

# THE *February 1, 2010* STANDARD BEARER

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Volume 86 ◆ Number 9

# Manasseh Humbling Himself Before His God

*And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,*

*And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*

II Chronicles 33:12-13

**M**anasseh was the 14th king of the kingdom of Judah. Manasseh became king when he was 12 years old and reigned for 55 years, longer than any other of Judah's kings.

Manasseh followed in the footsteps of both his father and his grandfather. His grandfather was the wicked Ahaz, who exceeded all the kings before

him in evil. In his early years Manasseh managed to exceed even his grandfather in wickedness. Manasseh's father was the godly Hezekiah. After the Lord humbled him, Manasseh walked in the godliness of his father.

The passage we consider for this meditation speaks of Manasseh humbling himself before the Lord his God. On account of Manasseh's great sin the Lord afflicted him. In that affliction Manasseh besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. The Lord was gracious to Manasseh. He was entreated of him and heard his supplication and restored him to his kingdom.

Each of us must humble himself before the Lord. If we do not, the Lord will humble us as he did Manasseh. In the way of humbling us, the Lord will also exalt us, even as he did Manasseh. This is according to the universal truth repeated often in Scripture: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and

he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12).



Manasseh had fallen into great sin.

According to verse 2 of this chapter, Manasseh "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel." Not only did Manasseh pursue the idols of the heathen, Manasseh also "made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (v. 9).

What explains the great wickedness of Manasseh?

It is significant that when he was afflicted, Manasseh humbled himself before the Lord his God. This means that Manasseh knew the Lord as his God. This was due to his covenant training as a boy. His father was the godly king Hezekiah, his mother the

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godly Hephzibah. As godly parents, both Hezekiah and Hephzibah provided a solid covenant training, so that Manasseh came to know the Lord as his God.

But then Manasseh was led astray. He became king at the tender, vulnerable age of 12 and was most likely misled by ungodly princes and advisors of Judah. The nation as a whole had never fully embraced the reformation that Hezekiah had instituted in Judah. When Hezekiah passed away, the people and their leaders were eager to turn back into the idolatry of the reign of Ahaz. No doubt Manasseh was led also into this idolatry by influential men of the realm and then himself became a leader in this terrible sin. This underscores the need to provide our covenant children sound and consistent covenant training throughout their childhood and youth. We are all easily led astray, but especially our children and young people. To help children avoid being led astray, parents must be careful to provide consistent covenant training and nurture.

Manasseh's great sin brought affliction to him by the hand of the Lord his God. According to verse 10 the Lord warned Manasseh and the people, but they would not listen. The Lord threatened to deal with Judah as He had with the ten tribes of Israel. In response, "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (II Kings 21:16). This innocent blood included the prophet Isaiah.

And so God afflicted Manasseh. "The Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon" (v. 11). The king of Assyria was most likely

Esarhaddon, the most powerful of the Assyrian kings, who established his residence in Babylon for thirteen years. "Among the thorns" refers probably to the fact that in desperation Manasseh was hiding among the thorns. However, some translate this to mean that his captors put a hook in his nose.



And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him.

Manasseh besought the Lord his God. To beseech means to beg for help and deliverance. It has with it the sense of urgency. Manasseh besought the Lord his God. As a youth Manasseh had known the Lord as his God but had long departed from Him into idolatry, beseeching idol gods rather than the Lord. But now he turned back to the Lord his God, whom he had forsaken, to beseech Him.

The term "God of his fathers" is significant here. The "fathers" refers to the fathers of the nation of Judah—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and others. The term itself emphasizes the covenant that the Lord made with these fathers, including the commandments of the covenant and the promises. Manasseh had been instructed in these covenant realities as a child. For many years Manasseh had exalted himself in pride above the Lord his God and His laws. In pride he had concluded that he need not serve the Lord or listen to His prophets. In pride he had concluded that he could serve other gods that would allow him to indulge in all the pleasure of sin. This is the height of arrogance.

But now Manasseh greatly humbled himself before the Lord his God, and in the depths of humility he prayed to God. Although we do not have a record

of his prayer, we know what the humble prayer of a sinner is. It is the prayer of the publican in the temple: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The text of our meditation speaks of Manasseh's "supplication." This refers to a plea for mercy and grace. From this we conclude that Manasseh acknowledged his sin and the terribleness of it. He then cast himself upon the Lord's mercy, seeking forgiveness of the Lord his God in the blood of atonement. And he sought the Lord's help to turn from sin to serve Him.

Manasseh's humbling himself was the Lord's purpose in afflicting Manasseh.

It is important that we know how our covenant God deals with His people when they stubbornly persist in sin. Jehovah is angry with the sins of His people. Look up in a concordance the phrase "the anger of the Lord" to see how often the Lord is angry with His people. And in His anger He afflicts His people, sometimes grievously. But His purpose is not to hurt or to destroy. It is rather to correct and to purge His people from their sins. God first warns and rebukes them to turn them from their folly. But if they refuse His warning, He will afflict them. Sometimes that is the only thing that will bring His people to their knees in humility and repentance. This is called the Lord's chastening, and it is an expression of His love.

Certainly the Lord chastened Manasseh for his sin.

And that same chastening will come to us, should we follow the folly of Manasseh. Idolatry easily and readily becomes a part of our lives. An idol is anything in which we place our trust, other than in the living God. These idols can be such things as wealth, pleasure, sports, position, recognition, and education. Harboring these gods inevitably leads us away from the Lord our

God into sin. Should we fall into idolatry, the Lord will warn us. He will do so in the preaching and through the admonition of fellow saints. (Make sure you are in a church that will do this for you.) Should we stubbornly persist in this idolatry, the Lord will chasten us in His anger. If need be, He will bring disaster to our lives to get our attention and humble us. This is because He will not allow His people to perish.

Let us avoid this by heeding His word.

But should we be under such chastisement, let us humble ourselves before the Lord our God as did Manasseh.



And He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

That Jehovah was entreated of Manasseh means that He received Manasseh's entreaty.

Jehovah heard Manasseh's supplication by giving him what he requested. In his supplica-

tion, Manasseh sought the Lord's grace and mercy. The Lord heard by forgiving Manasseh's sins. He even delivered Manasseh from imprisonment and restored him to the kingdom.

Manasseh's restoration is according to the truth of II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Manasseh's restoration is also according to that universal truth: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

This is also what we will find as we humble ourselves before the Lord. He will quickly and freely forgive all our sins. And He will restore us to Himself, delivering us from the misery we have brought upon ourselves. True, He may leave us in a life-long situation of discomfort that we have made for ourselves in


our sin. But even this is to teach us not to turn back to our sins. And one day he will exalt us into heavenly glory.

Then Manasseh knew that the Lord, He was God.

This means that Manasseh knew that the Lord is *the* God, the one and only true God, who is to be served. Prior to this, Manasseh considered also the idols he served to be truly gods. But now that the Lord had humbled him, Manasseh came to know the Lord as the one only true God. His other gods could not help him. Jehovah alone had delivered him and restored him to the throne.

This knowledge of Manasseh was the knowledge of true faith, a knowledge of love and trust. This knowledge led Manasseh to a great reformation in Judah. He spent the rest of his reign seeking to destroy the institution of idolatry that he had established.

Do you know that the Lord is the God?

In that knowledge, destroy the idols in your life in order to serve the living God. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

## To be or Not to Be Reformed: Upholding the Formula of Subscription (3)

**I**n the new dispensation, the truth that God has entrusted to the church is constantly under attack. God has graciously given the Reformed church con-

fessions for a solid wall of defense against Satan's attempts to introduce heresy into the church. The Reformed church has learned from history how evil men, though claiming to be Reformed, have yet tried to bring in damnable heresies. The Formula of Subscription (FOS) was adopted as a means to preserve the truth of the confessions. Any church

that intends to be Reformed must maintain the FOS.

What does the Formula of Subscription require?

**Heartily believe...**

The form begins:

We...do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare by this, our

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*Previous article in this series:  
January 15, 2010, p. 172.*



subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God.

The FOS requires adherence to specific confessions, namely, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht. (Included by implication are the three ancient confessions, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Chalcedonian, for these form the foundation of the Reformed confessions. Indeed the Reformed confessions affirm their teaching.) The FOS's approval of the confessions is broad and emphatic—*all* articles and points of doctrine...*do fully agree* with the Word of God.

Take note that subscription expresses agreement with all *articles* and *points of doctrine*. Why does the form put it that way? The FOS does not require approval of every word and every detail in the confessions. What sorts of disagreements with the confessions might be allowed? Several kinds, beginning with points of information. For example, the Belgic Confession maintains that Paul is the human writer of Hebrews (Art. 4). That is not a point of doctrine, and there may be differences on that. Second, differences are allowed on the exegesis of a particular passage of Scripture. The Belgic Confession (Art. 37) seems to maintain that the final judgment will consist in this: God revealing the sins of each person to that person alone. That may be correct and it may not be. Another debatable teaching of the Belgic Confession is that Judas Iscariot partook of the Lord's Supper (Art. 35). Personally, I do not believe that he did.

Such differences with the con-

fessions may be tolerated in a Reformed church. However, those who sign the FOS may not dismiss whole articles, nor may they disagree with any *doctrine*. That is the crucial point. Officebearers promise that they heartily believe and are persuaded of these articles and points of doctrine.

### **Teach and Defend...**

That is not all. They also promise to teach and defend all these articles and doctrines. The FOS continues: "We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing."

Teaching them is obvious. The confessions summarize the Reformed faith and every officebearer should want the believers to know the Reformed truths. But the officebearer promises also to *defend* the Reformed faith against attack. He is on guard against attacks within and without, and can demonstrate that the confessions are faithful to the Bible.

### **Rejecting all Heresy...**

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those that were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors.

The form's language is explicit. Every man who signs it declares that he rejects all heresies that militate against this doctrine, especially Arminianism. Then he promises something more, namely, that he is personally disposed to refute and contradict these errors. All officebearers are obligated to refute heresy. They do not have the option quietly to sit in agreement with the Reformed

faith, or even to nod in agreement with another man's solid defense of the Reformed faith. They must refute and contradict all heresies. If your minister does not contradict heresy in his preaching, he is unfaithful to his vow. And so are the elders unfaithful to theirs.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are serious about this requirement. Synodical examinations of seminary students stretch out nearly three days. At the end of the examination, the delegates and visitors have no doubt that the candidates for the ministry know the Reformed faith. They have also heard repeated affirmations that the men believe these truths. And these men have demonstrated that they are able to defend the Reformed truths against past and current attacks.

Besides that, every classical exam has an examination entitled "Controversy." Often the pastor-elect is grilled on a particular historical controversy involving a doctrinal error, say on 1924 (common grace) or 1953 (the conditional covenant). At my classical exam, I was asked whether I was personally disposed to engage in polemics. The examiner was really rephrasing the promise of the FOS, "we are disposed to refute and contradict...." Later, I signed the form that promised the same.

The Protestant Reformed Churches demonstrate their seriousness about ministers being thus disposed. How much this is stressed with elders and deacons probably varies from congregation to congregation. Nonetheless, it is a requirement laid upon all who sign the form, and appropriate attention ought to be called to this aspect.

### **A Promise to be Honest...**

"And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise...."

The last part of the form is a rather lengthy discussion of what is required of officebearers who might later begin to entertain doubts about a doctrine of the confessions. They promise not to contradict the confessions or to teach their new views publicly or privately. In the context of the Arminian controversy, this section is especially pointed. For years Prof. Jacob Arminius privately taught students, in his home, doctrines that were contrary to the Reformed confessions. The FOS forbids that explicitly. Not only that, but if a church body has a question about a particular officebearer's position on a confessional matter, they may inquire into it, and the officebearer commits himself to full cooperation.

Such openness serves the good of the church. The FOS presents the orderly and honest way to deal with the matter. *Can* a man yet lie? *Can* he differ with the confessions and secretly teach error, even though he has signed the FOS? Of course, unscrupulous men can, they have, and they

will again. But the form makes it so explicit that there is no doubt to what doctrine and behavior a subscriber is bound.

And the form has teeth. Those who do teach contrary to the confessions, who break their word to be faithful, who refuse even to submit to the judgment of the ecclesiastical bodies, give the churches solid grounds to remove them from office. ("...under the penalty in case of refusal to be, by that very fact, suspended from our office.")

### Objections Raised

What could be wrong with that? An honest, Reformed man wonders why anyone would object to such a form. But in fact objections are raised against strict subscription to such a form.

One objection to the FOS is that it lifts the confessions to a position higher than they ought to have. It is argued that the FOS raises confessions above criticism and makes them to be infallible. We all know, say the objectors, that they were written by fallible men, and necessarily they

can have mistakes. They were written by men who themselves had an imperfect understanding of the truth. Besides, one cannot honestly say that the Heidelberg Catechism does "fully agree with" the Word of God because the Heidelberg Catechism does not speak of many things contained in the Bible, such as missions, and good stewardship of time and money. Therefore, they conclude, one cannot affirm that these confessions "do fully agree" with the Word of God.

It is not hard to see that this argument is faulty. In the first place, the FOS is not saying that the confessions *exhaust* the truth of Scripture. Certainly it is correct that not all the truths set forth in the Bible are found in the confessions. Secondly, the FOS does not even imply that creeds are infallible. They are open to correction, as the form states. The authority of the confessions is not that of the Bible. Rather the confessions derive their authority from the Bible. That is to say, they are authoritative only as far as they agree with Scripture.



Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass

Prof. David Engelsma

## Chapter Four

# Postmillennialism (3)

### Postmillennialism in the Reformed Tradition (cont.)

**C**ontemporary advocates of postmillennialism in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, particularly the

disciples of the Puritans and the Christian Reconstructionists, can appeal to a prominent, powerful strand of the Reformed tradition in support of their doctrine of the last things. Unlike premillennial dispensationalism, the other important challenge to Reformed amillennialism, postmillennialism must be taken seriously by the Reformed church in the twenty-first century.

### Edwards and the Puritans

In the preceding installment in this series on the doctrine of the last things, I quoted Jonathan Edwards' postmillennial hope in his *The History of Redemption*<sup>1</sup> as representative of many, though not all, of the Puritans. George Marsden accurately describes

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*Previous article in this series: December 15, 2009, p. 136.*

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The History of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers & Authors, n.d.), 305, 307.

Edwards' (and many of the Puritans') bright view of the earthly future of the church. During the coming millennium, "almost everyone would truly follow Christ. As a result, wars would cease, nations would dwell together as brethren, 'the wolf should dwell with the lamb.' There would be 'vast increase of knowledge,' and 'all heresies and false doctrines shall be exploded.' In short, the triumph of Christ's kingdom [in the "golden age" of the millennium—DJE] 'is an event unspeakably happy and glorious.'"<sup>2</sup>

Edwards called the coming earthly reign of Christ through His church the "church's latter-day glory."<sup>3</sup>

Marsden indicates an important motivation of Edwards' doctrine of a future millennium prior to the coming of Christ. Edwards was concerned that the number of those who are saved be greater in the end than the number of the lost.<sup>4</sup>

Typical of the postmillennial Puritans was Edwards' expectation of a future great revival that would usher in the millennium. In order to bring this necessary revival about by the extraordinary work of the Spirit, Edwards organized a vast, worldwide prayer chain. All Christians everywhere in the world were to pray at the same time that the Spirit would send the great revival.

It is a very *suitable* thing, and *well-pleasing to God*, for many people, in different parts of the world, by express *agreement*, to come into a *visible union* in extraordinary, speedy, fervent, and constant *prayer*, for those great effusions of the *Holy Spirit*, which

shall bring on that *advancement* of Christ's church and kingdom that God has so often promised shall be in the *latter ages* of the world.

Edwards concluded that this prayer for the great revival and, thus, for the millennium was a "duty" of all Christians.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that the biblical teaching of future lawlessness in the world and nominal church, of apostasy on the part of churches and professing Christians, of the rise of Antichrist, and of great tribulation for the true church is a "great damp" on millennial hopes and prayer chains, Edwards neatly consigned the realization of all such New Testament passages to the past, specifically, the time of the Protestant Reformation. "This notion [of a future Antichrist and tribulation—DJE] tends to discourage all earnest prayer in the church of God for that glorious coming of Christ's kingdom, till it be actually come; and that is to hinder its ever being at all."<sup>6</sup> That is, like all postmillennialists, Edwards was, and had to be, at least a "partial" preterist.

A full, consistent preterist in eschatology is one who explains all New Testament prophecies of Christ's coming and the things attending that coming as having been fulfilled in the past, whether in AD 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the time of the persecution of the early New Testament church by the Roman empire. A "partial," inconsistent preterist is a theologian who does exactly what the preterist does with eschatological prophecy, except for the prophecy of the coming millennium and the prophecy of the bodily return of Christ—especially the prophecy of the coming millennium.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *Praying Together*, 26. The emphasis is Edwards'.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 128, 129.

<sup>7</sup> For the Reformed criticism of "partial" preterism and the demonstration that "partial," inconsistent

## Dutch Reformed

It was not only the Puritans in the broadly Reformed tradition who taught postmillennialism. Prominent, influential Dutch Reformed theologians also advocated a coming "golden age" for the church before the return of Christ. Wilhelmus àBrakel looked for "the glorious state of the church during the thousand years prophesied in Revelation 20."<sup>8</sup> Ushering in this glorious, earthly state of the church, àBrakel held, will be a "conversion of the entire Jewish nation," involving "a restoration of the nation [of Israel], not only in a spiritual sense, but also in a physical sense"; the return of the Jews to Canaan; and the literal rebuilding of the earthly city of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

Waxing ecstatic over the prospect of the "wondrous increase in the measure of grace," the "great numbers" of converts, and the fine earthly state of the church worldwide in the millennium, as well as of the grand, earthly kingdom of the Jews in Canaan, àBrakel exclaimed, "Oh, what a glorious time this will be!" Wistfully, he added, "Who will then be alive?"<sup>10</sup>—a question that ought to have made him reexamine his postmillennial eschatology. Are all the Old Testament saints and the multitudes of New Testament Christians who will have died before the millennium to miss out on the most wonderful realization of the kingdom of Christ?

preterism necessarily commits one to full, consistent preterism, see my *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism* (Redlands, CA: The Reformed Witness, 2001), 129-158.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelmus àBrakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, tr. Bartel Elshout, vol. 4 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 531.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 348, 526, 530.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>2</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 335.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Praying Together for True Revival*, ed. T. M. Moore (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2004), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Marsden, *Edwards*, 335, 336.



## Scottish Presbyterians

Postmillennialism has also been the eschatology of Scottish Presbyterians. Writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, David Brown explained the millennium of Revelation 20 as that time in the future, prior to the return of Christ, when the biblical prophecies of the coming glory of the Messianic kingdom will be fulfilled in “their full *earthly* sense.” According to Brown, there will be a “universal reception of the true religion, and unlimited subjection to the sceptre of Christ,” so that all the religions of the pagans, the “imposture” of Islam, the false religion of the Jews, and the superstition of popery will be abolished. There will be universal, earthly peace; “much spiritual power and glory” because of a more copious outpouring of the Spirit; “the ascendancy of truth and righteousness in human affairs”; and “great temporal prosperity” for true believers and ungodly alike. As is invariably the case with the postmillennial vision, the beginning of the millennium will be the national conversion of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> David Brown, *Christ's Second Coming: Will It be Premillennial?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1983), 424-440. The emphasis is Brown's. As the sub-title indicates, much of the book is also an incisive, helpful criticism of premillennialism. John Macleod says of Brown's book that

## Presbyterians in the US

Presbyterians of stature in the United States have also espoused postmillennialism. On the basis, significantly, not of Revelation 20 (the passage that speaks of the thousand-year period), but of Revelation 19:11-21, the vision of the conquering Christ, northern Presbyterian Benjamin B. Warfield forecast a “golden age before the Church,” prior to the return of Christ. It will be “at least an age relatively golden gradually ripening to higher and higher glories as the Church more and more fully conquers the world and all the evil of the world.” Such will be the church's victory over evil, in Warfield's mind, that he left it an open question whether the millennial “winning of the world” implies the complete elimination of evil from it.<sup>12</sup>

The southern Presbyterian Robert L. Dabney shared his northern colleague's view of the last things. “Before this second

it was “perhaps the most influential book” of that period in Great Britain on the return of Christ (John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, repr. 1974, 278). Brown was obviously heavily influenced by the postmillennialism of Jonathan Edwards.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 662-664.

advent, the following events must have occurred. The development and secular overthrow of Antichrist...which is the Papacy. The proclamation of the Gospel to all nations, and the general triumph of Christianity over all false religions, in all nations.... The general and national return of the Jews to the Christian Church.” Dabney called these future events “this state of high prosperity” for the church on earth. He evidently saw this “prosperity” as the meaning of the millennium of Revelation 20, since he appealed to the chapter in support of his expectation of it.<sup>13</sup>

The strong presence of postmillennialism in the Reformed tradition does not make the millennial error respectable, much less an option for Reformed churches in the twenty-first century. Postmillennialism is false doctrine concerning the return of Christ, and a practical danger to believers and their children. But the presence of postmillennialism in the tradition does demand that we take the challenge to Reformed amillennialism today, especially by the disciples of the Puritans and by the men of Christian Reconstruction, seriously.



<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, repr. 1972), 838.

## All Around Us

Rev. Clayton Spronk

### ■ Pushing for Consistency on Marriage

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that John Marcotte is promoting an initiative to ban divorce in his home state of California.

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nia. Marcotte is pushing for the ban on divorce in response to the passage of Proposition 8 by California voters in 2008. Proposition 8, otherwise named the California Marriage Protection Act, banned homosexual marriage in California by adding to the state constitution the words “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in

the state of California.” Marcotte voted against Proposition 8 and is described in the article as a “gay-rights supporter.” He is hardly a supporter of “traditional marriage.” Why then push for a ban on divorce? Is he joking? Some think so, but Marcotte says, “It does hurt my feelings when people doubt my sincerity.” Marcotte's stated purpose is to show



the inconsistency of claiming to uphold "traditional marriage" by banning homosexual marriage while at the same time allowing divorce. He says, "If you want to protect traditional marriage, don't stop gay people from getting married, stop straight people from getting divorced." His argument is that California voters who favored the ban on homosexual marriage should also favor a ban on divorce. He says, "to not vote (for the divorce ban) would be a little hypocritical."

Interestingly, the article reveals that Andy Pugno, identified as "the protectmarriage.com campaign's general counsel who propelled Proposition 8 to victory," is not in favor of the divorce ban. He called Marcotte's initiative a "stunt." Yet, Marcotte has obtained the necessary signatures on his initiative to receive certification from the California Secretary of State in order to spread the initiative across the state in hopes it will receive enough signatures to be placed on next year's ballot. He claims support from "members of the gay and lesbian communities [and] some...from the ultraconservative religious right that opposes divorce."

Misguided though he may be, by pushing this initiative Marcotte is drawing attention to the truth that "traditional marriage" has been and continues to be destroyed by divorce, despite the fact that homosexual marriage has been held at bay in many states such as California. Marcotte is also exposing the hypocrisy of many "conservatives" who oppose gay marriage while tolerating divorce for almost any reason. As long as the divorce rates in the United States remain between 40-50% any claims of victory for "traditional marriage" by prohibiting homosexual marriage ring hollow. When we keep in mind, in addition to the frequency of divorce, that many in North

America do not marry at all and simply live in a state of fornication, it is all the more evident that there is no reason to be optimistic about the status of marriage in our society. Marcotte's initiative heaps shame upon those who oppose gay marriage but are ambivalent about divorce.

But Marcotte especially heaps shame upon churches that oppose homosexual marriage while allowing divorce for unbiblical reasons. Biblical marriage is the concern of the church rather than "traditional marriage." And the Bible certainly forbids homosexual marriage (I am aware that "homosexual marriage" is a contradiction in terms). Many churches (denominations) seem to uphold the biblical view of marriage by banning homosexual marriage. However, when a church or denomination ignores the Bible's prohibition of divorce for every reason but one, fornication (which is the only instance in which divorce is *permitted*, not *required*), it must be concluded that a prohibition of homosexual marriage is at best inconsistent and at worst hypocritical. When it is kept in mind that many churches not only allow divorce for unbiblical reasons, but also allow remarriage (and not just of the innocent party), it is all the more evident that churches do not uphold the biblical view of marriage.

What is at stake is God's blessing. God's blessing is given only because of His grace and only for the sake of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But His blessing is enjoyed only in the way of faithfulness to His word. Those who are unfaithful experience His curse. Despite the fact that gay marriage has by and large been prohibited in North America, North American countries have certainly experienced the curse of God in connection with the widespread occurrence of divorce. Our society experi-

ences many evils that are directly related to the breakdown of the family. Churches also are experiencing the devastating consequences of divorce, consequences that flow from the curse of God.

The Protestant Reformed Churches must learn a valuable lesson from Marcotte's initiative. Only by the grace of God are we blessed as we remain faithful to His word concerning marriage. Let us remember that, though we must battle against homosexual marriage, the battle for biblical marriage begins with divorce. The danger is that in the current climate we focus on the gross evil of homosexuality and forget the gross evil of divorce. Let us remember that God hates "putting away," but He loves it when His church honors the permanency of marriage as a reflection of the permanency of Christ's union with the church. May God in His grace give us the strength to be consistent on biblical marriage, and in that way may God bless us.

## ■ Tiger Woods Counseled to Turn to Christianity

Much attention has turned to the comments of FoxNews contributor Brit Hume about Tiger Woods. Hume suggested that Woods, the world's number one golfer, who is now better known for his adulterous affairs, should repudiate Buddhism and turn to Christianity. It is reported that on January 3 Hume said to a national TV audience, "I don't think that faith (Buddhism) offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, 'Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.'" Hume has come under fire for his suggestion, but he reiterated it the next day again on the FoxNews Channel stating, "My sense about Tiger is that he needs something that

Christianity, especially, provides and gives and offers. And that is redemption and forgiveness."<sup>1</sup>

Predictably Hume's suggestion is drawing harsh criticism. Buddhists are arguing that he has mischaracterized their religion. Members of the media who are not Buddhist, but nevertheless despise Christianity, are criticizing Hume for unnecessarily injecting Christianity into a news story.

An AP article reporting the indignation of Buddhists actually substantiates Hume's point that forgiveness and redemption are not found in that false religion.<sup>2</sup> Robert Thurman, a professor of Tibetan studies at Columbia University, is quoted as saying, "It is insulting to Buddhism to indicate that Buddhism doesn't take care of its own believers and followers." Will Buddhism take care of Woods and give him forgiveness and redemption? Yes, the article explains, Buddhism teaches that Tiger can find redemption by looking to himself rather than to God. The article reports there is no "creator god (sic) to bestow redemption" nor is there an "accountant in the sky wiping sins off your balance sheet as in Christianity." Tiger must save himself by turning to "an ethical way of life." So Buddhism says, save yourself. We know in the light of Scripture that Woods, like all men except Jesus, cannot live an ethically perfect life because he is by nature dead in sin. Therefore no one can find forgiveness or redemption in Buddhism.

Hume is correct in his assessment that Woods needs to turn to the Christian religion. However, it must be pointed out that forgiveness and redemption

are not found "especially" in Christianity; they are found *only* in Christianity. And it must be emphasized that forgiveness and redemption are based only upon the work of Jesus Christ. I am not sure why Hume did not mention Jesus' name, but I am afraid that if His name is not mentioned, the impression can be left that Christianity also offers salvation to those who simply change their lives and do good. Woods, like all sinners, does not need to do anything to earn forgiveness, he simply needs to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

This is not to say that Woods could find forgiveness and redemption by believing in Jesus and then returning to "life as usual." Oh no, true repentance includes both trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and a change from sin, or life as usual, to a life of obedience to God. If Woods were truly to turn to Jesus Christ for salvation, evidence of this would be seen in a radical change of life. Not only would he discontinue all adulterous affairs and devote himself to his wife (if she will accept reconciliation), but he would also discontinue his wicked practice of golfing on the Lord's Day.

Readers of the *Standard Bearer* with long memories will recall that Woods' golfing prowess, especially his putting abilities, were a subject of interest in the debate between Dr. Richard Mouw and Prof. Engelsma concerning the doctrine of Common Grace. In his book *He Shines In All That's Fair*, Dr. Mouw infamously expressed his belief that, along with the accomplishments of other unbelievers, God delights "in Tiger Woods' putts" (p. 36). Now that Woods' multitude of adulterous affairs have come to light, that belief has been further discred-

ited. Before, the question could be put to Dr. Mouw, "Does God really delight in Woods' ability to putt while he is desecrating the Sabbath Day?" Now we can add this question: "Did God really take delight in Woods' ability to putt, while he was carrying on adulterous affairs and violating his marriage vows?"

The answer of Scripture is that God "delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of man" (Ps. 147). God does not delight in any of man's accomplishments. He delights in the broken spirit and the contrite heart. He delights in obedience, not sacrifice. To please God, Woods must turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, and with a heart filled with love for God through the power of that forgiveness he must radically change his life. There is no common love of God for all the works of man; there is only a special love of God for His people in Jesus Christ and a special delight that He takes in seeing their lives transformed by the power of His grace. So the Woods' scandal exposes the superficiality of the doctrine of common grace.


However, I am not interested in merely scoring points in the debate on common grace. The Tiger Woods' scandal and Hume's suggestion that he turn to Christ serves as an important reminder for us to have the proper perspective on life. How many of us were impressed with Woods' ability to hit a golf ball? How many of us are impressed with the ability of other men to shoot a basketball or to throw or catch a football? How many of us are impressed with women who have the abilities of a Martha Stewart? Is it the case that we too tend to overemphasize the accomplishments of these men and women who deny Jesus Christ, while we overlook the importance of living a life of faith and devotion to Jesus Christ?

<sup>1</sup> Information on Hume's comments can be found at <http://www.foxnews.com>

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Lush, "Comments by Fox's Brit Hume Upset Some Buddhists," found at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34745053/>

Many of God's people do not have amazing physical talents and do not lead lives filled with

worldly excitement. They simply live their daily lives as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. That is impressive! Let us as Christians

imitate God and delight in those who delight in Him through Jesus Christ. 

## Women Assisting the Deacons (4) Implementing the Practice

**W**ith official sanction, and on a wider scale, Reformed churches ought to permit women to serve as assistants to the deacons.

Arguing that this should be done on a wider scale, I recognize that it is already done to a limited degree by a Helping Hands Committee or by some other means. This is good. Where it is already being done, let us be sure that it is being done with a clear understanding of the biblical basis for it, and that it is being done in a biblical manner. At the same time, let us examine whether we can implement this practice more broadly.

The official sanction that I have in mind would not be that of a statement in the Church Order, or a decision of a broader assembly. Rather, each Reformed diaconate, with the approval of the consistory that oversees its work, would do well to draw up its own policy for implementing this practice in its own congregation.

### Other voices

In saying that Reformed churches ought to implement this

practice more widely, I echo the voices of other Reformed writers who have already suggested this.

Already in the seventeenth century such a voice was heard. Gysbert Voetius

maintained that there is every reason to continue a type of female ministry in the churches.... Their work should be that of ministering to the poor, the strangers, the sick and especially women and children of the congregation. Many of the tasks which they can perform would be impossible or indelicate for the deacons. ...In smaller congregations, where the work would not be so extensive, he argued that this might well be performed by the wives of the deacons.<sup>1</sup>

Herman Bavinck, writing a century ago, and in the context of the situation of the diaconate in the Netherlands, argued along the same lines:

This development, which the distress of our times calls for, can in the main occur only along the following lines, [as I propose:]....

5. That in large churches the bearers of this office (deacons, DJK) avail themselves, if necessary, of the assistance of deacon-

esses in the same way the other two offices employ catechists and pastoral visitors of the sick....

7. That they extend their help to all the poor, the sick, the strangers, the prisoners, the mentally retarded, the mentally ill, the widows and orphans, in a word, to all the wretched and needy who exist in the church and are either completely or partially deprived of help from other sources, and that by word and deed they seek to relieve their suffering.<sup>2</sup>

Brian Schwertley concludes his work, *A Historical and Biblical Examination of Women Deacons*, by saying:

Given the biblical and historical evidence regarding women deacons, the question asked in the modern debate needs to be changed. The question has been: should the church have deaconesses? The question should be: what type of deaconess does the New Testament authorize? ...The simple fact is that having deaconesses in the church is biblical as long as the church defines deaconesses biblically.

It is not enough simply to oppose the "women in the same office as men deacons" view of deaconesses. Churches must

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*Previous article in this series: January 1, 2010, p. 159.*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 247.

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4: *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, translated by John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 428-429.



study and then put in place the servant-widows that do have divine authorization. Under divine inspiration Paul gives instructions to place godly widows on a list. These servant-widows or deaconesses are needed now just as much as they were in the early church.<sup>3</sup>

Let the reader understand that Schwertley uses the term “deaconess” to refer to an official position in the church that serves, but is distinct from, the male diaconate.

Near the conclusion of his book, Peter Y. DeJong himself writes:

In the light of the above it should be clear that there is very definitely a place for the ministry of women in the church of Christ. This service, however, does not have an official character, since nowhere in the New Testament is there proof that Christ or the apostles recognized any other offices than those of the ministers of the Word, the elders and the deacons as permanent. Yet the church is depriving herself of a unique opportunity and a fruitful source of help by ignoring the auxiliary aid which pious women can render the poor and the sick. These should be recognized as assistants to the diaconate in the discharge of its God-given functions.<sup>4</sup>

In saying that this service does not have an official character, DeJong does not mean God has not authorized it; indeed God has, in I Timothy 5. Rather, DeJong is making a clear distinction between this position of ministry of women, and the three special offices in the church.

### The Reasons

For various reasons, Reformed diaconates do well to implement

this practice more widely, and officially.

The first is that such a practice has scriptural warrant. In our first article on this topic, we noted this biblical warrant, examining I Timothy 5:9-10 at length, and also noting I Timothy 3:11.

The second is that by so doing, our diaconates can carry out the ministry of mercy more fully. This ministry of mercy is not limited to the care of the poor by providing them money with which to pay their bills, but includes the bodily care of all in need, including the aged, the widows, the sick, and the disabled. The care of all such needy might be more than the deacons can reasonably be expected to do, partly because of the limited number of deacons in comparison to the greater number of needy, partly because some of these needy require care during the day when the deacons are at work, and partly because some of the care required involves supplying the bodily and personal needs of women, which male deacons ought not do. To have assistants who are available to help during the day will enable the deacons to meet these needs. The goal, then, is the care of all, such that none are neglected. In the church of Jerusalem, the alleged neglect of some widows in the daily ministrations led the apostles to institute the office of deacon (Acts 6). Let the deacons of Christian churches today take heed that none of their own be neglected.

The third is that by this the church avails herself of the gifts God has given women, and she avails herself of these gifts in a legitimate, God-glorifying way. Those who advocate opening the special offices in the church to women argue their case on the basis of the fact that God has given women gifts for the church to use. They *wrongly* argue this, not because God has not given gifts to women, but because God

has not permitted women, even gifted women, to hold *these offices*. But God does permit gifted women to be used as assistants to the deacons; so the church rightly avails herself of the gifts of these women by letting them serve in this capacity. Particularly, godly and experienced women who are living out of the power of grace in Christ have the gifts of understanding the needs of women, and the compassion to attend to those needs. The reason why women should not serve in church office—that she was created to be subject to man, I Timothy 2:11-14—does not prevent her from serving as assistants to the deacons, for in assisting, such women place themselves under the deacons’ authority.

### The Objections

Some will object that such a plan is not necessary. After all, many sick or elderly church members have family who can care for their needs. And the government or other organizations make provision for such needs also, with meals on wheels, home health care nurses, affordable taxi services for low income people, and other services.

That some have family who can care for their needs does not render this care by the deacons and women assistants unnecessary. For, first, not all have family; and second, especially if one needs constant care, his family cannot provide that care constantly. Let me underscore this last statement. Is there someone in your congregation who provides full-time care to an aged parent, or a disabled child? Let the deacons assist, by arranging to give the caregiver a break from time to time!

That the government has its ways of helping does not mean the church need not help. That the church must care for her own is a fundamental principle of the work of the deacons. If the

<sup>3</sup> Brian M. Schwertley, *A Historical and Biblical Examination of Women Deacons* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1998), p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> DeJong, pp. 248-249.



church must care for her poor through her deacons rather than leaving the government to care for them, so must the church care for her other needy rather than leaving them to the cruel mercies of the government (Prov. 12:10).

Others might argue such a plan to be unfeasible, for whatever reason. In answer, the Scriptures give warrant for this practice. The church will always face difficulties as she strives to serve our Lord faithfully. Satan will see to this, in his desire to turn the church from the way of obedience; and the sovereign Lord will see to it, as He tests our faith. However, the proper response to such difficulties is not to cease doing what is good, but to persevere in that good.

### The Implementation

In implementing this plan, the diaconates will have to address the following matters.

First, they will have to spell out in what instances they would use the help of women. Such instances might include bringing or arranging meals for individuals or families; arranging transportation to and from doctors' offices; checking on elderly people who live in their own homes, and arranging for household chores to be done; and attending to bodily needs of the elderly. But let the deacons spell out these instances, so that the women and congregation know what to expect.

Second, the deacons will have to decide which women to use, and which criteria to use in selecting the women. Both I Timothy 3:11 and 5:9-10 make clear that these women must be qualified, not only with the natural gifts and abilities for this work, but also with *spiritual* qualifications. The deacons ought not avail themselves of the help of just any woman who is willing to help. They should carefully screen and select those whom they will use in this capacity.

The deacons do well to evaluate whether these women have a genuine love for God's people. Have they manifested compassion for the saints throughout their lives, or is this an entirely new practice for them (I Tim. 5:10)?

The deacons should judge whether these are women who can guard their tongues ("not slanderers," I Tim. 3:11). The sick or elderly might confide certain struggles to their caregivers. Will the women make these private matters public, by gossip? Those women who help might become critical of or impatient with those they are helping (not at all uncommon, when a perfectly healthy caregiver does not understand the limitations of age and disease); but does this criticism and frustration get spread throughout the congregation, so as to give the needy person a bad name? Or, in the very nature of the case, these women might witness embarrassing or humorous events that make a good story for others; but are they able to hold their tongue, to save the embarrassment of the needy person from being known by the church?

The deacons ought consider whether the woman is "grave" (I Tim. 3:11), that is, honorable and respected. Few aged or infirm, needy though they be, desire to be attended to by one, even if a member of the church, whose general character and reputation is questionable. And let the deacons be convinced a woman will faithfully serve the church's needy, and not seek her own profit. The world can provide enough caregivers who take sinful advantage of the needy; let not the church provide such.

The deacons ought consider whether the woman is old enough. With age comes maturity and patience, as well as more time to devote to such tasks, not having young children at home. For good reason the inspired

apostle prescribed that such women must be at least 60 years old (I Tim. 5:9). I do not understand this prescription to mean that today also, women who assist the deacons must be at least 60. But the principle is that they must be mature and godly women, and that their maturity has been manifest for many years.

In determining which women to allow to serve in this capacity, the deacons must make a *formal* evaluation. Just as the whole body of officebearers consciously applies the test of Scripture (I Tim. 3, Titus 1) to the men they are nominating for special office, so the whole body of deacons must evaluate how well prospective assistants measure up to the requirements of Scripture. And a formal decision must be taken, to permit these women to serve.

Third, the deacons will have to make clear to their assistants what work is expected of them, what work is not expected of them, and for how long the deacons desire them to serve. To be clear on these matters at the outset will help avoid frustration on the part of the women.

Fourth, the deacons must have a clear idea of how they will oversee the work of these women, and how they will hold them accountable. These women are not *replacing* the deacons in their work, but they are *serving* the deacons; they are not caring for the needy merely as members of the body of Christ, but in an official capacity. So it is necessary that the women be accountable to the deacons, and that the deacons insist on such accountability. A monthly report to be read and treated at the monthly deacons' meeting would be a good step in this direction.

### The Benefit

The main benefit of implementing such a practice is that in this way the communion of saints is more plainly manifested, and

the members of the body show their care for each other.

This benefits the needy who receive the care of which they stood in need. It also benefits the congregation and the assistants themselves. In giving, we receive, which is more blessed (Acts 20:35).

A second benefit is that in this way the church of Jesus Christ shows herself to be self-sufficient in a right way. She is not self-sufficient as regards her need for grace in Christ—she is not sufficient in herself at all for this, but she relies completely on God. But she is self-sufficient in

that she can care for her own, and does not need society and civil government to care for her.

Thus the church shows that her God and Savior is Himself all-sufficient—He cares for His own, through Christ as Mediator, by the agency of Christ's church.



*When Thou Sittest in Thine House*

*Abraham Kuyper*

## Sorrow Is Better Than Laughter

Every one among us knows that in the so-called Sermon on the Mount our Savior declared and testified: "Blessed are they that mourn." But do we also remember that, ten centuries before this, the Preacher said: "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:3)?

And do we bring to mind this yet stronger exhortation of the apostle James: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (4:9)?

Test by the principle implied in this, the ordinary tone of life in families, and you feel at once that, even in our Christian circles, this principle does not come to its own.

All too generally the common tone of life is one of gaiety, of tense amusement, where people come together, even for a good part, from an over stimulated desire to laugh.

Life must be "convivial," "convivial" one's associations, "convivial" the conversation, and under the dominion of this inclination you constantly come into companies in which, almost for hours together, it is a cracking of jokes, a play of wits, and in which the high-spirited, overstrained tone does not tolerate almost for a single moment the absence of laughter from the lips.

Mingling in such company frequently affects the nerves so strongly that it takes a certain period of time to bring oneself back again to the ordinary run of things, or to compose oneself to sleep.

It is a "setting-up" of life, a mutual attempt at "forced levity," a strain to work oneself up to a laughing, joking mood, which is not natural, but artificial, and which for the most part makes the impression as though one would cover up the inner hollowness and emptiness of his presence by witticism and cunning play of words.

When people can so laugh and giggle, and wind themselves up as it were to the point of folly, then they deem themselves to be just really happy; and a household in which this tone predominates is called "convivial" and "chummy."

But Scripture judges differently.

It discerns the inward untruthfulness of this play of excitement, and therefore it testifies: To mourn is better than *so* to laugh.

For under such laughter frequently the heart suffers loss, while sadness of countenance oftentimes makes the heart better.



Now do not take the meaning of this word amiss; and do not commit the fault of falling from one extreme into the other.

Also in that other extreme is very serious danger.

An extreme that shows itself in this, that intentionally one represses all freer, happier utterance of heart, lets gall operate upon the blood more freely than the blood upon the nerves, and now takes a certain kind of pleasure in showing a gloomy face, and sighfully and complainingly to make oneself a burden to others.

This, too, is unnatural, not commanded by Holy Scripture but avenged.

An affectation that makes pleasure in making a very spiritual show, and aims to make an intentional impression of piety,

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which perchance readily degenerates into spiritual pride and ends in making the heart insensible to the ordinary impression of our human life.

Then there is no thanksgiving and no laugh of gladness for the many good things that come to us from God.

There is a sigh, but no song of praise.

Always a saying it over of the: "O, wretched man that I am," with never a Hallelujah on the lips.



This is no "mourning."

"Mourning" must come from the heart. It must be an utterance of real "hunger and distress" that fills our inner life; and therefore the "mourning" that Jesus calls blessed has nothing whatsoever in common with that artificial melancholy that has presently become a second nature.

One can show tears. But "mourning" is the tender word of a sorrow of heart which permits no false show.

Thus, whether you mourn or do not mourn depends upon two things. First, whether the impressions that come to your heart make you glad or sad, and in the second place whether your heart is sufficiently sensitive to receive that impression and to undergo the effect of it.

In the blessedness of heaven, mourning is unthinkable, because there nothing sorrowful will come into your heart, and everything around you will be abounding wealth and glory. Also in Paradise it would have had no meaning if, before his fall, Adam had mourned. His was pure joy and gladness.

In our estate and condition, on the other hand, now that our internal and external life is sunken in and broken, most impressions that come to us are sorrowful and disappointing. Read your papers, whose influence

upon our life is now so great, and confess whether they do not bring you almost every day, from East or West, from far off and close by, sorrowfulness, of thunderclouds that threaten and of cruelties and accidents that have happened, while oh so rarely even for one single day nothing but praiseworthy and glad reports fill their columns.

But most of the time the sensibility of our heart is so dulled that, time and again, you see a person read his paper, which reports all sorts of murders and suicides, of people that are drowned and people that are burned, of theft and robbery, of cruel immorality and low intrigues, and then lay his paper aside and light-heartedly and jokingly resume conversation, as though his heart had received no single impression.



From this you understand already something of that "blessed are they that mourn." For he who lives in the midst of a world like ours, and sympathizes with the need and the moral and social misery which surrounds him, by much and serious thought about it would almost be overcome.

In the measure in which you have *less* love, you have less *sympathy* and thus less pity. All that misery does not affect you. It does not trouble you. And therefore you are always able to jest and to laugh.

Hence this continuous laughter and jesting is proof and evidence of your lack of love and of the apathy of your heart. While he who has *much* love, and is less concerned about himself than about others, is affected with great seriousness, and under the impression of all the misery and all the sin that is abroad, though the eye may not weep, is sadly tuned in heart.

And here we mentioned only general misery, and the dark

shadow which as such rests upon our human life.

But to him who lives the deeper life, there is, added to all this, not only his personal griefs and disappointments which he suffered at human hands, and unfaithfulness of friendship, but far more yet concern about the lot and future of people and native land, about demoniac spirits that are abroad, and, most deeply of all, sorrow over God's Zion when God's name is put to shame, or His church suffers loss, and His law is trodden underfoot.

Bring to mind what the psalmist sang: "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (119:36).

And now, who is there among the children of God who can say this after the psalmist, and who so loves his God?



There is, however, also much good abroad, much that makes for gladness and must be cause for joy.

He who understands what it is to *give thanks*, and does not abuse it as mere *form*, cannot kneel any night in worship, but material overwhelms him.... Even birds when they sing and the dog that jumps up to us in happy greeting bring something kindly into our life.


Hence, he who has a tender, receptive heart, and knows his own unworthiness, and in all honesty testifies: "Who am I, Lord, that all these blessings should come upon me," also truly knows in his heart the deep emotion of joy and gladness which the apostle had in mind when he wrote: "Rejoice evermore" (I Thess. 5:16).

This then is real gladness. No artificial flower, but one of joy budded on the stem of our life. A high gladness and thankfulness which has nothing in common with the laugh of excitement or of forced gaiety.

Not a gliding over one's heart, but a life from his heart, and therefore a being kind to everyone and a being thankful before his God, with a gladness which never quarrels with seriousness, which is in perfect keeping with compassion for all that are in sorrow and want.

What we need, therefore, in our homes and in society at

large, is neither endless laughter and joking fun, nor stiffness of melancholy and depression of sombernesses, but a serious tone of life which is animated by real *love*, which is token of a deep life, not of a gliding over things, but of taking vital interest in everything that pertains to the life of our heart.

Also the generous laugh in its time, and the pleasure of sparkling wit. But these as exception. As a rule, such a tone of life as an angel of God would strike if he came down into the midst of our misery, and at the same time opened our eyes to the rich grace wherewith the love of God sweetens it. 

*In His Fear*

*Rev. Richard Smit*

## *The Fruit of the Spirit (7b): Clothing Ourselves with Gentleness (2)*

**I**n the previous article, we focused on a description of gentleness and on its only source for us in Jesus Christ. Now, we follow through with some application of that virtue to our daily life, particularly by means of the admonition of Colossians 3:12. The Lord commands us, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, *kindness....*" We must clothe ourselves with this virtue of kindness, or, as it is also called in Scripture, gentleness.



What is this spiritual fabric that must be worn by the regenerated, believing, holy child of God? It is certainly not a clothing that we can fabricate. We can neither fabricate the clothing necessary to cover the shame and nakedness of our sin in the sight of God, nor manufacture this holy

clothing of gentleness. This is a robe that God has made with the living and golden threads of the holy life of Jesus Christ. For us to wear this robe, the Spirit of Christ must put it on us through His word. He must give us the strength to wear it and to exercise this robe of gentleness in our daily life.

For that robe and the faithful wearing of it, we must pray unto our heavenly Father daily. We must seek the Father for the Spirit and grace to wear it and exercise it.



To whom, then, must we exercise this virtue of gentleness? We must be kind and gentle towards our fellow saints within the household of faith, the church. To those in the grip of grief and sorrow, to those walking in sin, to our covenant children, to our spouses, and to all whom the Lord in His providence brings upon our pathway in the life of the church, we must be kind.

Little children must learn to be kind and gentle. At a very early age, we show by our fight-

ing or by our theft of toys from the unsuspecting sibling that we are prone to be brutal, cruel, and hostile towards others. Instead, we must be kind to one another. We must be gentle towards others who may have disabilities, may be wheel chair bound, or cannot learn and memorize as quickly as others. Diversity in the body of Christ is the God-given circumstance in which to exercise kindness.

In addition to that, we must even be kind to our enemies. In Romans 12:20, we are taught to give to an enemy a cup of cold water when he is thirsty. We are taught to be kind even to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:35-36). Even in persecution, the believer must be gentle, as Christ was: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).



When we consider the wide range of types of people to whom we must show kindness, that brings to mind some important

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characteristics of this amazing virtue of gentleness.

First, true kindness towards others ought to be unconditional. Just as we did not merit God's gentleness and compassion upon us, neither must we expect others to merit it from us. Freely must we put on and exercise this virtue of kindness. We must not wait for others to fulfill certain conditions and maintain a level of merit because of which we then exercise gentleness. We must not wait for others to show gentleness to us because of which we will then be gentle to them. God did not require of us to fulfill conditions of gentleness first in order then to be kind to us. God loved us first (1 John 4:19). Even when we were His enemies, God in our Savior was merciful and gentle toward us unto our redemption. Similarly, we must not exercise gentleness toward another on the basis of a set of fulfilled conditions and prerequisites. We must exercise a gentleness toward others that is unconditional and free.

It should be clear, then, that kindness should be exercised to the undeserving. There are those who by their behavior make it extremely difficult for us to exercise kindness. In fact, to those who provoke us by their sins, we are prone to retaliate in kind, but never in kindness. Nevertheless, even to the unthankful and evil, we must be kind. Our kindness toward our children, for example, may not be based upon whether they deserve it or not. It is a fact that no man, woman, or child will ever be worthy of any kindness. Yet, Scripture requires us to exercise kindness even to an evil and unthankful man, woman, or child, who in their unthankfulness show themselves to be the most undeserving.

Next, true kindness is constant. God is eternally kind to us. Ought not we, as the children of our heavenly Father, be exercising

this virtue constantly? Should we not be fighting diligently against retaliation, cruelty, bitter harshness, and spiritual brutality to others? Should we not be seeking by faith in Christ alone to put on that virtue of gentleness in word and action?

Let us not forget, though, that true kindness is also holy and righteous. We must not think that gentleness is never calling another to repentance. We must not think that a spiritually gentle father would never discipline his children. We must not think that gentleness avoids contending for the faith and doing the hard work of saying sharp words to a stubbornly impenitent sinner. True gentleness does not approve or tolerate sin. This is also illustrated by Christ in John 8, to which we referred earlier. We remember that Jesus forgave the woman caught in the guilt and public shame due to her sin of her adultery. Jesus would not condemn her, but forgave her, because He intended to redeem her as well. However, Jesus did not, then, say to her, that it was permissible to continue in her sins against the seventh commandment. Instead, Jesus in His kindness called her out of her past ways of sin by saying, "Go and sin no more!" Christ's kindness was both righteous in His forgiveness and holy in His call to forsake the ways of wickedness.

Such is the virtue with which we desire to be clothed upon by the Spirit of Christ. Our kindness may not tolerate sin, but must hate sin. In true kindness, we must call unrepentant sinners out of their sins of wickedness, or even of radicalism, into the holy and wise ways of repentance and faith in Christ. To those who confess their sins, kindness is righteously forgiving on the basis of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and kindness will in holiness lead a repentant sinner out of his sin and into the holy

and wise ways of the Father. In that way, true kindness honors our heavenly Father, is consistent with His love for us in Christ Jesus, and thereby shows that we are the children of our heavenly Father renewed by the Spirit in the image of Christ.

Finally, true kindness is filled with and governed by the word of God. It follows studiously the examples of the saints in Scripture. It is filled with the words and wisdom of Scripture for comfort, admonition, correction, and instruction in the paths of righteousness.



In order that we might bring forth this fruit, the Lord calls or commands us by His word and Spirit: "clothe yourselves with this kindness one toward another."

That command to do so is based upon the truth that ye are "elect of God." This echos the truth of election as taught in Ephesians 1:4. God has chosen us in Christ to be ordained unto eternal salvation through the wonder of our deliverance from sin by His grace alone. God has made this decree of election "before the foundation of the world." He has chosen us unconditionally and sovereignly unto salvation. According to God's will, this is what Christ calls us: the elect of God. We have been predestinated in Christ to be the sons and daughters of our heavenly Father in everlasting life with Him.

The goal of that election, according to Ephesians 1:4, is holiness and blamelessness before Him in the bond of love. The goal of that election is that we might be transformed into the image and life of Christ. We shall be like Christ in His glory, which includes all the virtues of that new man in Christ, including kindness. While we bring forth kindness in fulfillment of God's

will and counsel, we know that we are the elect of God.

This finds support in what the apostle Paul taught in II Thessalonians 2:13, where we read: "God hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." This teaches us that we are chosen unto that life of sanctification of the Spirit. We are chosen unto that life of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. In fulfillment of that will of God and eternal good pleasure of God in our salvation, Christ commands us to clothe ourselves not only with the new man in Christ, but specifically with kindness over against the cruelty, retaliation, bitterness, and harshness of our old nature.

Secondly, the command to clothe ourselves in kindness is based on the fact that we are called "holy." It may be a surprise to us, at first, that God would even dare to call us "holy." In response to our surprise, let us remember, first, that Christ is holy. He is pure in all His glory and being. He is totally consecrated unto the eternal good pleasure, the will, and the purpose of God. So holy was Christ, that He could not yield to the sinful temptations from the Devil. And now at God's right hand, Christ is beyond and above sin and temptation in His glory. He is holy, as God is holy.

By mentioning that we are holy, the apostle Paul reminds us that this is our new identity as members of the body of Christ, purchased by Christ, and now anointed and sanctified by His Spirit. In Christ, we are holy. That is quite a statement in light of all our present wickedness and sin. Yet, that is true: belonging to Christ, we possess now, in Him, His holiness. Even though we possess only a small beginning of the life of that holiness, yet we are holy in Christ. This we confess in the Apostles' Creed when we say that the church is

not only catholic, but also holy. We learn, of course, that the church is holy, not because of her members but only because of, and in, Christ by His sanctifying Spirit of holiness.

On the basis of that principle, Christ through His apostle declares that since we are holy, part of that life of holiness, in addition to bringing forth all the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, includes wearing the robes of gentleness one toward another. Live in consecration to your Head, Christ, and desire to exercise this Christ-like virtue. Show that thankful love and heartfelt devotion to Him in how you treat those who are also united to Him and to you by His Spirit through faith.

Finally, the believer ought to clothe himself by faith with kindness because the child of God is called "beloved." The love of Christ for us and in us surpasses our comprehension. We cannot begin to comprehend the dimensions and greatness of His love toward us. He so loved us first that He gave Himself entirely to the atoning death of our salvation. He did that even though we least deserved it and never shall deserve His redeeming love. Still, Christ loves us with His constant, never failing love. Though we sin against Him and sin against His people, yet He does not destroy us. When we experience coming to our heavenly Father in repentance and prayer by the gentle and rescuing mercy of Christ, we also experience that Christ is at the throne of grace, not as our accuser or adversary, but as our gentle and kind Advocate, who pleads with the Father, on the basis of His merits alone, for the grace and mercy that we need moment by moment. That faithful and powerful love of Christ and His faithful supply of the grace and mercy we need provide us the constant motivation to wear the virtue of kindness towards one another.

That we are "the beloved" assures us that Christ has poured into us His love. This is prime evidence that we are His beloved. He not only loves us by doing various things for us, but His love carries through to the point where He fills us with His love by His Spirit. He unites us to Himself in love, in the bond of perfection. Because He gave us His love, His life, and His Spirit, we have the possibility and the reality of a life of love toward Him and of a life of the production of the fruit of the Spirit, including kindness.

That reminds us that without the exercise of love, the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, there will be no fruit of kindness. We have the hope that with the love of Christ by His Spirit in us His beloved, there will also come forth fruits of gentleness and kindness.



This faithful exercise of gentleness will result in peace. This is not the same as earthly peace, nor the end of all controversy and struggle. We may not expect that, by the exercise of this virtue, suddenly our pathway becomes smooth, flat, and free of troubles, or that it will be much different than it was for Christ in His earthly sojourn. Christ said that as we live like Him, the world will hate us because it hated Him. Though we must exercise acts of kindness, yet do not expect that your lot in the midst of the world will improve because of this faithfulness to Christ. The world hates Christ. As the wicked and unbelieving behold in you the image of Christ, being more and more renewed daily by the work of the Spirit in the way of repentance and trust in Christ, they will despise the spiritual sweetness of your kindness. If not taking advantage of your kindness, then the world will persecute you. The result of


your spiritual gentleness, which does not compromise for sin and false doctrine, will be met with cruelty of various sorts from the proud and unbelieving.

Nevertheless, clothing ourselves with the virtue of kindness will have the result of the enjoyment of peace towards your heavenly Father as you seek to be as He is towards you. In that way, you will enjoy the priceless assurance that you are the Father's children. Furthermore, this exercise of gentleness will bear good fruit in your family homes and

in your church homes. Where we exercise kindness one toward another, there strife and schism stop and there healing and the enjoyment of blessed peace begin. Where there is that peace, there is the enjoyment of having our gentle Savior, by His word and Spirit, dwell within and among us.

Consequently, the result of kindness is an occasion for thankfulness. The end of our salvation is that God might be praised and thanked. Our gentleness is blessed by God with the result of

thankfulness, sometimes immediately, and at other times over a long period of time, in those to whom we deal in a kind and gentle spirit.

Give thanks to God that He makes it possible by the wonder of His grace that we who were once dead branches are now living branches in Christ Jesus, to bring forth the fruit of gentleness. Believing in the gentleness of His sovereign and irresistible mercy towards us, let us, then, in thankfulness clothe ourselves with kindness toward one another. 

Bring the books...



Charles Terpstra

## Start/Keep Reading (Especially Reformed Books)!(2)

### Why Read?

"In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you." Mortimer J. Adler

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." Mark Twain

"...Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." Ecclesiastes 12:12b

"...Give attendance to reading...." I Timothy 4:13a

**H**ave you started to read a good Reformed book yet? If not, find one and get started! If you have, keep at it! As we pointed out in our ini-

tial article, we want to encourage our *Standard Bearer* readers to become *greater* readers, that is, to read *more* books and to read *better* books. In order to help you do that, we not only present you with a couple of opening "pep-talk" articles; we will also be giving you some suggested reading materials, books that we and others have found profitable.

In this second article encouraging you to read, we want to explore the "why" of good reading. That is, why should you as a Reformed Christian want to become a greater reader? Or, to put it another way, what are the reasons for reading solid Reformed/Christian books? We believe there are many reasons that may be given; we will highlight a few of them in this article.

First of all, we begin with the most important reason, the *theological* reason (where all good Calvinists should begin!): We should read good books because God wants us to! Why do we say

this, and how do we know this? We have several points in mind under this reason. First, God wants/expects/calls us to read as His people because He gave us the greatest book to read—His holy word, the Scriptures! When God chose to communicate to us, His covenant friends, He chose to do so in *words*. It is true that these words were initially given *orally* (and in some cases *visually*—cf. the visions of Ezekiel and John), that is, out of God's mouth through the mouths of His spokesmen (prophets, apostles, etc.). But in the end God committed these spoken words to *writing* and had them placed in His Book, the Bible (cf. Ex. 24:7; I Sam. 10:25; Neh. 8; Luke 3:4, 20:42; II Tim. 3:15, 16; II Pet. 1:20, 21; Rev. 1:11), or scripture (Mark 12:10, 24; Rom. 1:2, 15:4).

And therefore, this holy Book God charges His people to *read* (cf. Neh. 8; Is. 34:16). That means that we must first and foremost be readers of this Book! Not just any

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book under the sun, but the Bible must be the first book we turn to! Every Christian must be devoted to reading the word of God, like the Bereans of old searching the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). This is chiefly what Paul meant when he instructed Timothy to “give attendance to reading” (I Tim. 4:13). And what was true for that young pastor is to be true of every member of God’s covenant. God wills that we be readers because He gave us this marvelous Book of His words!

Second, and closely related to this, is the truth that this chief and fundamental book God gave us to read centers in His Son, Jesus Christ. The most important Word God gave us to read was His Son, the living and abiding Word of God (John 1:1, 14; Heb. 1:1, 2; I Pet. 1:23). Everywhere we go in the Scriptures we must read “Jesus Christ” the “Word of God.” That is true not only in the New Testament portion of the Bible, but also in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 40:7; Luke 24:27; John 5:39). This is why the Scriptures are able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15). This is why they are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” so that we may be complete and mature Christians (II Tim. 3:16). But only if this word be read! So read, people of God! Read the Bible chiefly and diligently! Set yourself to do so faithfully in this new year! Let *sola Scriptura* be the motto we live by in 2010! Indeed, God wants us and calls us to be readers, because He gave us this holy Book, centered in His Son, our Savior.

There are more reasons why we should be and become better readers. And we may confidently say that the other reasons we will now list are all rooted in that first one. The fact that God gave us His Book to read is the *principle* that governs all our other reasons

for reading. This will become plain as we proceed.

So then, why should we read? In the second place, because reading is vital to the growth of our faith and walk in godliness. God in His sacred Book calls us to spiritual growth. II Peter 3:18, e.g., states, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (cf. also Eph. 4:15; I Pet. 2:2; Jude 20). Earlier in that same epistle Peter wrote that we should be “giving all diligence” to “add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness” (1:5, 6). And how are we going to do this? By reading! By reading (and hearing!) the Scriptures, of course (cf. I Pet. 2:2). But also by reading other sound Reformed/Christian books that teach us and encourage us to spiritual growth.

So then, are you tired of not being as strong in your faith as you should be and could be? Are you frustrated by the fact that your walk with God is not as close as it ought to be? Do you struggle with being spiritually mature and wise in handling trials and temptations in your life? Then *read*. Yes, again, read the *Bible*, so that your faith becomes more grounded in Jesus Christ and your walk is brought closer to the Lord! But also read the books that your fellow believers have written to help you grow in faith and godliness! They stand with you and support you in this calling to grow. They have wisdom and experience to share with you as we walk the common path of the Christian in this world. Our fellow Reformed Christians have written books because of their own struggles and hardships. Let us read them to benefit from them; to enhance our own spiritual life; to become stronger in faith and more holy in life! This too is why we must read!

In the third place, we should read good Reformed/Christian books because it is important to defend our faith and abide in the truth of God’s word. We are talking about the area of *apologetics*, the defense of the Reformed-Christian faith and walk. In this present world there are always threats to our faith and life. The devil and his hosts walk about as a roaring lion seeking to devour us with lies and deception (I Pet. 5:8). The world of unbelief with its “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” seeks to lead us astray from the Father (I John 2:16). False prophets and teachers in the church “bring in damnable heresies” and “pernicious ways,” trying to overthrow “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3; I John 4:1ff.; II Pet. 2:1ff.). And, yes, our own sinful nature is still inclined to and tempted by all these lies and errors and ungodliness. We are Christian soldiers, called to be on the defensive against all these spiritual dangers (Eph. 6:10ff.). We are exhorted to resist doctrinal lies and remain steadfast in the faith (I Pet. 5:9). We are admonished to abide in godliness and stay obedient to our Savior, suffering accordingly (I Pet. 3, 4).

And how shall we be able to do this? By *reading*! Yes, again, by reading the Scriptures (Eph. 6:17). But also by reading good Reformed books that lead us and help us in the battle for the truth and for godliness! By reading we stay abreast of dangerous trends in the church and in the world. By reading we are informed of and warned about wolves in sheep’s clothing. By reading we are encouraged by the courageous stands of our fellow believers in other times and places. By reading we are urged to be faithful when the majority fall away into error and lawlessness. Yes, we must read for this reason too! Do you see the need for reading,



especially now in these last days? Will you become a greater reader with this in mind too? We pray that you will, for the honor of Christ and His word, and for the safety of your own soul.

Finally, we have a very practical reason for reading good Reformed/Christian books. That is that by reading such books we set a good example for our children and young people. This too is so important, especially in the world in which we now find ourselves. As we mentioned in our opening article, we and our children are exposed to so many temptations and hindrances to good reading. We are in constant competition with TV, video games, the Internet, iPods, etc. But when our children and young people see us as adults taking time to read, to read the Bible and to read books that make us grow in our faith and walk, we provide a great example and encouragement for them to do the same. Then we are better able to gain their respect when we tell

them to read good books. And, of course, at the same time, when we have on our shelves and on our tables (and in our hands!) good Reformed/Christian books that we are reading, we provide them with the very materials we want them to read too! And that is a win-win situation!

Now you have, we hope, additional motivation for reading. Once again we encourage you to contact us with your ideas and suggestions for reading (cjterpstra@sbcglobal.net and suzlyng@comcast.net). We thank you for the feedback we have already received—it was most encouraging for us!

Before we leave you, we want to suggest a few devotionals to use in this new year. There are many good ones available—you may have your own, which you may suggest to us—but these are just a few of the really good ones we are aware of.

1. *Tabletalk*, published by Ligonier Ministries (www.ligonier.org). Not only are there devotions for

each day, but each monthly issue contains several articles centered on a theme (Reformed doctrine, church history period, biography, Christian living, etc.). In addition, there are regular feature articles to read and suggested reading resources to follow up on the theme for the month. Ligonier will send you three free issues to get a taste of this publication.

2. *C. Spurgeon's Morning and Evening*. This is a classic that Christians have used for years. You will find it in most Christian bookstores and online from various publishers.

3. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers*, A. Bennett, Banner of Truth.

4. *365 Days With Calvin*, J. Beeke, Day One and Reformation Heritage Books.

5. *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms*, S. Ferguson, Puritan & Reformed Publishers.

*Tolle lege*—"Take up and read"!



Guest Article

Rev. Angus Stewart

## 2010 BRF Conference in Wales

**C**roeso i Gymreu. This is Welsh for "Welcome to Wales!" Wales—the land of the ancient Britons and the origin of King Henry VIII, Puritan John Owen, war Prime Minister David Lloyd-George, and "the Doctor" (Martyn Lloyd-Jones)—is the venue for the 2010 British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference (7-14 August).

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Although perhaps little known by most *Standard Bearer* readers, and possessing a human population only a third that of its number of sheep, the natives quip that, if it were flat, Wales would be larger than England!

### "The Word of God for Our Generation"

Profs. Engelsma and Hanks are the main speakers at the 11<sup>th</sup> BRF Conference, the theme being "The Word of God for Our Generation."

One of the Sunday sermons is to deal with the authority of Holy

Scripture, with the special lecture by the Senior Deputation Speaker for the UK branch of the Trinitarian Bible Society explaining "The Preservation of the Biblical Text."

The six main conference addresses will build on this foundation. Prof. Engelsma will develop the Reformed world-view, while Prof. Hanks will trace the organic development of sin. The next three speeches focus on issues of pressing concern for us and our children in our increasingly liberal and anti-Christian Western society, covering pragmatism and

moral relativism, covetousness and profligacy, and pornography and fornication: "The Abolition of Truth," "The Reformed Believer and Money," and "The Sexual Revolution." The final address, "Towards a One-World Government," will trace the "progress" of the church's apostasy and the world's degeneracy as they desire, and prepare the way for, the universal reign of Antichrist—who will be destroyed with the brightness of our Lord's coming!

At least, these are likely to be amongst the issues explored in the six conference addresses, given the titles the speakers have settled upon. Profs. Hanko and Engelsma have full liberty to develop their subjects as they see fit! Here I simply want to whet your appetite.

### Hebron Hall Christian Centre

Hebron Hall ([www.hebron-hall.org](http://www.hebron-hall.org)) is well situated, being just a ten-minute taxi ride from Cardiff Airport (CWL). A short walk from our conference centre will take you to a station with frequent trains to Cardiff (Wales' capital city) and the coast—both only a few miles away.

All rooms are en-suite, with  
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*Hebron Hall Christian Centre*

ding and towels provided. Accommodation is full board. Free wireless Internet access is provided in designated areas of the centre. Hebron Hall has several tea/coffee areas, ideal for good discussions for young and old.

Hebron Hall has an indoor, 20 metre, heated swimming pool; an indoor sports hall for 5-a-side football (US: soccer), volleyball, basketball, etc.; an indoor games room with a pool table, a snooker table, and a table-tennis table; and two outdoor tennis courts.

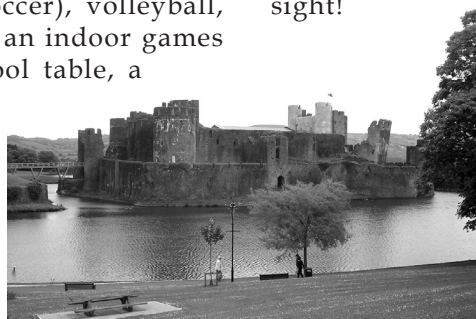
The BRF has the whole centre to itself, so we will not be disturbed by the "worship" (or raving) of Pentecostals!

### Two Day Trips by Coach

We think you'll enjoy the day trips! When in South Wales to give lectures, Mary and I scouted the local attractions, and those that have been chosen stood out. One trip is to the old Roman town of Bath, a World Heritage Site famous for its naturally heated spring waters, its beautiful buildings, its association with Jane Austen's novels, and its Royal Victoria Park.

Day-trip 2 takes us to Tintern Abbey, the best preserved medieval abbey in Wales. I've spoken with our tour guide over

the phone. He is a mine of information! Attired in his monastic cowl, he will show us around this beautiful, historic site. The other half of this day trip takes us to Caerphilly Castle, the largest castle in Wales, with its moats, islands, leaning tower, and siege engines. Yet it is surrounded by shops and cafes—an unusual sight!



*Caerphilly Castle*

### Do Come!

The costs are as low as the BRF can make them—and we don't waste money or aim at making a profit.

Those in N. America (which would be most

SB readers) can contact Cyndi Kalsbeek for prices in US dollars (16247 State Street, South Holland, IL 60473; (708) 331-1026; [ckalsbeek@yahoo.com](mailto:ckalsbeek@yahoo.com)). Those in the British Isles and the rest of the world should get in touch with Stephen Rushton (5 Clayton Lane, Clayton, Bradford, W. Yorkshire, BD14 6RE; 01274 883909; [stephen\\_rushton@btinternet.com](mailto:stephen_rushton@btinternet.com)). The BRF conference booking form provides more details and comes in both US and UK-sized paper to make it easy for people to print out (cf. [www.cprf.co.uk/articles/brfconference.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/brfconference.htm)).

We hope many of you can join us for an enriching time of fellowship (D.V.) in Wales!



## News From Our Churches

### Mr. Benjamin Wigger

#### Young People's Activities

The next opportunity you have to spend some time on the Internet, we invite you to look up [www.prcconvention.com](http://www.prcconvention.com) for a preview of this summer's 70<sup>th</sup> annual young people's convention. For some time now, members of the

Hudsonville, MI PRC, this year's host congregation, have been busy laying the groundwork for that all-important week. A steering committee has been selected, and they are sending monthly newsletters out in an effort to keep their fellow church members informed

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as to the progress of the various plans for the 2010 convention. This year's convention will be held at Springhill Bible Camp, located near Evart, MI, about 90 miles north of Hudsonville. The convention is scheduled to be held August 16-20, with a theme of, "The Truth Shall Set You Free." Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. R. VanOverloop, and Prof. B. Gritters are this year's scheduled speakers.

The Young People's Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA invited their congregation to a Christmas singspiration on Sunday evening, December 20.

The Young People's Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited members of their congregation, as well as others from nearby PR congregations, to their Christmas Singspiration on Sunday evening, December 20.

### **Congregation Activities**

**T**his past holiday season the girls of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI who are members of SALT, were collecting new and clean, gently used items for suffering Christians in Pakistan. This was a great way to show Christ's love and care to fellow saints in great need. The more items they collected, the more care packs they could send. So families in Georgetown were encouraged to clean out their closets, or, when shopping, to throw in a new towel, sheet, or pair of socks to help in the effort.

The deacons of the Byron Center, MI PRC conducted a grocery drive to help families in their congregation who were in need. The deacons were looking for non-perishable grocery items collected on Old Year's, New Year's Day, and the Sunday following. It was hoped that not only would this provide for the needy, but also through that drive the congregation could again have the opportunity to show their love and concern for one another in the body of Christ.

Mr. Martyn McGeown and Mr. Dan Holstege, our two student interns, led worship services at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and the Randolph, WI PRC, respectively, for the last time in their internships, in late December. For Mr. McGeown it was on New Year's Eve, and for Mr. Holstege, the Sunday morning worship service on December 27. Mr. Holstege's plans were then to head to the Loveland, CO PRC and preach for them on December 31, January 1, and January 3. Mr. McGeown's plans took him to the Lynden, WA PRC, where he was scheduled to fill their pulpit January 10 and 17.

Members of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI were invited to sing praises to our Lord after their worship service on December 31, a fitting opportunity to close the year. After the singing they were able to enjoy refreshments while they fellowshiped with one another.

The 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade catechism classes of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI went caroling on December 27, after their evening service. They planned to come back to church, after caroling, for lunch and games.

The members of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada enjoyed an evening of praise and fellowship as they celebrated Christ's birth with their annual Christmas program on December 16. Although we do not know every special number performed that evening, we do know that Edmonton's Heidelberg Catechism class contributed a number, as did the Saturday morning catechism students, and Edmonton's choir also added to the program.

Speaking of programs, we hope you had the opportunity to thank the children and Sunday School teachers of your particular congregation for another wonderful Christmas program this past holiday season. That special program, like no other program

the entire year, remains a favorite of so many in our churches. It certainly captures the joy of the season!

In addition to the election of officebearers and passing the annual proposed budget, the members of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI also approved a proposal to enhance their auditorium heating and cooling system—something certainly appreciated on a cold Sunday in February or a hot Sunday in July.

### **Mission Activities**

**A**ll the members of the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, South Dakota were invited to Bethany Meadows Lutheran Home in Brandon on Sunday evening, December 13, for a brief instrumental and vocal program by the children and other members of the Fellowship, followed by caroling.

The members of the Pittsburgh, PA Mission enjoyed their Christmas Social on January 2. The event started at 4:00, with the singing of some songs and playing games with the children, followed by their Winter BBQ dinner.

The congregation of the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, hosted a Young Adults Fellowship activity on December 30 at the Mt. Horeb Retreat Facility, not far from the Berean PRC. In attendance were 44 young people/young adults from the All of Grace PR Fellowship in Gabaldon, the First Reformed Church, Muzon; the Christian Faith Ministry in Batasan Hills; and the Berean congregation. The theme was "Walking As the Children of Light" (I Thess. 5:5-8). Rev. D. Kleyn gave the inspirational speech and there were two Bible study sessions. 1) The Children of Light and Technology, and 2) The Children of Light and Entertainment.



### Minister Activities

**P**rof. D. Engelsma declined the call extended to him from the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL to serve as their next pastor.

The Loveland, CO PRC has extended a call to Rev. S. Key to serve as their next pastor.

First PRC in Holland, MI ex-

tended a call to Rev. K. Koole to become their next pastor.

Rev. Eriks declined the call to Byron Center PRC.



## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of the First PRC of Edmonton express their sincere Christian sympathy to Sadie Tolsma and family in the death of their husband, father, and grandfather and our fellow officebearer

**MR. GEORGE TOLSMA**, who was taken into glory on Sunday, December 6, 2009. May they be comforted with the words found in I Corinthians 15:51, 52, 54b: "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. Death is swallowed up in victory."

Council of First PRC of Edmonton

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC express Christian sympathy to the Bleyenbergh family of our congregation, following the passing of their mother and grandmother,

**MRS. TILLIE BRUMMEL.**

May they find comfort in God's word, Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Rev. Dennis Lee, President  
James VerHey, Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 15, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

**TERRY and SANDY ELZINGA**, marked their 50th wedding anniversary. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6).

- \* Mr. and Mrs. Gary Boverhof
  - \* Jan Pawloski
  - \* Mr. and Mrs. Rich Elzinga
  - \* Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Day
- 10 grandchildren  
2 great grandchildren

Zeeland, Michigan

**Check out the  
RFPA web page at  
[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)**

### CLASSIS

Classis West of the PRC will convene at the Loveland PRC in Loveland, CO, on Wednesday, March 3, 2010 at 8:30 A.M. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Elder August Hollema, at (970) 344-7281, or by e-mail at [achollema@msn.com](mailto:achollema@msn.com).

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,  
Stated Clerk

### SEMINARY

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Stefan Engelsma (Phone: 616-662-9363). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 16, 2010, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Stefan Engelsma, Secretary

## Reformed Witness Hour

February 2010

Date	Topic	Text
February 7	"May God's Will Be Done"	Luke 11:2
February 14	"Husbands, Love Your Wives"	Song of Solomon 1:9-11
February 21	"Praying for Daily Bread"	Luke 11:3
February 28	"Forgive Us Our Debts"	Luke 11:4