

The Standard Bearer

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Receiving Good and Evil from God's Hand

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Job 2:9-10

What evils had come upon Job! In one day he lost all his earthly riches and his ten children. All that was left to him were his wife and a few servants. Soon after this he was afflicted with a loathsome disease that left him covered with horrible sores.

In despair his wife suggested that perhaps the best thing for Job to do was to curse God and die. This is exactly what Satan wanted both of them to do.

Job's response was exactly what his wife needed to hear. It is also what we need to hear whenever we become discouraged in time of trouble. "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

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



The Bible speaks quite frequently of the hand of God. It was the hand of God that brought the universe into being. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands" (Ps. 102:25). Our food and drink come from God's hand. "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24). Even the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, so that He controls the king's decisions and actions (Prov. 21:1).

The hand of God is an anthropomorphism, a description of God in human terms. We are to understand the hand of God figuratively. The hand of God speaks of the power of God to create, preserve, and rule the universe. By His great power God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. By His power He continually upholds the universe, causing it to continue to exist. And by His power He rules the universe, energizing every creature and directing its course. This great power of God is called the hand of God.

Nothing takes place but by the hand of God.

In the framework of the error of evolution many imagine that most things in life simply happen by

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chance. There is no Creator God that brought the universe into existence. The universe came into being by some spontaneous development of matter that was a chance happening. In turn, the universe developed over billions of year from the less complex to the more complex by survival of the fittest and chance mutations. There is no God that directs and controls the events of the universe. Mankind controls as much as he can. The rest just happens by chance.

However, the Bible emphasizes that all things take place only by the sovereign hand of God. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without the will of God (Matt. 10:29). God has even numbered the very hairs on your head (Matt. 10:29). It is He that works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11).

It is important to know exactly who this sovereign God is that rules all things by the power of His hand. He is Jehovah, the faithful covenant God, who establishes and maintains a beautiful covenant of friendship with His elect church in Jesus Christ. In that covenant, Jehovah shows Himself to be the friend of His people by saving them from all their sins, providing for all their needs, and causing all things to work to their advantage.

Job knew Jehovah as his God. When Job learned that all his riches and children had been taken from him, he responded, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The term "LORD" here is really the name "Jehovah." When Job spoke of the name of Jehovah, he had in mind Jehovah as He reveals Himself by the works of His hand to be Jehovah, the faithful covenant God. In this time of great calamity Job recalled to mind all the saving works in which Jehovah had demonstrated His faithfulness to His people. To that name Job clung. That name Job blessed.

What a comfort to know that the sovereign God of heaven and earth, who controls all things by His hand, is Jehovah, our covenant God! All those who belong to Jesus Christ may know that and have that assurance.



From the hand of this sovereign, covenant God comes both good and evil.

This was Job's testimony to his distraught wife.

Great calamity had fallen upon Job and his wife. In one day they lost all their children and wealth. Soon after that, a terrible disease befell Job. In despair Job's wife concluded that Job ought to curse God and die. Job rebuked his wife in response, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

What is this good and evil? Good refers to that which is pleasant and delightful. There are many good things in life—food and drink, clothing and shelter, health and riches. Evil refers to that which is unpleasant, in the sense of giving pain or causing unhappiness. There are many evils in life, such as drought, famine, poverty, sickness, loss of loved ones, war....

The hand of God brings both good and evil.

The hand of God certainly brought both to Job. God had given Job many good things. By the hand of God, Job had ten children, great riches, and health. But the hand of God also brought many evils to Job. God's hand brought death to his children, loss of all his riches, and horrible sickness. It is true that Satan had his hand in this. But Job recognized that it was ultimately the hand of God that brought these evils.

The same hand of God brings both good and evil to all men. This includes not just His children, such as Job, but also those outside the household of faith.

How are we to explain this?

God sends both good and evil to the ungodly reprobate for their destruction. Some deny that this is so. They acknowledge that God does send evil upon the reprobate as judgment for their sin, and that, ultimately, God sends *only* evil on the reprobate when He casts them into hell. But they insist that the good things that God gives the reprobate wicked in this life He gives in His grace, as an undeserved favor. His intent, they say, is not to *save* them, but His gifts are a matter of grace. The Bible, however, gives a different explanation. The psalmist Asaph struggled for a while with the prosperity of the wicked. But in the sanctuary he learned that God gives good things to the wicked to set them on slippery places so that they will be destroyed (Ps. 73:18). The principle is that the more good things you give to the wicked, the more they have with which to sin and bring destruction upon themselves. And this is God's purpose in opening His hand wide to the ungodly to give them good things.

God sends both good and evil also to His children. This was not only Job's experience but it is also the experience of all God's children. In the case of His children, God gives good and evil things in His grace. God's grace is not common but particular. Grace is God's undeserved favor, which He shows to His elect people in Jesus Christ and which always results in their salvation. It is God's saving grace that leads Him to send His beloved children both good and evil. It is easy to see the grace of God when His hand sends us good things. But why would a gracious God send His people evil things? Asaph learned this also in the sanctuary of God. Through the evils that come from His hand, God was guiding him so that afterward he could receive him into glory (Ps. 73:24). God uses the evils of life to refine us as gold is refined by fire and to make us fit for our place in eternity.



Job indicated to his wife that we must receive not only good from the hand of God but also evil.

The word "receive" means to receive willingly. It is the opposite of rejecting something given or offered to you. For example, when someone gives us something good that provides joy and pleasure, we gladly and willingly receive it. But if someone will give something evil that will bring hurt and sorrow, we will not receive it. Someone may force it upon us, but we will not receive it.

We must receive from the hand of God both the good and the evil that He sends.

We must receive the good things that give us joy and pleasure in gratitude.

But we must also receive the evil that God sends. We must receive it in patience. Patience is the ability to endure the evil God sends and be content, be at peace and remain faithful.

Job's wife had lost this patience. Her response to the terrible things that God's hand had brought to them was, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." "Integrity" means completeness. It expresses completeness in faith, righteousness, and service of God. Job's wife questioned why under these circumstances Job still retained his complete devotion to God in faith. She challenged him rather to curse God and die. She did not receive this evil from God's hand.

But Job did receive this evil in patience, so that he sinned not with his lips. He was able to do this because he recognized the hand that brought these great evils upon him to be the hand of Jehovah, his ever faithful, covenant God. These evils therefore, painful as they were, were not for his destruction but for his salvation.

When the hand of God brings us suffering, we must cling to the same truth. The hand of God is the hand of Jehovah, our faithful covenant God. Whatever comes from His hand is our salvation!

What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Harold Camping, Yet Again (2)

And so October 21 has come and gone, and no return of the Lord Jesus.

No rapture either.

Nor for that matter, did God's

final judgment fall with history-ending severity.

One did not have to be a Bible scholar to have predicted that. Even the unbelievers' prophesied' October 22 would dawn bright and clear.

However (and this is what Christ's church must continue to declare), the judgments of God that

bring about this world's end did and will continue to rumble through creation and the nations.

Harold Camping or no Harold Camping (let the scoffers hoot and howl as they may), Christ does continue to "...come quickly" (cf. Rev. 22:20—almost the last word of Scripture!), and every sign indi-

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2011, p. 5.

cates that the 'Day of the Lord' will be sooner rather than later. We must not allow a scoffing, laughing society to deter us from declaring the world's approaching end, any more than Noah did as he declared the end of the "world that then was," and that while building an ark on dry land in the days before men had ever felt a drop of rain (cf. II Pet. 3:6).

Undoubtedly God has His purpose even in Camping's mad prophecies, namely, the hardening of the hearts of many over against God's true word. This too the Lord God will use to prepare the world for judgment, as mankind looks for every reason to refuse to pay heed to the undeniable judgments of God all about itself, loud as those rumblings may be.

Be that as it may, Camping's guilt and egotism in all of this is not to be minimized. He is anything but a humble Bible-teacher. Concerning the precise time of His return, Christ Himself declared that "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36). No man, that is, other than Harold Camping!

How does Camping get around Christ's statement? Post-1994 we heard that his response was, "No one knows the *day and hour*! But that does not apply to the *month and the year*!" Evidently, in the intervening years, that changed and Camping convinced himself that his knowledge had reached such a level that he, Harold Camping, had become the one man in all of history who was able to decipher even the day.

What temerity!

It is not to be minimized.

Neither is the evil that Camping has done.

Being a cause for the enemies of all righteousness to blaspheme God's name, church, and Word is serious enough. But, as various reports have made plain, Camping and Family Radio are accountable for more than that. He, and really all those who continue to support and to be associated with this ministry of his, now have blood on their hands.

A colleague alerted us to the following report lifted from WorldNetDaily (WND) that indicates to what extent Camping's false prophecies have misled those new to the Christian faith, those not yet well-founded biblically, bringing death to some and, to others, despair.

The following quote, though a bit lengthy, is most significant.

The executive director of a ministry that works with the persecuted church in the northern reaches of Vietnam says he's outraged that a "prophecy" by an American preacher apparently cost the lives of many tribal Hmong people who believed it.

The prediction by Harold Camping, 89, of Oakland, Calif. based Family Radio was that Jesus Christ would return to Earth to "rapture" his followers to heaven on May 21. Camping said mankind had run out of time, and the Creator of the universe would arrive on that Saturday.

The horrific aftermath of the unfulfilled prophecy was reported by James Jacob Prasch, a key leader of Moriel Ministries, which emphasizes the "last days apostasy" dis-

cussed in the Bible and ministers to persecuted church members.

The organization describes itself as a "teaching ministry to believers" that brings awareness of issues such as the "social gospel" and ecumenical efforts that "masquerade" as Christianity.

Prasch routinely travels and meets with members of the Christian body worldwide. A recent trip took him to Vietnam, where a large number of the Hmong tribal peoples of the nation's Central Highlands are Christian.

They are referred to in the West as Montagnards.

They had heard of Camping's prophecy and not having sophisticated methods for evaluating its validity, took it literally, he explained.

The result, for many, was death, Prasch reported in an email to supporters:

"After listening to a translation of Camping's prediction 7,000 of these people (known in the West as Montagnards) gathered on a mountain praising God their suffering at the hands of the communist regime was about to end because Jesus was returning that day in May to establish a new kingdom.

"The police and military police slaughtered many of them at gunpoint—beheading two pastors. Others were arrested. I am told by Hmong pastors that so many were shot dead that they were buried in mass graves bulldozed over in an episode that I read about in Britain but did not understand the magnitude of until I got here."

Prasch reported that he spoke to a secret meeting of Hmong pastors to explain to them "false prophets and false teachers."

"Due to a combination of poverty, ignorance, and persecution these poor Christians don't understand much, so they believed Camping's shortwave broadcast which is how most get their teaching," he said.

Now "their families don't know if their missing loved ones are among the many shot dead, among those arrested and imprisoned, or among those from the 7,000 hiding in the jungle," he said.

"These people already suffering for their faith in Jesus had it bad enough. They are not like the undiscerning whackos in the West who should have known Camping was a crackpot and a proven false prophet and false teacher," Prash reported. "This is a persecuted church who just had no means to know any different. This is why...I warn so much about false teachers and false prophets."

He continued, "Of course we can blame Satan and the communists, but their blood is on the hands of Harold Camping and his Family Radio. Women without husbands, children without parents, husbands without wives."

A WND request of Family Radio for comment did not generate a response.

Family Radio's very silence is a self-indictment. How can they respond in any acceptable way over against such a horror and grief?

Did such news lead Family Radio to reconsider its predictions and repent of its follies lest it be accountable for more such horrors?

Not at all. Rather, Family Radio allowed Camping to offer a new date for the final judgment and so

continue to mislead the ignorant and endanger the pliable.

Closer to home, WND reported the following:

When Camping's expected rapture did not occur, International Business Times reported, Lyn Benedetto of Antelope Valley, Calif., slit the wrists and throats of her two daughters and then slit her own, claiming to prevent them from going through the "Tribulation" on May 21.

A neighbor summoned an ambulance in time for them to be hospitalized.

One cannot help but wonder how many others Camping's failed predictions have led to despair, to say nothing of disillusionment with Christianity altogether.

Indeed, Harold Camping's persistence in folly, folly that plainly is condemned by the very Scriptures Camping claims to understand better than any Bible student who ever lived, is no little matter.

But having stated the above condemnation of Harold Camping and his irresponsible predictions, the question arises, what are we as the church of Christ in these latter days to preach concerning Christ's second coming? Ought we in the name of Christ to continue to preach the 'soon' return of Christ and the nearness of His second coming, and with it, the end of this world?

Or does continuing to do so number us with the irresponsible?

Those of the apostasy, who have long ago ceased to believe the prophetic Scriptures or to confess the coming judgments of God, are sure

to seize upon what has just transpired (or, if you will, what did NOT occur) and justify their silence on Christ's second coming. Surely, they say, if the Harold Camping fiasco has taught Christianity anything at all, it is that preaching the return of Christ, and in particular some imagined 'nearness,' is nothing but 'alarmist preaching.' All it can do is lead to more dashed hopes, and with it despair, disillusionment, and, for some, grievous and needless suffering for their Christian faith.

But such a perspective is unbiblical. Such is exactly what the Arch-deceiver wants the Christian church in these latter days to believe and practice—a preaching silence concerning the Lord's return, a moratorium on warning all and sundry concerning Christ's nearness as judgment day approaches.

We are not given to know the day or the hour. Nor do we claim to. Not even the year. But that is not to say that Christ's church is to act ignorant of her Lord's close approach. Nor, for that matter, will the church be taken by surprise when Christ's time to reappear is at hand.

To be sure, Scripture in more than one place states that Christ's coming will be as a thief in the night. But, strikingly, in I Thessalonians 5 the apostle applies this being taken by surprise exclusively to the ungodly and apostate, "For when *they* shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon *them*, as travail upon a woman with child: and *they* shall not escape" (v. 3). As for the believers, the apostle declares, "But ye,

brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *you* as a thief" (v. 4).

The reason? The "signs of the time" spelled out in the New Testament Scriptures.

Scripture's prophetic reality is, Christ cannot come at any time.

This is why at the conclusion of last month's editorial we stated that Camping's predictions concerning the end of the world would no more be fulfilled on October 21 than they were on May 21 or back in 1994. Nor, for that matter, is Christ going to return next month, next year, or the year following, 2013.

Such predictions do not make one guilty of Camping presumptuousness.

In Matthew 24 Christ Himself tells the church what *must* first take place, namely, His kingdom gospel must be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations, "...then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

This tells us who live in the twenty-first century that the return of Christ is near, very near.

To live in the twenty-first century and not to see that the White Horse with its Rider has nearly finished his great task is to be willfully blind. For those who have heard the gospel, the time to repent and believe, or perish, is short.

But that is different than saying Christ can come at any moment.

Scripture is plain. There is one great sign and reality that must occur before Christ returns, namely, the appearance of the one whom Paul calls "the man of sin" (II Thes. 2:3), labeled by Christ in Matthew 24:15 as the "abomination of desolation... stand[ing] in the holy place." It is in connection with the appearance of this Antichrist that Paul warned the church, knowing how it early on expected an immediate return of Christ: "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day [of Christ's return] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

We are well aware that Camping maintains that Satan is that Antichrist and already stands in the holy

place (the pulpits of all Protestant churches). But here too, in light of his prophetic fiasco, Camping is discredited and his explanations dismissed.

The simple fact is that the Antichrist as the *man* of sin has not yet made his appearance. The great tribulation that the monster of iniquity and deception will bring upon the church (Matt. 24:15ff.) has not yet occurred. Until he stands forth, bringing with him the great tribulation, Christ will not appear, and time cannot end.

So we wait, and watch, and warn.

But we set no exact date. To do so would be folly and only plays into the hand of the Deceiver himself.

Of such Harold Camping and Family Radio have been guilty. They have much to answer for to the Lord of truth.

But this foolish date-setting is not the worst of 'False Harold's' (as one wag labeled him) evils. There is more.

With this we will deal in our next editorial. ☞

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

A Significant Anniversary (2)

Sixty years ago a steadfast friend of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) came into being. It is the anniversary of our friend, the

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Previous article in this series: October 1, 2011, p. 10.

Declaration of Principles (Declaration), that we celebrated in the last article. Remembering that anniversary is remembering a significant event. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, and others with him, maintained that the document was "one of the most important documents that was ever adopted by our churches" (34.11:244). It was the settled and binding decision of the PRC on

“one aspect of ‘common grace’” that represented the culmination of years of Protestant Reformed thought (28.5:53).

It represented the culmination of years of Protestant Reformed thought because the issue faced in 1953 was not substantially different from the issue faced in 1924. Herman Hoeksema insisted that the PRC in 1924 rejected bindingly the Heynsian doctrine of the covenant, which was the error of the well-meant gospel offer applied to the covenant. This Heynsian doctrine of a grace to all the baptized was not essentially different from the Liberated covenant doctrine of a promise to all the baptized (27.7:150–51).

Over against that doctrine the Declaration clearly states the doctrine of the covenant of the Reformed creeds.

The Declaration was not adopted because the PRC thought that the Reformed creeds were unclear on the issues, but it was adopted because she believed the confessions were perfectly clear on these disputed points and she wanted to state her belief over against those who said they were Reformed and yet denied these things that the three forms of unity taught. As Hoeksema said, “The strength of this declaration [is that] it rests exactly on the assumption that the confessions are certainly not ambiguous” (27.1:7).

In a controversy over the covenant, the Protestant Reformed Churches come from a position of strength, from a conviction. It is the conviction of the Declaration, resting squarely on the Reformed creeds.

Particularly important is the Declaration’s interpretation of Canons 2, Article 8: “All the covenant blessings are for the elect alone” and “God’s promise is unconditionally for them only”; and of the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 74: “little infants surely cannot fulfill any conditions. And if the promise of God is for them, the promise is infallible and unconditional, and therefore only for the elect.”¹

Of importance as well is the insistence of the Declaration: “faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto sal-

vation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ.”²

The Declaration also repudiates the teachings “that the promise is conditional and for all the baptized” and “that the promise is an objective bequest...giving to every baptized child the right to Christ and all the blessings of salvation.”³

These statements in the Declaration are a basic description of Heynsian and Schilderian covenantal theology rejected at that time. Today, by their own admission, false teachers among the federal vision have developed this covenantal theology. The basic point, however, remains the same: by baptism every single baptized child is incorporated into Christ and receives Christ and all His benefits. There is a universal—common—grace in the sphere of the covenant.

In this light, one must explain the Declaration’s inclusion of the section on common grace. That is not merely a reminder of some past controversy, but it lays the groundwork for the covenantal controversy of that time. Any Reformed covenantal doctrine must harmonize with the teaching of sovereign, particular grace; must reject common grace, that is, a grace of God that is wider than the decree of election; must thoroughly reject the well-meant gospel offer; and must insist on the total depravity of the unregenerate man.

Although the issues of 1924 were more basic and logically and necessarily had to be faced first, the end of those issues came nearly thirty years later. Indeed, I highly doubt that, apart from the events of 1924, 1953 would have been possible. The theological groundwork of 1924 found its conclusion at last in 1951 “in the fact that our [the Protestant Reformed] churches finally officially declared what according to their conviction is the truth as expressed in our confessions, especially concerning fundamental principles, all concentrating around the promise of God and the preaching of the gospel, and therefore around one aspect of ‘common grace’” (28.3:52). In the Declaration the truth of God’s sovereign, particular grace was applied decisively to the promise of God in the covenant.

In the final analysis, this is also the emphasis of Scripture: God loves Jacob and hates Esau. If one

¹ Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 418–19.

² Ibid., 423.

³ Ibid., 424, 426.

can be convinced that God loves every baptized child and gives to every baptized child the promise of salvation, it is a very small step—indeed demanded by that theology—to teach also that God loves all men and offers to all men salvation in Christ. In a similar way, if I am convinced that God does not love all men and does not offer to them salvation on the mission field, then a penetrating analysis of the reasons—all finding their source in the creedal doctrine of election and reprobation—demands that I apply that same truth in the church among the baptized. The rejection of Arminianism demands the rejection of a universal promise in the covenant. The teaching of a universal promise in the covenant is essentially Arminianism.

Remembering the adoption of that little document is remembering a significant anniversary! Its adoption was a victory for the truth of sovereign grace (in the covenant) and for the Protestant Reformed Churches' continued witness to that truth over against the Arminianism of universal grace (in the covenant).

I pray that this important document, which gives the reasons for the existence of the PRC, is not as unknown as might be supposed. Certainly we would assume that it has been discussed in societies, and no doubt we assume it has been taught in the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine classes, and almost certainly it has been explained in some form or other.

And if not, then a modest proposal on this the "diamond white" anniversary of the Declaration: let us study it!

I am thankful to report that on September 22 Prof. David Engelsma, professor emeritus of the Theological School of the PRC, and recent editor of the *Standard Bearer*, gave a speech entitled, "The 60th Anniversary of the 'Declaration of Principles': A Commemoration," to the annual association meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). We could only hope that his speech will be the occasion for the members of the RFPA to return to their own churches with a renewed appreciation for and interest in the study of the Declaration.

Would that the subsequent year in the PRC would be devoted to a renewed interest in and study of the Declaration of Principles! Perhaps an officebearers' conference or two! Studied in church societies! See-

ing that the original purpose of the Declaration was for missions, would that evangelism committees would make a renewed study of it and incorporate the distribution and promotion of it into their labors! Perhaps Professor Engelsma could be persuaded to give his speech elsewhere, as I know he will in the Chicago area at the request of the Senior Adult Bible Study of Peace Protestant Reformed Church.

And failing all this, perhaps only this: that the membership of the PRC and all other interested Reformed believers would obtain a copy of the Declaration and at least read it and consider it themselves.

What a wonderful year it could be to remember this significant anniversary of our faithful friend of sixty years!

Rev. Hoeksema could write that the future did not look bright for the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1949. In this he proved prophetic. Another statement he made at that crucial moment also proved true: "Whatever will become of the *Standard Bearer*, and for that matter of the Protestant Reformed Church[es]..., God will preserve His Church, and the gates of hell shall never overshadow her" (26.1:6).

God saw fit to preserve His church also in the institution of the PRC. Of that the Declaration is proof, as is the continued existence of the *SB* and of the PRC's official adherence to the principles set down from the Reformed creeds in the Declaration.

The anniversary of that document is also significant today in the ecclesiastical climate in which the PRC find themselves. That document, inasmuch as it was responsible, by God's grace, for the preservation of a distinctively Protestant Reformed witness to the truth of the Reformed creeds concerning the doctrine of the covenant, is responsible also for the fact that the PRC have an important testimony to give to the Reformed church world over against the heresy of the federal vision. Even if it could be said with absolute confidence that the heresy of the federal vision is no threat to the PRC, they would be negligent, culpably negligent, if they would not speak about the truth of the covenant set down in the Reformed creeds that the federal vision is so gleefully attempting to destroy.

Let us declare it! 

News from the Seminary

The seminary has once again opened its doors and begun another year of instruction. There is always an eagerness to begin classes again. The summer recess is just long enough for students and faculty. Now we have buckled down to the rigors of another academic year.

One significant change from last year concerns the seminary building itself. The summer of 2009 saw the renovation of the entrance to the seminary. This summer's work was more extensive. It involved construction of a new (larger) all-purpose room, new (larger) rest rooms, a new kitchen, and a new faculty lounge, which will double as a meeting place for denominational committees. In addition, this phase included



New all-purpose room



New kitchen-lunch room

construction of a centrally located bookstore. The bookstore carries all of the textbooks used by the students in all the different courses they take, as well as

many other worthwhile books for the libraries that they are beginning to build. Purchases may be made from the bookstore by anyone who visits the seminary.

This project was funded exclusively by donations and not at all through synodical assessments. We are grateful to the Theological School Committee and to all those who contributed. The building has not only been improved functionally but also updated aesthetically.



Modernized architecture

Staff and students alike work in a very pleasing environment that is conducive to study and learning. If you have not yet seen the changes in the seminary building, or have never seen the seminary, we invite you to stop by and take a tour.

The new school year began with the seminary-sponsored conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Prior to the conference in the Grand Rapids area, the seminary professors gave their speeches at the officebearers' conference of Classis West. That was the first week of September. The following week, the conference was held at the First Christian Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan. The conference was well attended and a profitable time had by all. At the time of this writing, the faculty is planning a third presentation of their conference speeches in the NW Iowa area, October 7 and 8, 2011. They will also be preaching in the area churches the Lord's Day of October 9. All three speeches will also be published in the upcoming (November 2011) issue of the *Protestant*

Prof. Cammenga is current rector and professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Reformed Theological Journal. Besides the three conference speeches, the journal will include Rev. Doug Kuiper's introductory meditation at the Officebearers' Conference entitled "God's Word Written: Where, How, and Why?" If you are not a journal subscriber, you may contact the seminary in order to have your name added to our mailing list.

This past year three seniors graduated from the seminary, now Rev. Nathan Decker, Rev. Brian Huizinga, and pastor-elect Jonathan Mahtani. What a joy for the faculty to see these brothers take their place as ministers in our denomination. But our joy is bitter-sweet. These three will be sorely missed "on the hill." We are confident that the Lord will use them in the office of Christ for many years in our churches.

This fall we welcomed to our halls one first-year student, Mr. Ryan Barnhill, a son of our Hudsonville PRC. We have one second-year student, Mr. Joshua Engelsma, a son of our Hope PRC of Walker, MI; one third-year student, Mr. Eric Guichelaar (who was recently wedded to a daughter of the undersigned), a son of our Wingham, Ontario congregation; and one special student, Mr. Vernon Ibe, a member of the Berean PRC in the Philippines. Both Mr. Guichelaar and Mr. Ibe have been licensed by the faculty to speak a word of edification in the churches. As much as possible we will be scheduling them to lead the worship services of the churches that request pulpit supply from the seminary.

Mr. Ibe is presently serving an internship under the supervision of Rev. Ronald VanOverloop and the Grace PRC consistory. Mr. Ibe is anticipating graduation from the seminary in the spring. After his graduation, Mr. Ibe, his wife, Melody, and young son, Martyn, intend to return to the Philippines and take up labor there.

Besides their teaching loads, the professors also preach regularly, teach catechism classes and lead Bible study societies, speak to various groups on different occasions, write for the denominational publications, develop their courses, and mentor the students. All three professors will be giving Reformation Day lectures in the churches. We love our work and pray that the fruits of our labors are a blessing to our churches, our sister churches, and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world.

In addition to the four seminarians, seven area pre-seminarians are studying Greek Grammar under the tutelage of Prof. Gritters. The faculty is aware, also, of a few other men, outside the Grand Rapids area, who intend, after graduation from college, to attend the seminary. If there are young men in the churches who are so inclined, we urge them to contact our registrar, Mr. Don Doezema, for advice concerning course selection. Completion of the seminary prerequisites is necessary for entrance into the seminary.

Besides welcoming back students and staff, the seminary welcomed one new full-time staff person. With the approval of Synod 2011, Mr. Charles Terpstra, a member of Faith PRC, was hired to work in the library. The focus of Mr. Terpstra's labors is the processing of the Letis library, which the seminary purchased a couple of years ago, and incorporation of this collection into our library. The faculty is grateful for the synod's decision. Mr. Terpstra has already proved to be a very helpful addition, both to the students and to the faculty.

We at the seminary covet the prayers of the churches. We pray for the churches, and we trust that the churches pray for us. Pray that we may be given by God strength for the work. Pray that we may remain faithful to our Reformed heritage and distinctives. And pray that God will raise up more young men to study for the ministry of the Word—men of God; men who have the necessary gifts; hardworking, humble men; men who love Christ and who love His bride, the church.

Pray for men who heed the apostle's exhortation in II Timothy 2:15: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."



Updated classroom

For the Faculty,
Prof. Ron Cammenga, Rector



Fathers: the Glory of Children

Young people, do you view your parents, and specifically your fathers, as the source of your joy and happiness? It is tempting for a child, as he grows older, to despise his parents and to reject their good advice and admonitions. The wise child, according to the book of Proverbs, is a son or daughter who keeps the commandments of father and mother, receives reproof, thus making father and mother glad. The foolish child is one who despises instruction, will not hear rebuke, and turns away from the commandments of his parents. Are you living as a wise, or as a foolish, young person?

One striking way in which God puts this calling is found in Proverbs 17:6: “The glory of children are their fathers.” The word glory there can be understood as boasting, and the idea is that children delight in their fathers. The father is the source of highest glory and boasting to a child. The child holds his father in high regard. It is ordinary for small children to think a lot of their fathers, but as they grow to be teenagers, that honor tends to diminish. What does it mean for you that your glory is your father? How do you show that? You need to show that you glory in your father by obedience and respect.

Children must honor and respect others, especially their parents. Our temptation is to honor self, but God demands that we turn away from self to honor others. The degree of success and happiness in your life has directly to do with the extent to which you are able to focus on others, not yourself. It is interesting to note how many words have the word “other” in them. Mother, brother, and another are just a few. We know that the greatest “other” is God. We need to put the glory of God above that of ourselves. This is the lesson God is teaching us through all of life—God first—me last.

Why must you glory in your father?

First, you owe a debt of gratitude to your parents. You owe them for their care for you, for their sacrifices, for their hard work. The debt you owe your parents is a huge one, and you need to be reminded constantly of the hard work that your father and mother perform to provide for all your needs. Your mothers should remind you of all the hard work your fathers perform, and your fathers should remind you of the hard work your mothers are involved in to maintain your place in your home. A spirit of thankfulness needs to move you to honor them. It is easy to take parents for granted, but we may not do so.

Second, God has given to your parents a high and noble office that you need to respect. The office of parent demands respect, regardless of the person who fills the office. Remember the difference between obedience and honor. Hopefully this never is the case—but you may not obey your parents if they demand sinful things of you. Say no to them, and tell them you must obey God not them.

Third, your parents must be honored and respected because of the experience that God has given to them. They have obtained a profound education in the school of life, in addition to the other training they have. They have struggled against sin, fought against temptations, labored and sacrificed and worked hard, and have been required to make many decisions. God has given to them a wealth of experience, for which you must be thankful.

Fourth, your parents must be loved and respected because God has set them as His representatives. Your parents, especially your father, represent God. If you do not respect and glory in your father, you do not respect and glory in God!

Finally, the most basic reason is that God says so. This is God’s clear command in Ephesians 6:1: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” The parent who demands respect and requires that both father and mother are treated courteously and with deference is not being selfish. He is training his child in the way that he should go, the way of obedience before God.

Rev. Brummel is pastor of the Heritage Protestant Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

As young people, you need to put the interests of your parents above your own. You need to put their comforts and needs above your own. You are called to lift their burdens, and to show an interest in them and in their lives.

Help your father and your mother without their having to demand it of you. That starts with the little things. Set and clear the table, wash the dishes or load the dishwasher, always leave a room cleaner than when you entered it. Pick up your trash and that of others and throw it away. Put your dirty clothes in the hamper; put your clean clothes away. Keep your bedrooms looking neat. Shovel the snow, mow the lawn, take care of pets, run errands, show your love and respect by putting your parents and their needs above your own. Ask your father or mother what you can do to help lighten his or her load. Hold the door open for your dad and mom. Give them the best chairs in the living room. You are called to serve them. The child who is selfish at home will be selfish at school and selfish in the whole of his or her life.

Put the glory of others ahead of yourself!

The same is true of your grandparents. Their place as your elders demands your love and attention and respect. They need your visits. You should write them letters, call them, e-mail them, show special love and attention to them.

Your relationship to your brothers and sisters must be one of unity and love. Wickedly the world talks about how brothers and sisters don't get along and are prone to fight. That ought not be the case in a Christian home! Our sinful natures rise up at times, but the norm should be love toward one another. This is so important that God says in I John 4:20: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." If you do not love your brother and sister whom God put on your pathway, then you cannot say that you love God! You need to share. You need to learn to avoid jealousy. You need to be able to praise your brothers or sisters for something they can do better than you. You need to ask them for help when you are struggling with something

they are good at. Those of you who have younger brothers or sisters need to help take care of your siblings. God has put you as an example to them, so you as the older children have the greater calling.

This will carry over to your teachers in school, which is an extension of your home. When obeying and honoring your teacher, you are honoring God.

Be kind and helpful in the classroom. Don't talk about your teacher or mock him behind his back. You older students on the bus, on the playground, and in your classroom need to be good examples to the younger students. Your classmates need to be treated like your brothers and sisters. They are spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ! Show them what it means to be obedient and respectful. There is no place for

selfishness anywhere in life, not at school either. You need to think of others ahead of yourself. Work hard, accept the instructions and assignments and discipline of your teacher. You need to pray daily to be kind, unselfish, and loving toward those around you. You need to play games together and abide by the rules. Be fair. Put others ahead of yourself. Don't argue when you lose or "get out." Wait your turn where that is required. Respect the property of others as well as their bodies.

It is a shame today that I hear so many children referring to adults in a very disrespectful manner. Never should you call your dad or mom by their first name. The other adults in the church should be addressed as Mr. and Mrs. It is a shame that so many children call their uncles and aunts by their first name. They don't even have the courtesy to call them Uncle and Aunt. Ministers need to be addressed by their titles. Adults need to demand this form of respect for God's sake. These titles are not important because the people are so great, but because God demands respect for the office and position they occupy. They are your elders, and in honoring them you honor God. Remember what happened to the forty-two children who refused to show honor to Elisha. Two mother bears came out of the woods and tore them in pieces. God demands honor and respect!

As the end of the world gets nearer, there will be great temptations for God's people, including children and young people. One characteristic of the end, according


*As young people,
you need to put
the interests of
your parents
above your own.*

to II Timothy 3:2, is that children will be “disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection.”

Tragically we see this already in our day. Children and young people are disobedient. They are selfish. They are unthankful. They lack natural love for their parents and siblings. They do not live holy, but live according to their own sinful desires. As God’s children, we need to fight those temptations.

If we are honest with ourselves, we need to conclude that we do not do very well. We are very selfish. We want our own will, not what our parents and siblings desire. We are very sinful. We do not love those whom we can see, and we therefore deserve to be cast off by God whom we cannot see. But God is merciful. He shows us what love is. He gave His own Son to die on the cross to save us from our sins. If God and Jesus were selfish like us, we would never have been saved. But God loved us, and now works in our hearts by His Spirit so that we love Him and

show it by loving one another. We need to be children of prayer, children who say we are sorry, and children who know that we need Jesus Christ and His saving grace in our hearts. You need to put first in your life, not yourself, but God and His will.

In this way, not only will you glory in your parents, but, as Proverbs 17:6 states, you will be the crown of your parents and grandparents. You will have thankful and glad fathers and mothers and grandparents. Why will they be glad? Not just because you are respectful and obedient. But because in that respect and obedience they see young people who are loving God. They have no greater joy than to see their children and grandchildren grow up in the truth. They want to see you walking in the truth and walking in love with God and one another. May God grant that we show ourselves wise sons and daughters for His glory and praise! 

FEATURE ARTICLE

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAS

The 60th Anniversary of the “Declaration of Principles”: A Commemoration*

Introduction

In the last few days of September and the first three days of October, 1951, that is, sixty years ago to the month and almost to the day, the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) took the most important decisions in their history to that date, indeed, to the present day. By votes consistently of nine to seven—the slimmest majority possible, one vote—the

synod adopted a document called “The Declaration of Principles.”

Herman Hoeksema, who had led the fight for the adoption of the Declaration, with his colleague, George M. Ophoff, certainly regarded the adoption of the Declaration as the most important decision the PRC had taken to that date. Writing in the *Standard Bearer* of November 1, 1951, immediately after synod had adopted the Declaration, Hoeksema said this about the synod: “[It] will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the most important synods—if not the most important—that to date was ever held.” The importance of the synod, of course, was the adoption of the Declaration.

The importance of the Declaration for the PRC is

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* *The text of the address given at the annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) on September 22, 2011 at Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI.*

evident. The adoption of the Declaration was the occasion (note well: I do not say *cause*, but *occasion*) of a grievous schism—the most dangerous, distressing denomination-wide event in the PRC from our founding to the present. In direct response to the Declaration, some two thirds of the members of the PRC, including ministers, separated from the denomination.

The importance of the Declaration for the PRC was also that it preserved the remnant—those few who were left when the majority departed—in the gospel of sovereign grace, which had been the origin of the churches in 1924.

Contemporary theological developments in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, especially in North America (which is today the heartland of Reformed Christianity in the world), show that the decisions adopting the Declaration were also of the greatest importance for the maintenance of the Reformed faith *in all the world*, not only in the PRC.

Fifty years before the then-Orthodox Presbyterian theologian Norman Shepherd unleashed the heresy of the federal vision on the community of conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the Declaration of Principles exposed and rejected that doctrine as false, on the basis of the Reformed confessions. Whereas all other Reformed churches today stand helpless before the covenant heresy that calls itself the federal vision, armed with the Declaration the PRC resist that heresy, and defeat it.

It is strange, therefore, and wrong, that so little attention is paid to the Declaration by members of the PRC, indeed, that it is virtually a forgotten document in the PRC. We largely ignore the anniversaries of its adoption. We seldom refer to it. Few study it. I fear that many younger members of the PRC are ignorant of it.

There are reasons for this strange slighting of that important document.

In the bitter internal warfare (and “warfare” is not too strong a word) leading up to, attending, and then following on the adoption of the Declaration, the enemies of the Declaration were largely successful in portraying the Declaration as the unnecessary cause of all the trouble and misery in the PRC.

After the schism occasioned by the Declaration, even

some who steadfastly confessed the truth of sovereign grace and remained loyal members of the PRC questioned the necessity of the Declaration.

In addition, it is not impossible that the religious climate of our day, which cries up peace and unity and decries doctrinal precision and controversy, influences members of the PRC, so that there is distaste for, and aversion to, the Declaration. The Declaration is a monument to everything that contemporary religion disavows.

Whatever the reasons, the Declaration does not have the place in the consciousness—and in the *heart*—of the members of the PRC that it ought to have.

This is changing. God is using the contemporary heresy of the federal vision to stir up in us renewed appreciation for the Declaration; clearer understanding of the fundamental issues the Declaration addresses and settles; and, therefore, also more zeal to study the document.

The title of this article describes it as a commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration. We commemorate events that are good, important, and beneficial. The Spirit of truth was at work in the adoption of the Declaration, preserving and developing the gospel of grace—preserving the gospel of grace in the PRC exactly with regard to the issues of the covenant raised by the federal vision.

The document itself is a glorious testimony to the gospel—a testimony to the gospel exactly in those respects that the federal vision denies.

The Declaration has been a blessing to the PRC. Down the years it has had a powerful influence on the PRC, whether or not it was studied. The ministers have all preached the doctrine of the covenant as set forth in the Declaration. They have condemned, or at least avoided, the covenant doctrine that the Declaration condemns—the covenant doctrine that the federal vision is vigorously promoting, defending, and developing.

A Brief History of the Adoption of the “Declaration” Synod of 1951

The Declaration cannot be understood apart from the history of its adoption. Twenty-five years after

the founding of the denomination over the doctrinal controversy in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) concerning common grace, the PRC were engaged in a battle for their life. This battle was fought at the synod of 1951—a recessed synod that ran from June to the beginning of October. The issue was the adoption of a document called the Declaration of Principles of the PRC.

The physical existence of the denomination was in jeopardy. Many ministers and consistories openly warned of a split if the Declaration was adopted. It was evident that a sizable majority of ministers and members strongly opposed the Declaration. Virtually all of Classis West—one of only two classes making up the denomination—not only opposed the Declaration, but also threatened separation, if the Declaration was adopted. Outside observers, especially in the CRC (where the wish was father to the thought), predicted the demise of the hated PRC.

If the Declaration were not adopted, the spiritual existence of the PRC would have been sacrificed. The churches would have opened themselves to an influx of members—Dutch immigrants in Canada from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) (RCNlib)—whose strongly held covenant doctrine would eventually have obliterated the distinctive confession of the PRC. Thus, the PRC would have succumbed to a doctrine of universal, resistible grace in the sphere of the covenant. This doctrine contradicts the doctrine of particular, sovereign grace, which is the PRC’s right of existence before the face of God in the community of Reformed churches.

Just before the meeting of the synod of 1951, at which the Declaration was to be adopted or rejected, Hoeksema wrote, in the April 15, 1951 issue of the *Standard Bearer*: “If our next synod should dare to reject it, I see no longer any hope for the future of our PRC as remaining distinctively Reformed.” He added: “Hence, ‘with malice toward none,’ I shall fight for it.”

The synod of 1951 adopted the Declaration.

Adoption was a slow, almost agonizing process. Synod did not adopt the document as a whole, but section by section.

There was this to the credit of the synod. It was a

deliberative assembly. Both advocates and opponents of the Declaration raised and pressed their arguments. They responded to each other’s arguments—at length. The synodical rule limiting a speech to ten minutes was annulled, or ignored, or grossly transgressed. Leading the fight to adopt the Declaration were the two seminary professors, Hoeksema and Ophoff (both delegates from Classis East, since Hoeksema was pastor of First Church, Grand Rapids and Ophoff was an elder in this congregation). There were two sides, ominous for the future unity of the denomination: Classis West versus Classis East. One delegate from Classis West would vote with the eight delegates from Classis East to gain the adoption of the Declaration.

As in the great tragic plays of Shakespeare, there occurred a moment of “comic relief.” In the midst of the heated debate, with the existence of the churches at stake, someone moved “to instruct all to abstain from smoking in this room.” Wonderful to relate, in that age of pipes and cigars as virtually a badge of Dutch Reformed orthodoxy, the motion carried.

The result was schism (not the result of the motion to ban smoking, but the result of the motion to adopt the Declaration)—the schism that had been threatened by some, and feared by others. The schism took place, not at once, but two years later, in the fall of 1953. Because the synod of 1951 finally adopted the Declaration late in the year, at the continued session of synod in October, protests against the Declaration could not be brought until the synod of 1953. The synod of 1953 was deadlocked. Every vote was eight to eight, the East voting against the West, and the West, against the East. Synod, therefore, recessed until the spring of 1954, more out of despair than hope, placing all the protests against the Declaration in the hands of a committee for advice.

Before synod could reconvene, however, the schism happened, in the late summer and early fall of 1953. How the schism occurred is not now our interest. Suffice it to say that the immediate cause was two doctrinal statements by one of the minister-enemies of the Declaration. These statements expressed the conditional theology that the Declaration condemned and that Classis East judged heretical.

Synod of 1950

Our interest is the Declaration, and for right understanding of that document it is important to know also the history that *led up to* the controversial adoption of the Declaration by the synod of 1951.

The action that led to the writing and adopting of the Declaration was a request to the synod of 1950 by the denominational mission committee, that synod “draw up a form that may be used by those families requesting organization into a Protestant Reformed congregation.” The mission committee added: “This would serve to remove all misunderstanding and aid toward unity” (Acts of Synod [of the] PRC, 1950, 54).

This request arose from work that the mission committee was doing with Dutch immigrants in Canada. These immigrants carried with them from the Netherlands strong convictions concerning the covenant, derived from the teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder and the RCNlib. The RCNlib had split from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands only a few years earlier over the very same issues concerning the covenant that are addressed by the Declaration.

Understandably, these potential members of the PRC wanted to know, expressly asked, in fact, whether the Protestant Reformed doctrine of the “Covenant and Baptism” would be binding on them, should they join the PRC.

The origin of the Declaration in this request to synod by the mission committee of the denomination refuted the charge by the enemies of the Declaration that its adoption was illegal. In defense of the legality of its adoption of the Declaration, synod appealed to Articles 30 and 51 of the church order. Article 30 requires the major assembly (which a synod is) to deal with matters that “pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common.” Article 51 attributes to the “general synod” the authority to “regulate” the “missionary work of the churches.”

A committee of pre-advice presented the 1950 synod of the PRC with a very brief response to this request from the mission committee. The committee called this brief response a “clear-cut expression [of what the PRC required of the Dutch immigrants and of others who would join the PRC].” This brief statement would have informed the mission committee and the Dutch

immigrants that in the PRC it is binding doctrine that the promise of the covenant “is not general,” but is “particular, that is, it pertains only to the elect of God” (Acts of Synod, 1950, 54).

This brief response addressed the fundamental issue in the controversy over the covenant between the RCNlib and the PRC, and would have decided the issue correctly. Hoeksema was not a member of this committee of pre-advice.

Synod did not adopt this advice. Rather, it referred the matter back to the committee, adding Hoeksema and Ophoff to the committee. This happened on Friday.

The following Monday, the committee of pre-advice presented for adoption the Declaration of Principles, calling it by this name. The document, therefore, was written over one weekend, very likely in one day—Saturday. The synod of 1951 would revise the document somewhat, especially by adding a preamble and by inserting a couple of important paragraphs in section three. Basically, however, the Declaration in its present, final form, is the document presented to the synod of 1950.

The author of the Declaration was Hoeksema. The rest of the committee may have added a word or crafted a phrase, but, as Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence, Herman Hoeksema was the author of the Declaration of Principles.

Synod 1950 adopted the Declaration *provisionally*. On the advice of Hoeksema, it postponed the *decisive* adoption to the synod of 1951. The purpose of the postponement was to give the churches time to study the document and weigh in on its contents.

In view of the bitter opposition to the Declaration that would immediately surface in the papers and pulpits of the PRC and in view of the storm of controversy that would arise, culminating in the knock-down, drag-out fight at the synod of 1951, and, eventually, in the schism of 1953, it is curious, indeed intriguing, that the synod of 1950 adopted the Declaration provisionally without much debate and with little or no dissent. Only one delegate voted against adopting the Declaration in 1950.

One other aspect of the provisional adoption of the Declaration by the synod of 1950 must be mentioned.

Although decisive adoption was put off to 1951, in the meantime the Declaration would function as a “working hypothesis for our mission committee and for our missionaries in the organization of churches” (Acts of Synod, 1950, 90).

This aspect of the provisional adoption of the Declaration by the synod of 1950 is important for two reasons. First, it helps to explain the fierce opposition by many Protestant Reformed ministers between the synods of 1950 and 1951, whereas they did not object at the synod of 1950. The RCNlib and the immigrants in Canada, who were well aware of the decisions of the synod of 1950, informed these Protestant Reformed ministers that there would be no missions among the “liberated” immigrants, no church growth for the PRC, and no ecumenical relations with the RCNlib, if the Declaration were in force.

Second, the Protestant Reformed minister whose heretical statements expressing the doctrine of a conditional covenant were the direct cause of the schism in 1953 made the first of his statements *after the provisional adoption of the Declaration with its condemnation of the doctrine of a conditional covenant promise*. He preached the first of his statements advocating a conditional covenant in the spring of 1951. He preached the second of his heretical statements after the *decisive* adoption of the Declaration. In addition to being heretical, his teaching was deliberate, public contravention of settled and binding synodical decisions.

Controversy before the Synod of 1950

The request of the mission committee for a form to be used for organizing churches came to the synod of 1950 in circumstances of controversy within the PRC regarding the covenant. The issue was the unconditionality or conditionality of the covenant of grace. Hot already in 1950, the controversy became hotter after the synod of 1950, until it boiled over into the schism of 1953.

The controversy was carried on in the two magazines that circulated among the Protestant Reformed people, the *Standard Bearer*, which contended for the unconditional covenant, and *Concordia*, which contended for a conditional covenant. Ministers engaged in the controversy in their sermons, virtually every Sunday.

As I well remember, as a teenager in those days, the controversy raged in households, in extended (and even not so extended) families, and between former friends, all of whom were as yet members of the PRC.

Advocates of a conditional covenant began the controversy. Late in 1947, one of the ministers determined to introduce a conditional covenant into the PRC began defending the doctrine of a conditional covenant, and criticizing the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. He contended for a conditional covenant in the newly created church paper, ironically named *Concordia*. The name described it as seeking peace and unity. The motto spread at large across the top of the cover of every issue was Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how Good and Pleasant for Brethren to Dwell Together in Unity.” The magazine became the instrument of war and division, the *worst* war and division—war and division in the church of Jesus Christ.

Only then, and in express response to the articles in *Concordia*, did Hoeksema begin defending the unconditional covenant in the *Standard Bearer*, as well as criticizing the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

The provocative articles in *Concordia* were precipitated by the visit to the PRC earlier in 1947 by the Dutch theologian and leading churchman of the RCNlib, Klaas Schilder. The PRC invited him on behalf of ecumenicity and missions. The PRC welcomed him with open arms as a theologian with whom the PRC were one. Schilder spoke at officebearers’ conferences in October and November, 1947. He traveled throughout the denomination, preaching in the congregations of the PRC (although carefully he referred to his preaching as only bringing a word of edification), lecturing to audiences of Protestant Reformed people, and, especially, talking privately to the Protestant Reformed ministers.

Wherever he went, Schilder promoted his doctrine of a conditional covenant with all baptized children of believers alike. He made no secret of his detestation of the covenant doctrine of Hoeksema and the PRC.

The effect of the visit by this personable man and renowned theologian was sympathy for Schilder’s doctrine of the covenant. Many of the ministers were eager for the reception of the Dutch immigrants with their convictions about a conditional covenant.

In the womb of this history was conceived, and out of this history was born, the Declaration, in as difficult and bloody a birth as ever there has been.

A lovely child, really!

But despised by the distant relatives of the PRC to this day!

And not always and everywhere warmly embraced by the members of the PRC!

At best, a neglected child, among us!

Ought this to be?

Let us briefly examine the contents of the Declaration.

... to be continued. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (1)

This writer has long prepared lessons for the study of Bible history in the Sunday Schools of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Some of that material (written originally more for Sunday School *teachers* than for Sunday School *students*) has recently been collected and printed in a three-volume set of books entitled *Upon This Rock*. The books cover New Testament Bible history. Given opportunity, now, to write a series of articles for “Search the Scriptures” in the *SB*, I’ve decided to focus again on the very beginning of that history. You may be sure, however, that what appears on these pages will not be just a reprinting of the first chapters of *Upon This Rock*. It will be the fruit of additional study, and my hope and prayer is that you, the reader, will share some of the benefit that I have already derived from it.

I would like, however, to begin by reflecting briefly, in the first installments, on a bit of Old Testament history, specifically the end of the nations of Israel and Judah—not for its own sake, but for the perspective that the Old gives to the New. For it is out of the scattering of the people of Israel and the ruins of the house of David that there comes the glorious kingdom of David’s greater Son.

First, then, Israel—that is, the Israel of the ten tribes, the northern kingdom. We pick up the history in the days of Jeroboam II. Of special interest to us in this history will be the testimony of the prophets. We think immediately, of course, of Elijah and Elisha. Their ministry, you will remember, had brought no national repentance to Israel. Not yet, however, would God remove the ten tribes “out of his sight.” Nor, with the death of Elisha, did He leave them without witness. For it was very likely in the latter part of the reign of Jehoash and the early part of the reign of his son Jeroboam (II) that Jonah prophesied in Israel. As foretold by this prophet (Jonah), Jeroboam recovered territory that had been lost to Hazael king of Syria, thus restoring the boundaries of Israel in the north to the point to which it had extended during the time of Solomon (II Kings 14:25).

Interestingly, a powerful testimony of Jonah to Israel came about through his preaching in another country. We refer, of course, to Assyria, one of the two great powers in the world at that time (the other being Egypt) that were a threat to the independence of Israel and its neighboring states. Syria had already suffered at the hand of Assyria, and records discovered on Assyrian monuments suggest that, some 30 or 40 years earlier, Jehu king of Israel too had been obliged to pay tribute to the king of Assyria. The growing threat of Assyria,

Mr. Doezeema is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

in fact, would soon bring long-time enemies Syria and Israel together in a defensive alliance. It was into this enemy territory that the Lord sent His prophet Jonah the son of Amittai (Jonah 1:1, 2).

The capital of Assyria was Nineveh. It was a great city—having a “circumference of about 60 miles,” according to Fairbairn. It was surrounded by walls that “were 100 feet high, and so broad that three chariots could be driven abreast on them.” It was, further, a city that had been enriched by the plunder taken from conquered countries and from the tribute paid by subject nations. So rich was it that there seemed to be “none end of the store” of its gold and silver (Nahum 2:9). In addition, it was an exceedingly wicked city. According to the word of God to Jonah, “their wickedness is come up before me” (1:2). And the prophet Nahum spoke of it as a “bloody city...full of lies and robbery” (Nahum 3:1).

It was to this great and wicked city, the capital of a people who would one day destroy Samaria and enslave the people of Israel, that Jonah was sent. “Arise,” the Lord said, “go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (1:2).

And Jonah did not want to go.

Why not? Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh? Was it, perhaps, fear? That would be easy to understand and appreciate, for the Assyrians had a reputation for cruelty—especially with respect to their treatment of conquered peoples. Add to that the fact that Nineveh was a city of exceedingly wicked people who, as far as Jonah could tell, had not the slightest respect for the commands of God. For Jonah, a foreigner, to cry against that city on account of its corruption could only, it would seem, expose him to the mockery and persecution of those wicked idolaters. If he met with little sympathy in *Israel*, what could he expect from *Assyria*?

That it was therefore a formidable assignment is plain enough. But it is evident from his own testimony that fear cannot have been the main reason for his disobedience. He said that he fled unto Tarshish because “I knew that thou art a gracious God...and repentest thee of the evil” (4:2). Further, we read that, in the end, it “displeased Jonah exceedingly” that God had spared the city (4:1). It seems, therefore, that Jonah antici-

pated that, as a result of his testimony in Nineveh, some would repent (for why else would the Lord send him?). He understood, too, that the repentance of some would result in the sparing of the entire city. And since Jonah keenly desired that the city, rather, be *destroyed*, he fled “from the presence of the Lord” (1:3).

But why was the prophet so bent on the destruction of Nineveh that he disobeyed a direct command of the Lord? Part of the reason may have been, as some suggest, that Jonah, whose primary concern was the well-being and security of *Israel*, could hardly have hoped that God would spare *Nineveh*, the capital of the people who constituted the greatest threat to the continued existence of Israel. It is not likely, however, that Jonah’s concern for Israel was for nothing more than its physical security. As a true prophet of the Lord, which Jonah certainly was, he desired, more than anything else, that *Israel* *repent*. He may then have hoped for the destruction of the city of Nineveh in order that it might serve as a striking example of God’s judgment, and that the people of Israel might be moved thereby to recognize the seriousness of their own sin.

Closely connected with the prophet’s jealousy for Israel would be his inability to comprehend a mission to a heathen nation. Jonah knew well the promise of God to father Abraham. And, indeed, for hundreds of years God had manifested His love to only one people, namely, the people of Israel. And all other nations showed themselves to be enemies of God and of His people. There were, of course, numerous examples of Gentiles who had become Jewish proselytes, but the fact is that Jonah’s *preaching of the word* to a *heathen people* would be a unique experience in Old Testament history. The distinction that God made between peoples in the old dispensation was real. In His sending of Jonah to Nineveh God was, in effect, making an exception to His own rule. Jonah could not, and did not, understand that. To the prophet, with his understanding of God’s method of dealing with men, the mission seemed so very wrong. Jonah’s confusion and resulting reluctance to go to Nineveh were, in that light, rooted in his love for the people of God.

If Jonah’s dilemma has a New Testament counterpart, it would be the experience of Peter described in Acts 10 and 11. We read there that the apostle was prepared, by a vision, for the arrival of messengers

from Cornelius, an uncircumcised Gentile centurion. He saw a vessel like a sheet let down to earth, wherein were all manner of animals, and he heard a voice saying, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Twice this was repeated. And each time Peter resisted: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." Not unlike Jonah's "I will not go to Nineveh."

For centuries the seed of Abraham had been the special heritage of God. The Jews had come to think that God Himself was bound by this distinction between peoples, and that Gentiles, unless they became Jewish proselytes, were forever outside the kingdom. But the command of God was clear: "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Strictly speaking, the vision had to do with unclean *animals*. But Peter learned soon enough that the *lesson* had to do with *men*. Even to the apostle, that was a revolutionary revelation. Through the messengers from Cornelius God was opening for Peter the door to the Gentiles. That of which Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites was a prefiguration was about to become reality. And Peter, post-Pentecost, had virtually to be pushed through the door. Hardly surprising, then, that Jonah, some 800 years earlier, and *pre*-Pentecost, needed a great fish to set him on his way to Nineveh.

We believe, especially on the basis of Christ's testimony concerning them, that the repentance of some of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah was *unto salvation*. There were, then, people of God who were living in the spiritual darkness of this Gentile city. It was for their sakes that God sent a prophet to Nineveh.

Of special interest, of course, is that God Himself had *placed* them there. And He did so in order that this whole history might serve as instruction for Israel.

There was first of all the typical significance of Jonah's having been three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. A type he was of Christ, who would be "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). And then there was that amazing conversion of Assyrians in Nineveh. The ten tribes were soon to be cast out of their inheritance and scattered over the

face of the earth, never to return. For they continued obstinate and unrepentant in the face of repeated warnings from the prophets and in spite of the fact that many signs and wonders were wrought among them. By contrast, on the basis of a single sermon and sign of Jonah, the Ninevites repented. What a powerful testimony against Israel. How inexcusable was their impenitence.

So also was that repentance of the Ninevites for the condemnation of the Jews of Jesus' day. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it," said Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt. 12:41).

But would the scattering of the ten tribes mean that God had forgotten His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Would the captivity, later, of Judah mean that God's promise had come to nothing? When the apostasy of the nation of Israel, the natural descendants of Abraham, would reach its ultimate fulfillment in the rejection of the Christ, and Israel as a nation would be destroyed by the Romans, would God then be left without a people? The repentance of the Ninevites speaks to this too. For it was a picture of the ingathering of the Gentiles. It prefigured the time, after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, when the gospel would be

proclaimed to the Gentile world, and God's elect would be gathered out of every nation, tribe, and tongue. The true children of Abraham—saved.

Yes, although scattering and captivity lay in the future for both Israel and Judah, a remnant would be saved. The Christ would come. And He would die. But out of death... life. God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is sure. The prophet Jonah, the great fish, and the repen-

tance of the Ninevites were God's pledges of the truth of that.

Next time: The prophets Hosea and Amos. 

*...on the basis
of a single sermon
and sign of Jonah,
the Ninevites repented.*

September 14, 2011
Hope Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 2011 at the Hope PRC, Walker, MI. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. G. Eriks was the chairman of this session. The delegates *ad examina* from Classis West were present, as were two visitors from a small denomination in Germany who were in the area to visit with our Contact Committee.

This was a happy occasion for the classis. The delegates were able to witness the successful classical examination of Nathan Decker, Pastor-elect of the Trinity PRC.

This young brother gave a good account of himself, and at the end of the day he was informed that classis approved his examination and that Trinity PRC was authorized to proceed with his ordination and installation. There was ample evidence that the churches were glad for God's gift of another minister of the gospel in the PRC.

Classis was in closed session to deal with a matter of discipline. Classical appointments were given to Cornerstone and Hope. The expenses of the classis amounted to \$1,185.30.

Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 11, 2012 at the Hudsonville PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregational Activities

Pastor-elect Brian Huizinga, his wife, Michelle, and their children, Anna, Calvin, and Jacob, arrived in Redlands, CA late Thursday evening, September 8. His ordination and installation as the twelfth pastor of the Hope PRC took place during the morning worship service on Sunday, September 18, with Prof. R. Decker leading the service. Rev. W. Langerak, who was also present, read the form and participated in the "imposition of hands by the officiating minister and by other ministers present," as noted in

Article 4 of the Church Order. For the worship service Prof. Decker preached from God's Word found in II Timothy 4:1-4 under the theme, "The Preachers Charge." Hope officially welcomed the Huizinga family after their evening service with a brief program and a time of fellowship together. The following Lord's Day, September 25, Rev. Huizinga preached his inaugural sermon as pastor at Hope, preaching from Isaiah 40:9, under the theme, "Behold Your God."

On Thursday evening, September 29, the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI gathered in worship to witness the ordination and installation of Pastor-elect Nathan Decker as their second pastor. Prof. R. Decker led the worship service, preaching from

I Timothy 4:12 under the theme, "Called to Be an Example of the Believers." At this service there were ten ministers who participated in the "laying on of hands" at the time of ordination. The following Sunday evening, October 2, Rev. Decker preached his first sermon as pastor at Trinity under the theme, "Bringing the Word in Love," based on God's Word found in I Thessalonians 2:11, 12.

We rejoice with these two congregations as their vacancies come to an end. May the King of the church bless the relationship between pastor and congregation by using them to be a blessing to each other.

We can also add here that Rev. N. Decker, his wife, Jessica, and

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

daughter, Kate, will not be moving into Trinity's present parsonage next to their church. Trinity's congregation voted to purchase a new parsonage about two city blocks from Trinity and to tear their old parsonage down. A study showed that making necessary improvements to their present parsonage was just too costly to justify, making the purchase of a new home for their pastor and family the best choice.

While on the one hand Trinity welcomed their new pastor to their fellowship, they also said farewell to Prof. R. Dykstra, who had been providing them Catechism preaching for the past ten months. To mark this occasion the congregation had an appreciation coffee for Prof. Dykstra on Sunday, October 2, after their morning worship service.

On Saturday, October 1, the men of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were invited to a work bee at their church to remove dead and diseased trees from their property.

The Long-Range Planning Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC recently reported to their congregation that the progress of their church addition and renovation remains on schedule. The building addition, including a new nursery, infant room, a large meeting room, classroom, new restrooms, and consistory room is finished. The renovation work, including a new library; expansion of the fellowship hall; and renovation of the existing society room, church office, the new church offices, and the east and west entrances, is scheduled to

be completed around the end of the year.

For its first Bible study meeting of the year, the Senior Adult Society of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL arranged for Prof. D. Engelsma to speak about the Declaration of Principles. The speech was entitled, "The 60th Anniversary of the 'Declaration of Principles': A Commemoration." Peace invited the members of area churches to join them for this special society meeting. The meeting was held at Peace on September 27.

The League of Protestant Reformed Adult Bible Studies held their beginning-of-the-year mass meeting on September 20 in First PRC of Holland. First's pastor, Rev. D. Holstege, spoke on "In Everything Give Thanks."

The First PRC congregation in Holland, MI sponsored a lecture series entitled "Train Up a Child" on three consecutive Wednesdays in September at the Howard Miller Library in Zeeland, MI. The first speech on September 14 was given by Rev. D. Holstege and was entitled, "Parenting in the Information Age." This was followed on September 21 by Rev. G. Eriks speaking on "Child Discipline, Nurturing, and Communication," and September 28 with Prof. B. Gritters speaking on "The Christian Lifestyle of a Parent."

On Friday evening, September 23, Rev. S. Key gave a speech at the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA. Rev. Key spoke on "Amazing Grace," the story of John Newton, the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," which showed how he himself experienced the amazing grace of God.

The Reformed Doctrine Class

met for the first time this fall on September 18, at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Prof. D. Engelsma devoted this first class to consideration of objections to his book concerning church membership, *Bound to Join*, and a brief critique of the rejection of the instituted church by Harold Camping.

Mission Activities

It is typhoon season again in the Philippines. Our missionaries and the saints there endured one of these typhoons in late September, but suffered only minor inconveniences this time. Let us thank God for His protective care and remember to pray for the continued safety of our missionaries and of the saints in the Philippines.

Sister-Church Activities

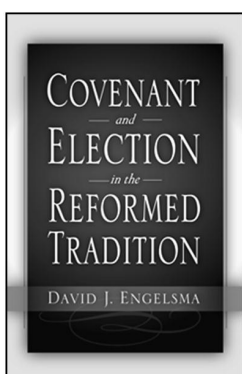
A second "overnighter" was planned for September 23 and 24 for the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI and the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Limerick, Republic of Ireland. The venue was the Foy Centre, Carlingford, Co. Louth, on the Cooley Peninsula. Discussions on the office of believer and the antithesis were planned.

Minister Activities

Candidate Jonathan Mahtani accepted the call he received to serve as the next pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. This means that he also declined the call extended to him to become the next pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC.

Rev. R. Hanko received the call to "come over and help" from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. ∞

ANNOUNCEMENTS



New Release! Now Available for Purchase!

Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition by David J. Engelsma is a fresh study of one of the most important truths in Scripture. Offering a positive and comprehensive exposition of the Biblical relation of covenant and election, Engelsma demonstrates the Reformed tradition of the relation in an explanation of the baptism form, a critique of various prominent Reformed theologians, and criticism of the heresy of the federal vision.

Retail Price: \$28.95 Book Club Price: \$18.82

To order, call (616)457-5970, email mail@rfpa.org, or order online at www.rfpa.org.



Notice

■ *Standard Bearer* announcements should now be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org).

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Calvary PRC express their Christian sympathy to Marv and Melinda VanMaanen, and to their children and grandchildren, in the passing of Marv's father, and to Henry and Jane Hoksbergen, in the passing of her brother,

MR. ED VAN MAANEN.

We pray that the Lord will comfort them in their loss. "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).

Rev. Cory Griess, President
George Hoekstra, Assistant Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Calvary PRC express their Christian sympathy to Peter and Keisha Brummel and children in the passing of Keisha's stepfather,

MR. RANDY SMITH.

May the family find their comfort in the gospel of Christ crucified and confess with the psalmist, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Cory Griess, President
George Hoekstra, Assistant Clerk

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the **PRCA**

Reformed Witness Hour November 2011

Date	Topic	Text
November 6	"To Protect and Provide"	Ephesians 5:25, 26
November 13	"A Wife's Submission to Her Husband"	Ephesians 4:22-24
November 20	"Grace For Today"	Matthew 6:34
November 27	"The Desert Shall Blossom As the Rose"	Isaiah 35