evening!

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2015, are hereby notified that all material for this year’s synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Cornerstone PRC express their sympathy to James Flikkema in the death of his mother,

WINIFRED FLIKKEMA.

May comfort come from the words of Psalm 116:15 “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, President
Paul DeYoung, Clerk

Teacher needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School in Wingham is planning to begin a school in September 2015 with grades 1-8, D.V. To that end we are seeking applications to fill a full-time teacher/administrator position for the 2015-2016 school year. For more information and to apply for this position you are encouraged to contact our recruitment committee: Henry Devries 519-367-3627 devries@wightman.com, Brian Hilt 519-357-0667 brnhilt@gmail.com, Gerry Guichelaar 519-395-5868.

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Tuesday
Rev. N. Langerak
Christian Living Under the Cross

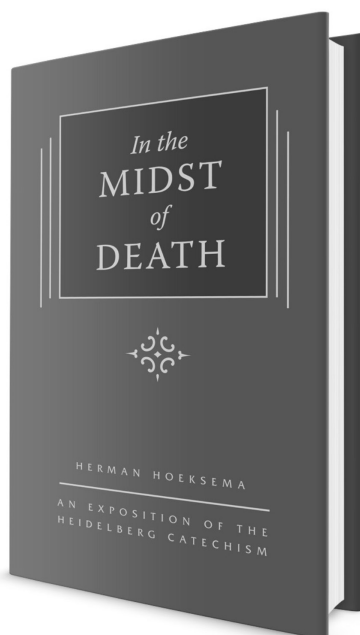
Wednesday
Rev. C. Haak
Christian Living in this Present World

Thursday
Prof. D. Engelsma
Christian Living and the End of our Life

Registration begins on March 15, 2015.

Registration forms available on line at our Creteprc.org

To register by mail or by phone call: Henry Bleyenburgh
@ 708.595.1919 or Bert Worries @ 219.718.8732



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