

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Jesus Mocked at the Cross REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA	266
<i>Editorial</i>	Bavinck? Yes. Hoeksema? No. (2) REV. KENNETH KOOLE	268
<i>Strength of Youth</i>	Strength from Peace REV. MARTIN VANDER WAL	271
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	The First Isaianic Woe! ABRAHAM KUYPER	273
<i>Convocation Address</i>	The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the "Good Christian Schools" (2) PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA	276
<i>Ministering to the Saints</i>	The History of the Office of Elder (6) After the Reformation REV. DOUG KUIPER	279
<i>Go Ye Into All the World</i>	A Goal in the Philippines: Self-supporting Churches (1) REV. DANIEL KLEYN	282
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Review PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	284
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	286

Jesus Mocked at the Cross

Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.

Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.

Mark 15:31-32

At 9:00 A.M. on the day of the Passover, Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem with two malefactors.

There had been many events that had led up to this. Jesus had been arrested the night before by a band of the temple guard. He had endured a mock trial before the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, which condemned Him to death on the charge of blasphemy: He said He is the Son of God. At the crack of dawn Jesus had been brought to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The Jewish leaders wanted Pilate to condemn Him and crucify Him on the basis of His claim to be

the King of the Jews. This made Him a threat to the empire. When Pilate hesitated, the leaders manipulated the people to demand Jesus' crucifixion.

And so it was that Jesus was crucified on the day of the Passover. Out of spite Pilate had placed a placard over Jesus' head, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

As the morning wore on, various groups taunted Jesus as He hung from the cross. He was taunted by those that passed by on their way to and from Jerusalem. He was taunted by the chief priests and scribes. And finally He was even taunted by the two malefactors that were crucified with Him.

Our attention is especially on the taunting of the chief priests and scribes. How evil and devilish these taunts were. They charged Jesus with being powerless to save. How wrong they were. As we consider their taunts, we will see just how powerful Jesus is to save.

A wicked mockery!

All the mockery that was hurled at Jesus on the day of His crucifixion was exceedingly evil. But especially that of the chief priests and scribes!

The chief priests consisted of the ruling high priest,

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those that formerly occupied this high office, and other dignitaries from whose ranks the high priests were generally selected. The chief priests were entrusted with the custody of the temple. They were made up mostly of the Sadducees.

The Scribes were the teachers of the law. They studied, interpreted, and taught the law both in the temple and in the synagogue. They were mostly Pharisees.

Matthew, in his account (27:41), makes mention of elders that mocked Jesus, along with the chief priests and scribes. Each district in Israel was ruled by an elder. The more prominent elders, along with the chief priests and scribes, formed the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel. It was this Sanhedrin that had arrested Jesus, condemned Him, and then maneuvered Pilate to crucify Jesus. And now members of the Sanhedrin mocked Jesus.

Notice, that they mocked Jesus among themselves. They did not speak to Jesus, as did the passersby and the malefactors. They simply talked among themselves. Could this be the ultimate snub?

Listen in on their mockery.

He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

Oh, how many miracles had Jesus performed to save others from sickness and a life of misery? But does He have the power to save Himself from death by crucifixion?

Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.

It is interesting that they brought up the matter of Jesus being the Christ, the king of Israel. Earlier that day they had condemned Him for His claim to be the Christ. This was blasphemy, making Him equal with God. Then they brought Jesus to Pilate with the charge that He claimed to be a king. That threatened the rule of Caesar. Jesus aspired to be the king of Israel. There was also the superscription on Jesus' cross proclaiming Him to be the King of the Jews. Now the leaders mockingly suggest that if Jesus is the Christ, the king of Israel, He could demonstrate that by saving

Himself, by descending from the cross. If only Jesus would do that, they would see and believe.

A proper evaluation!

From a certain point of view Jesus did have the power to come down from the cross. Jesus had demonstrated that sufficiently throughout His ministry. Repeatedly Jesus had cast out demons, thereby demonstrating a power greater than Satan himself. When the temple guard came to arrest Him, Jesus made them fall back as dead men. A few nails and Roman soldiers certainly could not have kept Jesus on the cross, had He a mind to come down. How blind could the leaders be?

Had Jesus been the kind of king that the people had envisioned, He would have come down from the cross.

They envisioned Him to be an earthly king with an earthly kingdom and power. What a time to show His power and win back the support of the people!

Yet, from another point of view, Jesus did not have the power to come down from the cross.

Contrary to the insinuation of the chief priests and scribes, Jesus is the Christ, the King of Israel. He had been sent into the world to establish the kingdom of God and rule it as king. This kingdom is not earthly and physical but heavenly and

spiritual. It consists in the gracious rule of Christ in the hearts of God's elect people. It is a rule that transforms them into a great spiritual nation that gladly bows the knee to Him and serves Him in love. It is a kingdom that knows no national boundaries but is found among the nations. It is an everlasting kingdom that begins shortly after Jesus' departure from the world and will be perfected in the new creation.

This kingdom required that Jesus stay on the cross.

For, you see, this kingdom is possible only through the atonement of sin. So long as God's elect stand in the guilt of their sin before God, they are bound to the depravity that has taken hold of mankind generally. Their life would be one of rebellion and defiance against God,

*Had Jesus been
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not one of willing submission to Jesus as their King. Only when the guilt of their sin is removed through proper payment can the elect of God be transformed into willing and obedient servants of God's King. This payment of sin Christ was now making on the cross. God was pouring out upon Him the full fury of His wrath as the proper punishment of sin.

From this point of view, it was not possible for Jesus to come down from the cross and save Himself. He is the Servant of the Lord, sent down from heaven as the Mediator of the church. He is the perfect Servant, who because of the perfection of His own being, can only do what the Lord has given Him to do. This bound Him to the cross, willingly and lovingly.

A necessary faith!

The chief priests and scribes indicated that, were Jesus to come down from the cross, they would see and believe. By this they meant that they would take notice of this great feat and then would believe that He is the Christ, the king of Israel.

That, of course, was folly. After all the miracles Jesus performed, which clearly testified that He is the Christ, these leaders refused to believe.

That is the nature of unbelief. It blinds a person so that he foolishly denies obvious reality.

But what of you?

You have seen.

You have seen the Lord Jesus Christ suffering on the cross, not in weakness but in power, to endure the full penalty of sin for His people. No, you have not seen it with your own eyes. But you have seen it on the pages of Holy Writ. And its testimony is true.


But with your own eyes you have seen the kingdom that Christ has established on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of the cross. The great spiritual nation of the church is found among all nations. They are identified by their joyful service of Jesus Christ as their King. What a glorious witness their obedience is to the cross.

Having seen, now also believe!

Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the King of Israel.

Believe on Him and His work on the cross so that you find a place in His kingdom.

Believe on Him so that you joyfully serve Him as your King.

Believe on Him to the salvation of your soul! 

Bavinck? Yes. Hoeksema? No. (2)

We are dealing with an article in the *Mid-American Journal of Theology* entitled "Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Herman Bavinck's Reformulation of the Pactum

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2013, p. 244.

Salutis Contra 'Scholastic Subtlety'" (*MJT* 22, 2011), written by Dr. L. R. O'Donnell III.

As stated in the last issue, O'Donnell does his best to put as much distance as possible between Bavinck's covenantal views and those of certain twentieth century theologians charged with "extreme formulations" of this doctrine, Hoeksema being one so labeled. The charge brought against Hoek-

sema and these others is that they in their covenantal views are guilty of "ontologizing" the covenant of God (by grounding it in His very being and nature as God triune).

This is not a charge O'Donnell wants brought against Bavinck and his understanding of the covenant of God triune. He attempts to demonstrate that Bavinck's treatment was too carefully "nuanced" to be guilty of being charged with

such *scholastic* subtleties. This, he claims, is something certain recent scholars have missed in Bavinck (due to their lack of subtle discernment), or they would not have placed Bavinck's covenant views in the same category as Hoeksema's.

We ask, why does O'Donnell consider this "ontologizing" of the covenant so serious an error? What dangerous leaven does he claim it contains?

Because, as pointed out in the last issue, O'Donnell claims such a view, "...when pressed to its logical conclusion, would deny the contingency [!] of creation and the pure grace [!] of the re-creation [the salvation of the world through the redemption of man]."

In other words, he views it as being an impingement on the freedom of God.

If the essence of God's own inner-triune being and life is covenantal and God is 'federal' in His very being (which is certainly Hoeksema's conviction), then God is compelled of inner necessity to work the covenant of grace in a certain way, along certain lines. It is all logically, necessarily, predetermined.

And is that not an impingement on the sovereign freedom of God?

The answer to which is, No.

The issue here is really little different than the issue facing the church and its theologians nearly a millennium ago, the one Anselm raised and then answered in a book entitled *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became man). Did He *have to*?

To that question there are two

right, though at first flush seemingly contradictory, answers. Yes. And yet, No! And each can be the true answer to the question.

This is no paradox. It all depends on the context of the question.

If you mean, as Anselm did, "Did God have to become man *in order to redeem man*?" then the answer is "Yes."

Why?

Read the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 5. It has everything to do with *who* God is, namely, the most righteous One. In other words, with God's being.

Satisfaction had to be made, and

...there was
no other way
for God Himself
to save sinners,
that is, not if He
was to be true
to Himself and
uphold His own
righteousness,...

the very character (natures) of the mediator of the covenant is accordingly prescribed.

This is an *ontological* issue.

God bound by the truth of who He is in Himself!

We may not speak of God as *free* to save man in some other way, not as the *righteous* God. Did not Christ Himself (I speak as a man)

explore that possibility in the garden? "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless..."

But there was no other way for God Himself to save sinners, that is, not if He was *to be true to Himself* and uphold His own righteousness, a righteousness that has to do with God's very Being.

Yes, because of *ontological* realities, who God is in Himself, and due to His commitment to *being true to Himself*, for God to save His own He *had to become man* and enter our flesh to satisfy all the demands of His own law and righteousness.

That said, does that impugn on the freedom of God, God's sovereign freedom?

What Reformed man would dare say so?

Significantly, *non-Reformed theologians* of various stripes have argued against the Reformed (and biblical) doctrine of satisfaction for sin being demanded by God's very being, God bound by who He is in Himself, the most righteous one. And they have done so by charging the Reformed, creedal view with the very same charges Loonstra and O'Donnell have brought against Hoeksema's and others' covenantal views, namely, with being too 'scholastic' and an infringement on God's divine freedom. In fact, this is a charge that is being heard in Reformed circles these days against the Catechism, in particular Lord's Days IV and V: "They are so 'scholastic' and would bind the God who has a love for all, to working salvation for sinners only along the lines of *our* view of absolute justice, introducing talk about wrath and hell,

infringing upon *his* divine freedom and mercy.”

And the charge (“too scholastic by far”) has become the excuse to jettison the Catechism and no longer to be bound by such doctrines in their preaching.

That said, no truly Reformed man in the name of God’s divine freedom would do so.

Why not?

First, because for Jehovah God, being true to Himself while He accomplishes His own will and good pleasure, never compromising His being, is exactly what constitutes His true freedom. Between what pleases Him and His decrees, works, and being, there is always perfect consistency. Harmony. Yes, logical consistency.

Something that cannot be said about mere mortal beings, especially not sinful ones.

And second, *because God did not have to save man at all!* As our Canons state, “...God would have done [fallen man] no injustice to leave them all [us all] to perish” (Head I, Art. 1).

Why did God become man?

Because He *had to*? God had no choice in the matter?

No! Not that kind of necessity—some kind of *pantheistic* inevitability that binds God, leaving Him no choice but to reveal Himself as the saving, “incarnating” God (“*pantheistic*” being the word O’Donnell throws at Hoeksema’s covenant concept).

Nonsense.

Not if God did not *will* to save fallen man. God had the sovereign freedom *not* to do so, if He so chose.

But, that was not His sovereign choice.

Behold the *free* grace of God’s freely determined decree to work reconciliation.

And yet God, by the very nature of His being, bound to work it out in a certain way. With God, righteousness is not a negotiable virtue or issue.

*With God,
righteousness is not
a negotiable virtue
or issue.*

The point is, as it is with our redemption through the divine necessity of the atonement, so it is with God’s covenant with fallen mankind.

The great Jehovah was not bound to covenant with fallen man. He did not have to reveal His covenant. There is not some kind of *ontological* inevitability, some absolute inner necessity, that compels God whether He will or not to covenant with fallen man. He remains sovereignly free to do so or not to.

Nonetheless, when God determines to enter into covenant with mankind and reveal His covenant to men, it would be a covenant in keeping with His *being*. Yes, it must be, because that is who He is, *Jehovah*, God-triune, which is to say, because of who *they* are, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And this, God be thanked, the three great ‘I AMs’ in their eternal council in sovereign freedom chose (took counsel) to do.

It is no impingement on God triune’s sovereign freedom to covenant within Himself to remain in covenant as sovereign friend of a remnant of mankind. He was also free, sovereignly free, to have determined to sever all ties with man once man fell, just as with Satan and the fallen angels.

But this was not Jehovah God’s good pleasure when it came to the creature man.

That said, the reality is that the difference between Loonstra and O’Donnell amounts to this—Loonstra was honest enough to see the inherent, undeniable connection between Bavinck’s covenant view and that which followed in Hoeksema (though he was not happy with the direction either theologian went), whereas O’Donnell refuses to acknowledge the fundamental similarities, trying to make the differences define the two views.

Theologians have done the same between Calvin and Beza, not liking Beza’s strongly worded, closely argued, conclusions. So the charge: Beza the “scholastic,” Beza the “hyper,” Beza the “extremist.”

For all that, can it be validly argued that Beza did not follow in the line of Calvin, so as to be closely identified with Calvin? Beza really not so Calvinistic after all? History puts that claim to bed. And Calvin would have had stronger words for such an allegation, we are sure.

That said, we reiterate, it is becoming plain, with the publishing

of Bavinck's *Dogmatics*, that there is a concerted effort afoot to divorce Hoeksema's covenant views from those of Bavinck, lest any get the impression that Hoeksema's covenantal views are closely related to those of the esteemed Bavinck, two covenantal theologians thinking along the same lines as they trace the covenant of grace back to its deepest source and fountain.

Evidently that would put Bavinck in poor company.

Or maybe put Hoeksema in company some judge too good? Maybe he was not so 'hyper' after all?

Neither of which appears to be the popular trend these days.

But the question is, why?

Let it be said here already, we are convinced it is more complex than simply that some have taken a personal dislike to Hoeksema for whatever reason and cannot find it in themselves to write a good word about him and his views, no matter what.

There is something deeper afoot here, something of deeper theological significance for our day and age.


We intend to address that in time.

But before we give our explanation of what we are convinced is behind this concerted effort to drive a wedge between Bavinck and Hoeksema's covenant views, we would call the reader's attention to

another article in the *MJT* entitled "Covenant and Election in the Theology of Herman Bavinck" (*MJT* 19, 2008, pp. 69-115)—written by Dr. C. Venema.

As becomes plain from this article, it is not only O'Donnell who is committed to driving a wedge between Bavinck's covenant view and that of Hoeksema—even when it comes to election and the covenant, the attempt is made to disconnect the view of the one theologian from the other.

No small task, and rather telling.

But the Doctor from Mid-America Seminary sets about to do just that, as we will demonstrate next time. 

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. MARTIN VANDER WAL

Strength from Peace

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Isaiah 26:3, 4

Peace is one of the most precious gifts that God has given to you. This peace is a wonderful peace. Its wonder is that God gives it to you, who are by nature only at war with Him. Your character by nature is no different from that of the ungodly nations who strive in their unholy rebellion against

God and His Christ. But God has made everlasting peace between you and Him through the blood of His Son, the Prince of Peace.

God's peace is also wonderful because it is given to you to make you strong. Think about it. Without this peace, you could have no confidence in this world. You could only hide away in the corner of some contrived shelter, vainly hoping that no danger or trouble will ever visit you. But His peace makes you strong to walk in this world with boldness and confidence.

This peace is also wonderful in its strength because it makes you strong in order for you to take your position on the front lines of the battle of the Christian's spiritual warfare. This peace equips you to fight this battle with strength and with endurance every day.

This peace is a very particular peace. It is not the

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peace of the wicked world, the kind of harmony that the world keeps for the sake of its rebellion against God and its persecution of the church (Ps. 2). It is not the peace that the world takes up to further itself in its perverse abominations before God (Is. 41:6, 7). Nor is this the peace of compromise with that wicked world, a compromise sought by apostate and apostatizing churches. That peace is always warfare against God. That peace you must loathe and eschew.

Your peace is fundamentally from God and unto God. This peace is the peace of the kingdom of God. This peace is your place in that kingdom of God, your feet walking in it, your heart fixed upon it, and your mind filled with its riches. This peace is the glorious, eternal Christ reigning in your heart by His sovereign grace.



Your peace from God is strong in the face of danger and trouble. This peace means that you have God, with all God's power and wisdom, as a fortress, a rock, and a strong, high tower. His glorious name is your hiding place (Prov. 18:10). This peace is confidence that everything will be well because you are hidden in God through Christ. It does not guard you from ever having any kind of danger or trouble. It will not guard you from ever having to engage in battle. But God's peace will guard your heart and mind from discouragement and despair in the midst of them. Truly and really, you have nothing to fear from your enemies or from those dangers and troubles you face. Your side is the Lord's side!

The Bible teaches that this peace is also prosperity. This peace is very well illustrated in the first verse of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This not wanting anything is not a mental adjustment about what you have or do not have. It is not such a focused and powerful denial that you convince yourself that you have no lack. Not at all! This peace is fullness

and prosperity. It is such a fullness and prosperity that in truth you lack nothing. This peace says to your heart that, *because* the Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want. He is your covenant God! Your God has given you Himself, in and through His only begotten Son. In His blood, the precious blood of the covenant, you have your redemption, your regeneration and faith. The kingdom of God, with its righteousness, peace, and joy, is all yours (Rom. 14:17). Its fullness, declared to you in the gospel and sealed to you by the Holy Spirit, is meant to fill your heart, so that you have perfect peace. Why worry? Why be anxious? It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!



God's peace to you is a gift of His sovereign grace alone. You receive that gift through faith. But this gift of peace God gives you with a calling to grow in that peace. Your peace grows first through your fellowship

with God. Turn the affections of your heart and mind to Him. Find your delight in God's house and in gathering with His people there, young and old. There fill your heart and soul with the fullness of the gospel of peace, and enjoy that peace together with your fellow saints. Carry on in your fellowship with God in the blessed exchange of prayer. Bring to Him your

troubles and anxieties and receive in that gracious exchange the peace of His promise to keep and guard your mind with His peace (Phil. 4:6, 7).



How does this peace appear in you? As a young Christian man or woman, this peace gives you a spiritual maturity, a calm demeanor. Rather than being easily upset, angered, aroused, or moody, you show peace that you have in your heart. In situations where you are tempted to be sulky or sullen, or simply reactionary, this peace will enable you to show a godly attitude and to have godly reactions.

*This peace
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because the Lord
is your shepherd,
you shall not want.*

By this peace, you are also able to live in peace with one another. There is a great warfare for the sake of the truth, great warfare for the sake of godliness and righteousness. That warfare we fight against our enemies. And for the sake of that battle it is so important to be strong together with fellow saints. For such a reason God has placed you in communion and fellowship with your church and with your fellow saints. His purpose is that we might be strong together, and strengthen each other. But to have this strength you need also to keep peace among yourselves. You must lay aside and cover over all the insignificant matters that can divide and so ruin your peace. You must carefully watch to make sure roots of bitterness do not spring up in you and defile others, robbing them of their peace when they must deal with you (Heb. 12:14, 15). When others' actions threaten peace, you must work peacefully to bring resolution and remove all offense. You must keep from all quarreling, from beginning quarrels as well as from jumping into them.

Practice that peace of God among yourselves as young people! Learn to rejoice in one another. Enjoy each other's company. Rejoice in and give thanks to God for the good gifts He bestows on your fellow saints. Where you see weakness in another, in mercy help him. When you know your own weakness, seek help from another. Be open to blessing one another, and being blessed by one another, all from God. Where peace in the church is threatened, use your kindness, gentleness, and meekness to work reconciliation and peace. When you are among those who are contentious or mean, you will not feel so inclined to respond in kind. You will be able to offer the gentle answer that

turns away wrath and be blessed as a peacemaker (Prov. 15:1; Matt. 5:9).



Or is this peace lacking in you? Are you often in conflict with others, arguing with others around you, brothers and sisters, schoolmates? Do your parents and teachers find you rebellious or quarrelsome toward them? Is there often grumbling and murmuring on your lips, or jealousy, envy, and covetousness in your heart? All these things can indicate a lack of peace in your heart.

One reason for your lack of peace may be that you are looking for peace in what people think of you. Or you may be trying to find it in having lots of possessions. You are then anxious either about losing them, or about not being able to get more. In rivalries and jealous competitions, you worry about losing your coveted place among others. In such cases, your lack of peace means that you must clean the house of your heart, making more room for Him and the peace that He gives (Heb. 12:5, 6). Be thankful, then, for His jealousy! May you be as jealous to have His peace alone fill your heart as He is!

In those cases your calling is to keep your heart clear of those things that rob you of your true, lasting peace. Ask your God's pardon for them, and for His help to clear your heart of them. In His answer to your request, you will find His grace to help, and you will find Him nearer to you, His peaceful presence stronger in your heart and mind. Look for that peace to increase and abound in all your life. Look for God's peace to show its strength of grace in your words and actions.

Be strong, in His peace! 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

ABRAHAM KUYPER

The First Isaianic Woe!

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest in Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Love of Money

The well-known "Woe unto you's!" of the prophet Isaiah are six in number, with the "Woe unto you!" against the service of Mammon, i.e., against the love of

money, the mania to have and to save, as starting-point of national self-weakening.

Of loose capital there was almost none in Isaiah's days. There was no other great possession thinkable than in fixed goods, i.e., in houses and in lands.

This gave to the first *Woe unto you!* a peculiar tint.

Just listen. Thus sounded the *Woe unto you!* against the eagerness for riches: "Woe unto them, that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" (Is. 5:8)....

The over-large possession of lands springs from sin; runs counter to the ordinances of God; and ends in the break of the divinely-appointed relation between the land and the dwellers on that land.

Already in days of old, Calvin pointed out how foolish it was to enlarge one's house, till all sorts of chambers stood unoccupied, while others scarcely have necessary room. And how senseless it is "to add so much land to land, as to necessitate the removal of those whom God has put there, while the earth indeed was given us for our common dwelling-place."

In like sense wrote a prince among exegetes of our century, Delitzsch: "They, the insatiable, do not rest, before every small landed-property is swallowed up in the large landed-property. A sin the more atrocious in Israel, where the Divine legislation had instituted an equal division of lands."

In Isaiah's utterance there is a definite and sharp judgment of bringing large landed estates into the possession of one owner.

This must not be.

Even the State should not tolerate it.

And yet, the first dreadful *Woe!* from which presently the other five follow does not turn itself against wrong possession of land as such, but against the sinful spirit that expresses itself therein.

The first *Woe!* condemns in every man and in every nation the sinful inclination of making wealth the ideal of life, and of always getting more property, more money.

It is a *Woe!* against the unholy fever of capitalism.

A *Woe!* against Mammon, and against everyone who

as priest or choir-boy at the altar of Mammon dances to the tune of covetousness and penuriousness.



That there is also a protest in that *Woe unto you!* against the old, sinful custom of taking a whole street, with over-sized houses and gardens, in possession on the part of well-to-do families, while the numerous households of the humbler classes are assigned to cellars, shacks, and slums, goes without saying.

Calvin chastises this practice justly as covetousness and vanity and unmercifulness, which we likewise must condemn. Yea, already Chrysostom did not hesitate to scourge his Byzantine hearers with the woes: "Your covetousness goes so far, that at last you would rob the poor even of sunlight and free air."

It has actually come to this. And the present movement to provide better houses for the laboring classes, where he who has little can at least have God's dear sun and better air, is doubly worthy of the hearty support of every Christian.

But apart from this there lies in this first *Woe!* a warning for every confessor of the Christ, not to seek good in large houses, nor in building of semi-palaces, nor in laying out of large country estates, but to be contented with a moderate residence, which offers room for necessary use.

Also in the choice of a house the *use*, and not the ambition to live on a grand scale, must be the standard.

For therein vanity has play, and the desire to push others back is evident.



For the root of the sin of covetousness is that everyone is bent upon securing privilege for himself, and to realize this end, pushes others to the wall.

The prophet makes this sharply prominent in these words: So long do you join house to house and lay field to field, that at length there is no more room for other dwellers, and you dwell all alone.

Truly, it does not come quite so far, because they fall short in power, but yet, as Calvin says correctly, "as far as they are able, they go to work indeed, as though they want to push every one out of his place and eject him

from his possessions, so that he must either live under the open skies, or move elsewhere.”

In the capitalistic fever works the motive of brother-envy.

For of course, though it is pure folly in a world of man in which by power and disposition one is altogether different from the other to dream of equal possessions for all, yet this inequality has *certain limits*.

Poor and rich there will always be, but this does not take away the fact that one is too poor and the other too rich; and it is this grievance that covetousness and miserliness refuses to reverence.

The one ever increases store, though he knows that by adroitness and cleverness the other is outdone.

He who dares to do this and succeeds comes to power. That power has honor and distinction. The great masses go out of the way before it. And in this way, the effort to make money, to lay up fortunes, to be mighty owners of vast sums of money, like a poisonous fever attacks the entire national constitution, and thereby tears it away from every higher ideal and holier calling, and so brings the *Woe unto you!* of almighty God upon the whole national existence.

Until even the purest that is known on earth, the love between husband and wife and the sacred honor of marriage, ends by coming under that *Woe!*

One chooses a wife, not because he loves her person, her soul, her real self, but because he loves her money, her house, and the landed estates she brings with her.



And do not say that this occurs among the higher classes, but that such eagerness for money and property, such passion for possession avenged of God at the sacrifice of others, is not found among ordinary burghers and farmers, or among the lower classes.

For facts deny this assertion.

*In more than
one company,
and in more than
one house,
it has already
come to pass that
not the man has money,
but money the man.*

Among the children of God there is indeed among the lower classes a most estimable group of people who truly live soberly, labor diligently, earn reasonable wages, and lay nothing by, but at least comparatively *give* and *communicate* with a generous hand and take more pleasure in *generosity* than in *hoarding*.

But that is not the national spirit.

And he who overhears our young men when they talk of their future, and our merchants when after their work is done freely express their mind, and our farmers when they make plans for the future, and our fishermen when they put out their eel-baskets in the water, observes, alas, all but too surely and too constantly, that in the blood of our people the fever of money-greed and covetousness throbs all too excitedly, even ever more so.

If anywhere, the fever-thermometer at this point indicates most ominous figures.

One thinks of money, dreams of money, chases after money.

In more than one company, and in more than one house, it has already come to pass that not the man has money, but money the man.



This is extremely dangerous, because the boundary between what is conformable to duty and what is *admissible* on one side, and what is *sinful* and what is *accursed of God* on the other, is not clearly evident.

Am I not right in my business to be on the alert? The answer is: To neglect it would render you guilty. You must be zealous, and be zealously on the watch, in the calling wherein God has placed you.

And so it is asked: Am I not permitted to earn money and lay by for wife and child? Again the answer sounds: He who merely looks out for himself, and at his death, by his own fault, leaves wife and child behind in destitute circumstances, stands guilty before God.

But further along comes in the difficulty.

One lives, a family lives. Those persons are creatures

of God, and they have no thought of the Lord their God. They have a soul, and that soul they leave to starve, to become barren and impoverished. They are on the way to an eternal fatherland, and up to their death they are merely concerned about houses and fields, about money and goods, here on earth.

They think of nothing else. They speak of nothing else. In their beds they dream of it.

So are father and mother.

They beget children. Those children drink in that selfsame Mammonistic spirit. The poisonous money-fever takes hold of them also.

So the entire family becomes a small Mammon-temple.

With neighbor at the right and neighbor at the left it goes the same way. So the city-spirit is corrupted. Presently also the spirit of our towns and villages. In the end the spirit of the nation as a whole is infected.

And then comes the *Woe unto you!* from the Lord Jehovah upon such a people, and ripens it for destruction.




Only one spirit goes in against this and offers an antidote.

That is the Spirit of Christ, that is the Spirit of God, who speaks in His interpreters and witnesses, the Spirit of the Word.

And therefore it is so dreadful when Christians also are infected by this insatiable, deeply ignoble, spirit of Mammon.

For then there is no more deliverance. Then the horror has penetrated into the sanctuary. Then the altar of Mammon is carried into the holy places, and by His own children God the Lord is provoked to His face.

Let it be said therefore to all Christian households and be bound upon the heart, to testify against that unholy spirit; to banish that unholy Mammon-spirit from their midst; to make not money, but God their *highest good*; and not less than by large, generous, if needs be extravagant, generosity to lift the *ban*, which *because* of money and *through* money rests upon so many a Christian household. 

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the “Good Christian Schools” (2)

The “Good Christian Schools”

Church Order, Article 21 calls Protestant Reformed officebearers, and by implication the Protestant Reformed Seminary, to promote “good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed

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Convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary were held on September 5, 2012 at South-west Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville. The text of Prof. Cammenga’s address on that occasion continues here. First installment of the address can be found in the February 1, 2013 issue, p. 203.

according to the demands of the covenant.” Thus far we have noticed that the calling is to promote good Christian *schools*, communal schools, schools to which the parents send their children and where they are instructed by others who stand in their place, the Christian school teachers. We also noticed that these schools are *parental schools*. It is not a government-run and government-funded public school, nor a church-operated parochial school, but a school owned and operated by like-minded parents.

In the third place, these good Christian schools are *Reformed* Christian schools. Church Order, Article 21 is the Church Order of the Reformed churches. It has

its roots in the Reformed churches of the Lowlands. The “good Christian schools” are certainly schools that are “good” from an academic point of view, and the importance of academic excellence in these schools must not be minimized. But these schools are “good” Christian schools especially from a spiritual point of view. They are good *Christian* schools in distinction from the Christ-less public schools, under the dominion of the philosophy of humanism and evolution, and where immorality abounds.

As Reformed Christian schools, they are schools founded on the basis of the Reformed confessions. The teachers subscribe to the Reformed confessions. And the content of the instruction is in harmony with Holy Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed confessions. The Reformed world-and-life view is taught in these schools. And the Reformed view of the Christian life as gratitude and obedience to God by keeping His good commandments is included in the curriculum, as well as exemplified in the teachers and enforced in the daily life of the school. It is the death of the schools as distinctively Reformed Christian schools that they repudiate the Reformed confessions and distinctively Reformed way of life. Time and again, Christian schools have done this in order to make a broader appeal, in the hope of increasing diminishing enrollment and income. And invariably the result has been the loss of the distinctive character of the Christian schools. They have sacrificed doctrinal integrity for numbers and dollars. And the irony is that, for the most part, this has not been adequate to save the majority of these schools from closing their doors.

Fourth, for us these good Christian schools are *Protestant Reformed* Christian schools. These are the good Christian schools that are to be promoted by Protestant Reformed officebearers and by the Protestant Reformed Seminary among the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Not only are we not satisfied with the public schools, the atheistic, antichristian public schools. But neither are we satisfied with the existing Christian schools, where the error of common grace has had very detrimental effects both on the philosophy of the education and the instruction given. Besides, this false teaching has also worked itself out in the lifestyle of those who have embraced it, a lifestyle antipathetic

to the antithetical lifestyle of the Reformed faith, which teaches the children that we are called to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. In many of these schools the education stands in the service of the unbiblical endeavor to “Christianize” the world, in order to usher in the kingdom of God on this present earth.

To be sure, where it is not possible in the providence of God to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian school, our people make use of the best options available to them, including the existing Christian schools ordinarily. Our people use these schools thankfully. They make use of them until such a time as the Lord makes possible the establishment of our own Protestant Reformed Christian school or our own Protestant Reformed Christian high school. But the *good* Christian schools are Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Here our children are instructed in harmony with our religious convictions. Here our children are instructed by teachers who believe as we believe. And here they establish friendships, many of them lifelong friendships, with those who are one with them in the faith of the gospel. These, for us, are the “good Christian schools” of Church Order, Article 21.

Promoting the Basis for the “Good Christian Schools”

But how, in principle and practically, are these good Christian schools to be promoted? And, more specifically, how is the Protestant Reformed Seminary to be involved in the promotion of these good Christian schools?

The Protestant Reformed Seminary involves itself in the promotion of the good Christian schools by faithful instruction of its students in and faithful defense of the doctrine of the gracious, unconditional, unilateral covenant of God established with elect believers and their Head in the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by promise also with the children of elect believers in their generations.

This is the principle upon which the Christian school rests, and must rest: God’s covenant with believers and their children. In the covenant, God promises to save believers and the children and children’s children of believers. This is “the promise” essentially as it is referred to throughout Deuteronomy 6: (v. 3), “as the Lord

God of thy fathers hath promised thee"; (v. 10), that which the Lord thy God did "sware unto thy fathers"; (v. 23), the Lord fulfilled all "which he sware unto our fathers."

This promise is not a conditional promise, made with all the children who are baptized, which promise is dependent on the child's acceptance of the conditions of the promise and cooperation with God in fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant. The promise of God is not a universal promise that depends for its efficacy on the sinner, in this case the sinful child born to believing parents. The Protestant Reformed Churches repudiate the conditional covenant, and its bastard offspring, the Federal Vision. The conditional covenant is by *implication* what the Federal Vision is *openly and publicly*: a denial of all the tenets of the gospel of sovereign, particular grace. In our day, the Federal Vision has taken the conditional covenant to its logical and necessary conclusion. This is no basis for a "good" Christian school.

The good Christian school rests on the biblical and confessional truth of the unconditional covenant of grace. This is the truth that our part in the covenant is the fruit of God's grace in the covenant; that our part in the covenant is the thankful response of obedience for covenant grace already received; that our part in the covenant is the response of faith, which is the work in and gift of God to the elect believer. Our part in the covenant is not compliance with conditions fulfilled in order to become a member of the covenant, nor conditions fulfilled in order to remain in the covenant. Our part in the covenant is gratitude—thankful obedience, which is the sphere in which the friendship and fellowship of the covenant come to expression and are enjoyed.

This is Article 21 of the Church Order. Officebearers are to promote the good Christian schools in which parents have their children instructed "according to the demands of the covenant." The "demands of the covenant" of grace are at the basis for the establishment

of the good Christian schools. Not the "conditions" of the covenant, but the "demands" of the covenant. The establishment and maintenance of the good Christian schools is grounded in the covenant of God, God's covenant of grace with believers and their children.

I dare say that the Protestant Reformed Seminary is the only seminary in the entire world, at least the only seminary of which I am aware, that teaches the truth that God's covenant, both in its establishment and in its maintenance or administration, is unconditional and unilateral. Even when there was controversy within the Protestant Reformed denomination in the early 1950s, controversy that resulted in the schism of 1953 in those churches, the Protestant Reformed Seminary never wavered. Its professors made not one concession to the Liberated doctrine of the covenant, which was essentially the Heynsian view of the covenant, which was the conditional covenant view. The seminary stood firm, and that firm stand of the seminary contributed in no small degree to the survival of the denomination and its preservation, by God's grace, in the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace.

This is the basis, the only basis, for the good Christian schools. This is the only basis, because having the truth of the unconditional covenant as the basis of the schools, God Himself is the basis of these schools, the fundamental truth about God Himself. That is the most solid basis that it is possible to have.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary fulfills its responsibility to Church Order, Article 21, its responsibility for the promotion of the good Christian schools, by teaching the young men preparing for the ministry the truth concerning the covenant of grace. Thus, the seminary prepares these men to preach and to teach this truth after they are ordained as ministers of the gospel. What an invaluable service to the churches!

This is not to take away from the contribution and the responsibility in this regard that the professors themselves have in their own writing, teaching, and

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preaching in the churches. In their sermons, in their writing for the *Standard Bearer* and the seminary's own *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, and in the books they publish, in the lectures and classes that they lead in the churches (as, for example, Prof. Dykstra's classes on the schism of 1953 held in a number of our churches, in addition to which he is also researching and writing on the subject of Christian education while on sabbatical), in all their work in the denomination, professors past and present, active and emeritus, fulfill their responsibility in regard to Church Order, Article 21. This is certainly an important as-

pect of the seminary's promotion of the good Christian schools.

But chiefly the seminary fulfills its responsibility to Article 21 by the training of the future ministers and missionaries of the denomination and our sister-churches in the biblical and consistently Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Having received this training, the young men go out into the churches equipped to promote the good Christian schools, the schools "in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."

... to be continued. 

The History of the Office of Elder (6) After the Reformation

God used the great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century to restore the office of elder to its rightful place in the church of Christ—particularly in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Having treated this restoration in our last article, we now conclude our treatment of the history of the office of elder by noting some highlights of this history after the time of the Reformation, and making a concluding analysis of this history.

Creedal Expressions

It belongs to the history of the office to note that the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions speak often and rightly of this office.

Because we quoted from the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons in our last article, we will not quote from it now. However, we must bear in mind that this form is a minor confession of Reformed churches—"minor," not because its authority is less

than other creeds or confessions, but because it speaks to just one area of Reformed teaching and practice, that being the office of elder and deacon in the church. The writing of this form and continued use of this form were one way in which Reformed churches set forth their understanding of the office of elder.

That the churches should have the office of elder in them, and that the work of the office involved spiritual oversight and the exercise of Christian discipline, was codified in the church orders of the reformation era. Chapter 4 of the "Articles of Wesel, 1568" was entitled "Concerning the Elders." While too lengthy to quote in full here (three pages in DeRidder's translation),¹ this early document relating to the office of elder is worth summarizing. Among other things, this chapter:

- stipulates that the elders (along with the minister) form the consistory, and are required to meet regularly as a consistory; and that if they must meet as elders in the ministers' absence, they are "obligated faithfully

¹ Richard R. DeRidder, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches*, by P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), 30-32.

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2013, p. 153.

to reveal to the ministers the reason why the consistory meeting was held as well as what was dealt with there.”

- requires that each elder must “diligently keep watch over his own parish or district, and visit the members under their care from house to house at least once a week,” with a view to instructing them and carrying out spiritual oversight, as well as requiring them to visit the sick. It also sets forth the benefits of dividing the church into geographical districts, better to carry out this oversight.

- provides for the election and installation of elders, emphasizing the need that these be men qualified in accord with the inspired word of the apostle Paul (Titus 1; I Tim. 3).

The church orders of the Provincial Synod of Dordrecht (1574), the General Synod of Middelburg (1581), and the National Synod of 'sGravenhage (1586) are early versions of what was later set forth in the Church Order of Dordrecht (1618-1619).² The latter document requires the office to be found in the church (Art. 2), and regulates the duties of the office (Arts. 16, 22, as well as sections three and four), election to the office (Arts. 22, 27), and other matters regarding how the elders do their work (section two).



The office of elder is prominent not only in Reformed Church Orders, but also in the creedal statements of Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

Although our Heidelberg Catechism does not use the term “elder,” its teaching that the exclusion from the Lord’s Supper of those who declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly “is the duty of the Christian church” (Answer 82), and that this is carried out by “those who are thereunto appointed by the church” (Answer 85), presupposes the existence of the office of elder, and suggests the necessity of the office, in the church of Christ.

The Belgic Confession is explicit. All Reformed believers confess in Article 30: “We believe that this true church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in His Word, namely,

² The interested reader can find these church orders in Richard R. DeRidder’s book, 59ff.

that there must be ministers or pastors...; also elders and deacons....” Article 31 speaks of how such are to be chosen to office, and Article 32 of the necessity of Christian discipline.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 30, makes clear that the church must have its officers, “distinct from the civil magistrate,” to carry out the work of censure. The Presbyterian Form of Church Government speaks of “other church-governors” in addition to pastors, teachers, and deacons, and makes clear that these “other church-governors” are those that “reformed churches commonly call Elders.”



That the place of the office of elder in Reformed and Presbyterian churches is given creedal expression is significant in at least three ways.

First, it indicates that the restoration of the office of elder at the time of the Reformation was no passing fad, no half-hearted attempt to bring back what the early New Testament church enjoyed, but was true and full restoration.

Second, it indicates that Reformed and Presbyterian churches as a whole enjoyed the benefits of this restoration—the place of the office of elder in such churches was universally and authoritatively recognized in such churches. Not just the churches in the Netherlands or in Scotland; not just some congregations here and there; but all Reformed churches agreed on the need for and place of the office of elder. Reformed believers and churches consider the existence of this office an essential matter.

Third, ever since the 1500s and 1600s, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have had clear guidance regarding the place of the office in the church. Regardless of whether or not Reformed and Presbyterian churches today adhere to their confessional statements regarding the place of the elder in the church, the fact is that they have a clear witness and testimony regarding what that place must be.

The Office Preserved

In Reformed churches today, the office still exists.

That the office exists in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, and in our sister churches (the

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore and the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland), both members and friends of these churches are well aware.

But the office exists not in these churches only; in all American churches that are Reformed in name and in heritage, the office exists—including the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CANRC), Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRC), the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations (HNRC), the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC), the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), as well as a number of Presbyterian church bodies in North America, and in Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world.

To say that it exists in these churches is not the same as saying that these churches regulate the office according to the Scriptures *in every particular respect*. Some of these denominations, contrary to God's revealed will, permit women to serve in the offices. In some, church discipline is not exercised as readily as it ought be, or in strict accordance with the Word of God—which is, in fact, a danger for every Reformed congregation. Within any Reformed congregation, including those in the Protestant Reformed Churches, care must be taken that the elders do not become lax in their work or personal life. In these and other respects, the office of elder in every Reformed *congregation*, not to mention *denomination*, must strive to be always reforming.

But to say that the office exists in these churches is to say that these churches view the office of elder as consisting of a plurality of persons, chosen from out of the congregation; that they view the essential work of the office as being the spiritual oversight of the church; and that they do ascribe to the elders the authority to discipline the members of the church.

That the office of elder continues in Reformed and Presbyterian churches since the time of the Great Reformation is not ultimately of man's doing, nor is it to man's praise. The office of elder continues, not because Reformed people want to follow "tradition," nor because of an allegiance to Calvin, and certainly not

because influential men want to retain their influence. Rather, the office of elder continues in Reformed and Presbyterian churches because God has opened the eyes of their members to see that this office is necessary in the church of Christ. Through the elders' faithful labors, Christ Himself rules His church. The members therefore benefit greatly from having these rulers and being subject to them.

That the office is preserved in these churches, therefore, is due to God's grace, and is a reason for thanksgiving.

Lessons We Learn from This History

Concluding our survey of the history of the office of elder, both in the Old and New Testaments, and throughout the history of the Christian church, we learn several lessons.

One is the necessity of the church having the office of elder in her midst. The church must not let the state govern her (the Erastian form of church government); she must not let one man govern her (which would be hierarchy); and she must not let a majority of her members dictate how she lives (which is what congregationalism does). She must have this office in her midst, because through it Christ Himself works to rule His church.

Second, we learn that Satan seeks to destroy the church, among other ways, by causing the church to minimize the necessity of the office of elder, or causing the church to permit her elders to do what does not really belong to their office. Against this we must guard.

Third, we are reminded that God always defends and preserves His church. Especially at the time of the Protestant Reformation, He used men to restore this office to its rightful place; but since then, by preserving the office in true churches, He preserves His church!

All this has several implications for us.

If Christ rules His church through *elders*, and if the office of elder has been preserved especially in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the child of God ought to seek to join such a church.

And the church and individual children of God ought be fervent in prayer: "Lord, continue to show Thy love to us in causing us to appreciate the elders Thou hast given, and in giving us elders until Christ Himself returns." ❧

A Goal in the Philippines: Self-supporting Churches (1)

Money plays a significant role in missions. In fact, we could not do mission work without it. We need money in order to investigate fields. We need money to prepare men to be missionaries, and to support those men and their families as they do the work on our behalf. We need money for mission field expenses, such as travel, literature, conferences, ministerial training, etc. Few would disagree that the work of preaching the gospel in all the world with a view to establishing Reformed congregations cannot be accomplished without money.

This raises vital questions regarding the wise use of that money on the mission field. And these questions are especially significant when we are doing mission work in countries where a significant economic disparity exists between us and those among whom we labor. While we have an abundance, at times those who are the objects of our mission work have nothing extra, and even struggle at times to find their daily food. While we are able to give generously to the churches, for them it can be difficult to provide for the causes of Christ's kingdom.

As we do our work in such circumstances, we face many questions with regard to the use of money. How much money should we provide for those among whom we labor? Is it proper to use our wealth to help cover the regular expenses of the local churches? Is it wise to provide support for local pastors? Should we purchase,

or at least subsidize the cost of, church land and church buildings?

It all comes down to this question: How ought we to use our money such that we do not jeopardize the work of establishing self-supporting churches?

In previous articles we considered how we are to establish indigenous churches that are self-governing and self-propagating. Now we face what is perhaps the most difficult matter, that of churches being self-supporting.

How is a self-supporting church established?

Perhaps a good way to answer this question is by means of a few anecdotes that indicate what not to do in order to achieve this goal. These are true stories. They come from an article entitled "Unhealthy Dependency vs. Sustainability," written by Rev. Joel L. Hogan.¹

Concerning work in Liberia, in West Africa, Rev. Hogan writes:

A group of visitors went to Africa. They wanted to help poor people, so they visited a village and met with the leaders and others who lived there. The group asked about what their needs were. Other visitors had come to the village before, so the villagers were used to these kinds of questions. They told the visitors that they needed jobs, money, food, better homes and clean water. The visitors got together and decided that they could get the money together to put in a well for the people of the village. They told the people of the village that they would be back to put in a well, and everyone was happy. The visitors went home and told stories about

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¹ Rev. Joel Hogan is director of the Christian Reformed World Missions of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

how people were getting sick because of unclean water and soon collected enough money to pay for the well and for their return trip to Liberia. The villagers in Liberia waited for the visitors to return to dig a well for them. Finally, the well was dug, the pump installed, and everyone celebrated when the water came out of the spout. However, what the visitors didn't know was that wells need regular maintenance. Rubber gaskets wear out, parts break, and it costs money to repair the well. After a few months, the pump broke and it no longer pumped water. The villagers, who had no money and were used to getting along without a well, just decided that they could not afford to fix it. The well sat unused for several months, until one night someone stole the entire pump. Now there is only a small hole in the cement where the pump once was. No one in the village ever heard from the visitors again and once again there is no clean water.

Rev. Hogan provides another account that demonstrates the same problems. This story comes from mission work in the Dominican Republic.

Work teams from USA and Canada frequently come to the DR [Dominican Republic] to build churches and other buildings. One such group came and built a church in a rural area. The resources used to build the church were overwhelmingly outside resources. The work team came with almost all the money for building supplies and with a work team and western equipment to get the building up in record time. The work team went home happy and the local group was happy with a church building. However, about 5 years later, they called a missionary and said, "Could you send those people back here. The church needs painting." In their minds, they didn't own the building. In their minds, they were recipients and depended on outside resources even to paint their church building.

I trust we would all agree that digging wells and putting up buildings is not true mission work. But the

point made in these accounts is clear—funneling money and resources into a mission field does not produce self-supporting churches. Instead, it produces churches that are dependent. It produces churches that are unable to do anything (or have been led to think they either cannot or should not do anything) apart from those who gave them what they have.

Two other authors make a similar observation when they write:

The sad truth is that...all around the world one can find donated equipment that is rusting away, latrines that have never been used, community associations that have disbanded, and projects that disintegrated soon after the nonprofit organization left town.²

On account of our wealth, it is difficult for us not to fall into the above mentioned practices in our mission work. The following factors might tempt us to do so.

First of all, as wealthy westerners we are well able to hand out money toward the needs of those among whom we are working in poorer countries. In comparison to what our own churches and members have, the amount that is needed for food and clothing, or even for land and buildings, is minimal. We can give large sums of money without having to make personal financial sacrifices.

Secondly, we are tempted to allow the distribution of money to be an activity that soothes our consciences with regard to the calling and obligation to do mission work. It makes us 'feel good' to give generously to others. It perhaps soothes our consciences, too, of the sense of guilt we might have for being as wealthy and prosperous as we are. And so we give, and convince ourselves that we have fulfilled our obligation to be ac-

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² Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), Kindle Edition, Loc. 2200/4541.

tively involved in the spread of the gospel throughout the world.


Thirdly, we are tempted to distribute money because it is an easy way (or so it seems) to do mission work. Not much sacrifice is needed. We can remain in the comforts of our affluent lifestyle. We do not have to vex our souls over the difficult questions of how much money to distribute, to whom to give it, how often to give it, etc. All we need to do is to share our wealth with those who are poor. Mission work is easy—just send money to the mission field for the people to use as they see fit.

Fourthly, we are tempted to hand out money because doing so can appear to be a very effective way of doing mission work. It produces results. Hundreds (or thousands) come to hear the Word. Churches grow numerically, and do so in leaps and bounds. And even if some may initially come for the wrong reason (financial gain), the fact is they still come. Surely that gives us the opportunity to teach them the truth.

Finally, we are tempted to be liberal with our money

in light of the injunction of Scripture to show love in concrete ways to brothers and sisters who are in need. “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:15-16). We say to ourselves, “Doesn’t this mean that we ought to be generous with our money and resources to anyone who is at a lower economic level than we are?”

Aside from the fact that some of these motives do not constitute proper Christian giving, it is also true that it is not always proper or wise to distribute money in this way. This is not the way to do mission work. Nor is it effective. It is not the method that avoids dependency and encourages and guides churches to become self-supporting.

So, what is the proper way in which to distribute and utilize money in missions? How can we effectively establish self-supporting congregations? We will consider these matters in our next article, the Lord willing. 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele, *Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explored* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2012). Pp. 165. \$12.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The purpose of this book is commendable: an overview of the biblical doctrine of the covenant that will introduce this essential truth to Reformed and Presbyterian believers.

Sacred Bond gives brief explanations of all the important aspects of the covenant, from the source of the covenant in the “covenant of redemption” to the new covenant, including also the covenant with Adam in Paradise, the covenant with Noah, the Abrahamic

covenant, the Sinaitic covenant, and the Davidic covenant. There are references to the main passages of Scripture teaching all the aspects of the covenant and brief explanations of these passages.

That the book fails to achieve its purpose is due to two serious faults. The explanation is not precise and consistent. And it is doctrinally erroneous in important respects.

The imprecision and inconsistency concern, chiefly, the definition, or basic description, of the covenant, no minor matter. The title of the book suggests the correct definition and right description: the sacred bond (of communion) between God and His elect people in Jesus Christ. Here and there, throughout the book, the authors renew the description of the title, referring to the covenant as a “relationship” and as “communion.”

But the formal, authoritative, and controlling definition identifies the covenant as an “agreement that creates a relationship with legal aspects” (11). The

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

emphasis throughout on conditions and conditionality indicates that the authors meant by “agreement” what the word signifies.

An agreement is not a sacred bond, or relationship. As the definition expresses, at best an agreement can *create* a relationship. When its mutual stipulations are violated, an agreement can also *destroy* a relationship.

As if this confusion were not enough, there is yet another description of the biblical covenant: a promise. The important administration of the covenant with David—the “Davidic covenant”—is defined as “God’s promise to David,” etc. (123).

A promise is neither a sacred bond nor an agreement, but something quite different from both. Theologically, the concept of covenant promise (by God) *contradicts* the concept of covenant as mutual agreement.

Similarly, it is contradictory to assert, on the one hand, that “the covenant of redemption was not a ‘plan B’ to fix the mess Adam made, but the original blueprint for the work of Christ” and, in the same breath, to assert that God’s plan regarding Christ was “to remedy the disastrous results of the first Adam’s failure to fulfill the covenant of works in the garden of Eden and bring humankind to glory” (23).

The explanation of this contradiction is the authors’ conviction that Adam might have accomplished for all humans what Jesus Christ accomplished only for some, that is, the meriting of eternal, heavenly, immortal life. Christ, therefore, was not decreed as the Savior whose purpose was served by the covenant with and the fall of Adam, but was planned by God merely as the (partial) “remedy” of the failure of Adam.

More grave is the inconsistency, indeed the contradiction, concerning the Sinaitic covenant, that is, the covenant established with Israel at Sinai. The book describes that covenant both as an administration of the covenant of grace, established originally with Adam in the promise of Genesis 3:15 and then with Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and as a republication of the covenant of works (as the authors see and call it) with Adam before the fall. As a republication of the covenant of works, the covenant with Israel put that nation in the position that “Israel’s standing before God... rested on their keeping of the law.... The people’s law-keeping was their merit or righteousness before the

Lord” (110). “The Mosaic covenant is compared to a business deal...” (111).

The authors suppose that they relieve this contradiction by distinguishing eternal benefits from temporal blessings and the heavenly Canaan from the earthly. But the fact remains that on their view the Sinaitic covenant was not *wholly* an administration of the covenant of grace. In an important respect, it was the imposition upon the people of God of a covenant of works and merit. And the apostle’s answer in Galatians 3:19-24 to his question, “Wherefore then serveth the law?” must be significantly qualified. In a certain respect, the law was indeed “against the promises of God.”

This leads to the second fault of the book: It is doctrinally erroneous.

This reviewer marvels at the error, in light both of the identity of the authors and of the contemporary development of the doctrine of the covenant that these authors espouse. This development is the heresy of the Federal Vision. The heresy has grievously troubled the denominations to which the authors belong. One of the authors is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; the other is a minister in the United Reformed Churches.

The Federal Vision is, as it advertises itself as being, the natural, inevitable development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. Out of the theology of the covenant as a conditional agreement between God and men comes the denial of justification by faith alone, as of all the doctrines of grace.

In their exposition of the covenant, the authors of *Sacred Bond* show no awareness of the covenant heresy and its root. If they are aware, as one cannot imagine they are not, they have learned absolutely nothing from the heresy and its dreadful effects in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, including their own.

The biblical covenant confessed and explained by Brown and Keele is conditional from stem to stern, from source to fulfillment. The “covenant of redemption,” whence the covenant and the covenant Christ originate, is a conditional agreement between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, with the Holy Spirit chipping in that He will apply the covenant.

Likewise, the book presents the covenant with Adam as a conditional pact between God and Adam—a “cov-

enant of works.” Doing full justice to the word “condition,” the authors declare that Adam could very really have merited eternal life by his obedience (44-46). Everlastingly, Adam and the entire human race might have shouted and sung in heaven about the highest life and supreme blessedness, “This is what we earned. Glory be to us!”

Although the authors recognize the covenant with Abraham as unconditional, they go on to describe the new covenant with believers and their children, which is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, as conditional: “Its [the new covenant’s] condition is, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ’” (138). As though the Canons of Dort had never exposed the Arminian heresy as teaching that faith is the new covenant condition of salvation, rather than obedience to the law in the old covenant (Canons, 2, Rejection of Errors: 4), the authors of *Sacred Bond* distinguish the new covenant from the old thus: “Its [the old covenant’s] condition was, ‘Do this and you will be blessed’.... The new covenant, on the other hand, is based on God’s promise to save sinners. Its condition is, ‘Believe...’” (138).

As for the covenant with Noah, that, according to *Sacred Bond*, was “the common grace covenant” (73). God made that covenant with “all humanity descended from Noah” (77). The covenant with Noah expresses God’s grace toward reprobate, God-hating, depraved sinners and bestows God’s blessings upon them, apart

from the righteousness of the cross, in “sunshine, rain, food, and possessions.... They are common graces from God, and the Noahic covenant gives God’s covenantal foundation for them” (75).

All humans have a grace of God in common. All humans alike are bound to God and to each other in a *divine covenant of grace*. God is bound, *in His covenant, graciously*, to the likes of Nero, Duke Alva, Hitler, Stalin, John Wayne Gacy, Richard Dawkins, and all those today whose rebellion against Him has reached the pitch of changing “the truth of God into a lie, and worship[ing] and serv[ing] the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25).

The authors put the blessing of God in the houses of all these wicked persons, where it may contend (successfully, the authors think) with the curse that God Himself has placed in these houses (see Prov. 3:33).

To this reviewer, it is irksome that Reformed writers illustrate holy, biblical truths by scenes or lines from profane movies. The Christian life need not, and ought not, be taught by a line that a Hollywood actor portraying the unbelieving Wyatt Earp spoke to another Hollywood infidel acting out the life of godless Doc Holiday (70, 71). Perhaps this is the Christian “culture” that characterizes the theology and practice of common grace. If so, it is another reason why Reformed Christians should repudiate common grace. ☞

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

Reflecting on the words of Psalm 84:2, “My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the LORD,” we call your attention to the anniversaries of the Hull, IA PRC, organized on March 16, 1925; the Doon, IA PRC, organized on

March 17, 1926; the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, organized on March 29, 1989; and the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, organized on March 31, 2009.

A recent bulletin from the Wingham, Ontario PRC reminded their congregation of an organized church skate on Saturday, February 16. The first hour was scheduled to be a free skate, while the second hour was reserved for hockey.

The Hope PRC in Redlands, CA asked for everyone’s help on February 16 to remove the driveway and grade for a new one at their parsonage. This event could never happen at a parsonage in one of our West Michigan communities in February. If there was any type of work bee, then it would be to remove snow from the driveway rather than remove the entire driveway.

The congregation of the George-

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

town PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to a picture/video program on Sunday evening, February 10. This program featured a report on the work done by Georgetown's delegation of Prof. B. Gritters, Rev. C. Haak, and Elder D. Wassink and their recent trip to the Reformed Christian Church in Vellore, India and the Grace Foster Home.

We were reminded recently of just how much our world continues to change with regard to increasing lawlessness. A new committee on Security and First Aid was organized at the Loveland, CO PRC, and from their first report to Loveland's Council we learn that it was decided to lock the entry doors to their church after the start of each worship service. This is the first line of defense in preventing any disruption during the worship service. A member will remain in the narthex for several minutes to allow entry to any late comers. Loveland now joins an ever growing list of our churches who have already implemented similar safety procedures.

The Activities Committee of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited their congregation to a fun-filled night of sledding and games on Saturday, February 9. Plans called for the congregation to meet at Johnson Park for sledding and tubing in the late afternoon, followed by pizza, dessert, and games at Hope PR Christian School.

That same day, February 9, the Program Committee of members of the Byron Center, MI PRC hosted their annual sliding party at Byron Center Christian Middle School.

Sliding was the main order of business for the afternoon, followed by dinner at Adams Christian School.

Evangelism Activities

The Reformed Witness Committee, comprised of our PR Churches in Iowa and Minnesota, along with the Dordt Bible Study of Dordt College, sponsored a lecture given by Prof. D. Engelsma entitled, "Christianizing the World?" on Friday evening, February 8. This topic promised to be a very timely one, well worth the hearing, especially as our young people continue to be bombarded with the call to "make this world a better place."

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada recently put three new pamphlets in the back of their church, hoping that those publications would be profitable in addressing acquaintances with regard to the truth of God's Word. The first was entitled, *The Proper Use of God's World*, by Prof. H. Hanko; the second, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* by Rev. A. Stewart; and the third, *The Kingdom of God*, by Prof. D. Engelsma.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI hosted their annual "Night of Music" on Saturday evening, February 2 at Grace PRC. Those there that evening enjoyed some great musical talent provided by Matt Fisher, Bryan Westra, The Fourthrights, Eric and Gabrielle Phelps and more. A free-will offering was taken to help defray the costs of this year's convention for the young people of Grace.

School Activities

Have you noticed, as we have, the many different announcements already crowding our church bulletins advertising for teachers needed? It seems these announcements grow more numerous and start earlier each year. We even notice that one church published the list elsewhere because of limited space on their bulletin.

Somewhat related to the above, we can also report that the members of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD met in January to discuss the possibility of forming a school society. At that meeting on January 28, the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws were approved, and the Association for PR Education was officially constituted. Three men from Heritage were also elected to the Board.

The members of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada also met together on January 24 to determine interest in their school society, discuss future plans for the school society, and elect new officers. This society is not new. Rev. J. Marcus writes that "he believes it was organized in the 80's, but had not met for years." Now obviously there is a renewed interest.

Minister Activities

Rev. D. Overway accepted the call from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI to serve as their next pastor.

Sunday, February 17, the Randolph, WI PRC voted to extend a call to Rev. Cory Griess, from Calvary PRC, to serve as their next pastor. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Rev. Steven and Nancy Key in the death of Nancy's mother,

MRS. RUTH BOSCH

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (II Thessalonians 2:16-17).

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

August Hollema, Vice President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to John and Sandra Heys and to their children and grandchildren in the death of Sandra's mother,

MRS. ANNA POORTINGA.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10)

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Alice Nederhoed in the death of her daughter,

JOYCE MORA.

May her comfort be found in God's Word in Psalm 23:4: "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."

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Dan Kiel, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Adult Bible Society of Doon PRC express their sympathy to Eugene and Karen VanDenTop in the death of Karen's mother,

GERTIE VAN ENGEN.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:17, 18).

Rev. D. Overway, President
Mary VanDenTop, Sec.

Wedding Anniversary

■ On March 18, 2013, D.V., our parents, **JIM and BETH KOERNER,** will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God with them on this joyous occasion. May they continue to experience the covenant mercies of Jehovah in their life together. "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 107:1).

- * Andrew
- * Joel
- * Joanna
- * Miriam
- * Matthew
- * Ruth

Wyoming, Michigan

Visit the
RFFPA website
www.rffpa.org
and listen to
audio sermons
from the archives of
the **PRCA**

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their Christian sympathy to Arlis Hoekstra and family in the loss of their husband and father,

JERRY HOEKSTRA.

May they take comfort in the words of our Lord Jesus in John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am."

Rev. D. Overway, President
Perry VanEgdom, Clerk

Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2013, 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 Doezema
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418

Reformed Witness Hour March 2013

Date	Topic	Text
March 3	"Joseph in Prison"	Genesis 40
March 10	"Joseph Remembered and Exalted"	Genesis 41:1-40
March 17	"Joseph, the Prime Minister"	Genesis 41:41-57
March 24	"Tetelestai—It Is Finished"	John 19:30
March 31	"Now Is Christ Risen"	I Corinthians 15:20