

The Standard Bearer

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Special Reformation Issue:

The Ecumenical Spirit of the Reformation

The Reformation. Luther. And ecumenical spirit?!?

The reader might be taken aback by the theme of this year's Special Reformation issue. Perhaps even a bit skeptical. Was not the Reformation about division? Did it not involve coming out, being separate, and building the church anew? In the Reformation, did not the faithful believers reject the false doctrines and practices of the Romish church and condemn her as apostate?

To be sure, the Reformation was all of that. But it was more.

The Reformation was God's powerful work of restoring His church to what the Bible says the church ought to be. One of the biblical elements lost in the apostate church of Rome was true ecumenicity. In the Reformation, the church of Jesus Christ returned to the biblical pattern. The reformers, to a man, endeavored "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), deeply moved by their Lord's will that His church be unified in the truth.

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Calvin on Unity*

This excerpt of Calvin's Twenty Second Sermon on Ephesians treats especially verses 3-5 of Ephesians 4 and the call to keep the unity of the Spirit. Because of the length of the sermon, the first part was omitted. In it, Calvin movingly exhorts to godly attitudes towards others: "lowliness and meekness, with patience, bearing with each other in love...." Reading Calvin always comes with rich rewards.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Ephesians 4:1-5

St. Paul rules further that (as I have touched on already) we must keep the unity of the Spirit or the bond of peace. For here he puts down the unity of the Spirit as a mark that is required in the church and

flock of God, insomuch that if we are divided among ourselves, we are estranged from God. And with this, he shows us what we have seen briefly before, which is that if we are not at one among ourselves, God disclaims us and tells us we do not belong to him. This unity therefore is something which ought to be valued nowadays, seeing it is the way in respect of which we are acknowledged as God's children.

It is true that the wicked and the unbelieving have their conspiracies, and are so linked one to another that there is not a closer alliance to be found in the world. For even their evil doings bind them to one another, as though they were tightly stitched together, because they perceive themselves to be bound, insomuch that he who has conspired in some evil with another wicked man will be afraid of him, and that fear is like a bond that cannot be broken. However, St. Paul presupposes here that the faithful are at one in God, as he will presently show. For this reason he shows them how the same unity may be kept. "It is (says he) the bond of peace...."

And now he shows what kind of reconciliation or union it is that he has spoken of, saying that there is but one God, and one faith, and one baptism, that "there is but one hope to which we are called, and that there is but one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is

* Excerpted, by permission, from *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 3 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh, EH12 6EL, UK, www.banneroftruth.org.

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above us all and in us all.” It was very necessary that this should be added, to show that peace will never be good or allowed by God, yea, rather it would be an evil, unless it has a good basis. For what sort of a peace would it be if nowadays we were to join the papists? We should have to forsake the pure doctrine of the gospel and to set up ourselves against God and defile ourselves with all kinds of filthiness and abominations. But it would be better if the whole world were sunk, and we with it, than to seek such a peace. We might just as well be eager to do it with regard to the Turks, for it is only a means to wrap us in destruction and pluck us away from God....

Be that as it may, no peace is commendable but such as joins us together as God reigns over us and we become all one in him, for without that it will be but a curse. And so you see why St. Paul calls us back here to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ, to baptism and to the faith of the gospel, to show how we ought to be of one accord.

Now then, we have here two points to bear in mind. One is that in seeking union with men we must always have our eye upon God, and when we are come to it, we must be settled in it more and more.... Now in general it is true that peace is to be desired, and that the very name of it is held in esteem among men. But yet for all that, we must not so shroud ourselves under the shadow of peace that we separate ourselves from God, that in the end we make war against him, and he proclaims us to be his enemies. And for that reason it is said that we must be at continual war with the wicked. For since they serve Satan, they will not cease to fight against God and our salvation. And therefore we must not be cold and negligent in that respect, but zealous in setting ourselves against them. Even though they are in honour and credit, yet let us abhor them, as it is said in the psalm, let them be to us as stinking and abominable things, full of filth and uncleanness....

Now then, if we are joined together in God, let us follow the rule given us here, that is to say, to be so abased in ourselves that the world may perceive by our mildness, that there is no more presumption in us to divide us.

And as kindheartedness brings patience, so let us also condemn men's vices, and yet labour always to draw the parties to God and to win them to him, rather than to embitter them.

But now let us come to the words set down here by St. Paul. He says that “we are one body and one spirit, as we are called in one hope of our calling.” In the first place he shows us upon what condition we are called by God, that is to say, that there should be such a union among us as might show that we are in very deed the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is not enough for us to be piled up together like a heap of stones, but we must be joined together with cordial affection. And just as it is said that there was one heart and one mind among the faithful in

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the primitive church [Acts 4:32], so must the same appear among us too at this day. St. Paul then, in telling us that we are one spirit and one body, meant that we are made, as it were, all one man in Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ can well find in his heart to communicate his name to all the company of the faithful, and that is in order to draw us the more to the said affection of walking together in concord and brotherly love, even with such union that we may be more than brethren, that is

to say, joined together as the fingers of a hand,...

Now St. Paul, to stir us up the better, shows us that we are called to an inheritance. In saying so, he shows that there is a much holier union between us than there is between the natural brothers of this world. For although they are born of one father and one mother, so that they are only one blood, yet nevertheless, every man soon begins to look after his own affairs, and the inheritance is parted among them, so that the brethren seem to be separated, and the natural bond that was among them before to be half broken. But we have an inheritance that cannot be divided up. It is not a question of saying, I have that which belongs to me, I will get me away, and I will stand aloof. For what is our inheritance? It is God himself—and, moreover, the heavenly life which is purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and into which he himself is gone before us, to gather us there to him....

Were this thoroughly imprinted in our hearts, surely there would be another kind of friendship and brotherliness among us than there is, and men would see another kind of meekness, mildness, and patience.

But if we have so far been ill advised, yet it is much better to take instruction late than never. Wherefore, let us learn from this doctrine of St. Paul's that whenever we are provoked to displeasure so that we seem to have reason to reject one, to leave another, and to separate ourselves from this one or that one, we must understand that we all have one hope of the kingdom of heaven, and that Jesus Christ, who is our Head, calls all of us to himself, and sets this condition before us, without which we cannot come to him, namely, that we must show truly and by our deeds that we count all such as are partakers of the gospel with us, as our brethren and as though they were our own flesh and blood, joined together as the fingers of the hand, as I said before.

And next St. Paul, proceeding with the same doctrine, says, "there is but one Lord." It is certain that by this he means one God, who has sovereign dominion over us, and is our master to keep us in unity, because he cannot suffer us to be divided. In the twelfth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians [v. 6], St. Paul says that there is but one God, to show that service which we owe to God, specially for granting his gifts with which to edify his church. But his attributing of sovereignty to God in this passage is to make us understand that we cannot serve God unless we are at one and in accord. And why? For although a mortal man is changeable and changes his mind from morning to night, yet he will not have any discord in his house. If there are riots, or if there rises any strife, he cannot endure it. And what shall God do, who is the God of peace, seeing he will have us gather together under him, and tells us that he dwells in our midst, and that we are his house? Do we think we can involve him in our troubles and contentions, our quarrels, violence and outbursts?...

Now he adds that "there is one faith, and one baptism, and one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." His saying that there is one faith is to show that we have one

common treasure, even in this world. For he has spoken already of the heritage we hope for and which is assured us in heaven, though it is not manifested to us yet. Now what is the pledge of eternal life but the gospel? And that we have in common together. Seeing that is so, then if the faithful forsake one another's company, surely the gospel would be as good as torn in pieces.... So now, when he

says that there is but one faith, it is surely not to our credit if the gospel is torn into bits and pieces, even to shreds, as they say, when we cannot agree with our brethren, nor bear with them gently and patiently, as was commanded before. That then is what God calls us to.

...Next St. Paul also tells us that there is but one baptism. By baptism we put on Jesus Christ and are joined to him, to be partakers of his life and of all his benefits.

Now there is one baptism only, in which the name of Jesus Christ is always invoked, as he is our redeemer.... Seeing then that God so calls us to himself by a visible sign, must it not of necessity be that we are too peevish, like wild and mad beasts, if we do not continue in such unity as he commands?...


By these words of St. Paul, we may see plainly that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are but one God. For if baptism is one in such a way that it serves to bring us to this unity of body and soul, that is to say, to a brotherhood that surpasses all the alliances of the world, what will it be when we come to God, from whom baptism receives all the power it has? And what is God? He is not only the Father, but Jesus Christ is joined with him, and also the Holy Ghost. So then, let us note that there is truly a unity in the essence of God, and that although there is distinction of persons, yet God is neither separated nor divided in himself. And although the Father is named simply God (as St. Paul will speak of him hereafter), that is with reference to distinction and order, and because he is the Head of him who was sent to be the mediator, and the more especially as Jesus Christ humbled himself, and although he possessed equal form with God (as St. Paul says) [Phil. 2 :6] and it would have been no robbery for him to have shown himself in such

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sovereign majesty, yet it was his will to humble himself, and even utterly to empty himself.

But be that as it may, yet we see that baptism leads us straight to God. And by this we see what we have dealt with before, namely, that if our peace and concord is not grounded in God, and unless we are governed by him according to his Word and by the power of his Holy Spirit, there is nothing but loathsomeness in us. But if our hearts are touched by what is said to us here, that is to say, that Jesus Christ has linked us to himself, with the condition that we also should link up with one another, we shall be kept in such concord that the devil shall not be able to gain so much at our hands as to separate us from the flock, but we shall overcome all temptations; and where there are any vices and infirmities we shall bear with them mildly and

patiently and continue in the holy union to which we are daily exhorted by the gospel, and by the common baptism we have received.

Now let us cast ourselves down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgment of our faults, praying him to make us so to perceive them that we may hate them more and more and run back to him with true repentance to obtain such grace from him that we may withdraw ourselves from all defilements, and by that means learn to be unabashed or undismayed at any assaults of Satan, and be able to overcome them all, with all the obstacles that he can put in our way to turn us out of the path of salvation. That it may please God to grant this grace, not only to us, but also to all people and nations of the earth.... 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

The Ecumenical Spirit of the Reformation: Unity in the Truth

I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church. That confession is found in the Nicene Creed, the first ecumenical creed adopted by the church. The church of Jesus Christ is one, and it is ecumenical. The root meaning of the word ecumenical is *universal*. The one church is Christ's church, and He gathers His church out of all the nations. The true church of Christ on this earth constantly seeks to manifest that oneness. That is proper ecumenicity.

The sixteenth century Reformation of Luther and Calvin is generally not known for having an ecumenical spirit. On the contrary, two of the most common charges against the reformers were that they were heretics and that they

were schismatics. In his Papal Bull threatening Luther with excommunication, Pope Leo described Luther as the wild boar in the vineyard of God (a reference to Ps. 80:13). Similarly, Cardinal Sadoletto, in his letter seeking to draw Geneva back to Rome, alleged that the reformers were guilty of "great seditions and schisms."

On the surface of it, history might seem to bear out this serious charge. The Reformation led quickly to four groups out of Rome—Lutherans, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist. Each of these would divide, even splinter, into countless subgroups. The result is that today outside of Rome are thousands of denominations and independent churches around the world.

Nonetheless, all these thousands

of churches exist because they have not followed the true ecumenical spirit of the Reformation. The reformers highly esteemed ecclesiastical unity, and they worked very hard for it. And their goal was a unity founded on the truth of God.

History demonstrates that the Reformation's standards for ecclesiastical unity are very different from Rome's. Rome's position was, and is, this: unity is found only in submission to the pope. Submit to the pope, and you maintain the unity of the church. Refuse to submit, and you are schismatic. It is that simple.

Do you think that an exaggeration? It is not. About 240 years before the Reformation began, "The Doctor," Thomas Aquinas, wrote on

the question of schism as follows:

Now the unity of the Church consists in two things; namely, in the mutual connection or communion of the members of the Church, and again in the subordination of all the members of the Church to the one head, according to Col. 2:18,19: "Puffed up by the sense of his flesh, and not holding the Head, from which the whole body, by joints and bands, being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God." Now this Head is Christ Himself....

So far, Aquinas is on the right track—the unity of the church is in Christ. But then comes his conclusion.

Now this Head is Christ Himself, Whose viceregent in the Church is the *Sovereign Pontiff*. Wherefore schismatics are those who refuse to submit to the *Sovereign Pontiff*, and to hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his supremacy.¹ (Emphasis mine, RJD.)

That became the accepted view of unity in the church of the Middle Ages. Approximately one hundred years before Luther wrote the Ninety-Five Theses, the medieval church was badly divided. The schism was caused by the fact that two different men claimed to be the pope, and both had some legitimacy to

their claim. Eventually this expanded to three popes. The church was in a fix, with no easy solution in sight. The Frenchman Jean Gerson was one notable theologian who searched for a solution. In a treatise entitled *On the Unity of the Church*, Gerson proposed that a church council could settle the matter and heal the schism. But he was adamant that the *unity* of the church could only be restored when the church again had but one pope. In this treatise, the last ten of the twelve considerations begin the same way: "The unity of the Church in one undoubted vicar of Christ...."

Thus Rome's longstanding contention was that Church unity depends on submission to the pope. Rome has never changed on that.

Today, ecumenical activity has reached a fever pitch, also among churches in the Reformed camp. This drive for unity is too often at the expense of the truth. Churches seem perfectly content to give up longstanding differences of doctrine for the sake of forging yet another ecclesiastical relationship. Not every effort involves such compromise, obviously. But the basis for unity too often is a small body of vague, universally held doctrines such as the Trinity, while important differences on vital doctrines of theology are ignored. In the worst cases, the unity is built overtly on false doctrine, and the truth is thrown to the wind.

That might seem to be very different from Rome's position, but it is not. Apostate Rome has always been willing to allow diversity of doctrine and life within her walls, so long as the doctrine or practice did not threaten the papacy. In the Middle Ages, she

allowed mystics to teach that each believer is like one drop, some day to be lost in the ocean, God. Rome tolerated, at the same time, the most vigorous scholasticism, with its endless wrangling and pointless discussions that led theologians into the absurd. And she put up with the biting satire of an Erasmus, who openly ridiculed the ignorance and sins of the clergy. All this was tolerated by Rome, so long as the members were willing to submit to the pope and not threaten the hierarchy of mother church. Essential to that hierarchy is the false teaching that the priest stands between the believer and God, and dispenses grace and salvation to the members.

All the churches today who are flirting with Rome, who imagine that true unity of the church of Jesus Christ includes Rome, are warned that Rome has not changed. Unity is still only in submission to the pope. Indeed Rome will put up with astounding diversity, so that she is willing to talk with Anglicans, Buddhists, Lutherans, Muslims, and the Christian Reformed Church. This kind of "ecumenism" results in the unified church of the Antichrist. All sorts of diversity will be allowed. Simply submit to the head.

But Rome could not abide Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and all the reformers. For their doctrine, faithful to Scripture, pulled down the whole Romish system. That tearing down began with Luther's discovery of justification by faith alone. If God imputes His righteousness directly to the believer only by faith in Christ, then the church is not the repository of salvation, and the

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part; Treatise on Theological Virtues, Question 39; Article 1.

priest does not stand between God and man. The rest of Rome's false doctrines would crumble as well.

Unwilling to tolerate the truth, Rome cast out those who preached it, and put to death those who held fast to it. And the reformers would not abide the false doctrine of Rome.

But the reformers were concerned for, even zealous for, the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. So much so, that they were willing to sit down with priests and bishops of Rome, to discuss their differences, if perchance reunion were possible.

In 1530, some thirteen years after the Reformation began, the Lutherans came to Augsburg to meet with the representatives of Rome. Admittedly, there were political pressures involved—the Emperor called this conference. Admittedly, Luther was not optimistic, and in fact fretted from afar (with good reason) that Melancthon would compromise the truth. Still, Luther assisted Melancthon in drawing up a statement of doctrines for the conference, a document that eventually became the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran churches. And, even though Luther was excommunicated by Rome, and banned by the Emperor, so that he could not attend, the preface to the Augsburg Confession stated:

If, however, our lords, friends, and associates who represent the electors, princes, and estates of the other party do not comply with the procedure intended by Your Imperial Majesty's summons, if no amicable and charitable negotia-

tions take place between us, and if no results are attained, nevertheless we on our part shall not omit doing anything, in so far as God and conscience allow, that may serve the cause of Christian unity.

But their consciences were bound by the Word of God, and thus would not allow them to compromise with the truth. For that reason, all efforts at reunion with Rome failed. The reformers would have nothing of a superficial unity whereby the essential doctrines would be compromised and an institutional unity forged. They demanded true unity—unity built on the truth of God's Word.

The reformers understood that Jesus Christ is the unity of the church. The church is one body, Christ's body, and though it have many members, the body is not divided. In his work, also written to Emperor Charles V (*On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*), John Calvin answers the false charge of schism leveled against the reformers by Rome with that understanding.

Let our opponents, then, in the first instance, draw near to Christ, and then let them convict us of schism, in daring to dissent from them in doctrine. But, since I have made it plain that Christ is banished from their society, and the doctrine of his gospel exterminated, their charge against us simply amounts to this, that we adhere to Christ in preference to them. For what man, pray, will believe that those who refuse to be led away from Christ and his truth, in order to deliver themselves into the power of men, are thereby schismatics, and deserters from the communion of the Church?

Christ is the central unity of the church. Christ, who is the truth of God.

The ecclesiastical spirit of the Reformation is evident from the conferences held between Lutherans and the Swiss Reformed, and among the Swiss Reformed themselves. In the days before telephone, email, or even the regular post, the reformers had an amazing amount of contact with others all over Europe. They wrote thousands upon thousands of letters, encouraging each other to faithfulness as well as discussing the truth. They wrote treatises and books to spread the truth. They wrote confessions that churches other than their own could and did adopt.

And their efforts were not a failure by any means. True, God prevented the Lutherans from becoming one with the Reformed. The Swiss Reformed did not become one with the Church of England. And there are yet today thousands of churches and denominations. Partly the cause is geographic separation. Part of the cause is departure from the truth. The lie divides, and Satan works hard to spread his lies.


Yet, the reformers' zeal for unity in the truth meant that people came to church, and worshiped in a congregation that was united—not by fear, nor by false doctrine, but by the truth. The ecumenical spirit of true unity starts in the local congregation—that local manifestation of the body of Christ. And the churches of the Reformation came together, and the believers worshiped God in spirit and in truth.

In addition, the Genevan saints

could know that the French Reformed adopted the confession that John Calvin wrote. And the Reformed believers of both Geneva and France could know that the Reformed churches of the Netherlands had a confession very much like the French confession of Calvin. And the Presbyterian Calvinists in England and Scotland were holding fast to the same truth taught in the academy in Geneva,

and in the University in Utrecht. Unity in the truth.

The days in which we live are characterized by apostasy and false ecumenism. It is discouraging to behold. A faithful Reformed or Presbyterian church or denomination is tempted to draw into itself and give up hope of ever having unity in the truth with others. That, however, would be contrary to the command of Christ given to the Ephesians and to us that

they (we) must be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:3-6). Those who, like the reformers, love Christ, love also His church. And they have the same ecumenical spirit. 

REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK

More Wonderful Work in Jesus' Name: The World Communion of Reformed Churches

Sadly, in this issue devoted to the ecumenical spirit of the Reformation, it is necessary to consider another spirit among churches claiming this heritage. It is the spirit of apostasy foretold to come before the day of Christ (II Thess. 2:3). Although ecclesiastical, it is the spirit of this world, and of the Antichrist. Although religious, this spirit forsakes the truth in willful unbelief and disobedience. It is also an ecumenical spirit that unites its own in order to prophesy, cast out devils, and do many wonderful works in Jesus' name (Matt. 7:22). But it is a false ecumenical spirit that rather works iniquity.

There is such a spirit at work in supposedly Calvinistic, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches. Nothing recent exemplifies this whorish, rogue spirit more than the formation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This occurred in June when 400 delegates from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) met

at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI to merge their respective bodies under the new constitution of WCRC.

Formation of the WCRC is a significant ecumenical event. Official news releases bill it as “a new beginning... the world's largest Reformed Protestant network,” and claim it will “usher in a new era of Reformed church history.”¹ The organization is massive. It unites some 80 million people in 230 denominations from 108 countries. Notable members from the USA are the CRC, RCA, United Church of Christ, and PCUSA. By its sheer size alone, the WCRC will be the *de facto* organization dictating the terms, agenda, discussions, concessions, and declarations of all future ecumenical moves by most Reformed churches.

The WCRC is thoroughly ecumenical. Its constitution lists only two purposes for its existence, both ecumenical in nature. The first is to unify member churches by such things as “broadening understanding...transforming churches into interdependent missional communities,” and promoting “full participation and partnership” of all

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¹ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/docs/UGCNewsNo1.pdf>

members, ages, and genders. The second purpose is “to contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world.”² The former purpose is intended to serve the latter, and more important, purpose. “This communion is for the sake of the world’s transformation,” WCRC officials declared.³

Regarding its ecumenical goal to unify member churches, WCRC deliberately calls itself a *communion*. WARC president Clifton Kirkpatrick declared, “We are at a defining moment for the Reformed tradition.... This is the time for us no longer to be an ‘alliance’ or ‘council,’ but truly to be a communion.”⁴ REC secretary Richard van Houten said, “*communion* is key to WCRC’s identity...it means we belong to each other.”⁵ This communion is the closest possible, sacramental union. “It points to a new form of working relationship,” said Setri Nyomi, secretary of WARC. “As a communion, we recognize our common baptism and togetherness at the Lord’s table, making us better witnesses and more effective in making a difference in the world.”⁶

WARC intends to enforce its communal table. Although it doesn’t want to be a denomination (it fears too much the bogey of denominationalism), neither does it want a loose-knit organization, because it is committed to “transforming members into *interdependent* missional communities.” Communion, however, requires that all members participate. Or else. According to the constitution, “member churches are expected to join in achieving the Aims and Purposes of the WCRC,” and the Executive Committee may suspend membership “for actions in violation of the Basis,

Values, or Aims and Purposes.”⁷ Also, according to Peter Borgdorff, former director of the CRC and co-author of the new constitution, “*Communion* implies...member denominations will accept the ordination of each others’ clergy and respect the rites of each tradition.”⁸ Troubling, because the WCRC is officially committed to “ordination of women in all member churches,” and some are already clamoring for ordination of homosexuals.⁹

Although Reformed in name, and claiming to “embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the historic Reformed confessions,” the WCRC is a traitor to the Reformed faith.¹⁰ Homage is paid to John Calvin, but only to garnish his tomb (Matt. 23:29)—he would neither recognize their theology, nor approve of their purpose. Commitment to the Reformed confessions is mere lip service. One looks in vain for specific references to them, especially the great ecumenical standard of Reformed identity, the Canons. Rather, welcomed to the WCRC communion table are avowed enemies of the Canons like the Remonstrant Brotherhood, and the 2.3 million member PKN, which jettisoned the Reformed creeds in 2004, boasts of being a pluralistic church where all faiths are welcome, and approves of homosexual relationships, practices, and unions.¹¹ The god WCRC serves bears no resemblance to Him confessed in the confessions either. He is sometimes

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but only to garnish
his tomb
(Matt. 23:29)—
he would neither
recognize their theology,
nor approve
of their purpose.*

she, a dysfunctional father-mother who loves all men as created [sic] image bearers, a son who died to save all men, and spirit that tries to unite them (especially through the WCRC). Like the golden calves of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, the WCRC is an idol manufactured solely to solidify political power and accomplish a common mission (I Kings 12:26-28).

The false, anti-Reformed ecumenical spirit of the

² <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Constitution-English.pdf>

³ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/newthing.html>

⁴ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/WARCPresReport-English.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/docs/UGCNewsNo1.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/againstthecurrent.html>

⁷ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Constitution-English.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/unionproposed.html>

⁹ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/PolicyCommittee.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Constitution-English.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.remonstranten.org/site/index.php>


WCRC is most apparent in its second main purpose, “to contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world.” This global transformation is neither spiritual salvation from the guilt and power of sin for all who believe in Jesus presented in the gospel, nor is it hope of the resurrection, and recreation of all things at His coming. It is the present physical formation of a peaceful, pleasurable, and permanent world-kingdom through social, economic, and ecological justice.

To accomplish this, the constitution calls members “to share their gifts...to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person...[so that] no one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender.”¹² Not surprisingly section reports submitted to the General Council read more like special interest demands at a Democratic National Convention. The report on Gender Justice rails against patriarchy, systematic exclusion of women from office, and masculinity practices.¹³ The Youth Empowerment report calls for youth to be appointed to executive positions.¹⁴ The Mission report calls for repentance of “mission praxis that disempower or dehumanize.”¹⁵ The Peace and Reconciliation report laments “the issue of lesbian and gay ordination tearing apart member churches” and calls for “reconciling relationships between the church and Indigenous people”—an issue highlighted by a pow-wow/church service in Ah-Nab-Awen Park with native drumming and dancing.¹⁶ There are reports on Climate Justice, Remodeling the Social Market, and Justice in the Economy. Only one on Reformed Identity and Theology. Finally, the Policy Committee recommends confirmation of the Accra Confession, a socialist-liberation theology document adopted by WARC in 1994, that demonizes the global, neoliberal capitalist empire and declares “global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith.”¹⁷

This ambitious kind of world transformation depends on developing ecumenical ties. High on the list is Rome. Although WCRC made no official declarations, its intentions

are obvious. Its largest parent organization had completed three phases of discussions with the Vatican going back to 1970, and called members “to search together with their Roman Catholic brothers and sisters for the unity which Christ wills for his church...[and] reconsider traditional disagreements.” The Policy Committee urged discussion on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This document, adopted in 1999 by the Vatican and Lutheran World Federation, basically reduces the entire Reformation, with its resultant butchery of Protestants, to a big misunderstanding. Catholics and Lutherans “are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification...and the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.” It appears WCRC wants in on the deal. When asked its most urgent tasks, one official responded the first was “go forward with inner-Christian dialogue...with the Lutheran World Federation and with the Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁸

Not surprising, the Pope sent “warm greetings” and “prayerful good wishes” to WCRC delegates. In a letter read by his representative, Pope Benedict commended them for “ecumenical progress” and said it “served as a sign of hope and encouragement.” Never questioning that this might signify his delight in possibly buying their Protestant birthright for a mess of popery, WARC delegates were giddy with the prospect of this suitor. Borgdorff declared, “This is really a welcome signal that the Vatican has taken interest in what we are doing.”¹⁹ President Jerry Pillay said it spoke volumes for the possibility of further interactions with the Pope.

This is the fine ecumenical work being done together in Jesus’ name today by the vast majority of Reformed churches. “Lord, Lord,” they cry. He is not impressed. To the churches of the Reformation He commands, “Stand fast and hold the traditions which ye have been taught” (II Thess. 2:15). His ecumenical Spirit declares, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?...Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (II Cor. 6:14-17). 

¹² <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Constitution-English.pdf>

¹³ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Section6Report.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Section7Report.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Section8Report.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/Section9Report.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://reformedchurches.org/docs/AccraConfession-English.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://reformedchurches.org/deepeningdialogue.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.reformedchurches.org/popewishes.html>

John Calvin: Lover of the Church Catholic

It can be said that whereas Luther was used by God to enable Christ's church to break with Rome and begin anew with the gospel restored, it was Calvin whom the Lord used to keep His church, once loosed from Rome, from fragmenting into a thousand pieces. It was Calvin, more than any other, whom the Lord used to reinstitute His church as the church Catholic. No one can read Calvin's *Institutes*, and especially his letters, and then deny that Calvin, in spite of all the labors and demands placed upon him by Geneva the cantankerous and uncooperative, yet had his eye and heart on the well-being of Christ's church found across Europe and on the gospel cause wherever it could be found.

He labored and argued and reproved and besought the Protestant congregations, with their leaders, to strive for the unity of the faith and to stand in that unity, a unity that, due to our sinful natures, is so fragile that it requires Christ's Spirit to grant us forbearing meekness, or it would never survive (cf. Eph. 4:2, 3).

G.M.S. Walker puts it well:

[Calvin's] outlook was surprisingly modern [i.e., not simply occupied with one's own immediate community or nation, but looking out across the world—kk]. It has been said that "because of its very origin Calvinism is an ecumenical movement." Whereas Lutherans and Anglicans drew together into national churches [German and English—kk], the followers of Calvin formed an international alliance, reaching out into many lands from the small city of Geneva, and occupying a central position in their churchmanship. Indeed, it is inaccurate to speak of Calvinism at all because, through his efforts for unity, Calvin secured something greater than a merely personal

following. He aimed with considerable success at restoring a Reformed [and yet] catholic church (*Readings in Calvin's Theology*, p. 239, D. K. McKim, ed., Baker Books, 1984).

It was not that Calvin anointed himself, like some pope, to serve as the great counselor to pastors and their congregations scattered across Reformation Europe. Rather, it was that his Lord thrust it upon him. The Lord gave him supreme gifts of mind and insights into the Scriptures, and, once editions of the *Institutes* began to be published across Europe, God's people and the various reformers themselves recognized what the Lord had given them in this man Calvin. To him, with the multitude of issues that perplexed them, they turned for advice, far more so even than to the increasingly cantankerous Luther. They would not be turned away. How Calvin found time among all his other labors to engage in all the correspondences that came to his door from every part of Europe is a marvel all its own.

In the name of Christ's church catholic, Calvin found it necessary to engage in a twofold approach. On the one hand, he had to defend the Reformation's break with Rome as not making its leaders guilty of creating schism in the body of Christ. This, of course, was Rome's charge. To this Calvin, in his pamphlet *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, responded:

The last and principle charge which [Rome] bring[s] against us is, that we have made a schism in the Church... and...that in no case is it lawful to break the unity of the Church. How far they do us injustice, the books of our authors [of the reformers—kk] bear witness....

But judgment must be used to ascertain which is the true Church, and what is the nature of its unity...and...to beware of separating the Church from Christ its Head....

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We are as ready to confess as [Rome is] that those who abandon the church, the common mother of the faithful, the “pillar and ground of truth,” revolt from Christ also; but we mean a church which, from incorruptible seed... nourishes [her children] with spiritual food (that seed and food being the word of God), and which, by its ministry, preserves entire the truth which God deposited in its bosom... (pp. 125, 127-8, Protestant Heritage Press, 1995).

Calvin’s point is clear—the reformers were not guilty of schism. If Rome had any vestige left of faithfulness to Christ’s authority and Word, the reformers might properly be charged with schism and creating division in the body of Christ. But Rome had long ago, like the priesthood of Old Testament Israel and the synagogues of the apostles’ day, departed from God’s law and gospel, and so had lost all right to call herself the church of Christ or a manifestation thereof.

But now, having broken with Rome, Calvin had a second weighty concern, namely, to be able to answer to his Lord on behalf of Christ’s beloved bride, the church, that he and his contemporaries had done all in their power to maintain and nurture the unity that Christ’s church is to manifest here on earth even in her institutional form, at least to the extent that she can.

Calvin well understood that that unity is found ultimately in Christ’s one Spirit of spiritual life and shared truth (which is why for Calvin the ancient creeds and common confessions were so important). But he also understood that here on earth the church of Christ in her institutional form (though holy in principle) is imperfect and often at odds and prone to fragment. This he witnessed with his own eyes as the Reformation unfolded itself during his life and then in too many instances the Protestants’ unity in truth unraveled as well. When the separation occurred over fundamental theological doctrines and sacramental practices, that was one thing. But when the division was caused by a lack of forbearance in love, Calvin, for all his strong opinions and convictions on nearly every notable biblical teaching, was grieved.

It was this concern that came to expression in Calvin’s well-known response to Thomas Cranmer’s letter (from England) urging Calvin to throw his considerable weight behind “call[ing] together a godly synod [of Reformed

theologians across Europe], for the refutation of error, and for restoring and propagating the truth.”

As Cranmer properly noted,

...nothing tends more effectually to unite the Churches of God...than the pure teaching of the Gospel and the harmony of doctrine (*Letters of John Calvin*, ft. nt. p. 130, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980).

Calvin responded (in part),

Your opinion, most distinguished Sir, is indeed just and wise.... No remedy can be devised more suitable than if a general meeting were held of the devout and the prudent, of those properly exercised...in the school of God, and of those who are confessedly at one on the doctrine of holiness.... And then I am aware that English matters are not so all-important in your eyes, but that you, at the same time, regard the interests of the whole world.... This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute amongst us.... Thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were on account of it.... Now, seeing...Churches, though divided on other questions, might be made to unite, I think it right for me, at whatever cost of toil and trouble, to seek to attain this object... (*Letters of John Calvin*, to Cranmer, April, 1552).

What is noteworthy is how the divisions at work in the Reformation churches of Calvin’s day, and that between worthy men, sorely grieved him. “...the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding” is vivid language indeed.

But other leading theologians could not be persuaded to gather for another great synod/conference at that time. Cranmer’s great dream never materialized.

Still, Calvin did all he could to foster this unity between leaders and their congregations.

On the one hand, Calvin emphasized with all the vigor and sharpness he could muster the need of every confessing believer to be a member of a church institute! This is where the marks of Christ’s true church enter in, namely, where the gospel of grace is purely preached, the sacraments properly administered, and discipline exercised. A believer is to look about himself for such a church, and

then *join and remain joined*. As Calvin states in his *Institutes*,

How perilous, then, nay, how fatal the temptation, when we even entertain a thought of separating ourselves from that assembly in which are beheld the signs and badges which the Lord has deemed sufficient to characterize his Church! (IV. 1.11, Beveridge, Eerdmans Publ.).

In the very next section Calvin says things that may surprise some, but make plain that Calvin was a Churchman, that is, not one given to cater to every believer's independent notions, as if the Reformed faith sponsors or approves of the ultimate autonomy of self, and all things must line up with one's personal convictions or he has the right to break fellowship with the church institute yet imperfect here on earth. To this individualistic thinking that lacks the grace of forbearance Calvin states the following:

When we say that the pure ministry of the word and pure celebrations of the sacraments is a fit pledge and earnest, so that we may safely recognize a church in every society in which both exist, our meaning is that we are never to discard it so long as these remain, though it may otherwise teem with numerous faults. Nay, even in the administration of word and sacraments defects may creep in which ought not to alienate us from its communion. For all the heads of true doctrine are not in the same position. Some are so necessary to be known, that all must hold them to be fixed and undoubted as the proper essentials of religion: for instance, that God is one, that Christ is God, and the Son of God, that our salvation depends on the mercy of God, and the like. Others, again, which are the subject of controversy among the churches, do not destroy the unity of the faith... (IV.1.12).

For Calvin, in the interests of preserving communion in the church local and for fostering unity of the church catholic, the perspective that "all heads of doctrine are not in the same position" was key.

What is evident is that Calvin had to struggle with a great issue that has always beset (I almost say 'has bedeviled') the New Testament church throughout her existence, namely, the striving for the ideal (the church perfect in understanding and love) over against the reality (her weaknesses and deficiencies displayed due to our mortal weaknesses).

This struggle in Calvin's pastoral soul is nowhere plainer than in his *Institutes*, in the last part of the Article we just quoted. As he states,

"The best thing, indeed, is [for believers] to be perfectly agreed, but, seeing there is no man who is not involved in some mist of ignorance, we must either have no church at all, or pardon delusion in those things of which one may be ignorant, without violating the substance of religion and forfeiting salvation (IV.1.12).

But having acknowledged this reality Calvin immediately states "Here, however, I have no wish to patronise even the minutest errors, as if I thought it right to foster them by flattery or connivance..." (IV.1.12). He did not want to leave the impression that he was suggesting that what a church confesses in doctrine and life is of little importance, thus patronizing that vulgar spirit so dominating our age, namely, for the appearance of unity let's crucify truth—unity at whatever cost.

And yet having stated his full commitment to scriptural truths as he was convinced of them, he goes on to say:

...what I say is, that we are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord. Meanwhile, if we strive to reform what is offensive, we act in the discharge of duty (IV.1.12).

Note the phrase, "...provided it [a church] retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments...." This for Calvin was the heart of it, the touchstone according to which membership in a church should and could be maintained, and also according to which churches in various countries with their own peculiarities should strive to maintain an expression of unity international (or catholic)—the doctrines of grace that promote piety and a proper view of the administration of the sacraments with their significance.

That what we have just asserted is true for Calvin is evident from Calvin's correspondence.

One of the most troubling issues that confronted Protestantism in Calvin's day (as it does our own) was that of

worship and its purity—what Scripture requires, what Scripture allows, and what smells of Rome. Where Calvin stood on the issue of the proper elements of worship was one thing; what he pleaded with Reformed leaders to tolerate to some extent for the sake of unity was another.

There is the well-known history involving the Englishman John Hooper, one that highlights the controversy between the hierarchy of the Anglican church and the non-conformists in their midst. Hooper, when appointed Bishop, refused to wear the required vestments and take the oath prescribed for his installation, leading to his imprisonment. Hearing the news, Calvin wrote Bullinger,

I had rather he [Hooper] had not carried his opposition so far with respect to the cap and linen vestment, even although I do not approve of these (*Collected Letters*, March 24, 1551).

When the issue of the manner of worship threatened to scatter a congregation composed of French and English refugees in Frankfort, Germany, Calvin wrote to both parties, pleading with them not to march off in their separate ways, banners of accusations flying. What is significant is that Calvin reserved his strongest language for the party with which from a biblical perspective he was most in agreement on this issue, namely, the English party. Hearing of the mounting contention, he wrote the English faction:

This indeed grievously afflicts me and is highly absurd, that discord is springing up among brethren who are for the same faith exiles and fugitives from their country; and for a cause indeed which in your dispersion should like a sacred bond have held you closely united.... Now, on the contrary, that some of you should be stirring up contentions about forms of prayer and ceremonies, as if you were at ease and in a season of tranquility, and thus throwing an obstacle in the way of your coalescing in one body of worshippers, this is really too unreasonable... (C.L. Jan. 15, 1555).

If one cannot hear Calvin's plea for some forbearance with regard to certain differences that would throw up obstacles to any expression of unity between two believing groups, based on the deeper things of the gospel of grace, one is not listening.

And yet, Calvin sought to be evenhanded as well. Later, in the same letter, he writes,

For my part, if I would not have you to be unduly rigorous towards those whose weakness cannot scale the highest steps of the ladder, [and yet] I would have the others admonished not to have too much complacency in their own ignorance... (C.L. Jan. 15, 1555).

What Calvin is saying is that forbearance between members of that which is undeniably the church of Christ goes a long way, and yet let neither party imagine that it does not have room to learn.

Writing a following letter to his beloved (and sometimes exasperating) younger colleague John Knox, who was one of the leaders amongst the English refugees in Frankfort, Calvin had this to say:


And as I exhorted those who differed from you [in this instance, on the issue of pure worship] to give way a little with what moderation they could, so I own it displeased me, that in your turn you neither gave up nor conceded anything of your opinions (C.L. Jan. 15, 1555, p. 174).

Calvin, as a spiritual father in Reformation Europe, like Paul the apostle in the early New Testament era, pleaded that all do everything within their powers to promote the unity of Christ's body in its institutional form, not only in congregational life, but in the church universal as well. No, not at the expense of truth, and yet in some matters deferring to others.

As Calvin adroitly summarized it in his letter to Cardinal Sadoletto:

The Church...is the society of all the saints...spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by one doctrine, and the one Spirit of Christ, [she] cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord (*Reply to Sadoletto*, Tracts I, 37).

Calvin, a churchman of strong convictions, was one who sincerely strove to labor on behalf of his Lord and His beloved bride with this in mind.

Also in the area of the organic unity of the church universal, Calvin is a worthy mentor. 

Ecclesiastical Isolationism

The Reformed faith always requires a believer to walk a narrow path between two extremes. He must eschew liberalism that seeks to draw away the church into worldly-mindedness. But he must also detest the reaction to liberalism that results in legalism, an attempt to regulate the life of the child of God by robbing him of his freedom in Christ. The Reformed church must flee from the loathsome disease of Arminianism when calling sinners to repentance and faith, but it must likewise run from the opposite extreme of hyper-Calvinism, which denies God's serious call to all to turn from sin and believe.

This narrow road between two extremes also applies to the doctrine of the church. The Reformed system of church government, for example, repudiates hierarchy in the church, a malady of Roman Catholicism, but it also stands against the separatism of Baptist and Congregational churches. The church must guard herself carefully from the extreme found in the modern spirit of ecumenism through amalgamation. But the church must also not react to this movement by going to the opposite extreme of allowing a spirit of isolationism to prevail among her clergy and members. It is this last subject we wish to address.

Ecclesiastical Isolationism Defined

It is necessary that we have a clear understanding of what we mean by our use of the term isolationism in this article. By isolationism we do not mean, first of all, the calling of the church to be separate from the unbelieving world. It certainly is the duty of the church whose members have been called out of unbelief and into faith to be a separate people unto the Lord in this world. In the sec-

ond place, we do not mean by ecclesiastical isolationism the need for the true church to isolate itself from the false church. It is not a sin for churches to separate themselves from union with a denomination that has forsaken God's Word and to begin the church anew on the foundation of the truth of God's Word.

In the third place, we are not referring in this article to the error of independentism or separatism. The Anabaptists and the Congregationalists, or Brownists, were known as separatists because of their independentism. Separatism teaches that to belong to a denomination of churches is unbiblical. Each congregation must remain church-politically separate from all other congregations, except for mutual, non-binding fellowship and advice. To enter into a federation of churches that share oversight of one another is automatically hierarchical and therefore wrong.

This, too, is not what we mean by ecclesiastical isolationism.

Ecclesiastical isolationism is the belief that a denomination must detach itself from the rest of the church world by keeping to herself. It is the idea that a church or denomination of churches must isolate itself by entering only warily into discourse with other denominations. At the same time, she casts up embankments and fortifies her walls, peering out from behind those walls with suspicion and fear of infiltration by the enemy. We must not mistake such isolationism for a determination strongly to defend and maintain doctrines without compromise. Surely, the church of Jesus Christ is always called to maintain its doctrinal distinctiveness. But when a denomination sets itself up as the only bastion of truth left in the world, then proceeds to stand in judgment over all else that calls itself church—that is ecclesiastical isolationism. The demeanor of such churches as a whole is that of ecclesiastical and theological pride. Her clergy

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and members, for the most part, unwittingly exude a condescending attitude toward others. When dealing with others, without even realizing it, they leave the impression of being exclusive and unapproachable.

Objections to our quarrel with isolationism ought not to be ignored. An objector may argue like this: You are interpreting in a negative way my deep love for and commitment to the denomination of which I am a member. I am called to defend the truth against the lie. I am not going to soft-pedal differences! If that means I am an isolationist, then so be it!

The answer to this objection can be given by asking a simple question: does devotion to one's church and doctrines, does a strong defense of those doctrines, require a spirit of isolation? I, for one, as a member and a minister of my denomination, am committed to the doctrines of grace God has given to our churches. I am grateful for and deeply humbled by the salvation that God has freely given me by His grace. By God's grace, I will defend those truths until my dying breath! I will never compromise them! But this does not require of me as a member, or of us as a church, to isolate ourselves from dialog with others. Loving and defending the truths I hold dear ought not to keep me personally, or us as churches officially, from conversing with members or churches in a cordial and brotherly manner. Neither does it mean that I do not love my churches or the precious truths they teach! I love my church! But this will not deter me from entering into talks with churches about the truth of Scripture, even when others do not entirely agree with me.

A second objection is: isolation is the only way that a denomination will be able to guard itself from compromise of the truth. Without an isolationist approach in our dealings with others, we will fall prey to the modern spirit of amalgamation and ecumenism that prevails in the church world today. We are opening ourselves to the temptation of being persuaded by others to forsake the truth.

It is true that evangelicals are playing footsie with Roman Catholicism in an attempt to merge. It is also true that some Reformed denominations strive to merge with other denominations at the cost of the soul-saving truth of God's Word. The spirit of antichrist is alive and well in the ecclesiastical world of today. Churches are uniting on the basis of compromise. That is frightening! But isolationism is a fearful reaction to this spirit of amalgamation. It is going to the opposite extreme, and in doing so is falling into an equally devastating error. Isolationism is *not* the answer to avoiding what is happening in modern Christianity. On the contrary, it weakens the testimony of those churches who pray that the truth of God's Word might prevail in the Christian church in these last days.

The Error of Isolationism

The error of isolationism is exposed in the simple confession of the Nicene Creed: "I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church." The Belgic Confession defines this confession further for us in Article 27: "We believe and

profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation of true believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost." This same article concludes: "Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the same power of faith, in one and the same Spirit." The

church of Jesus Christ is not limited to or focused in one local denomination. It is not bound or confined to a certain place or limited to certain persons. True believers are not found in bulk in one denomination and then just scattered here and there in the rest of the churches. The Belgic Confession confesses one universal church over against the haughty insistence of the Roman Catholic Church that there is no salvation outside the bounds of her denomination.

*True believers
are not found in bulk
in one denomination
and then just scattered
here and there
in the rest of the churches.*

The faithful church institute in this world confesses that she is but a small part of the entire body of Christ. It is the height of ecclesiastical pride to contend that if another church is not in complete agreement with my church in every instance, then my church ought not to have any dealings with that church. Such an attitude reveals arrogance and haughtiness. How can the beauty of the Reformed faith be shared with others when one believes it to be the sole possession of one particular church? How is a person able to persuade others of what he believes if he approaches them with the condescending attitude that the truth stands or falls with him and his church?

John Calvin labored tirelessly under the conviction expressed in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession. He disputed hard and long with the Lutherans, writing personal letters to Melancthon in an attempt to convince him of the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. Melancthon refused to turn the Lutheran churches from the serious error of consubstantiation. In fact, Melancthon also revealed, by his silence, an unwillingness to stand against other doctrinal errors that had crept into the Lutheran churches after the death of Luther. Set on the unity of the church, Calvin continually fostered contact with the Lutherans and maintained a close personal relationship with Melancthon himself. He never stopped corresponding with Melancthon. Upon Melancthon's death Calvin wrote, "O Philip Melancthon, I appeal to thee as my witness! Thou now livest with Christ in the presence of God, and waitest for us to share with thee that blessed rest. Wearied with labor, oppressed with many cares, a hundred times didst thou express thy wish to live and die with me. I too a thousand times wished that we could live together" (*This Was John Calvin*, by Thea Van Halsema, pp. 162, 163).

Another concrete case in the life of the Genevan reformer was his dispute with Bullinger, the leader of the Zwinglians. The Zwinglians denied any kind of a spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper—another serious error regarding this sacrament. Calvin wrote these lines to Bullinger: "I may hold that Christ is present in the Lord's Supper in a fuller way than you hold Him to be, but we will not, on that account, cease to hold the same Christ, and be one in Him" (Van Halsema, p. 170). Calvin never held to an attitude of isolation in his dealing with others. When given the op-


portunity to debate, to sit in council, or to correspond with others, even those who disagreed with him, Calvin was of a ready mind and spirit to do so.

Calvin believed in one, universal church. He believed this church is "not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons." He maintained that there were believers in this world who may not agree with him entirely, even in key points of doctrine, yet "held the same Christ and were one in Him." This attitude of the great reformer stands as a witness against the spirit of isolationism.

The Results of Separatism

Isolationism has a number of harmful results. The first of these is the loss of a witness to this world. The church is called to let her light shine so others can see it. The denomination that separates herself from the rest of the church world will lose that witness. This is true because a condescending attitude toward others always leaves one's witness ineffective. But it is also true because other churches that might otherwise be willing to listen to her witness will no longer want to listen to her. Few will want to correspond; few "outsiders" will attend her conferences; and her literature, as good as it might be, will largely go unread.

There is another result, one that affects that denomination itself. Her members become complacent. To be complacent means that a church and her members become so self-secure that they are unaware of the danger of their own deficiencies. The members of the church lose their fervency. They float along unconcerned with the truths of God's Word. They are satisfied that as long as they are members of this faithful church, they are automatically good Christians.

We heed the warning of Scripture: "Be not high-minded but fear! For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee" (Rom. 11:20, 21). Every member of the church of Christ must confess, God has called "out of the whole human race a church chosen to everlasting life" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, A. 54). I pray for that church—not just as she is found in my own denomination—but as she is dispersed over the whole world. May our own denomination of churches be a living, vibrant witness to that church of Christ universal. 

The Westminster Confession and Church Unity (1)

“The Nearest Conjunction and Uniformity in Religion”

The assembly of divines or theologians meeting in Westminster Abbey in London in the 1640s was passionately concerned with true church unity.¹

King Charles I (1625-1649), with his “divine right of kings,” and William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1633-1645), with his “divine right of bishops,” zealously sought to impose a different sort of unity in Britain: a unity in Erastian, Episcopalian, high church, ritualistic, Romanising Arminianism! Eventually the opponents of Charles I and Laud—Presbyterian Scotland and, south of the border, the Puritans (chiefly for religious reasons) and the parliamentarians (mainly on political grounds)—made common cause against them and their false church unity.

In subscribing to or ratifying the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Parliament of Scotland, both English Houses of Parliament (Commons and Lords), and the Westminster Assembly of divines all pledged themselves to:

[1] the *preservation* of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies; [2] the *reformation* of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the Word of GOD, and the example of the best reformed Churches (pp. 358-359).

The oath continues, we “shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion,” before mention-

ing especially four particulars: “confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship, and catechising” (p. 359). Through “this blessed union and conjunction,” we shall endeavour “that the Lord may be one, and his name one, in the three kingdoms” (p. 359).

These are very comprehensive and ambitious proposals for a real and deep Christian unity (“the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion”) that is generational and covenantal (“that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us,” p. 359) and is based on biblical and Reformed principles (“according to the Word of GOD, and the example of the best reformed Churches”) in all areas (“doctrine, worship, discipline, and government”) in the three churches and kingdoms of England (which in those days was understood to include Wales), Scotland, and Ireland!

Similarly, the Scottish ministers and elders sent to London were commissioned by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (19 August, 1643) to “further the so much desired union, and nearest conjunction of the two Churches of Scotland and England” in aiding the production of “one Form of Kirk-government, one Confession of Faith, one Catechism, one Directory for the worship of God” (p. 13)—the same four documents mentioned in the Solemn League and Covenant (above), though given different names.

The four desired formularies would ultimately become five, for the Westminster Assembly produced not one but two catechisms varying in length: the Westminster Larger Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The cover pages for the five key documents formulated by the Westminster divines (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Directory for the Publick Worship of God, and the Form of Presbyterial Church-Government) all state they are “a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland” (pp. 17, 127, 285, 369, 395).

¹ All page references, unless otherwise indicated, are to *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1985), which book also includes the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Directory for the Publick Worship of God, the Form of Presbyterial Church-Government, the National Covenant, the Solemn League and Covenant, etc., as well as pertinent parliamentary acts plus acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

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Of these five, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (27 August, 1647) correctly identified the “Confession of Faith for the Kirks of God in the three kingdoms [as] being the chiefest part of that uniformity in religion which, by the Solemn League and Covenant, we are bound to endeavour” (p. 14). The Westminster Confession, the General Assembly continued, is the “principal part of the intended uniformity in religion, and...a special means for the more effectual suppressing of the many dangerous errors and heresies of these times” (p. 15). To this “chiefest” and “principal part” of the desired church unity in the British Isles, the Westminster Confession of Faith, we will turn in our next article, but first we shall consider the churchmen who produced it.

The Westminster Divines

As well as looking to “the example of the best reformed Churches,” the Westminster Assembly reflected Reformed catholicity, and sought to further Reformed unity through its composition (or at least the invitations to attend). Parliament nominated two divines for each English county and one for each Welsh county. There were six Scottish commissioners. Anglican Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, James Ussher, was invited but did not come. However, the Irish Articles of Religion (1615), largely formulated by Ussher, served as a model for parts of the Westminster Confession.

Likewise, three prominent New England churchmen (John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and John Davenport) were requested to participate in the Westminster Assembly but were unable to attend. William Barker notes, “Two members of the Assembly had spent time in New England,” John Phillips and Sir Henry Vane, Jr., who had been Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for a year.²

It would appear that the Westminster divines included at least three brethren of French or Huguenot blood: Philippé Delmé, minister of the French-speaking congregation at Canterbury (a superadded divine), and Samuel de la Place and John de la March, ministers of the French Church of London, representing the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey respectively.

The Westminster Assembly also included “one of Dutch or German descent,” “two or three Irishmen,”

² William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), p. 259.

and “some who, to avoid the persecutions of Laud, had left their native land for a time and acted as pastors to the congregations of English exiles and merchants in Holland.”³

Indeed, Alexander Mitchell reckons, for Alexander Henderson—the main drafter of the Solemn League and Covenant, the Moderator of several Scottish General Assemblies (1638, 1641, 1643), and the undoubted leader of the Scottish delegation—“the closer union of the churches in Britain was chiefly valued...as a step towards securing the closer union of all the Reformed Churches.”⁴

The Westminster Assembly was “a matter of great interest to the Reformed Churches on the Continent.”⁵ S. W. Carruthers notes that the Westminster Assembly corresponded with Reformed ministers, churches, classes, and synods in the Netherlands (Walcheren, Zeeland, N. Holland, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Gelderland, etc.), Germany (Hamburg and Hesse), Switzerland (Geneva and Zurich), and France, as well as the Protestant Churches in Transylvania (today we would say Hungary and Romania), Poland, Sweden, and others.⁶ The Assembly of divines in London even wrote to the Dutch churches to thank them for their contributions for the Protestants in Ireland (January, 1645).

However, the Westminster divines were not agreed on everything. The first main difference concerned church polity. Most of the Episcopalians who were invited by Parliament, being royalists and supporting Charles I, did not turn up, but there were a few at Westminster who held to Episcopalianism (a church hierarchy with archbishops, bishops, etc.) or a more moderate form of it. There was also a small, self-conscious party of Independents (who denied binding authority to broader church assemblies), led by the “Five Dissenting Brethren” (Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Jeremiah Burroughs, William Bridge, and Sidrach Simpson). But most of the Westminster divines, including all the Scottish commissioners, were Presbyterians, as were a majority of the

³ Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1883), p. 117.

⁴ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵ S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), p. 63.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 63-72.

parliamentarians. However, most of the Presbyterian theologians held to divine right (*jure divino*) Presbyterianism, whereas Parliament favoured Presbyterianism on more pragmatic grounds.

The second major issue was the relationship between the church and the state. All the Westminster divines held that there should be an established state church (whether Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Independent), but some were Erastians to various degrees (giving the civil magistrate unbiblical authority in church government and discipline), and most of the English Parliament was decidedly Erastian.

The differences on church polity (Presbyterianism, Independency, and Episcopalianism) and state authority over church government and discipline (Erastianism, non-Erastianism, and shades between them) obviously

were complicating factors in hammering out two of Westminster's formularies: the Directory for the Publick Worship of God and, especially, the Form of Presbyterian Church-Government. But with the Confession of Faith—and even more so with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms—the Westminster divines “were less impeded by differences among themselves.”⁷ While giving some examples of debates and dissenting voices in drafting the Confession, “on the whole,” notes William Beveridge, “the unanimity” was “marvellous” and “remarkable.”⁸

... to be continued. 

⁷ B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), p. 55.

⁸ William Beveridge, *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1993), pp. 90, 91.

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Unity in Diversity: The Ecumenical Spirit of the Great Synod

The “great synod,” for anyone of the Dutch, Reformed tradition, is the Reformed, ecumenical synod that met in Dordrecht in 1618-19. This is the synod that dealt decisively with the Arminian errors. This synod was striving for unity. For the great breach in the church was the Arminian heresy. Luther and the Reformers understood that false doctrine divides. Indeed, long before them, Paul warned the saints at Rome, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Notice, the *divisions* were caused by departures in *doctrine*. Simply put: heresy divides. It causes schism in the church of Jesus Christ.

And the churches in the Netherlands were badly divided in 1618.

The destructive error that man had a hand in his salvation was infiltrating the church. The teacher was a minister and seminary professor named Jacob Arminius. Those who continued his teaching were called Remonstrants.

The Reformed churches of the Netherlands had known unity. From the Reformation on, through the 1500s, the churches enjoyed remarkable unity, even in the most difficult of times—times of fierce persecution. Philip II of Spain followed in his father's repressive steps with a vengeance. He swore to the Pope that he would not be ruler over heretics. Untold thousands died martyrs. He did everything in his power to destroy the Reformed church in the Netherlands.

But God's grace sustained these believers, and in the face of threats on their very lives they manifested their unity. They conducted ecclesiastical gatherings—independentism was not an option for them. As they were able, they held consistory meetings, as well as gatherings of classes and particular synods. They adopted common

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rules for governing the churches. They adopted the Confession written by Guido de Brés. They preached the Heidelberg Catechism, thus maintaining and strengthening their doctrinal unity.

The Reformed churches in the Netherlands were unified.

Until the false teachers crept in, and surreptitiously introduced the “damnable heresies” of which the inspired apostle Peter warned (II Pet. 2:1ff.). Indeed, these heretics were “denying the Lord that bought them.” For they claimed to believe in Christ. They publicly testified that they had been saved by His blood. They were baptized. They not only partook of the Lord’s Supper, they administered it. Yet they denied the sovereignty of Christ, the Lord, especially His lordship in salvation, and made salvation dependent on man.

According to Arminius and his followers, God’s election was conditioned on man’s faith and perseverance in obedience. Natural man’s depravity was not total—man has a free will to choose salvation, and to cooperate in faith. God’s grace, though necessary for salvation, was neither sovereign nor particular. Christ died for all, and God graciously offered salvation to all who heard the gospel. The perseverance of the believer to the end was not a sure thing. It depended on man’s being faithful to the end.

With the spread of these deadly errors, church unity was no more. In churches and regions where the errors were allowed to go unchecked, these heresies undermined the confessions, thus destroying the very foundation of the church, God’s truth.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Reformed believers in the Netherlands witnessed appalling division. One classis would condemn a particular teaching, and another approve it. A preacher might be condemned by a classis, but his consistory approve him. Or a consistory might vote to depose a minister for heresy, but the local magistrates, who paid the salary, might refuse to approve the consistory’s action, and continue to pay the heretical minister.

Division was everywhere. Congregations split; seminary faculties were divided. And there was no end in sight. For the government had too much power in the church, and it refused to allow a national synod to meet in order to deal with the Remonstrants and their erroneous teachings.

Finally, in the providence of God, who is truth, and who loves unity in the truth, the way was opened to hold a general synod—the great synod held in the city of Dordrecht.

Again, in the providence of God, nearly every delegate sent to the synod was Reformed. Thus the synod set about to heal the schism by repairing the breach in the Reformed faith. They would thoroughly examine the teaching of the Remonstrants in the light of the Bible and the confessions (the Heidelberg Catechism and the [Belgic] Confession of Faith), in order systematically to condemn and remove the lie. They would seek to repair the foundations, restoring truth, and expressing it even more clearly than heretofore.

Can you see, then, that although the battle was indeed for the truth, the disunity in the Reformed churches was on the mind of all the delegates, and in the consciousness of every Reformed believer in the Netherlands? For the God of peace, who loves unity in His church, places the same love in the hearts of His people. Unity was a goal of the great synod.

However, the threefold goal of these Dutch, Reformed believers (removing heresy, defending truth, and restoring unity) was not limited to the churches in the Netherlands. The Reformed in the Netherlands were not concerned merely about themselves, and their spiritual well-being. If that were true, they could have banished the Remonstrants, condemned their errors, and had peace in their own churches.

Their goals were broader and higher. They had in mind that the truth would be affirmed by all who called themselves children of the Reformation. They envisioned a rejection of the lie by all the churches that loved and preached the truth. They hoped for an ecumenical manifestation of true unity by the churches of the Reformation.

This Dutch desire for unity with Reformed churches outside of the Netherlands was not new. Indeed, as early as 1571, mindful of the need for unity with others, the Synod of Emden decided the following: “In order to demonstrate the unity in doctrine among the Netherlands churches, the brethren thought it well to subscribe to the confession of faith of the Netherlands churches, likewise to subscribe to the confessions of the churches in France, in order thereby to attest their agreement and unity with these French churches....”

With this in mind, the churches sent out invitations into Europe, asking for help, asking for delegations to come to the synod that began meeting in November of 1618. The ministers came as delegated by their churches and or rulers:

Great Britain (4)

The Palatinate (3)

Hesse (4)

Four Reformed Republics of Switzerland (5)

Geneva (2)

Bremen (3)

Nassau-Wetteravia (2)

The French churches delegated four representatives, but the Roman Catholic king refused to allow them to attend. And, although two men were appointed from Brandenburg, they were prevented from coming to Dordrecht due to intense Lutheran opposition in their region.

But the rest came. They participated in the great synod.

The road to unity was not always smooth. The greatest difficulty was with the Remonstrants. Synod dealt with the uncooperative and deceptive Remonstrants for weeks. Finally, on January 14, 1619, President Johannes Bogerman sent them out with this ferocious speech:

You boast that many foreign divines did not refuse to grant your request. Their moderation arose from a misunderstanding. They now declare that they were deceived by you. They say that you are no longer worthy of being heard by the synod. You may pretend what you please, but the great point of your obstinacy is that you regard the synod as a party in the case. Thus you have long delayed us. You have been treated with all gentleness, friendliness, toleration, patience, and simplicity. Go as you came. You began with lies and you end with them. You are full of fraud and double-dealing. You are not worthy that the synod should treat with you further. Depart! Leave! You began with a lie, with a lie you ended! Go!

Not everyone among the foreign delegations appreciated that speech. Some thought it was long overdue. Now the synod could get to work, on doctrinal unity.

A study of the process reveals that their unity was not built on any compromise of the truth they confessed.

That is not to say that there were no compromises made. The final product was the result of study, debate,

resolving disagreements on how to express the various articles, and even which articles to include. A few of the foreign delegates were weak on the doctrines of grace. Some delegates argued vehemently for the supralapsarian position, but had to settle for the infra position. The debate could get hot, even violently so. Diversity was clearly on display.

But out of it came unity. The wise procedure encouraged unity.

The various delegations met in the mornings to consider the views of the Remonstrants. In the afternoon, they presented their speeches publicly, and discussion followed. Each delegation wrote up their judgment on the views of the Remonstrants on each of the Five Articles. These documents were kept by President Bogerman and not made public until all the articles had been discussed and judgments made. These judgments were then read, discussed, and considered by synod. There was remarkable agreement.

Next a committee was formed to write the concept canons. This committee included Bogerman, the two vice presidents, three other Dutch delegates, and three foreign delegates—Bishop Carleton of England, Abraham Scultetus of the Palatinate (Heidelberg), and Johannes Deodati of Geneva.

In the end, all the delegates signed the Canons of Dordrecht. There was unity, based squarely on the truth. The truth that God is sovereign. The truth that salvation is of God alone. That election is sovereign, free, and unconditional. That grace is sovereign and particular. That God in the preaching does not beg, or offer, but rather commands all men to repent and believe. That Christ died for the elect alone, and His atonement is effectual. And that every believer perseveres to the end, because God preserves to the end.

On the doctrine, there was no compromise. There was unity.

Another Display of Unity

The synod's desire for unity in the truth was manifest in another striking way. The Dutch delegates wanted the foreign delegates to join in their approval of the Netherlands (or Belgic) Confession of Faith. However, the Dutch delegates also recognized that a number of the articles of the Confession dealt with practical matters of

church government. There were differences among the foreign delegates on church government. The Dutch delegates did not want that matter to stand in the way of the foreign delegates' approval of the Confession of Faith. Therefore, they excluded several of these articles from the resolution to have the entire synod approve the Confession.

Was this compromise?

Some are critical of the synod for this action. Not I. I see wisdom. I see an example for Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. The great synod did not say that Reformed church government is not important. Certainly it was and it is. The synod was not declaring that the Bible has nothing to say about church government. It does. But the essential doctrines of God, the Bible, Christ, the atonement, etc., and especially the sovereignty of God, those are central. That is, the truth unifies.

Do we agree on that viewpoint? That is the Reformed viewpoint.


Dordrecht is an inestimable blessing from God. The church found unity in the truth. This is the model for true, Reformed ecumenicity yet today. Churches seeking unity must meet together with the goal that they will reject the lie, agree on the truth, and be unified on the basis of truth.

But Dordrecht also demonstrates that unity does not mean uniformity. Two denominations need not be carbon copies of each other to have meaningful unity. They will not necessarily agree on all aspects of worship and church government and on all their teachings and practices. Reformed and Presbyterian churches who desire unity must hold to the doctrines of Dordt—sovereign, particular grace. They must agree on a doctrine of God's covenant

of grace that is in harmony with the Canons, namely, an unconditional covenant that God establishes with the elect. A Reformed church cannot be one with a church that holds to the well-meant gospel offer, to common grace, or to a conditional covenant.

History demonstrates, with striking negative examples, the importance of unity in the truth. The first is the 1892 union of the Afscheiding and Doleantie churches in the Netherlands. They did not work out their doctrinal differences on such critical doctrines as the covenant, baptism, and common grace. In 1944 two groups parted, and the Liberated Churches were formed, primarily from the branch of the Afscheiding churches that had maintained the well-meant gospel offer and the conditional covenant.

The second illustration is even more dreadful. In the early 1900s, those same two groups (Afscheiding and Doleantie) were present in the Christian Reformed Churches in America. They united in 1924 based on their agreement over common grace and the well-meant gospel offer in the adoption of the Three Points of common grace. Their unity, based on error, led the CRC down the apostatizing road it continues to travel yet today. A dreadful warning.

Reformed and Presbyterian churches must be committed to the ecumenical unity displayed in the great synod of Dordt. Unity in the doctrines of sovereign grace. But diversity on other matters. The difficulty is in working this out. Nonetheless, the ecumenical spirit of the Reformation was clearly displayed by the Synod of Dordrecht. That synod is an example for the church today. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Chuck and Lois Kregel in the death of Chuck's brother,

KEN KREGEL.

May they find comfort from God's Word in verses such as Psalm 34:22: "The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

Rev. K. Koole, President
H. De Vries, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Southeast PRC extends Christian sympathy to Edward and Adriana Ophoff in the death of her only sister,

MARGARET ENGBERS,

and to Larry and Terry VandeVegte in the death of his mother,

GRACE VANDE VEGTE.

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57).

Rev. W. Langerak, President
Jim Holstege, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Ladies' Society and Men's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker express sincere Christian sympathy to Josie Koole and John and Nette DeVries in the death of their sister and sister-in-law,

ALICE KNOTT.

May the family and we be comforted knowing God is wise and doeth all things for His glory. "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26).

James Koole, Pres.
Kathy DeMeester, Sec'y

Wedding Anniversary

■ Giving thanks to our heavenly Father, we honor and celebrate our earthly parents,

LEONARD and MARCIA HOLSTEGE,

as they celebrate on October 28, 2010, their 50th wedding anniversary. The Lord continues to be faithful to our family through many years, and we are thankful to Him for giving us such faithful parents and grandparents. "For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- ❖ Jim and Kathy Holstege
- ❖ Dan; Nathan and Sarah and Ella; Lynn; Joe
- ❖ Tom and Fiona Holstege
- ❖ Len and Tammy Holstege
- ❖ Ricky (in glory), Sami, Steven

Dorr, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Faith PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Andy Brummel, Mr. and Mrs. Don Offringa, and Mr. and Mrs. Mike Brummel in the passing away of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. ALICE KNOTT.

May the family find their comfort in the risen Lord Jesus, to whom we belong, and express by faith as did their loved one: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:23, 24).

Rev. Andrew Lanning, President
Richard Flikkema, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ On October 7, 2010, Lord willing, our parents and grandparents,

DONALD and JANICE FEENSTRA,

celebrated 50 years of marriage. We joyfully thank God for the many covenant blessings He has bestowed upon them, and pray for His continued mercy and care for them. "I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2).

- ❖ Christopher Feenstra
- ❖ Glenn and Beth Feenstra
- ❖ Rebecca, Benjamin, Zachary, Jacob, Emily, Bruce, Abigail, Clara, Samuel
- ❖ Marlin and Sarah Feenstra
- ❖ Paul, Thys, Aaron, Wesley, Victoria, Noelle
- ❖ Wayne and Michelle Buiters
- ❖ Brian, Rachel, Sherry, Caleb, Lane, Kathryn

Redlands, California

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanks to God, our parents and grandparents,

ALVIN and PHYLLIS RAU,

have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on October 1, 2010. We have been blessed by their godly example in their marriage. They have taught us to wait upon the Lord and to trust Him in all the ways He leads. "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

- ❖ Jim and Lois Rau
- ❖ Rev. Kenneth and Pat Koole
- ❖ Dave and Mary Kregel
- ❖ Dave and Norma Rau
- ❖ Mike and Elaine Rau
- ❖ Steve and Rosie (in glory)
- ❖ 24 grandchildren
- ❖ (1 grandson in glory)
- ❖ 31 great grandchildren

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