

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • May 15, 2012

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Looking to the Ascended Jesus

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

The previous verse instructs us to run with patience the race that is set before us. In that verse the Christian life is compared to a race that is to be run. This race is not a 100-yard dash, but an endurance race requiring great effort. Those who finish the race receive a crown. By this comparison, the Scriptures emphasize that the Christian life is difficult and strenuous, requiring great effort.

As we run this race, we are told to look to Jesus. He is the author and finisher of our faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God. Looking to Jesus, we will also be able to finish the race and claim the crown.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

We consider this instruction of our Lord Jesus in order to meditate on His ascension. It is true that Jesus' ascension is not mentioned here. Nevertheless, the basis for His ascension is set forth—His enduring the cross. And so is the result of the ascension—His being seated at God's right hand. Because of Jesus' ascension into heaven, we have someone to look to as we run the race of the Christian life.



Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.

There was a great deal of shame attached to the cross.

First, there was the shame of death by crucifixion. Death is never glorious but always humbling. This was especially true of death by crucifixion, in which a person died by inches, in delirium. In addition, crucifixion was the Roman form of capital punishment. What a shameful thing, to be executed as a criminal.

Secondly, Jesus' crucifixion was shameful in that He was publicly shamed and repudiated by the same people He came to minister to. This is emphasized in verse 3, "for consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself."

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But Jesus' crucifixion was especially shameful because it was the accursed death. By His death on the cross, Jesus endured all the punishment of hell for the sins of His people.

Yet Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.

Jesus went to the cross meekly, as a sheep to the slaughter. Being the Son of God, He had the ability to come down from the cross, as He was mockingly challenged to do by the taunting crowd. But He endured the cross, courageously and bravely suffering the full agony of its curse to secure the salvation of His people.

He did so despising the shame. To "despise" means to think little of something. This Jesus did with the shame of the cross. On the one hand, the suffering of the cross was overwhelming, as is evident from Jesus' agony in Gethsemane. On the other hand, Jesus thought very little of the shame of the cross. He considered it as nothing.

Jesus was able to do this because of the joy that was set before Him.

What a contrast! The shame of the cross over against the joy set before Jesus.

This joy is the joy of being set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This speaks of a position of honor and power. The one who sat at the right hand of a king was clothed with power and authority to rule the realm in the name of the king. Similarly, to be set at the right hand of the throne of God is to be elevated by God to the highest position of creation, clothed by God with power and authority to rule all things on behalf of God.

What joy to hold such position!

This joy was set before Jesus. It was set before Him in eternity as a reward for enduring the shame of the cross. It was set before Him in a special way on the Mount of Transfiguration, when in the presence of Moses and Elijah Jesus was given a little foretaste of the glory that awaited Him.

The joy set before Jesus was so great that the shame of the cross was not worthy to be compared to it.

And so, despising the shame, He endured the cross.

As a reward, He was set at the right hand of the throne of God.

This took place at Jesus' ascension, forty days after His death.

The ascension was a change of place. For thirty-three years Jesus lived, according to His human nature, on the earth. At the ascension, He left the earth in His human nature and now is in heaven.

The ascension was also an advancement in glory. On the basis of the perfect atonement of the cross, God raised Jesus from the dead. This was a wonderful transition from humiliation and shame to honor and glory. For the body Jesus received in the resurrection was a heavenly, glorified body. And then, at His ascension, and still on the basis of His perfect atonement, Jesus was given the joy that was set before Him by His being taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the throne of God.



As we run the race set before us, we are to look to the ascended Jesus. This look is to be the look of faith. We are to look to Him in faith.

The subject of the previous chapter is faith, where faith is described as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This emphasizes that faith is the inner conviction and confidence in God that He will keep all His promises for our future glory, in spite of what may seem contrary in this life. In this chapter the holy writer also demonstrates how the Old Testament saints lived victoriously in this faith. We know them as the Old Testament heroes of faith. Listed are such notables as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

With the same faith that they had we are to look to Jesus as we run the race set before us.

This brings us to the question, for what must we look to Jesus?

We must certainly look to Him as an example to follow. The Old Testament heroes of faith listed in the previous chapter are set for examples of those who have run the race and received the crown of glory. They serve as a great cloud of witnesses. But the great example of one who ran the race and received the crown is Jesus. Focus your eye on Him. By faith, follow His example. Do so blindly, trusting that, by following Him even into shame and humiliation, you will be exalted as He was.

But we must look to Jesus also for strength to run the race of the Christian life. How difficult this race is. It is a marathon requiring the utmost spiritual strength

and stamina. How our besetting sins weigh us down. How our sinful nature tires us. How the temptations of the world distract us. To finish the race is impossible on our own. Yet in Jesus Christ there is the strength to run this race and overcome every obstacle. For He sits at the right hand of the throne of God in power. Look to Him in faith. Look in such a way that you rely upon Him for all that you need in order to run the race of the Christian life. Look not to yourself. Look not to those broken reeds upon which the world relies. Fix your eye of faith solely on Jesus, who sits on the right hand of God.



Look to Jesus, remembering that He is the author and finisher of our faith.

That He is the author of our faith means that our faith originates in Him. No, faith does not originate in us. On account of the fall and the corruption it brought to the human race, we do not have even the ability to

believe. Faith must be given to us from above. Jesus works that faith irresistibly in the hearts of all those for whom He gave His life as an atonement for sin.

Jesus is also the finisher of our faith. He is the one who brings faith to completion, to its goal. And the completion or goal of faith is our own glory. For our glory Jesus died for us in shame—to earn it. For our glory Jesus also brings us to faith in Him so that we are empowered in Him to run the race that leads to glory.

Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith only because He has been set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For this reason we must look to Jesus.

He it is that gives us faith.

And He it is that will finish our faith, bringing us to glory.

Look to Him, that we may run the race set before us.



EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Pre-Synodical Report

What do you get for \$1.6 million?

The denominational labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches are directed by the annual synod. The churches empower the twenty delegates to govern the work of the churches in common. Synod also tells the churches what the work will cost monetarily. Each family is assessed a certain amount, collected by the local congregation as part of the budget of each.

The budgeted amount for all the labors of the churches in 2012

was over \$1.8 million. After adjustments for existing balances, that was reduced to about \$1.6 million. Each family is assessed \$871 for 2012. From the reports in the synodical agenda, the amount approved at the synod of 2012 for next year should not be a drastic change.

Now \$1.6 million is a lot of money. A tremendous amount of money. Yet, viewed another way, for the contribution of \$871 over one year's time, a tremendous amount of kingdom work is supported. And

here is another perspective: The per-family synodical assessment is about what the average tuition-paying family in the PRC pays—each month.¹

Every synod, and all the committees, are deeply conscious of their

¹ That is an estimate, based on budgets of Hope PR Christian School, Walker, and Covenant CHS. Hope's tuition is from \$413 per month (one in kindergarten) to \$1,019 per month (four or more in school). Covenant's families will pay from \$580 to \$1,305 per month. Many of these families (from Hope and Covenant) overlap.

responsibility before God to do the work to which He calls them—they answer to the King of the church. At the same time, they know that they must be good stewards of the money that God provides, which money the saints willingly contribute. All the committees spend conservatively. The committees rarely spend all that is allotted them, and the surpluses offset the budget for the next year.

Synod 2012 convenes June 12, D.V. The agenda is in. The agenda contains reports to the synod of the work of the various synodical committees. The committees ask for synodical approval of past labors, as well as of proposals for future labors. To put it differently, they report how they spent the money last year, and how they propose to spend it in the year following.

So, what do the Protestant Reformed Churches get for \$1.6 million?

Allow me first to point out what the PRC are NOT getting for their money. The synodical assessments are not financing agricultural programs, schools, hospitals, or abstinence programs. There are not reports on programs for drug awareness, race relations, better nutrition, the homeless, or HIV/AIDS. Nor is any of the money going to adoption agencies or orphanages.

Why not? Do not the members of the PRC care about any of these things? That would be the wrong conclusion to draw. The correct answer is: None of the above is “ecclesiastical” business, and therefore all are excluded from the ecclesiastical

assemblies. (Church Order, Art. 30: “In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner.”)

Christ commands His church to preach the gospel to all the nations, administer the sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline in the church. All three of those activities are the work of the local congregation. Yet the churches work together on projects, ecclesiastical matters, that one congregation could not do on its own. Synod’s work is strictly “ecclesiastical matters.”

Returning to the question, the answer is, first, that the churches’ money supports mission work. Solid, Reformed, God-honoring, church-establishing mission work. The larger portion is outside of North America.

Foreign Mission Work

The Foreign Mission Committee reports to synod on the diligent labors of Revs. Kleyn and Smit and their families in the Philippines. These men are involved in an amazing amount of labors that makes the reader feel a bit tired just reading of it—preaching, teaching, traveling. They are doing what they are supported to do—bring the gospel and the Reformed truths everywhere they can. Their report begins:

Our labors in the past year have for the most part consisted of a continuation of the work we reported on a year ago: in the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in Cubao (Manila), the All of Grace Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Gabaldon (Nueva Ecija), the First Reformed Church in Muzon (Bu-

lacan), the Christian Faith Ministry in Batasan Hills (Manila), and the Reformed Free Church in Inayauan (Negros Occidental). In addition to the above, we have also taken up regular work in the Maranatha Church in Valenzuela, Manila.

What we do not realize is all the extra work that goes on. Free of charge, if I may say. Let’s look in on some of the labors of the missionaries and committees of which most of us are unaware. Here is an excerpt from Doon PRC’s report:

First, the sub-committee of our council meets regularly with our missionaries via Skype, at least once a month, and usually on the fourth Thursday of the month. This committee thoroughly dissects the monthly field report provided by our missionaries and approves the labors of each man, as well as approving financial requests for reimbursement by Rev. Smit and Rev. Kleyn. We ask additional questions of the men to attempt to obtain the fullest understanding possible of the work there. The sub-committee reports heartfelt confidence in the men God has called to the field, and also an excellent working relationship with them.

Secondly, our council, at its monthly meeting each first Tuesday, treats recommendations of the sub-committee and meets also with our missionaries via Skype. This method of communication presents the entire council of nine men the opportunity to address our missionaries personally, and in an individual or a collective manner. We find this method to be very profitable....

The third method our council uses to evaluate the Philippine mission field is the annual sending of one of our members as part of a two-man delegation to the field of labor to observe and report on the work there. This was most recently accomplished from January 18-31, 2012....

And that is only Doon's council—the FMC itself meets regularly besides. And the FMC reports not only on the mission work in the Philippines, but of ongoing work in Myanmar, though the time is not right, they report, for a missionary there. All of this, to send forth the word to the nations wherever Christ sends.

Also included in the mission work supported by the churches is the Limerick mission in the Republic of Ireland. Rev. McGeown labors there faithfully and zealously. Our sister congregation, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, oversees the work, but is unable to finance it at this time. There can be no doubt that this is money well spent for the cause of the spread of the Reformed faith and the gathering of the church.

Domestic Mission Work

For our synodical assessment of \$871, the churches are able to support in common also the good work in Pittsburgh. Rev. Bruinsma continues to nurture the saints there in Reformed doctrine, walk of life, and church government—preparing them for organization, in God's time, D.V. He manifests a zeal to send the word out to other places as much as he is able.

The Domestic Mission Committee, desiring to call a second home missionary, reports on other investigatory work as they seek in particular a place where Christ gives an open door. They report that no place has been found that would justify calling a second missionary.

What we do not realize, again, are the many hours spent making sure that the work is carried on in a Reformed (i.e., biblical) way. The DMC reports on many hours of writing and meeting expended by missionary, calling church (Southwest PRC), and the missionary.

Both the FMC and the DMC wrestled much with the matter of giving missionaries a certain term of service on a conditional basis, and both come with separate proposals. If the minister and his family work well on the field, he would be given another term of service (and this is to be repeated, say, every three years). If not, the minister will be declared eligible for a call. The FMC adds the provision that the foreign missionary would not be eligible for a call during his term of service. Synodical delegates will have to judge whether or not these proposals 1) are in harmony with the Church Order, 2) are in fact equivalent to the manner in which a seminary professor is dealt with, and 3) will serve well the cause of missions. Synod will also need to harmonize the two proposals, at the very least the terminology.

A Seminary

A large portion of the synodical budget supports the Protestant Reformed Theological School in which

students are trained to be solid, Reformed preachers and pastors. Student numbers are down to but four, three preparing for the ministry in the PRC, and one, Vernon Ibe (pronounced like Ebay), preparing to be a preacher in the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines. Mr. Ibe completes his studies this year. His home church in the Philippines requested that the PRC synod examine their student, and the Theological School Committee recommends an exam that includes elements from the synodical as well as the classical exam. The TSC reports that next year's lone fourth-year student, Erik Guichelaar, plans to do his internship in Loveland PRC.

Among the many things that money cannot buy is the Christian spirit of Mr. Ibe. He is one among a thousand—a capable, diligent, and humble servant coming to a seminary in America who, after five years, remains steadfastly committed to returning to his native land. Vernon and his wife, Melody, cheerfully leave behind the comfort, the wealth, and the conveniences of America, zealous to bring the gospel to their own land and people. Such students, and their wives, are an inestimable blessing to the seminary. And, FYI, his financial support was not from the assessments, but from free-will offerings for foreign students.

The TSC also reports on the completed remodeling of the building (financed exclusively by private donations—bequests) resulting in a beautiful and functional building. They propose 1) holding off on Prof. Cammenga's permanent ten-

ure one year until his Th.M degree is complete; 2) hiring Mr. Charles Terpstra on a permanent basis and expanding his labors beyond that of librarian; 3) granting Prof. Dykstra a partial sabbatical to do research and writing on Christian schools; and 4) seeking release from the mandate to find a way to obtain instruction in the Dutch language for our seminarians.

Contact with Other Churches

Confessing from the heart that the church is “one, holy, catholic church,” the PRC have a standing committee (the Contact Committee) that seeks to manifest the unity of the church on earth as much as that is possible. The CC reports on the blessed relationship with the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, as close a sister as one could want. Part of the relationship includes a yearly visit to CPRCNI—a visit that includes a modified church visitation, a visit to the mission field in Limerick, and, generally, cementing the bond between us.

The renewal of a sister-church relation with Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore was approved at the synod of 2011. With joy the CC reports that CPRCNI has no objections to this relationship and, accordingly, the CC asks synod to confirm this relationship. In the last year, the new sister in Singapore endured the painful process of release of their pastor (not for sin, but according to Church Order, Art. 12). Because of the vacancy, the CC has supplied CERC’s pulpit as much as possible,

with CERC bearing the costs. The CC brings a proposal to synod to call, temporarily, a minister-on-loan for Covenant.

The CC reports on contact in Germany, with the BERG (Confessing Protestant-Reformed Congregation) and with Dr. Klautke. Dr. Klautke’s theological school has endured reproach and attack for standing faithfully for the infallibility of Scripture and the doctrines of sovereign grace. The CC plans to send two members to Germany this summer to encourage the saints and to seek closer unity in the truth.

The CC also reports that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, with whom we maintain a corresponding relationship, has suffered a blow in the loss of one of their ministers, who was granted release from his labors due to ill health.

Concerning the six churches in Namibia, visited two summers ago by Profs. Gritters and Dykstra, the CC informs synod that currently little advance is possible toward any official relationship. The six churches remain part of a larger body of apostatizing churches, and will eventually be forced to face the possibility of leaving their denomination. Unofficial contact is proposed, along with the translating of PRC material into Afrikaans.

The CC also reports on their delegation’s visit to NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). The CC brings a recommendation that the synod approve sending observers again this year.

Catechism Books

The churches in common maintain their own catechism curriculum. The Catechism Book Committee seeks to make improvements to these books as directed by synod. Their report indicates the seriousness with which they take their work. Delegates will see the fruit of their careful study and review of the Confessions book of the PRC, and the recommendations concerning the proof-texts given for the Heidelberg Catechism.

Ministers Emeriti

As part of the commitment of the PRC to the gospel ministry, the churches gladly support the ministers who have given their lives to the work of the gospel ministry. The Emeritus Committee brings requests for these eleven ministers and for one widow of a deceased minister. They bring no recommendation whether or not to change the minimum level of support.

Stated Clerk

Without fanfare, Mr. Don Doezema reports that he has done the ordinary work of the stated clerk. And that he has, with the capable assistance of Mrs. Doezema. And at as little cost to the churches as it could possibly be done.

Meetings of Classes

The synodical budget finances the meetings of Classis East and Classis West. The classes also send reports to synod. Among other things, both classes recommend to synod the support of smaller churches. Without this support,

these churches could not afford to call their own pastor, and the gospel would not be preached regularly from Protestant Reformed pulpits in Dyer, Roselle, Kalamazoo, Lynden, Edmonton, Lacombe, Spokane, Sioux Falls, or Wingham.

All that, only as a summary, you get for \$1.6 million.

But, it is not about money, is it? Finances are *an* aspect of the work of synod. God provides ministers, elders, and others who assist in the labors, the spiritual work of the church. He also provides the necessary funds.

Yet we are deeply conscious of the truth of Lord's Day 50 "that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessing."

Therefore pray for the blessing of God on the work of the Protestant Reformed Churches and on the labors of the PR synod in Crete, IL.

If you are in the area, do come to the pre-synodical service in Crete Protestant Reformed Church, Monday, June 11, at 7 P.M. And you are welcome to visit the examination of Seminarian Ibe on Tuesday morning and following, and the deliberations

of synod, most of which are open to the public.

And if you are in the Grand Rapids area, please join the seminary for the commencement of Mr. Ibe in First PRC on Tuesday, June 19 at 7:30. Prof. Cammenga will speak.

Pray for synod. The agenda is mainly "ordinary" and contains few controversial elements. Nonetheless, pray for the direction of the Spirit and the blessing of God. Without that, it is \$1.6 million that will testify against us. With His blessing, it will honor Him, and bless His people. ∞

EDITOR'S NOTE

Included in this Pentecost issue is a sermon by Prof. Engelsma on John 7:37-39. A year ago, a reader of the *SB*, having heard the sermon preached, recommended that this be printed in the *SB*. All agreed that it was worthy of printing, but the length of the sermon was a question. Articles of this length, common in the

"old days," we today ordinarily will split into two parts. But the sermon does not divide well. Since the sermon is not only edifying, but is also a fine model for ministers and seminarians, the editors decided to print the entire sermon in this issue.

—RJD ∞

FEATURE ARTICLE

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMASMA

Out-flowing Spirit of Jesus

(A Pentecost Sermon)

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

Sermon preached on Pentecost Sunday 2011.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

Introduction

When the Lord stood and cried these words, He was observing with the rest of Israel the Feast of Tabernacles. So we are informed in verses 2 and 14 of John 7. The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three main holy festivals, we could say, extended worship services, of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, as you may read in Leviticus 23. That extended worship service lasted seven days. The first day was a Sabbath, and then the eighth day (the day following) was also a Sabbath. And it was on that day, the great day of the feast, that Jesus spoke the words of our text.

During that holy festival, all of the males of Israel were to gather in Jerusalem for the worship of Jehovah God. There were two main purposes of the Feast of Tabernacles. One was that the people would celebrate and give thanks to God for the harvest of their crops, which was completed by this time.

The second purpose of God with this festival was that Israel would remember the hardships that they had endured during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They were to recall God's special care of them during those forty years in which He provided for them in wonderful ways—the manna from heaven, their clothes not wearing out, and God's bringing water out of the rock for them in that dry and thirsty wilderness through which they passed.

During the Feast of Tabernacles the people of Israel had to remember, in a curious way, God's care of them during the forty years of their wilderness wandering. The men had to dwell for seven days in little huts, or booths, that they made for that purpose out of the branches of trees. That is why this religious festival got the name that it had: the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, with reference to those little huts in which they dwelt. Evidently during the time of the forty years of the wandering of Israel in the wilderness, that was the kind of lodging that they had. And, of course, as they dwelled in those huts during the Feast of Tabernacles, they would remember that God brought their fathers and mothers safely through the wilderness and finally gave them the land of Canaan, in which they could dwell, as they were doing at the present time, in goodly houses.

The Feast of Tabernacles was therefore character-

ized by joy. It was a joyous, holy festival. The crops were in, so that the people could live physically. And they recalled with joy God's gracious unflinching care that had brought them into the land of Canaan. They were to show that joy during the Feast of Tabernacles in a peculiar way. They cut down branches of palm trees and waved those palm branches, expressing their great joy.

That Feast of the Tabernacles is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That is the meaning of Jesus' words on the last day of this feast: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. In me, by coming to me, which you do by believing on me, you have the reality of the Feast of Tabernacles and the real celebration of that Old Testament feast."

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of those Old Testament ceremonies. All of them. We observe the Feast of Tabernacles, but not by living in booths and remembering in a special way God's deliverance of Israel through the wilderness into Canaan, but by coming to Jesus Christ and believing on Him. He is the fulfillment of that Old Testament festival.

And yet, Jesus is the fulfillment of that Old Testament festival in such a way, so He teaches, that He bestows on us the Holy Spirit. According to our text: "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." The fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles is Jesus Christ pouring out His Holy Spirit upon the church on the day of Pentecost. And then, He is the fulfillment of that feast in this way: when we have received from Christ the Holy Spirit, that Holy Spirit flows out from us to others. Out of his belly, said Christ, shall flow rivers of living water.

With this text we observe Pentecost Sunday. Let us consider the Word of Christ: "The Out-flowing of the Spirit." We notice from the text, first, that this was a striking promise; second, that that promise speaks of a strange source of the Spirit; and, third, that in that connection Christ gives a stirring call.

A Striking Promise

When Jesus cried out with a loud voice at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink," He was promising the gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He was promis-

ing that great event of salvation that took place fifty days after His resurrection from the dead and ten days after His ascension into heaven—the pouring out of the Spirit, at that time, upon the 120 believers who, waiting for that Spirit, were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. And the signs of that gift of the Spirit, according to Acts 2, where that great event is recorded, were the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, tongues as of fire hovering above the heads of believers, and their speaking in many different languages.

That gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost had lasting effects for the church of Jesus Christ down the ages. That Spirit was poured out in such a way that He abides with the church and gives Himself to the individual elect members of the church to the world's last day. That Christ, in our text, was promising the outpouring of the Spirit is the authoritative explanation of those words by the apostle John in verse 39: "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." Christ promised the Spirit.

The promise of the Spirit was striking, first of all, because it implied that at that time the Spirit was not yet. That is exactly the explanation by the apostle in verse 39, for he adds: "for the Holy Ghost was not yet." Our Authorized Version inserts the word "given." When Jesus spoke those words the Spirit was not yet.

That cannot possibly mean that the Holy Ghost did not exist. For the Holy Ghost is one of the three persons of the blessed Trinity of God, and as one of the persons of the Trinity, shares in the perfection of being eternal. As the Father is eternal and the Son is eternal, so also the Holy Ghost is eternal. Hebrews 9:14 expressly describes the Holy Ghost as eternal. There never was a time when He did not exist. In the being of God, the Holy Ghost is always proceeding from the Father to the Son (as we read in John 15:26).

That the Spirit was not yet refers rather to the fact that when Jesus spoke these words (which was, of course, prior to His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven) the Spirit was not as the Spirit whom God would give to the man Jesus Christ, to be the Spirit of the man Jesus Christ. And then, as the Spirit of the man, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to be given by Jesus Christ to the church and to the individual members of the church.

That that is the meaning is indicated by what John adds in verse 39. After he has written "for the Holy Ghost was not yet," he adds, "because that Jesus was not yet glorified." When Jesus would be glorified, that is, when He would be raised from the dead as the One crucified for the sins of His people, and then exalted up into heaven in the ascension, and given all power over heaven and earth by God's seating the man Jesus at His own right hand, then the third person of the Trinity would become the Spirit of the man Jesus Christ. We read of that in Acts 2:33. On the day of Pentecost Peter, as the explanation of the outpouring of the Spirit, preached about Jesus to the crowd that was gathered in Jerusalem: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Upon the glorifying of Jesus, the Spirit becomes the Spirit of Christ.

That was a significant event for the third person of the Trinity, just as it was a significant event that, in the fullness of time, the second person becomes a human being in the womb of Mary. That may help us to understand what verse 39 means. Just as the man Jesus 'was not' before His conception and birth, so the Holy Spirit 'was not' before Jesus was glorified and the Spirit became the Spirit of Christ.

The Spirit's becoming the Spirit of Jesus Christ depended upon the glorifying of Jesus Christ. Only after Jesus is glorified could the Spirit bring this glorified Jesus to Jesus' church in the world. Only after Jesus is glorified can the Holy Spirit bring the beginning of the completion of salvation to each of us as a believing member of the church.

You see how Pentecost, in fact, was the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. At the time of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament, all of the harvest of the crops of Israel was safely in the barns and in the storehouses, ready for the use and enjoyment of the people. So now, after Christ is glorified at God's right hand in heaven, all of our salvation, having been completed by the cross and resurrection of Christ, is safely stored in the man Jesus at God's right hand, for us to begin to live from and to enjoy by the presence among us of the Holy Spirit.

Before Pentecost the Spirit was not, as far as the

church in the world is concerned. But after Pentecost the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus in us and for us. Before Pentecost the church of Jesus Christ in the world did not have and enjoy the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and the great salvation that is stored up in Christ. Now, after Pentecost, the church has that Spirit of Christ and enjoys the salvation that the Spirit brings to us from Christ.

It is not as though the church in the Old Testament did not have the salvation of Jesus Christ whatsoever. They did. There is only one salvation for God's people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. By faith Abraham had the forgiveness of sins, just as we have the forgiveness of sins. By faith the people of God in the Old Testament were made holy, just as we are made holy, delivered from the power of sin and freed to serve God. So it is not an absolute difference, as though the Spirit did not bring the salvation of Christ to the people of God in the Old Testament in any sense or degree whatsoever. But it is a matter of the richness and fullness of salvation that now the church enjoys through the Spirit who has become the Spirit of Christ. In the Old Testament, salvation was a kind of dribble, a very small stream. In the New Testament, after the outpouring of the Spirit, it is a river of salvation from Jesus Christ. We enjoy, already now, the abundance and the riches of salvation that the people of God in the Old Testament did not have.

And because of the difference of abundance, it is as though the Spirit was not yet then, but now is the Spirit of Christ to the church today.

That promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is striking, not only because it implies that the Spirit was not yet, but also because that promise teaches that the Spirit will flow out of us. The Pentecostal Spirit will flow out of us. Notice that. Speaking of the Spirit, the Lord promises, with regard to everyone who believes on Him, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." It is this kind of expression that makes the reading and study of the Bible exciting. There is always something surprising in it, maybe something that you never noticed before. What would you expect here, since the Lord is here promising the gift of His Spirit? You would expect Him to say, or expect John to explain Him as teaching, "This spoke he of the Spirit which

he would *pour out into* his people." But instead, the Lord's promise is this, that the Holy Spirit shall *flow out of* His people.

"Rivers of living water" in the text is a figurative description of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is as though the Lord says, "Out of his belly shall flow the Spirit as the Spirit of Me, the Messiah." This Spirit is aptly represented as water, and then *living water*. For the Spirit Himself is alive, and the Spirit is the worker of life wherever life is to be found. The Holy Spirit, by His work of providence, gives physical earthly life to every creature, whether that creature is a worm or a tree or a reprobate unregenerated unbeliever—every earthly creature has its, or his, physical life from the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. We sing that in one of the Psalters based on a Psalm: "Thy Spirit, O Lord, makes life to abound." Even the secular, unbelieving scientist finally admits that life is a mystery. The ultimate explanation of physical life defies the brilliance even of the PhD, the scientist. And that is because physical life originates in the mysterious Spirit of God.

But the reference in the text is not to physical life. The reference in the text is to spiritual life. Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water—the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is referred to here in His *operations*, His *saving* operations and works, and with regard to His *blessings*, His *saving* blessings, His gifts of salvation. The Holy Spirit bestows eternal life, communion with God. And sparkling on these rivers of water, which are the Holy Spirit, are the benefits of salvation, the pardon of sins and righteousness before God, holiness of life and the power to overcome sin in the world and in one's self, the hope of the resurrection of the body in the day of Jesus Christ, and all the other blessings of salvation.

This Holy Spirit, as the living stream of eternal life with its blessings of salvation, does not only flow *to* you as a church from Christ, but also flows *out of* you as the church of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of eternal life and salvation, not only flows *into* you personally as an elect, believing child of God, but also flows *out of* you as a believing child of God. That is the striking aspect of the promise. Pentecost is not only our reception of the Spirit, but is also the flowing out of the Spirit of Jesus Christ *from* us to others.

There are three ways in which it is true that the rivers of living water (which are, I remind you, the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself) flow out of the church and out of the believer to others.

First of all, the Holy Spirit flows out of the church to God. He does that by the public worship of God by the church, and by the church's thanking God in her songs and in her prayers, and also by the praise of God through the reading and preaching of the Scriptures in the public worship services of the congregation. You see, water always seeks its own level. The Holy Spirit, called the rivers of living water in the text, has His origin in God, through Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. Those rivers come down to us as salvation. But they must go back again to the level of their origin, which is heaven itself where God is. That is what is happening in the worship service. That is what the worshiping congregation is engaged in. That is what each one of us who is a living member of the congregation and joins in the worship from the heart is doing in worship. The Holy Spirit is flowing out from us, back to God, whence that Holy Spirit has come. That is the importance of the public worship of God by the church. That is why it is your calling individually to be here, if it is at all possible, every service of public worship that the church has. You are part of this body, are you not, who has received rivers of living water from the crucified and risen Christ. It is important to you, is it not, that you join with the church, so that these waters may flow back to God in the praise and thanksgiving and worship of Him.

If you stay away deliberately when you could and should attend, that guilty feeling you have is the working in you of the Holy Spirit, who wants to get out and flow back again unto God.

The second explanation of the flowing out of us of these rivers of living water is that the Spirit flows out of the church to all the nations of the world in missions and in evangelism. That is certainly what happened immediately after Pentecost. By the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit of Jesus Christ went into all the world among the Gentiles. There was reference to that, unwittingly, on the part of those who asked: "Is Jesus going to go away? Is He going to the Gentiles?" Yes, indeed, that is exactly where He is going to go, because the Spirit is going to flow out of the Pentecostal church

in the preaching of the pure gospel of salvation, for the salvation of all the nations in the elect among them. And we are thankful that that happened, because most of us are those Gentiles to whom the Spirit of Jesus Christ came after Pentecost in the gospel of salvation.

And still today, in the missions and the evangelism of the church, the Spirit goes out to others for the salvation of God's elect children. But also for the hardening and leaving without excuse of many others.

Then, the third way in which the Spirit flows out of the belly of the people of God is more personal, although there is a personal aspect to the other two instances as well. This instance is more individual. Notice that Christ is quite personal in verse 38: "He that believeth on me...out of his belly [individually] shall flow rivers of living water."

That takes place when we speak a true word from Scripture to each other, or, as we have opportunity, in witness to others outside the church. This refers to the father who is instructing his son. This refers to the mother who is teaching her daughter. This refers to the church member who goes to the hospital and opens up the Bible and gives a comforting word to someone who is in the hospital. This refers to a word that the believer must speak to a fellow church member when he sees that fellow church member walking in sin and thus headed on the way to destruction, a word of rebuke. Then these rivers of water, which are the Holy Spirit, are coming out of the belly of the individual child of God, flowing to his fellow believers especially (or, in the case of a witness, to an unbeliever).

Pentecost is not only the inflowing of the Spirit to the church and her members, but also the flowing out of the Spirit to others—to God, first of all; to the nations of the world; and then to each other.

There were two bodies of water in the Old Testament land of Canaan. One had not only an inlet, but also an outlet. That was the Sea of Galilee. That lake was alive, it was not stagnant. It was not dead. People could fish that lake; and they did. The other lake had an inlet, but it had no outlet. And it was aptly named: the Dead Sea. The Holy Spirit is no stagnant, dead water. He is living water. He makes His entrance into the church and into the believer and then He also flows outward, out of the believer.

A Strange Source

That immediately confronts us with the strangeness of the source of the Holy Spirit. The source is our belly. You would not expect that. You would expect that Jesus would have said something like this: Out of his mouth, or out of his heart, or out of his mind, or out of his soul, will flow these rivers of living water. But, no, out of his belly. Christ spoke here as a good Hebrew. The Hebrews of the Old Testament regarded the bowels, located deep in the belly, as the location of the experience of the child of God. That carried over in passages of the Bible that speak of “bowels of compassion.” Oh, when somebody dear to us, say a son or a daughter, is in deep trouble, deep distress, then a parent feels that trouble, and his compassion for that child, deep down in the stomach, in the bowels, in the belly.

We receive salvation in our heart. We know salvation with our mind. We experience salvation in our belly.

Experience is not the main thing with regard to salvation, but it is an important thing. The Holy Spirit not only gives to you and me salvation, but also the experience of salvation. Imagine what life would be if we were forever devoid of the experience of salvation! The Spirit conveyed to me the forgiveness of sins, but I never had peace. The Spirit bestowed upon me holiness of life, but I never had the experience that I am powerful to resist sin, to say “No” to the world around me, to put to death and crucify my powerful sinful inclinations within me. What if the Holy Spirit spoke to us in our mind about the resurrection of the body and never gave us the experience of the hope of that resurrection, which helps to take us through the loss of loved ones and our own dying, when it comes to that.

There is a place for the experience of salvation. There must be a place for it in the preaching of that salvation. There certainly is a place for it in the scriptural revelation of salvation. There is a place for it in our own life. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter Spirit. He affects not only our mind and our will, but also our feelings or experience.

And thus it is that out of the belly of the church and out of the belly of the believer flow those living waters to others. The church that has experienced the comfort of salvation by grace alone will praise and thank God in her worship services. The church that has experienced

the preciousness of the truth of the gospel herself, in her belly as it were, cannot keep her mouth shut to witness to others in missions and evangelism. Yes, and the church that knows the preciousness of the gospel of salvation by grace alone cannot keep her mouth shut when that gospel is opposed and denied and corrupted.

The individual child of God who has himself or herself experienced the forgiveness of sin as the removal of all shame, the removal of all punishment so that he or she has peace with God, will speak that gospel, will speak of the crucified Christ, to his wife, to her husband, to their children, to their grandchildren, to each other, and, as opportunity arises, to anybody and everybody.

That is strange, at first sight, that the source of the out-flowing Spirit is our belly. No less strange is it that we are the source of the out-flowing Spirit at all. Who are we that the Spirit of Christ, rivers of living, eternal water, should proceed out of us at all? Notice, by the way, something about the Holy Spirit. He is always proceeding. He is never stagnant. In the Godhead He proceeds from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. On the day of Pentecost He proceeded from the Son to us. And all our lifelong, and as long as the church is in the world (which will be till the end of history), He is proceeding from the church back to God, out to the nations, and to each other.

But who are we that He should proceed from us at all? We are not a source of living water. We are dry. We do not have any eternal life. We do not have any goodness. There is not any salvation whatsoever within us ourselves. By nature we are dry with the guilt of our sins. We are arid with the wrath of God burning upon us. We are a wilderness of defilement and depravity. Out of us shall flow the Holy Spirit? Christ humbles us with the truth of our natural dryness in His opening words: “If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink.” We are thirsty. Thirsty people are people without water. And these thirsty people are those without any moisture of goodness, life, or salvation within them whatsoever. We must come to Christ. From Him we receive these fountains, these rivers of living water. Only as we are in union with Christ does this living water flow from Him to us and then out of us to others. We are not the ultimate source of the

Spirit. We are not the ultimate source of the rivers of living water. We are only channels. Christ is the fountain of all the waters of salvation, the glorified Christ at the right hand of God. By His crucifixion He has earned this salvation. By His resurrection He has entered into the possession of it. Now, on the right hand of God, He is the One who has the Spirit as His own Spirit to bring the waters of eternal life to His people, so that they may flow out of us as Christ wills, back to God, out to the nations, and to each other.

Did not the people of Israel at this time, in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, remember that great incident during the forty years in the wilderness? They were remembering God's care of them. They were without water in that dry and thirsty land. And God brought water out of the rock. Jesus Christ is the Rock, the source of the waters of life.

A Stirring Call

That is why He issues this stirring call: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink these rivers of living waters." That is, receive the Holy Spirit and His operations and works of salvation.


This address is particular. A thirsty person is not simply one who lacks water, not even one who lacks all water. You can go to the local mortuary today and you will find corpses there that are without any moisture whatsoever. They are not thirsty. Christ is addressing

His call to those who have been made thirsty by the regenerating Spirit of Jesus Christ within them, and in whom also is worked the desire to have the waters of life—forgiveness and holiness and peace and joy and hope. To the thirsty, spiritually thirsty, He gave this call.

It was a gracious call. There is a fountain of water opened up to the thirsty—the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The thirsty may drink. The thirsty are summoned to drink. And to the thirsty there is no price, there is no cost, for these waters of life, of everlasting life, a life of body and soul.

As the Lord gave that call, once upon a time, at the Feast of Tabernacles, He renews it today. Hear Him, you thirsty (and I include myself): "Come unto me and drink. Always be coming unto me, always believing and always drinking."

And the promise is implied: He will quench your thirst, He will satisfy your longing with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, bringing to you the beginning of all of the blessings of salvation, so that out of you the Spirit may flow back to Christ and God, to the nations, and to each other.

Thus we keep the Feast of the Tabernacles. They kept it once by living in huts. We keep it truly by believing in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. A joyful feast. Pentecost. The outpouring to us of the Spirit of Christ for the out-flowing from us of that Spirit. 

The Culture of Free Choice and Motherhood

Women are free to choose—and there is no wrong choice. The women's liberation movement has definitely made "progress." Time once was when society thought it was immoral for a woman to "choose" not to become a mother by having an abortion. Time once was when society thought it was improper (immoral

may be too strong a word) for a mother to leave her children in the home while she pursued a career in the work-a-day-world. Then the feminist movement came along proclaiming women had the right to choose. Now women have freedom to choose. They may choose to give birth to a child or murder a child. They may choose to stay home and care for their children or pursue a business career and not care for their children. And the creed of our culture is that no one may judge.

A kind of societal confession of faith in the doctrine of a woman's right to choose took place in response to feminist Hilary Rosen's criticism of presidential can-

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didate Mitt Romney's wife, Ann. During a television appearance Rosen said of candidate Romney, "Guess what? His wife has actually never worked a day in her life." Rosen made the comment because Mrs. Romney stayed home to care for her five children rather than pursue a career outside the home. Rosen's comment suggested that the only "working" mothers are those who have careers outside the home. Mothers who rear children apparently are on vacation. The comment also betrayed Rosen's disdain for stay-at-home moms and her belief that it is better for moms to "choose" to work outside the home.

Rosen's insinuation that stay-at-home moms do not work has been almost universally criticized and rejected. Of course stay-at-home moms work. Faithful moms work very hard. Even Rosen later admitted this and attempted to back off her comment by saying she chose her words poorly. Many mothers in the home work as hard or harder than men and women who are busy in other careers. The *LA Times* reported on a study that estimates stay-at-home moms put in about 99 hours of work in a week and would earn about \$112,000 a year in the business world (*Ann Romney flap: Stay-at-home moms worth \$112,000, study says*, latimes.com, April 13, 2012). This quantification of the work of stay-at-home moms is a helpful way of underscoring the fact that moms in the home work very hard indeed!

However, these calculations are purely carnal. From a spiritual point of view, believing mothers in the home are worth far more than this study indicates. No amount of money is enough to compensate believing mothers for the work they do in the home—nurturing the children who are in the covenant in the fear of the Lord. The world recognizes that mothers work hard. This is especially true (at least it should be) of believing mothers.

But what does our society think of mothers staying home? Should they stay home and work, or should they go out into the business world and work? The popular answer seems to be, "they are free to choose, and no choice is wrong." Here are some responses to Rosen that express this answer:

Ann Romney in response to Rosen: "My career choice was to be a mother. And I think all of us need to know that we need to respect choices that women

make" (*Ann Romney addresses 'never worked' accusation on Fox News*, chicagotribune.com, April 12, 2012).

Frank Bruni for the *New York Times*: "What's most bothersome about Rosen's comment, though, was its betrayal of what the Democratic Party and feminism at their best are supposed to be about: recognizing the full diversity of human experience and empowering everyone along that spectrum to walk successfully down the path of his or her *choosing*, so long as it poses no clear harm to anyone else" (*Working and Women*, nytimes.com, April 14, 2012).

The editorial staff of the *Houston Chronicle*: "Ann Romney is *entitled* to her *choices*, as all women should be" (*Ann Romney's entitled to her choices*, www.chron.com, April 15, 2012).

A summary of responses reported by Laurie Kellman for the Associated Press: "Weighing into the debate: Vice President Joe Biden; female surrogates for Romney who said they were outraged by Hilary Rosen's words; first lady Michelle Obama; and the president's top campaign strategists. All defended mothers and the inevitable choices all of them must make" (*Obama sticks up for Ann Romney in working mom flap*, hosted.ap.org, April 13, 2012).


The above quotes all illustrate the godlessness of our culture and of the women's liberation movement. Women are sovereign. They are free to choose and are answerable to no one. They certainly are not answerable to men, including their husbands. Nor are they answerable to God—as far as society is concerned. Society denies that God has anything to say about the role of women in marriage and child rearing. A woman must only examine her own feelings, her own goals, and do what she wants to do.

This godlessness is *the* sin of our culture and its beliefs concerning the roles of women. Women choosing to murder unborn babies is certainly a monstrous sin. And in many instances women commit gross sin when they abandon their children to pursue a career outside of the home. But what leads to these sins is that women, encouraged by our society, completely rebel against the truth that God is sovereign over the lives of human beings. This is why we must even condemn Ann Romney's behavior as sinful.

It is almost tempting to take Mrs. Romney's side. After all, she did give birth to five children (not deliberately "choosing" to have merely one or two, as many do today), and she stayed home to care for them. But Mrs. Romney professes she did not do these things out of a conviction she was serving God but out of a conviction that she had the right to choose. Mrs. Romney made a sinful, godless decision. (We should also mention that Mrs. Romney stayed in the home but, rather than rear her children in the fear of God according to His truth, she raised them according to the God-denying teachings of Mormonism.)

This godlessness of the society around us is what we as Christians must fight against as we consider the role of mothers. There are choices, decisions, that believing women must make (with their husbands!). And they are free, but not free from the rule of God, as our society would have us believe. Their liberty is in Jesus Christ. Through Him they are free from sin. They are free to serve God. This means that as decisions are made about women and mothers, God's will must be considered and obeyed.

Believing women, along with their husbands, are making decisions. And it is so easy, even for believers, to be godless in making these decisions. Let's face it, we are tempted to decide how many children we would like to have, based on carnal reasons. We are tempted to decide whether to have mom work outside the home based on carnal reasons. For example, it is so very easy for us to make these decisions thinking only about the "almighty dollar." In fact, this is the only reason why so many in the world say that many women do not have a choice. They must work. Because not working would mean sacrificing a certain standard of living—exactly what godless people will not do. How often do believers also make decisions based on this ungodly reason?

The question for you believing mothers (and your husbands) is not merely, what are you doing, but why are you doing these things? You do not have "freedom to choose" to disobey God. You are free through Jesus Christ to serve Him. Your decisions must be made in light of the direction God gives in the Bible. God's Word has much to say about the role of mothers. Are you (we) listening? 

Religion and Discrimination in Employment (2)

In our last article under this rubric, we looked at some of the laws relating to employment discrimination, as well as some notable exceptions for religious organizations. It was noted that the United States Supreme Court was preparing to hand down a decision pertaining to the ministerial exception. The ministerial

exception, as you may recall, is the legal principle based upon the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which keeps the government from interfering with the internal affairs of the church, especially in matters of doctrinal instruction. The Court has since ruled in that case, and in this article we will analyze the decision more closely.¹

The case involved a claim of discrimination by a

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Previous article in this series: February 15, 2012, p. 233.

¹ *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School, v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 132 S.Ct 694 (2012).

teacher against a private Lutheran school in Michigan. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the First Amendment to the Constitution did require maintaining a ministerial exception, and that this exception required dismissal of the teacher's discrimination suit in this case. The unanimous decision in this case is noteworthy, since the Court has often been divided five to four, with four conservative justices, four liberal justices, and Justice Anthony Kennedy throwing the deciding vote for either side. The unanimous decision is also noteworthy in upholding the ministerial exception, since the current administration had advocated that the ministerial exception be abolished entirely.²

As believers, we can certainly be thankful for the Court's resounding affirmation of the ministerial exception. Once again we see the Lord's hand protecting His church from government intrusion through this means. Although the case dealt with an employment issue in the context of a school, the case has very important implications for our churches, as the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the government cannot interfere with churches in matters of doctrinal instruction. The majority explained that "whenever the questions of discipline, or of faith, or ecclesiastical rule, custom, or law have been decided by the highest of [the] church judicatories to which the matter has been carried, the legal tribunals must accept such decisions as final, and as binding on them."³

As the case dealt with the context of a teacher in a school, we might jump to the conclusion that the case also precludes government interference in employment decisions in our covenant schools. However, while the decision in this case is certainly good news for our own schools, we should be careful not to interpret the court's ruling as a broad application of the ministerial exception to any teacher in a private school. The circumstances of the teacher's employment in this case were quite different than in our Protestant Reformed schools. As was mentioned before, the current administration advocated that the ministerial exception be abolished, and the outcome was contrary to the position of the EEOC. In future cases, we can expect that these parties will seek to limit this decision to the specific

facts of this case, and will try to use factual differences to distinguish other cases so that the exception does not apply. In order to fully understand the implications of this case, we must look at the specific facts of the case more closely.

The case involved a claim of discrimination by a teacher against Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School, a Lutheran school located in Michigan. The teacher developed narcolepsy, a disorder that caused sudden episodes of sleeping from which she could not be awakened. After a period of leave, the teacher announced that she was coming back to work, against the school's wishes. When she appeared at the school and refused to leave until they acknowledged that she had reported for work, she was terminated for insubordination. The EEOC brought suit against the school for discrimination, but the school moved to dismiss the suit based on the ministerial exception.

The school in this case was actually run by the Lutheran church. The school hires two types of teachers. "Called" teachers complete a course of academic study in theology, obtain the endorsement of their local Synod district, and are called by the local congregation. They then receive the title of "Minister of Religion, Commissioned." "Lay" teachers did not receive training in theology and were not even required to be Lutheran. Lay teachers were hired only when called teachers were unavailable. The teacher in this case was a called teacher. The Supreme Court found that under these circumstances, the ministerial exception applied.

Obviously the process for becoming a "called" teacher is similar to the process of becoming a minister in our own churches, so there is no doubt that the ministerial exception would apply to churches. The question, then, is whether the exception would apply to the teachers in our schools. The Supreme Court in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case focused on the circumstances of the teacher's employment. The Court noted that she was held out as a "minister," and that the title of minister reflected "a significant degree of religious training followed by a formal process of commissioning."⁴ She claimed a housing allowance on her taxes, which is available only to employees earning their compensation "in the exercise of the ministry." The Court noted that her job duties

² *Hosanna-Tabor*, 706.

³ *Hosanna-Tabor*, 704.

⁴ *Hosanna-Tabor*, 707.

included a role in conveying the Church's message and carrying out its mission, and that she taught religious classes to her students four days a week. In summary, the Court relied on four factors: 1) the formal title given to the teacher as a "minister," 2) the substance reflected in that title, 3) her use of that title, and 4) the important religious functions she performed for the Church.⁵

In our own schools, teachers do not have the title of "minister," and do not perform their duties directly for the Church. They do not receive specialized religious training, and are not called to their position by the Church. All of these factual differences would undoubtedly be used by opponents to argue that the ministerial exception would not apply to our teachers. Because of these factual differences, it is not entirely clear that our teachers would come under the ministerial exception. The Court in *Hosanna-Tabor* stated that they were "reluctant to adopt a rigid formula for deciding when an employee qualifies as a minister," but that the circumstances of employment in this case warranted a finding that the exception applied.⁶

While the *Hosanna-Tabor* case does not provide a clear indication that our teachers would be covered by the ministerial exception, it certainly does not preclude the possibility. The majority of the Court noted that every Court of Appeals that considered the question has concluded that the exception is "not limited to the head of a religious congregation."⁷ Justice Thomas wrote a concurring opinion, in which Justice Alito joined, which emphasized the autonomy of religious organizations to determine who will minister the faith. Justice Alito wrote a separately concurring opinion in which Justice Kagan joined, in which he specifically noted that he felt it would be a mistake if the term "minister" or the concept of ordination were viewed as central to the issue of religious autonomy. Justice Alito wrote that, in his opinion, the ministerial exception applied in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case because the teacher

played a substantial role in "conveying the Church's message and carrying out its mission." [citation omit-

⁵ *Hosanna-Tabor*, 708.

⁶ *Hosanna-Tabor* 707.

⁷ *Hosanna-Tabor*, 707

ted]. She taught religion to her students four days a week and took them to chapel on the fifth day. She led them in daily devotional exercises, and led them in prayer three times a day. She also alternated with other teachers in planning and leading worship services at the school chapel, choosing liturgies, hymns, and readings, and composing and delivering a message based on Scripture.⁸

The duties described by Justice Alito sound very similar to the duties of our own teachers as they teach the students, lead them in devotions and singing, and plan chapel services. Justice Alito's concurring opinion does not reflect the opinion of a majority of the Court, but it is significant that this opinion of Justice Alito was joined by Justice Kagan, who is generally considered to be on the "liberal" wing of the Court.


Most of the discussion in the Court's opinion was based on applying the ministerial exception to those under the direct supervision of churches, so we cannot predict whether the Court would extend the exception to religious organizations affiliated with churches, as many of our schools are. In being "affiliated" with churches, I refer to the language in the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws of some of our schools, which indicates that the schools are established to further the instruction of our children in the doctrines held by our churches. The extent to which this language shows that the school (and therefore the teachers) instructs in accordance with the doctrines of our churches could be the basis as to whether the ministerial exception is extended to that school. Requirements that members of the school society be members of the denomination would also tend to show the connection between church and school.

The reasoning behind the ministerial exception would also support an extension of the exception to schools. The reason for the exception is that otherwise the state would indirectly control who will provide religious instruction, if employment laws regulated who a church could hire or discharge. The same would hold true for a religious school. Whether or not the school is directly run by a church, those operating the school should be free to make employment decisions that will

⁸ *Hosanna-Tabor*, 714-15.

ensure that the instruction given in the school is in agreement with their faith.

Until the question is addressed by the courts, we will not know how far the ministerial exception will be extended. In the meantime, we can be thankful that the autonomy of the churches has been preserved for

the time being. In a future article, Lord willing, we will look at how language in Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, decisions of ecclesiastical bodies, and practices can clarify the religious purpose and positions of our churches and organizations. 

Total Depravity (1)

Only Evil Flowing from the Dead

The devil told Adam's wife that she would not die if she ate of the forbidden fruit. Many people still today think that what the devil said was true.

Viewed externally, it might appear that what the devil said was correct. Adam and his wife both partook, and yet their bodily life continued. Contrary to what might have been expected, they did not drop down dead on the spot.

But what happened to Adam and his wife on the inside? Instead of communing with God, they ran away from Him. Instead of confessing their sin with sorrow, they made excuses and tried to throw the blame on someone else. From a spiritual point of view, something had definitely happened to them. Before, they had served God in genuine love. Now, they were prone to hate both God and one another. Though their bodily life would continue for many years, they really had died on the very day they ate of the fruit that God had forbidden. Starting on that day, they had a nature that was dead in trespasses and sins.

An unbeliever: A person with a dead spiritual heart

The Scripture speaks of an unbelieving man as a dead man. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Eph. 2:5).

An unbeliever, therefore, is a living dead person. There is a sense in which he is alive, and there is a sense in which he is dead—really dead.

God created man with a material body and a spiritual soul. The spiritual soul of man is invisible, and yet it is real. Something spiritual is not something make believe. Though undetectable with the eye of the body, man really does have a spiritual soul.

The spiritual center of man is called his heart. Man has a physical heart that can be seen. But he also has a spiritual heart that cannot be seen. Understanding this twofold nature of man is of central importance to grasping the difference between a believer and an unbeliever.

An unbeliever on this earth has one heart that is alive while his other heart is dead. A believer, on the other hand, has two living hearts.

So how did the believer obtain this living spiritual heart? Did he request it? No, he was dead before he received it, and was completely unable to request it, or even to desire it. He received it solely because God gave it to him. "A new heart also will I give you, and a

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

new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26).

Before God resurrects a person, that person has a dead spiritual heart, which is like a stone. Then God breathes new life into him, giving him a living spiritual heart, which is pictured by a healthy heart of flesh.

An unbeliever does not have this living spiritual heart. His spiritual heart is not like a healthy heart of flesh. Rather, his spiritual heart is lifeless, hard, and unbendable, like a stone.

Only one in the Life has life

Scripture speaks of this elsewhere, when it stresses that only those who are in Christ, and partake of Him, have life: “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (John 6:53b).

Christ here was telling some unbelievers that they had within them no life. It is true, they still had a bodily life, which they would have for just a little while longer. But Christ is Life: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25a).

Therefore, one must have Christ to have life: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:12).

Those in Christ have Christ’s life. In fact, it is correct to say that Christ Himself is their life: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear...” (Col. 3:4a).

Therefore, all those outside of Christ have no spiritual life. All this serves to bring out clearly that when man fell into sin he really did die. The only ones today who are spiritually alive are those who by God’s grace have been engrafted into Christ and have Christ’s life flowing into them.

Only evil flows from a dead spiritual heart

A dead heart is not an inactive heart. Thoughts do arise out of a heart that is spiritually dead. But those thoughts are not good thoughts. Rather, they are perverse, evil thoughts, which arise out of the unbeliever’s heart and render the entire man to be thoroughly polluted: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil

things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23).

Such evil is what arises out of an unbeliever’s heart not only on some occasions, but continuously: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).


Out of the carnal mind of an unbeliever arises only evil thoughts. In his heart he hates the true God and is not able to subject himself to what God tells him to do: “...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7–8).

This text says that a carnal mind—the mind of someone who has a spiritually dead heart—is not subject to God’s law. In fact, it stresses the fact that an unbeliever’s mind *cannot* subject itself to God’s law. The sinful mind of man is unable to think the thoughts God’s law requires. Only evil thoughts arise from within him.

The unbeliever’s problem, therefore, is not merely what he *thinks* and what he *does*. His problem is rooted in what he *is*. It is rooted in the fact that his spiritual heart is dead, and that in his heart he has nothing but hatred for God: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

The problem with sinful man is not merely that he speaks lies sometimes, but that his very heart itself is deceitful. Completely deceitful “above all things, and desperately wicked” is how Scripture describes an unbelieving heart.

This, in short, is what is meant by total depravity. That man by nature is totally depraved means that his spiritual heart is dead, and that only evil flows from this dead heart. There is no good in him whatsoever, and there is nothing good in anything he does.

Few today are willing to confess this truth. Rather, they would prefer to believe the devil. Yet what God says is true. And it is only in the way of confessing how great our sin really is, that we come to look to Christ for the deliverance from this misery—the deliverance that we can and do obtain only from Him. 

Shepherding a Child's Heart, by Tedd Tripp. Shepherd Press, 1995, paperback, 215 pages (also available as a Kindle ebook). [Reviewed by Dr. Julian Kennedy, CPRC, Ballymena.]

This is a book I wish I had read over 20 years ago, before I had my first child. It is a thoroughly biblical approach to child-rearing, and I highly recommend it. The call to raise your children means it must be a priority, requiring study, thought, prayer, and action. You have limited time and only one opportunity to raise your children in God's ways.

In this book Tripp guides us through the "why's" and "how's" of biblical child-rearing. Each informative chapter ends with questions that really test your understanding of his points. These make for an excellent review of the chapter and could be used in a Bible study group.

Tripp proceeds from the standpoint that parents ought to treat their (covenant) children as believers, and he rejects the notion of trying to "convert" them.

Tripp acknowledges that children are born sinners, but he affirms also that God can change the heart and that parents are God's agents. We are to help our children understand life from a biblical perspective, teaching them they are sinners. Our discipline should be corrective. We must set the biblical worldview before our children. They must be shown that man's chief end is to glorify God.

Tripp emphasizes that our lives as parents must be examples to our children, and that we must not send mixed messages by conforming to culture or adopting other goals. "You must help your children understand the rich treasures of living in the vitality of a robust and lively faith in Jesus."

According to Tripp, the biblical *method* is as important as the *objectives*. "Poor methods—bribery, reward for normal responsibilities—these encourage selfishness and greed. Superficial parenting that does not address

the heart produces superficial children who don't know their own hearts."

He helpfully explains communication as "how to draw out the thoughts of another, getting him to express himself, understand himself and see why he acted that way. Communication is the art of expressing in godly ways what is on my heart and of hearing completely and understanding what another thinks and feels."

Perhaps the most enlightening issue Tripp addresses is physical punishment—the rod! He rightly emphasizes this issue as applying to the *first 6 years of childhood*. The foolish child has no fear of God, will not submit, and bears no reproof. The selfish child, driven by his own wants and passions if allowed his own way, will end up a rebellious teenager. Such a child is in grave danger. Disobedience merits a spanking. Refusing parental rule is refusing God's rule and leads to death. The use of the rod (physical punishment) is an act of faith. The goal of correction is to bring the child's heart to sweet, humble heart-submission to God's will in obeying dad and mom. The method is God's, to drive foolishness far from his heart. It has to be timely, measured, and controlled, not done with anger, bullying, frustration, or retribution. It is God's way of saving a child from death. It imparts wisdom.

In addition, Tripp stresses other important points about discipline. It must be done in private. We must try to get the child to acknowledge the reason for the correction. Righteous anger is expressed when God is dishonoured. Hatred, not love, will keep you from spanking. Where will a child be in 30 years if no one ever challenges his determination to do whatever he wants whenever he wants? If he is old enough to disobey, he is old enough to be disciplined. The authority issue should be settled early in childhood.


For the child aged 6-12, Tripp states that "he needs to know what to do when you are not there." Our aim is character—honesty, kindness, helpfulness, diligence, self-control, purity—giving without expecting return, unselfishness. Strive to help your child, who is by nature a selfish sinner, see his need of Christ's grace and mercy.

Dr. Kennedy is a member of the CPRC NI.

With regard to teenagers, Tripp has this to say: “Don’t foster rebellion by public reproof or using destructive demeaning terms. They are insecure and bow to peer pressure and fear of man.” Proverbs 1:7-19 forms the basis of our instruction. They must 1) fear the Lord; 2) heed parental instruction; and 3) dissociate from the wicked. “Your prayer is to see your children internalize the gospel and develop autonomous identities as persons under God.”

Tripp fails on one major point, where he says he cannot find a promise in the Word that the children of

believers will have faith. In fact, there are plenty, e.g., Psalm 103:17; 102:28; 69:36; 89:4, 29, 36; Genesis 17:7; Isaiah 44:3; 59:21. Tripp places his hope in the power of the gospel without any reference to God’s covenant promises. He rightly states that teens may have serious doubts or questions. Relations with church people are vital. Your focus is to see them find comfort and strength in knowing God.

Overall this a helpful book and is recommended to all new parents. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Young People’s Activities

The Young People’s Society of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI hosted this year’s Easter Mass Meeting for the young people of our churches in west Michigan. This year’s meeting was held Sunday afternoon, April 15. Prof. Dykstra spoke on “Jesus’ Resurrection: Why Important—for Him, and for you?”

The Young People’s Society of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC invited their congregation to a Talent-Dessert evening on April 13. A collection was taken for the young people of Kalamazoo and the expenses of this summer’s convention.

The young people of the Hull, IA PRC, anticipating the needs of their congregation, asked the question, do you need your gutters cleaned or your lawn raked? How about your windows washed or your

garage cleaned? How about some boxes moved or some painting you’d like help with? If members of their congregation had some chores that needed to be done, but were having a hard time finding time to do it, their Young People’s Society was looking for different ways to help either inside or outside the home. But the one thing that caught our eye was the fact that this activity was not a fundraiser. The young people were simply looking for ways to help the other members of their congregation, and all for free (Gal. 5:13).

Everyone in the Lynden, WA PRC was encouraged to stay after their evening worship service on Resurrection Sunday to enjoy their Young People’s Society Resurrection Day Singspiration. An offering was taken for the 2012 Western Young People’s Camp and the 2012 Young People’s Convention.

If your congregation did not enjoy an ice cream social, sponsored by the young people of your church, follow-

ing your Good Friday church service on April 6, then we are almost certain that you are in the minority, because it seems that a large majority of our churches had opportunity to enjoy that activity last month.

Mission Activities

Since Thursday of the week before Resurrection Sunday is a public holiday in the Philippines, that day works well for the annual combined outing of the various groups our missionaries, Rev. R. Smit and Rev. D. Kleyn, work with around Manila. This year the outing was at the Cattleya Resort in Antipolo. This resort has two pools, an eating area with tables and chairs for a hundred or so people, and some places to do cooking, all of which served well for the daylong event. Looking at the pictures provided by the Kleyns on their blog (kleynsphilippines.blogspot.com) makes one almost envious of the picturesque landscape of the resort, but especially of the wide

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

variety of food enjoyed by those who attended.

Sister-Church Activities

In order that our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, will not be without pulpit supply for seven consecutive Sundays, the consistory of the Grandville, MI PRC approved sending their pastor, Rev. K. Koole, to Singapore to preach for them for three Sundays, the Lord willing. Rev. Koole was scheduled to leave Michigan on Wednesday, April 25, and then to preach for the CERC April 29 and May 6 and 13, returning home May 14. Rev. A. Spriensma is scheduled to provide preaching for Sundays beginning in late May.

Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of our sister church in Northern Ireland, was able to present a lecture twice in April, on the subject of "God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility." The first time was in South Wales on April 12, and the second in Ballymena, NI on April 20. Covenant advertised these lectures by asking those who were interested in attending to consider

that some say that these two ideas are irreconcilable and shrug their shoulders. Others reckon that God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are two parallel lines that meet in eternity. Yet others argue that since man is responsible, God cannot be sovereign. But what does the Bible say on this subject?

Congregation Activities

This year's Special Needs Program was held on April 13 at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, and everyone was invited to come and praise our heavenly Father, along with the special needs members of our west Michigan congregations, as they sang praises to Him. Refreshments and a time of fellowship followed the program.

The Trinity Men Singers, of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, presented their annual Spring Concert after their evening worship service on Resurrection Sunday, April 8.

The combined choirs of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL and the Crete, IL PRC, presented the Easter cantata "Hallelujah, What a Savior" at Crete on Sunday evening, April 8.

Rev. D. Holstege, pastor of First PRC in Holland, MI, gave a slide presentation on his and his family's trip to minister to the saints of the CERC in Singapore, on Sunday evening, April 8, following First's evening worship service.

The congregation in Randolph, WI was able to enjoy a combined choir concert/singspiration sponsored by their choir, on Sunday evening, April 1.

School Activities

Students of the Loveland, CO PR Christian School presented their All School Program on April 13. This program was a celebration of the great work our Savior has accomplished for us through His death and resurrection. There was an ice cream social in the school afterwards, hosted by the kindergartners. Classrooms were open to accommodate curious parents, friends, and supporters of LPRCS.

The choirs of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI and Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA presented a concert on April 12 at Trinity CHS.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ On May 5, 2012, our parents,

JIM and KAREN ANDRINGA,

celebrated 45 years of marriage. It is with heartfelt appreciation and gratitude that we thank God for the guidance and instruction given to us through them. We pray that God will continue to bless and keep them and that their marriage may be a reflection of the perfect marriage between Christ and His bride, the church.

"Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

✚ Chad and Dawn Andringa

Jaci, Shayna, Mandi, Silas, Shelby, Amos, Eliza

✚ James and Tanya Haveman

Tyler, Derek, Damon

✚ Rob and Candice Andringa

Kaylie, Luke, Gavin, Simon, Jack

Sanborn, Iowa

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville PRC expresses its sympathy to their fellow sister, Grace Bruining, in the death of her brother,

JOE BALKEMA.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121: 1, 2).

Erik Guichelaar, President
Donna Boven, Secretary

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness and praise to God, we rejoice with our parents,

BARRY and MARY WARNER, as they celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary on May 22.

We are richly blessed by their covenant instruction, loving care, and godly example in marriage. "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ✿ Jeff and Kristin Griffioen
- ✿ Jared and Rachel VanBaren
- ✿ David Warner
- ✿ Ben and Lauren Feenstra
- ✿ Kelly Warner

Dyer, Indiana

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men's Society of the Hudsonville PRC expresses Christian sympathy to its president, Mr. Bernard Bruining, in the passing of his brother-in-law,

MR. JOE BALKEMA, on Friday, March 30, 2012. Also, to member Mr. Henry Boer, in the passing of his brother,

MR. FRED BOER, on April 9, 2012. May the families find their comfort in Psalm 73:23, 24: "... thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Erv Kortering, Secretary

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC, Redlands expresses sincere Christian sympathy to fellow members Dennis and Beth VanUffelen in the passing away of Dennis' brother-in-law,

MIKE MC CLAUROY. May the Lord's comfort bring the family peace at this time of bereavement. "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" (Psalm 23:4).

Ed Karsemeyer, President
Trudi Hopkins, Secretary

Notice

■ Do you have bound volumes of the *Standard Bearer* that you are willing to sell? The RFPA is looking to buy back an inventory of these volumes. We will pay \$15 each for volumes 1-40 or \$5 each for volumes 40-87. Please contact us at (616) 457-4970 or mail@rfpa.org for more information.

Reminder

■ The *Standard Bearer* is published only once during the months of June, July, and August.

Call to Synod!!

■ Synod 2011 appointed the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois the calling church for the 2012 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2012 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 12, 2012 at 8:30 A.M., in the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 11, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2011 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Bert Worries, (708) 474-4926, e-mail: bworries@sbcglobal.net.

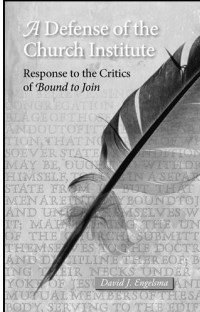
Consistory of
Protestant Reformed
Church in Crete
Bert Worries, Clerk.

Student Licensure


■ The faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary rejoices to inform the churches that they have licensed Mr. Joshua Engelsma to speak a word of edification in the churches. We are thankful to the Lord that He has brought the brother to this point in his preparation for the ministry of the gospel. And we trust that the Lord will use this aspect of his training further to equip him for his life's calling. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15). All scheduling of Mr. Engelsma to lead divine worship services will be through the seminary, and all requests for pulpit supply should be directed to the Rector, Prof. Ronald Cammenga.

Coming soon!

A Defense of the Church Institute:
A Response to the Critics of *Bound to Join*
by David J. Engelsma



This book defends the doctrine of church membership that Engelsma addressed in his book *Bound to Join*, demonstrating that love for the invisible church invariably expresses itself by love for the manifestation of this church in the church institute. In his defense of church membership, Engelsma also takes care to examine the "house church" movement and the claim by such men as Harold Camping that the church age has ended. This book is a must-read, especially for those who have read *Bound to Join*!


 For more information, visit www.rfpa.org,
phone (616)457-5970, or email mail@rfpa.org.