

January 15, 2009  
**THE  
STANDARD  
BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*In This Issue*

- ◆ *Judas' Remorse* **170**

---

- ◆ *Seminary and Saints:*  
*A Reciprocal Sine Qua Non (1)* **172**

---

- ◆ *Welcome to the "New"*  
*Wingham PRC Church Building!* **174**

---

- ◆ *The Dispensational View of God's Covenant (2)* **176**

---

- ◆ *Rome and Politics (5)* **179**

---

- ◆ *Covenant Life in the Home (2)* **182**

---

- ◆ *Not Anabaptist But Reformed (11)* **184**

---

- ◆ *The Origin and History of the*  
*Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (2)* **187**

---

- ◆ *Bring the books...* **189**

---

- ◆ *News From Our Churches* **190**

---

Volume 85 ◆ Number 8

# Judas' Remorse

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Matthew 27:3-5

**W**hat a tragic end to a very pathetic figure of history!

Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus who followed Him during His three and a half year ministry on earth. With the twelve he had heard the teachings of Jesus and witnessed His many mighty miracles. He had even been trained to take over the leadership of the church upon Jesus' departure.

But Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. This led to Jesus' arrest by the Jewish leaders, His trial, and His condemnation.

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented himself. That means he was full of remorse. This remorse led him to a confession of sin to the chief priests and elders: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." But when the Jewish leaders rebuffed him, Judas' remorse led him to suicide.

Daily we sin. Sometimes our sins approach the magnitude of Judas' sin. And we must have remorse. Our remorse, however, must be different from that of Judas. Judas' remorse was the remorse of unbelief. It led only to despair and suicide. We must have the remorse of faith. That will lead to forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace with God.

## A bitter remorse

Along with the masses, Judas had viewed Jesus as a political figure who would restore Israel to her former days of power and glory—the power and glory enjoyed during the reigns of David

and Solomon. His hope was to follow Jesus to riches and power. For this reason he had even volunteered to be the treasurer of Jesus' small band. But Judas had come to see his mistake. Jesus' kingdom was spiritual and heavenly, and not earthly and political.

With his sinful hopes dashed, Judas covenanted with the Jewish leaders on Wednesday of the Passover week to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The Jewish leaders had been desperate to kill Jesus, but were fearful of the crowds that had received Him as their King on Sunday. Judas covenanted for thirty pieces of silver to lead the leaders to Jesus after the feast day, so that they could kill Him in secret.

But Jesus foiled this plan by dismissing Judas from the Passover supper. This led to Judas' leading a band of soldiers to the garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus.

After arresting Jesus, the Sanhedrin conducted an illegal trial during the night in the palace of Caiaphas the High Priest. The purpose of this trial was to find a charge that they could use

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

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

### REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: [gritters@prca.org](mailto:gritters@prca.org))

### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Mr. Timothy Pipe  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.  
Jenison, MI 49428-7137  
PH: (616) 457-5970  
FAX: (616) 457-5980  
(e-mail: [tim@rfpa.org](mailto:tim@rfpa.org))

### Postmaster:

Send address changes to  
The Standard Bearer  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.  
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
(e-mail: [benjwig@juno.com](mailto:benjwig@juno.com))

### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
c/o B. VanHerK  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney  
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland  
(e-mail: [cprfaudiostore@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:cprfaudiostore@yahoo.co.uk))

### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$21.00 per year in the U.S., US\$25.00 elsewhere.

### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to the editorial office: SB Announcements, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Grandville, MI 49418 (e-mail: [doezema@prca.org](mailto:doezema@prca.org)). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFFA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

Website for PRC: [www.prc.org](http://www.prc.org)

to condemn Jesus. They finally settled on the charge of blasphemy, based on the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. But because they were not allowed by the Roman government to carry out capital punishment, they brought Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, at the crack of dawn. They would convince Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Judas saw this. Perhaps Judas was in the palace of Caiaphas, witnessing the events of the night. Or perhaps he was outside the palace and saw Jesus being led away to the governor's palace. Somehow he saw that Jesus was condemned.

And he repented himself. The word translated "repent" describes an emotional response to one's behavior. It speaks of regret and remorse. Judas' remorse was over the fact that he had betrayed innocent blood. He knew Jesus was innocent of any sin or crime. His close connection to Jesus left him convinced of this. But now the blood of this innocent man was to be shed. And Judas was full of remorse over his involvement. This is often the way it is with sin. There is remorse when one sees the consequences of his deeds.

Judas' remorse led to his suicide.

Before the Sanhedrin (comprised of the chief priests and elders) dispersed, Judas approached them with the thirty pieces of silver he had received from them. He confessed his great sin: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." It is apparent that Judas was consumed with a guilty conscience. So he sought to return the blood money he had taken from these leaders. Perhaps he was also looking for something from them to soothe his troubled conscience.

But Judas was met with cold indifference by the Jewish lead-

ers. What is that to us? See thou to that! In other words, that's of no concern to us. That's your problem. As religious leaders they had no time to calm a troubled soul, not even a soul troubled by a sin in which they themselves had been involved.

Leaving the palace of the high priest, Judas marched directly to the temple and threw the thirty pieces of silver into the court of the priests.

Then in despair he went and hanged himself. Acts 1:18 adds this commentary, "and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." It would appear that in haste Judas hanged himself from a tree that overhung a great cliff. Evidently the cord was weak (Judas was in haste and not thinking clearly), so that it broke, and Judas burst asunder at the bottom of a ravine.

What a tragic end to a pathetic figure!

#### **A proper evaluation**

To evaluate Judas' remorse properly we must bear in mind that the New Testament uses two different words for repentance. The word used in this passage and that is attributed to Judas means literally "to care afterwards." It emphasizes the emotional reaction one has to the consequences of his sinful or foolish behavior. It speaks of regret and remorse. This is what Judas experienced. The other word in the New Testament for repentance means literally "a change of mind." It is close to our phrase "a change of heart." This word presupposes the emotional reaction of regret and remorse to sin that the other word emphasizes, and then it goes on to emphasize also a change of mind about sin that the other word does not include.

One can regret his sinful behavior without having a change of mind about his sin. In that

case he continues to love and cherish his sin. His regret is only over the bad consequences of his sin. Perhaps he is overwhelmed by the enormity of what he has done. Perhaps his conscience is bothering him. Perhaps there is some social or legal penalty he is suffering. This regret may even curb his pursuit of sin. But the sin retains a cherished place in his heart, so that he looks for ways to follow his sin without the evil consequences.

But one who has a change of mind about his sin despises the sin he once cherished—not just the sad consequences. He also seeks forgiveness and reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. And he seeks in the power of grace to turn from sin to walk in holiness.

This change of mind Judas did not have. He had only the regret of his sin.

Judas' repentance was the sorrow of the world that works death. This expression is found in II Corinthians 7:10: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

Notice that a contrast is made here between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. Godly sorrow is a sorrow that grieves over offending God by sin and hindering the cause of God. The sorrow of the world is a sorrow that arises out of the depravity of the world and that grieves only over the sad consequences of sin. This was Judas' repentance.

Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation. The word "repentance" here is "change of mind" as we have just described it. It is a change of mind that despises one's sin. It is a change of mind that seeks forgiveness and reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ. It is a change of mind that seeks in the power of grace to turn from sin to walk in holiness. This repentance results in

salvation. This salvation is the salvation of the cross that consists of forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the power to leave a sin behind.

But the sorrow of the world works death. It works the eternal death of hell. It worked this for Judas through his gruesome suicide.

### **An important calling**

Implied in all this is the calling to true repentance. Certainly, we must have deep regret and remorse over our sin. But this remorse must be the remorse of faith that leads to a change of


mind about our sin, so that we come to hate sin, seek forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus Christ, and strive in the power of Christ to turn from sin to holiness.

Then we too will enjoy the salvation of God.

This was true for Peter, who committed a sin as grievous as Judas'. Publicly he denied Jesus three times. When the cock crew, Peter remembered the word of Jesus, who said unto him, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." And he went out, and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:74, 75). Peter was full of remorse. But his remorse was the remorse

of true repentance. And so the crucified and risen Lord made a special point to appear to Peter on the morning of His resurrection. Later, by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus even restored Peter to his office as apostle.

The repentant thief on the cross found that same salvation. In true repentance he asked Jesus to remember him when He entered into His kingdom. Jesus assured him that he would be with Him in Paradise that same day.

The same salvation will be freely and quickly granted to all those who truly repent of their sin. 

## *Seminary and Saints: A Reciprocal Sine Qua Non (1)*

**T**he purpose of the speech tonight is to exhort all of us to faithfulness in our respective callings. That is one of the main reasons for a convocation. It is a calling together to remind us of the purpose of a seminary. A convocation ought also to hold before us the goal of the instruction, and of the learning. In addition, a convocation should set before us incentives to be diligent as we set our hand to the plow.

When I speak of faithfulness in our respective callings, I have in mind, first, the more obvious calling of professors and students. Professors are called to

instruct. They must do so with diligence. They must give lively instruction. Above all, their instruction must be true to the Reformed faith. Accordingly, their calling is to defend Scripture and maintain the confessions.

The calling of students is also obvious—they are in seminary to learn. The admonition comes to the students not only to study diligently, but also to take heed to the instruction. They are not merely to listen and take notes, but to be doers of the word of instruction.

In addition to the God-given responsibility of professors and students, we focus attention on another calling. This calling involves all the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and all supporters of the Protestant Reformed seminary. They likewise have a vital calling in the support and maintenance of the seminary.

The title of the speech is "Seminary and Saints: A Reciprocal *Sine Qua Non*." The goal is to demonstrate the essential relationship between the believer and the seminary.

Everyone recognizes the fact that the believers support and maintain the seminary financially. Though significant, that is not the most important aspect of the relationship. The relationship is deeper, and it is reciprocal. The believers serve the seminary by maintaining it and overseeing it, and the seminary serves the believers by preparing men for the office of minister of the Word. That is a reciprocal relationship.

However, added to the title is *sine qua non*. This Latin phrase means "without which not." The phrase indicates a certain relationship between two objects. That relationship is this: if one object is the *sine qua non* of another, it means that if the first

---

*This article is the text of the address of Prof. Dykstra at the Seminary Convocation held at Trinity PRC on September 3, 2008.*

does not exist, the other cannot either. For example, good seed and goodly amounts of rain and sunshine are the *sine qua non* of a good harvest in the fall. The *sine qua non* of a profitable year for a businessman are the customers who purchase his product.

The burden of this speech is that the seminary and the saints are so mutually dependent on each other, that without the one, the other cannot exist—at least, not for long.

### **The Seminary Serves the Saints**

What is a seminary? In short, a seminary is the church through her ordained ministers instructing men in preparation for the gospel ministry.

We must be explicit in this regard. A seminary is not the building. Nor is the seminary the professors. This is obvious from the fact that the Protestant Reformed Churches had an active, solid seminary for almost *ten* years before the churches officially appointed the Reverends G.M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema as professors in the seminary. And the seminary existed in the basement of First Protestant Reformed Church for almost *fifty* years before a seminary building was erected.

The essence of a seminary is captured in Paul's inspired exhortation to the minister Timothy—"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). The essence of a seminary is a *minister* teaching faithful men, training them for the gospel ministry.

Paul himself practiced this in his ministry—he trained men for the ministry as he went about preaching, and Timothy is a prime example of that. That is the essence of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary—ordained ministers, called by Christ through His church to teach other men,

and by so doing, preparing these men to be preachers.

When we consider the Protestant Reformed Seminary, we gratefully acknowledge that God has given us much. This begins with a heritage of 84 years of faithful instruction of ministers. In 84 years, not one of the professors has even been under suspicion of heterodoxy. Although some graduates have departed from the Reformed faith as the Protestant Reformed Churches maintain it, the cause of their departure was *not* that the professors taught them false doctrine.

The heritage of this seminary includes the fact that the professors were polemical—they actively rejected the lie in all forms that they encountered it. In addition, they actively developed doctrine. They were not content to restate the same truth in tired expressions. Rather, to the extent that they could, in harmony with their God-given ability, they set forth the truth in clearer, more precise, more exciting form.

The seminary is a rich part of the heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In addition, God has given us a seminary building that is not only beautiful, but also eminently functional; thousands of books on the library shelves; and three ministers who can devote their lives to the work of theological professors. These men need not make two sermons a week, deal with pastoral problems, teach catechism, chair consistory meetings and periodically attend meetings of classis and synod, *and*, then besides, somehow find time to instruct students (as did Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff).

Nonetheless, even if we had no building, no books, and no installed professors of theology, it would still be the calling of the ministers in the PRC, somehow, to train men for the ministry. That instruction is the heart of the seminary.

The reason why ordained *ministers* train other men for the ministry is that God uses *preaching* to prepare men for this office. In his first epistle to Timothy (4:14), Paul admonished the pastor Timothy, "Do not neglect the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy." The "gift" is God's work in Timothy that qualified him to be a minister.

The root of the word "gift" is the word "grace." This indicates that the gift is the product of grace working in Timothy. That grace had operated in Timothy exactly through prophecy, i.e., preaching! The Reformed church confesses that preaching is the chief means of grace. Timothy had sat under faithful preaching. It was grace to him. The gift indispensable to being a pastor—that gift was a work of God's grace.

And that is seminary work, i.e., training men for the ministry through preaching. Seminary instruction is a form of the authoritative proclamation of the Word, that is, of preaching. That preaching is grace to the students. By it the Spirit molds and equips them for the ministry.

That kind of seminary is a *sine qua non* for the saints.

A merely intellectual training is not sufficient. No matter how biblical is the instruction. No matter how enlightening it is; and how theologically correct. A merely intellectual training is not a sufficient training for the ministry of the Word.

Rather, in proper preparation *preachers* commit the truth of God to faithful men. They commit to the men the Scriptures—God's infallible revelation of Himself, and then demonstrate how rightly to divide it. They commit to the students the true theology—the knowledge of God. These preachers (i.e., professors) set forth the history of God's dealings with His church. They teach students the best way to bring the Word of

God to the people so that it edifies, exhorts, and comforts. And they teach antithetically by exposing lies and refuting heresies.

Why is the seminary, then, the *sine qua non* of the saints? Simply because the spiritual life of the believers and the very existence of the church depend on preaching. Preaching is the power of God unto salvation. This is true for preaching that is biblical, preaching of the truth, and preaching that is antithetical. Preaching is the chief means of *faith*, according to the Heidelberg Catechism.

Thus, without preaching, faith withers, becoming dry and lifeless. Believers become very weak. They soon cannot stand for truth or godliness. They cannot live faithful, obedient, and godly lives. They fail to live up to their name—saints—holy ones and those dedicated to God.

Rather they will mingle with the world, like Israel of old. Judges 2:10 describes the dreadful situation that the people of Israel no longer knew Jehovah, nor the mighty works He had done. As a result, they took to themselves the gods of the heathen. Thus it would be with the church without preaching. Without preaching, it would soon diminish, and eventually cease to exist.

No, it would not happen overnight that with no seminary there would be no saints. But if a seminary ceases to give faithful instruction, it will ultimately result in the destruction of the church.

If a seminary is not giving orthodox instruction, ministers will be ordained who believe not the truth. They will teach the lie, undermining the foundation on which the church is built. They will lead people away with their damnable heresies. Thus churches will not only be corrupted, they will become ever weaker spiritually. Eventually they will lose their candle and cease to be a church of Jesus Christ.

If the seminary merely dilutes the instruction, the result is that students are not as well prepared. They graduate not knowing theology, church history, proper exegesis, and all the rest. They cannot give a thorough exposition of the text nor a solid refutation of the lie. Over time, with such ministers, churches will suffer. They will lose their spiritual vitality, and eventually fade away.

The same will result when a seminary neglects the *spiritual* aspect of the instruction. A seminary could give orthodox, rigorous, Reformed instruction, but fail to give it in such a way that it

builds up the students spiritually. This is instruction that is heady intellectualism with ivory-tower research. Instruction that is not designed to prepare preachers and pastors, but merely scholars. Professors who care only that the students can answer the questions correctly, not whether the truth is in their hearts. Such instruction teaches the definitions of theology, the facts of church history, the mechanics of sermon making, but not a love for the truth, a love for the church of Christ, and a zeal for preaching. It does not apply the truth to the students' souls. It does not seek to mold the prospective pastors and to correct their spiritual weaknesses. Such a seminary will produce ministers with fatal spiritual flaws, such as pride, selfishness, greed, and licentiousness. Ministers who cannot apply the Word of truth to the people because they themselves do not live the truth. Ministers who labor for the money, and not as slaves of Jesus Christ, serving the needs of the sheep. These men will do great damage to the churches they serve.

No faithful seminary...no church, and no saints.

But the saints—how are they the *sine qua non* of the seminary?

... to be continued. 

Special Article

Rev. Michael DeVries

## Welcome to the "New" Wingham PRC Church Building!

**A**s you may recall, the Wingham, Ontario congregation was admitted into the fellowship and commu-

*Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.*

nion of the Protestant Reformed Churches in January 2004. The congregation was organized in 1979 in the neighboring town of Listowel. In 1988 the congregation, with eight families, bought an old mechanic shop in Wingham. With much volunteer work,

the congregation transformed it into a church building. A portable building was added on as a lunch-room/nursery. This building served very adequately for twenty years for the Wingham congregation.

In 2007 the congregation at-

"New" Wingham PRC building



tempted to purchase a Christian school building near the neighboring town of Lucknow. This was motivated in large measure by the fact that a school society had been formed that desired to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian School in our area. This school building was of sufficient size to serve the dual purpose of church building and school. But in the providence of God our offer to purchase this facility was not accepted.

The Consistory continued to investigate other building possibilities as they came to our attention through the diligent labors of our Building Committee. In the spring of 2008 we focused our attention on the former Salvation Army "Citadel" property in Wingham. This building had been vacated a couple of years ago when the small Salvation Army group decided to reconstruct a building on Wingham's main street that would serve for both their worship and their thrift store. By this time they were eager to get their former property sold.

On May 26 the congregation was invited to view the building, and on June 9 a special congregational meeting was held to consider a proposal to put in an offer to purchase the Salvation Army property. On June 26 another special congregational meeting was needed. On July 16,

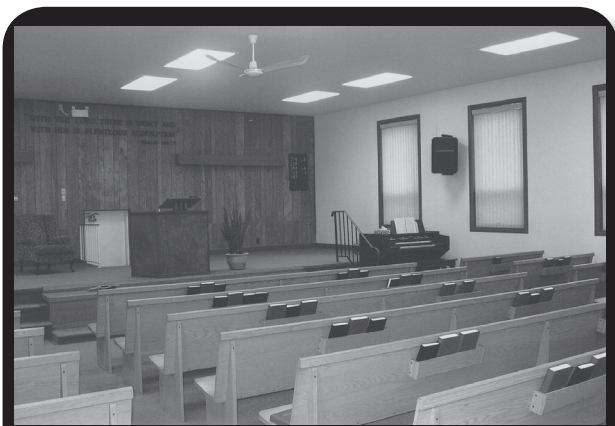
2008 our second offer was accepted! The closing on the purchase of this property took place on October 8. That led to two busy weeks of cleaning at the new building. Moving to the new building was accomplished on Wednesday and Friday, October 22 and 24. Sunday, October 26, 2008 was an exciting day for the congregation, as our first worship services were held in our new building! On Friday, October 31, we held our Reformation Day lecture in our new church and hosted approximately twenty visitors.

Our new property is in very good condition. A few minor repairs have been made. We hope to do some painting in some of the rooms in the near future. The building itself is brick, constructed in 1963. It is centrally located in downtown Wingham, just one block west from the main street, directly behind the historic Town Hall. This is a much more prominent location, which will serve to make us better known in the community and, we hope, lead to more visitors at our services. It has a very nice sanctuary, which includes pews on the main floor. Very little had to be done in the sanctuary. The seating capacity is about 150. The acoustics in the sanctuary are excellent!

The building has a full basement, with a large fellowship room and kitchen, as well as a nursery. On the main floor, at the rear of the building, are several additional rooms that originally

served as living quarters for the "officers." It was suggested that the current pastor and his wife could be moved into this part of the building—but that notion was quickly vetoed! Some of these rooms we hope will serve as classrooms when the school is able to begin operation. On the south side of the church building there is an old white wood-frame building that served as Wingham's "Loyal Orange Lodge." This building was erected in 1873. It is reported that in the early days Wingham Orange Lodge had the best fife and drum band in western Ontario. In recent years the Salvation Army used this building as their donation drop-off and sorting center. Decisions have not yet been made with regard to this building. It may be torn down to provide additional parking and/or playground.

We are thankful that, in the providence of God, we were able also to sell our old property so quickly. Of course, the transition to our new facilities leaves us with mixed emotions. Many, no doubt, miss the coziness of our former building. Nevertheless, so far things are working out very well in our new building. We are thankful too for the wholehearted effort and cooperation that has been seen over the course of this project. The Building Committee and the Consistory have had a lot of extra work. Everyone in the congregation pitched in with the



Sanctuary of Wingham PRC

preparations at the new building and with the moving.

In our first worship service in the new building we were together reminded that the church is not made of brick or wood. It is not the facilities that are the important thing. We heard the Word of God in Ephesians 2:20-22 regarding "The Building of God,"

God's people being gathered and built up as living stones into a holy temple unto the praise of our God. We remain thankful for the solid foundation upon which we are built—the truth of God's Word as we hold it dear in our Protestant Reformed Churches, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

We cordially invite you to visit us at our new location—292 Edward Street in Wingham, Ontario! It is our prayer that our new facilities will be used unto God's glory and unto our blessing as a congregation. May Christ continue to build His church in Wingham!



## The Dispensational View of God's Covenant (2)

**E**schatology is all about God's covenant promises. Wrong views of God's covenant will manifest themselves in wrong views of eschatology. Dispensational eschatology is based on an erroneous view of God's covenant, and specifically of the covenant promises made to God's people in the old dispensation.

As was pointed out last time, dispensationalists commonly refer to four covenants that they say are unconditional: The Abrahamic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant<sup>1</sup>, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. Dispensationalists view these to be four distinct covenants that contain unconditional promises to Abraham's physical descendants. When making predictions about the near future, dispensationalists often refer to one or more of

<sup>1</sup> By the Palestinian Covenant they mean God's promise to gather the Israelites that have been scattered, and to bring them to the promised land (Deut. 30:1-10).

*Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.*

*Previous article in this series: December 1, 2008, p. 110.*

these covenants to prove their position. Thus, it would be good to go through these different covenant promises, considering how the dispensationalists interpret them and how the Scriptures themselves interpret them.

Beginning with the covenant with Abraham, let us consider first how dispensationalists define what God's covenant is, and what they view to be the basis for this covenant. Then we will proceed to consider some of the main promises of that covenant, which they say will not be fulfilled until the coming millennial age.

### The Essence of the Covenant

We start by considering what dispensationalists view God's covenant to be. A leading dispensationalist defines God's covenant as an agreement or pact between God and man. He goes on to say that God has made a number of these agreements, some of which, he says, are conditional and others unconditional. Thus he offers a twofold definition of God's covenant:

A divine covenant is (1) a sovereign disposition of God, whereby he establishes an uncon-

ditional or declarative compact with man, obligating himself, in grace, by the untrammelled (sic) formula, "I WILL," to bring to pass of himself definite blessings for the covenanted ones, or (2) a proposal of God, wherein he promises, in a conditional or mutual compact with man, by the contingent formula "IF YE WILL," to grant special blessings to man provided he fulfills perfectly certain conditions, and to execute definite punishment in case of his failure.<sup>2</sup>

There are two kinds of covenants into which God entered with Israel: conditional and unconditional. In a conditional covenant that which was covenanted depends for its fulfillment upon the recipient of the covenant, not upon the one making the covenant. Certain obligations or conditions must be fulfilled by the receiver of the covenant before the giver of the covenant is obligated to fulfill that which was promised. It is a covenant with an "if" attached to it. The Mosaic covenant made by God with Israel is such a covenant. In

<sup>2</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*, 67-68. Pentecost here is actually quoting the definition of Charles Fred Lincoln. The emphasis is his.



an unconditional covenant that which was covenanted depends upon the one making the covenant alone for its fulfillment.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to say that even the unconditional covenants have some conditional promises attached to them:

...an unconditional covenant, which binds the one making the covenant to a certain course of action, may have blessings attached to that covenant that are conditioned upon the response of the recipient of the covenant....<sup>2</sup>

So in their judgment there are two kinds of covenants—conditional covenants and unconditional covenants that may have some conditions attached to them—and both of them amount to a compact between God and man.

As we have often pointed out in the past, the covenant is not presented in Scripture as a compact or agreement, but as a relationship of friendship that God Himself has sovereignly established with His people in Christ. It is a covenant that involves God writing His Word in our heart, causing us to know Him, love Him, and commune with Him as our intimate Father and Friend (Jer. 31:31-34).

Furthermore, God's covenant with His people in Christ is unconditional. It is true that many Scripture passages make known what man must do to enjoy the covenant blessings. Such statements, however, do not make God's covenant conditional, but they do make known a number of important truths. First of all, they make known our calling in the covenant, and how we must live if we are going to experience and enjoy the blessings of that covenant. Even though there is no way that a child of God can fall out of the covenant, if he

walks in sin for a time he will not enjoy the conscious experience of these covenant blessings.

Secondly, these statements make known that God's covenant is particular. They show that the promises were not to all the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but only to those who believed. That this does not amount to God's covenant being conditional is evident from the fact that God Himself is the one who works in His covenant people both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). For example, even though God requires faith, this faith is not a condition, since it is a blessing that is purchased by Christ and that is efficaciously wrought in the elect by the power of Christ's Spirit. Since faith is a gift from beginning to end, it makes no sense to refer to it as a condition.

*Since faith is a gift from beginning to end, it makes no sense to refer to it as a condition.*

#### **The Basis for the Covenant with Abraham**

Dispensationalists err not only with regard to the nature of God's covenant, but also with regard to its basis. Although dispensationalists refer to God's covenant with Abraham as unconditional, they claim that the basis for this covenant is found in Abraham's obedience. As astounding as this is, it is what they literally teach:

Whether God would institute a covenant program with Abraham or not depended upon Abraham's act of obedience in leaving the land. When once this act was accomplished, and Abraham did obey God, God instituted an irrevocable, unconditional program. This obedience, which became the basis of the institution of the program, is referred to in Genesis 22:18....<sup>3</sup>

Whether there would be a covenant program with Abraham depended upon Abraham's

act of obedience. When once he obeyed, the covenant that was instituted depended, not upon Abraham's continued obedience, but upon the promise of the One who instituted it. The *fact* of the covenant depended upon obedience; the *kind* of covenant inaugurated was totally unrelated to the continuing obedience of either Abraham or his seed.<sup>4</sup>

So according to a dispensationalist, first Abraham had to fulfill a condition, and only then did God institute His "irrevocable, unconditional program."

It is interesting to see how the dispensational view of the covenant with Abraham is related to dispensationalists' view of salvation. They maintain that just as the covenant with Abraham is based on one act of obedi-

ence that Abraham performed, so also a person's salvation is based on that person's one act of consciously believing in or "accepting" Christ. Once the person has committed that one act, then God is bound to save him unconditionally on the basis of what that person has done. The following quotation makes an explicit reference to the parallel between the dispensational view of God's covenant and what is a common dispensational view of salvation:

As given in the Scriptures, the Abrahamic Covenant is hinged upon only one condition. This is given in Genesis 12:1, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." The original covenant was based upon Abraham's obedience in leaving his homeland and going to the land of promise. No fur-

<sup>1</sup> Pentecost, 68.

<sup>2</sup> Pentecost, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Pentecost, 74.

<sup>4</sup> Pentecost, 75. The emphasis is his.

ther revelation is given him until he was obedient to this command after the death of his father. Upon entering Canaan, the Lord immediately gave Abraham the promise of ultimate possession of the land (Gen 12:7), and subsequently enlarged and reiterated the original promises.

The one condition having been met, no further conditions are laid upon Abraham; the covenant having been solemnly established is now dependent upon divine veracity for its fulfillment. A parallel can be found in the doctrine of eternal security for the believer in the present dispensation. Having once accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, the believer is assured a complete salvation and eternal bliss in heaven on a gracious principle quite independent of attaining a degree of faithfulness or obedience during this life. The original condition having been met, the promise continues without further conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Because God's covenant promise is a promise of salvation, it is not surprising to see that a man's wrong view of God's covenant would find a parallel in his wrong view of salvation.

The opposite is also true. If one has a correct view of God's covenant, that view will be in perfect harmony with the truth of salvation by grace alone. A covenant that is truly unconditional will involve no condition that man has to fulfill to get into it or to remain within it. It will be a covenant based not even partly on anything a sinful man has done. The blessings of God's unconditional and everlasting covenant come to His people solely on the

*The blessings of God's unconditional and everlasting covenant come to His people solely on the basis of what Christ has done.*

basis of what Christ has done. To teach anything else is to deny the fundamental truth that salvation, from beginning to end, is entirely a gift of God's sovereign and irresistible grace.

### **A Sense in Which Israel Has Already Received the Land**

Dispensationalists frequently assert that God's covenant with Abraham was about more than the blessings of salvation. In their mind, much of what was promised concerned earthly things, and it is especially these promises about earthly things that they say have not yet been fulfilled.

God did indeed give to Israel many earthly things, but those earthly things were given to them to picture the heavenly realities that God was promising to give His elect people in Christ. But this promise concerning the pictures has already been fulfilled. Take, for example, the promise concerning the land of Canaan—a land that was given to be a picture of the heavenly promised land. God says this promise concerning the picture has already been fulfilled. This truth is emphasized when Scripture says

that God has already given Israel not just part of the land, but all of the land that He swore to give unto them:

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which

the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass (Josh. 21:43-45).

In fact, the promise concerning all the good things God spoke concerning Israel are said to have been fulfilled:

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof (Josh. 23:14).

Thus the promise concerning the pictures has been fulfilled already.

We know, of course, that Israel's taking the promised land was not the complete fulfillment of God's covenant promise. This promise is being fulfilled today when God's people are being brought into God's heavenly rest. And the ultimate fulfillment of this promise is still future, when Christ returns on the last day and brings His people into the new heaven and the new earth. Yet the earthly picture of the fulfillment of this promise has already taken place. There is not going to be another one.

That is part of the significance of the fact that God says His promise concerning the land of Canaan has already been fulfilled. It indicates that there will be no more earthly pictures of the fulfillment of this promise. There is a fulfillment that is taking place now, and there is an ultimate fulfillment that is still future, but an earthly picture of the fulfillment of this promise will not happen again.

The same thing is said in Scripture about God's covenant promise that David's son will complete the construction of the house of God. King Solomon de-

<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, "Millennial Series: Part 13: The Abrahamic Covenant and Premillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 109 (January, 1952): 37-38.


clared this after the temple was built:

And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel (I Kings 8:18-20).

So God through Solomon has declared that the promise concerning this earthly event has already been fulfilled.

We know that Solomon's building the temple was a picture of Christ's building of the church. The promise to David is being fulfilled right now as King Jesus builds His church while sitting enthroned in heaven. And we know there is an ultimate fulfillment that is still future, when the entire house of God will be complete. But the earthly picture of the fulfillment of this promise has already taken place. God says the promise in that sense has already

been fulfilled. There will not be another similar event. Nor is there a need for one.

Next time, Lord willing, we will get into more of the specifics of how the dispensationalists say that God's promises to Abraham are going to be fulfilled in the millennium. Then we will take a look at how Scripture itself interprets these promises. Such passages not only prepare us to refute the dispensationalists, but also teach us about the wonderful and glorious covenant that God has made with us in our Lord Jesus Christ. 

## Rome and Politics (5): Rome's False Ecumenism with Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism

### Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism (1964)

**T**he most official, systematic, and widely accessible statement of the Roman Catholic Church's false ecumenism is Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* (1964). The Latin name of this decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, is revealing, for it means "Restoration of Unity." The unity the Roman Church

wishes to see restored is that original oneness that it claims all professing Christians and churches had with the "Mother Church" (Rome) and the "Holy Father" (the pope).<sup>1</sup> This will also serve Rome's geopolitical goals.

As *Unitatis Redintegratio* itself declares, Roman Catholic ecumenism can have only one outcome:

The result will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time (p. 348).<sup>2</sup>

Lest anyone within or without the Roman Church think that Rome's ecumenism implies any

<sup>1</sup> Thus the *Decree on Ecumenism* states that all the other groups "separated from full communion with the Catholic Church" (Walter M. Abbot [gen. ed.], *The Documents of Vatican II* [USA: The America Press, 1966], p. 345). Henceforward, pages in parentheses refer to this book.

<sup>2</sup> By "Church," Roman Catholic authors mean the Roman Catholic Church; by "Catholic," they mean Roman Catholic.

*Rev. Stewart is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.*

*Previous article in this series: December 15, 2008, p. 138.*

openness to the truth of God's Word or to forsaking its false doctrines, the *Decree on Ecumenism* states, "Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning" (p. 354).

In case Roman Catholic laity notice that this statement is particularly addressed to their clergy and theologians (and that this might provide them with a loophole), the "faithful" are told,

Their ecumenical activity must not be other than fully and sincerely Catholic, that is, loyal to the truth we have received from the apostles and the Fathers, and in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed, and at the same time tending toward that fullness with which our Lord wants His body to be endowed in the course of time (p. 365).

For Roman Catholics, ecumenism—efforts to bring all professing Christians into the papal fold—must be a priority. This is the first line of the *Decree on Ecumenism*: "Promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the chief concerns of [Vatican II]" (p. 341). Similarly, at the end of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the council "urgently desires that the initiatives of the sons of the Catholic Church, joined with those of the separated brethren go forward...[in] the holy task of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church" (pp. 365-366).<sup>1</sup> This is the "full and perfect unity which God lovingly desires" (p. 350) and the "divine summons" (p. 342)—that all return to the papal embrace.

"The seamless robe of Christ"

<sup>1</sup> John XXIII (1958-1963) is especially noted for referring to non-Catholics as "our separated brethren." This is another example of *aggiornamento* (Italian for "updating").

(p. 355), a historic image of the church's unity, is appealed to, and "rifts" in the church are said to be "damnable" (p. 345). All this must, of course, be read from Rome's perspective that Christ builds the church on the pope, the successor of Peter. John XXIII's prayer for the success of Vatican II includes this petition that all non-Catholics return to Rome:

We pray also for those sheep who are not now of the one fold of Jesus Christ [i.e., not in the Roman Church], that even as they glory in the name of Christian, they may come at last to unity under the governance of the one Shepherd [i.e., the pope] (p. 793).

In its introduction (pp. 34-342), the *Decree on Ecumenism* alludes to the World Council of Churches (cf. p. 342, n. 5) and other ecumenical efforts involving liberal Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox: "among our separated brethren...there increases from day to day a movement...for restoration of unity among all Christians." Amongst "divided Christians," there is "remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity." Rome attributes this to "the grace of the Holy Spirit," rather than to apostasy, its proper source. The Vatican "gladly notes all these factors" (p. 342) because it understands that all the roads of false ecumenism ultimately lead to Rome.

### Eastern Orthodoxy

For Rome, of all the various Christian bodies, the Eastern Orthodox Churches occupy a "special position." They are treated before, and given more space than, the Protestant churches in the *Decree on Ecumenism*. The decree emphasizes that Rome and Constantinople (the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch who ranks as *primus inter pares*, first among equals, in the Eastern Orthodox communion) have a lot in

common. Apostolic succession (viewed as the succession of bishops, in uninterrupted lines, back to the original twelve apostles), priesthood, eucharist, true sacraments, liturgy, spiritual tradition, jurisprudence, veneration of Mary (mariolatry), prayers to saints, etc., are all mentioned (pp. 357-361). Rome magnanimously acknowledges that the seven ecumenical councils (325-787) were all held in or not far from Constantinople (p. 357) and that monasticism originated in the East, adding that "Catholics are strongly urged to avail themselves more often of these spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers" (p. 359).

Both Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy are well aware of their disagreements, but these are not specifically brought up.<sup>2</sup> Instead, historical and cultural factors are mentioned as occasioning and/or maintaining the differences (pp. 357-358, 360). *Unitatis Redintegratio* advocates "legitimate variety" and reckons that their "various theological formulations are often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting" (p. 360).

Vatican II hopes to use the Eastern Catholic Churches to provide a bridge to the Eastern Orthodox Churches.<sup>3</sup> The *Decree*

<sup>2</sup> These would include the *filioque* clause on the procession of the Spirit, the role of the papacy, the lawfulness of married clergy, the dating of Easter, etc. The western and eastern churches had been drifting apart for centuries before 1054, the date usually assigned to the Great Schism, when Leo IX's representative, Cardinal Humbert, and Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, excommunicated each other. Over nine hundred years later, the excommunications were rescinded by Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople when they met at Vatican II (1965).

<sup>3</sup> The Eastern Catholic Churches are autonomous churches in full communion with the pope, which preserve the liturgical, theological,

on *Eastern Catholic Churches* (1964) states,

The Eastern [Catholic] Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special role to play in promoting the unity of all Christians, particularly Easterners, according to the principles of this sacred Synod's Decree on Ecumenism (p. 383).

Since the agreement between Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy is "very close," Vatican II reckons that "given suitable circumstances and the approval of Church authority, some worship in common is not merely possible but is recommended" (p. 359).

It is the Council's urgent desire that every effort should henceforth be made toward the gradual realization of this goal [of full communion between Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy] in the various organizations and living activities of the Church, especially by prayer and by fraternal dialogue on points of doctrine and the more pressing pastoral problems of our time (p. 361).

This would certainly add to the size, prestige, and power of the Vatican, for there are at present between 225 and 300 million Eastern Orthodox church members, found especially in eastern Europe and Russia, as well as (increasingly) worldwide. However, more needs to be done, for to this day both churches claim to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and each denies the other's right to that name. Rome expects this unification to be "gradual" (p. 361).

### Anglicanism

For Rome, "the Anglican Communion occupies a special place" (p. 356) among those

---

and devotional traditions of the various eastern churches with which they are associated.

churches that separated from it at the Reformation. The reason is obvious. Anglicanism's compromised Reformation left it with a hierarchical structure (referred to as "the historic episcopate" in ecumenical circles) and an unhealthy advocacy of early church tradition. The Church of England even considers itself a *via media*, or middle way, between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Anglicanism's high-church sacramentalism (prominent especially in its Anglo-Catholic wing) facilitates its restoration to Rome, which sees the church largely in terms of hierarchy, sacraments, liturgy, etc.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Anglican Communion is the third largest communion in the world (behind Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy) with about 77 million members, making it quite a prize for the papacy.<sup>2</sup>

The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), which arose out of the Joint Preparatory Commission (1967-68), has been discussing ordination, the doctrine of salvation, the eucharist, Rome's teaching authority, the role of Mary, etc., on and off for about four decades. In approving the statements from ARCIC's First Phase (1970-1981), "The Church of England has effectively ratified the doctrine of the Council of Trent [1545-1563] on Scripture and Tradition, and on the Lord's Supper, and it has

---

<sup>1</sup> Over the years, a lot of Anglican members and clergy (especially those in the high-church wing) have apostatized and joined the Church of Rome, including John Henry Newman (1801-1890), who was made a Roman cardinal (1879), and, in 1900, Mabel Tolkien and her young son, John Ronald Reuel (1892-1973), whose writings include *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the 18 million Anglicans in Nigeria outnumber all their co-religionists in the whole of Europe and North America. There are about 9 million Anglicans in the Church of Uganda.

accepted in principle the primacy of the pope."<sup>3</sup>

Since then, ARCIC has continued its labors to bring Canterbury back to Rome. In 2007, ARCIC issued *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, which declared,

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome as universal primate is in accordance with Christ's will for the Church and an essential element of maintaining it in unity and truth.... We urge Anglicans and Roman Catholics to explore together how the ministry of the Bishop of Rome might be offered and received in order to assist our Communion to grow towards full, ecclesial communion.<sup>4</sup>

Queen Elizabeth II, Supreme Governor of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith, and various Archbishops of Canterbury have visited the pope many times. In 2008, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams became the first (symbolic) head of the worldwide Anglican Communion to visit the Roman Catholic shrine of Lourdes in southwest France. There he took part in an international mass celebrating the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Mary to Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant.

Ironically, ecumenical relations between Anglicanism and Romanism have slowed, not because of opposition from orthodox Anglicans but because Anglicanism is too liberal for Romanism, especially concerning the ordination of women and homosexuality. John Paul II (1978-2005) suspended official talks between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion due to the consecration

---

<sup>3</sup> David N. Samuel, *The Church in Crisis* (Reading, England: The Church of England [Continuing], 2004), p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARCIC>.

of Gene Robinson, a practicing homosexual, as a bishop in the Episcopal Church in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams approves of sodomy, and his view of Scripture descends to the lowest depths of liberalism: God is "a spastic child who can communicate nothing but his presence and his inarticulate wanting," and John's Apocalypse is filled with "madness and vengefulness" (cf. Samuel, *The Church in Crisis*, pp. 131, 141-144). Apostate churches and church leaders are far and away the most blind and

We do not know the future (only God does), so we do not know if and when Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism will join with Rome and submit to the pope. But this is the earnest desire and stated goal of the Vatican, something for which it is working very hard. Such a union would bring the first, second, and third largest 'Christian' communions under the "Supreme Pontiff of the

deaf of fallen mankind (Isa. 42:19-20); they have been "bewitched" (Gal. 3:1).

Universal Church." With current population figures, this would take Rome from one-sixth to one-fifth of the world's population, and it would greatly strengthen her hand in eastern Europe, Russia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

Next time (DV), we shall consider Rome's false ecumenism with Protestants, those closer to us and with whom we are more familiar. The anti-Christian kingdom and the return of Jesus Christ are drawing near!

... to be continued. 

*When Thou Sittest in Thine House*

*Rev. Arie denHartog*

## *Covenant Life in the Home (2)*

# *The Love for God in Our Covenant Home (1)*

**I**t has been some time since I wrote the first article for an intended series on "Life in the Covenant Home." A very busy year in the ministry has made it difficult for me to continue to write articles for this series. It might be helpful for those reading this article to re-read the first article in the December 1, 2007 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. I intend to continue, the Lord willing, to write on subjects related to this general theme. I will do this by considering carefully what God says to us in Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

It is noteworthy that the beautiful example of covenant home life from the history of Israel given to us in Deuteronomy 6

follows from the Lord's command through Moses to the children of Israel that they should "keep the commandments and statutes, and the judgments which the Lord commanded." These in turn we must teach the covenant children that God has given to us. This is important even for us living many centuries after Moses and Israel and in a very different time and culture.

It is also of greatest significance that God gives the summary of His law at this time, but only the summary of the first table of this law. "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart." Love for God is the absolute and perfect requirement of God's law. There is no

keeping of the law without love for God. The whole book of Deuteronomy is full of repetitions of our important calling as God's covenant people to be serious about the commandments of the Lord.

We are commanded by the law of God to love God "with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might." This means we are to love God with our whole being and at all times, with all that He has made us to be before His sight. There may be no division in our lives between love for God and love for the things of this world. There may be no half-hearted love or divided allegiance. Our love for God must be complete, perfect, and ardent devotion.

We confess the truth that doing this is by nature wholly impossible for us. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us, we are

*Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.*

prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor. Even the most holy man has but a small beginning of the new obedience. Of this we are ashamed, and over this we grieve continually all the day long. This is the miserable reality concerning ourselves. We may not become complacent about this. We may have no rest in our souls until we by the grace and power of God's love in us attain unto perfect love for Him.

We are not to love ourselves, but God. It is natural for us according to our sinful nature to love ourselves above all. This is often so obvious in our daily lives. We should be ashamed of this. This is our awful sinfulness. We must fight against self love and pride with all our might. If we love ourselves first, then we cannot love God first. We must deny ourselves, sacrifice ourselves for God's sake, and count not even our own lives dear to us, because we love God above all.

There is no mere man that ever lived who loved God as God requires in His holy law. Only our Lord Jesus Christ was able to do that as perfectly as His heavenly Father requires. Because He loved God, it was His meat and drink to do the will of God. In that love He was obedient even to the shameful and agonizing death of the cross. We can love God only because of the atonement of Christ's perfect love for God. By His perfect love He covered all of our shameful failure and sin in not loving God as we ought.

We love God because He first loved us. He shed His love abroad in our hearts by giving us His Spirit. There is no love of God in our hearts except that which is the fruit of the continual work of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts. Our love must always again be revived and strengthened by God's love for us.

In our modern-day world of 'Christianity,' much of which is only outward show and mere

words (rather than sincerity of heart), it is common to put all the emphasis on love for the neighbor, so that concern for this eclipses the proper and central emphasis on love for God. We must however remember that love for God is the first and great commandment. The second commandment is that we love the neighbor. We must not turn the first and second commandments around in importance in our lives. There can be no true love for the neighbor, not even for our closest neighbor, our own spouse, wife or husband, and our covenant children, if we do not first of all love God.

True love for God must be hearty, warm and personal, and living. Love for God may not be something cold and impersonal, and merely formal and external.

We as Reformed people love the truth of the covenant, which we believe to be in its essence a living and personal knowledge of God and fellowship with Him. The reality of the covenant is the truth that God is our God and we are His people. We are His people only because He has personally chosen us to be His own, and because He has redeemed us by His sovereign grace and wonderful mercy and goodness from our wretched sinfulness. He has united us to Himself in the blessed bond of His love. He daily shows us His own covenant love and faithfulness. The covenant with God on our part must be that we love Him with perfect, holy, and ardent affection and delight.

This must be evident in all our life and conversation, especially in our covenant home.

Love for God is the most holy and sublime and perfect love imaginable. The soul of man cannot reach any higher than knowing and loving God. God makes Himself known to us as the covenant God, and we love Him

because He first loved us. Love for God means that with fear and trembling we know Him as He is in Himself. This is possible because He has revealed Himself to us and caused us in our hearts to experience this knowledge in a living and personal way. Love for God is love for His truth and love for His revelation to us in His own Word. Love for God is confessing and maintaining His truth. Love for God means that the knowledge of Him is the greatest joy of our life, that which is most precious to us, and the deepest satisfaction of our life. Love for God means that we love Him in all of His infinite perfections and majesty. We desire Him to be nothing other than what He has in grace made known concerning Himself in His most holy and perfect Word. Love for God is glorying in God and in His truth alone. It is worshiping God in His holy and glorious majesty and infinitely perfect attributes. It is fearing Him in a life of deepest humility, reverence, awe, obedience, and service.

We must show that we love God by loving our neighbor. In the covenant home our marriage was ordained by God to be a reflection of God's covenant love and faithfulness. The love of God is pure and holy, and this must

be reflected in the love that we have for our wife, our husband, and our children. The love of God towards us is shown in His amazing faithfulness to us even though we


are repeatedly unfaithful to Him because of the continual weakness of our sinful natures. We must reflect His love to us in our relationships with our wife or husband and with our children in the covenant home. We show the love of God to our spouse by living in holy purity and faithfulness with him or her all the days of our

*The soul of man cannot reach any higher than knowing and loving God.*

life. As the Lord in love pities us, so must we have compassion for and pity upon our children. As God is holy and pure in Himself, our marriage must be kept from the impurity, immorality, and abomination of fornication and adultery. As God is faithful to us, we must show ourselves to be faithful in our covenant marriage and family. The deepest reason we must do this is for God's sake, and for His glory!

Even worldly psychologists and those who want to teach men about proper family living will

say that love is the most important thing. If love is not present in marriage and in the relationship between parents and children, there will be enmity and strife and bitterness that will lead to the misery and the profound sorrow of the breakdown of the home and family. The humanist teaches that this love is only manward and does not first of all need to be Godward. But we know that true love for our wife or husband and our children can only be there when first of all there is love for God in our hearts.

It must be evident in the covenant home that the love for God is reflected in the marriage of husband and wife and in the whole perspective and atmosphere of this home. Children must be nurtured in the warm and blessed sphere of love for God. The spiritual reality of this love for God must immediately be evident when one enters our home. It is this love that makes a truly Christian home. We shall consider some of the implications of this in our next article. 

Translated Treasurer

## Not Anabaptist But Reformed (11)\*

by Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema

### Chapter 5. Van Baalen's Method of Scriptural Interpretation (2)

*In the first half of this chapter, Danhof and Hoeksema have established that Rev. Van Baalen cites many texts but has almost no exegesis. Their exposition of Psalm 73 demonstrated that Scripture teaches the opposite of common grace. They ask Van Baalen to reconcile this and similar passages with his "idea that God is actually good to the reprobate." They insist that this is the proper method of interpretation, that is, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and interpreting each text in the light of the whole of Scripture.*

**A**nd therefore, in connection with a few passages that are related to

\* Not Anabaptist but Reformed was a pamphlet written by Danhof and Hoeksema in 1923 as a "Provisional Response to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen Concerning the Denial of Common Grace." Translated here from the Dutch by seminarian Daniel Holstege.

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2009, p. 154.

our subject and that appear to teach that God actually lavishes goodness upon and is favorably inclined toward the reprobate, we would like to point out the following:

1) In the first place, we note that God actually is good to unthankful and wicked men. We also are such men. God's people are such. By nature we are all unthankful and, in principle, enemies of God. God is filled with eternal goodness toward those unthankful and wicked men, and He loved them even when they were yet enemies. He is so good that He gives Christ unto death for them, actually grants them His grace, and causes all things to work together for their good. In that goodness He grants them all good things, even though it may be that He leads them in ways of suffering and oppression, of persecution, slander, and death. Even those apparently evil things are always evidences to them

of God's goodness, because He seeks their good both in time and eternity. And therefore goodness is essentially a notion no different from grace. If anything, goodness expresses the same idea as grace in an even stronger way. But it is a goodness upon His people that works only for good to His people, and even comes upon them while they are still unthankful and wicked.

2) In the second place, we note that God's people live together with the reprobate in this world from a natural point of view. They are not yet separated as this shall occur in the Day of Judgment. They live in the same world and also receive the same gifts in that world. Those gifts are God's gifts, revelations of His goodness. The goodness of God, His grace and love, which is meant for His people and is actually a blessing for His people alone, is thus thoroughly revealed also to the ungodly, in the sense of repro-



bate. In the outward sense of the word they receive everything that God's people receive. From an earthly point of view they receive even more, because among the people of God are not ordinarily many noble or rich men. But all of this merely works their ruin. It is not that God intended it to be otherwise but did not accomplish His purpose. Rather, it was God's idea and His great wisdom to work their ruin through those gifts. Thus you can also understand something of the fact that the ungodly man is responsible for his own ruin. For the goodness of God that was revealed to him in the good gifts has only made him more wicked. He has polluted all of it through sin, and therefore, his guilt is all the greater.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> You have the same idea with respect to the Word. That Word is also a revelation of God's grace and comes not only to the elect, but also to the reprobate. Thus, these also have the revelation of God's grace, which was indeed intended to give life only to the elect. It is not, therefore, Reformed to say that God also now intends that the reprobate receive grace. Our fathers very clearly taught the opposite (see *Canons, Rejection of Errors*, IV, 5). The offer of grace does come to all in this world wherever elect and reprobate live organically together, but grace always remains particular from God's side. The one good Word is a savor of death unto death and a savor of life unto life, though it is according as God gives grace with the preaching of that Word or does not. And so it truly is with all things. According as God gives grace with His gifts or does not, all things work unto blessing or unto curse. See the reference to Psalm 73 and 92 above. And so it is also with suffering. Suffering in and of itself is an evil, but with grace suffering becomes a blessing for God's people. Therefore, we do speak of a general revelation of God's grace, goodness, kindness, mercy, etc, and of good gifts, which all men receive, but not of general grace. Righteous and ungodly men have everything in common in this world, except for grace.

3) We note that the child of God, in whose heart is the life of God, and in whom God has perfected His love, now also loves and blesses His enemies out of that living love, even as God loved him when he was yet an enemy—something that nevertheless does not at all mean that he now loves God's enemies too. The word of the poet pertains to them: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?...I hate them with perfect hatred" (Ps. 139:21, 22). This is certainly also the principle that was repeatedly expressed in Holy Scripture, but that was even taken up in the law of Israel (Deut. 13:6-11), and was later professed once again by the Savior in Luke 14:26: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." God's people, on account of the love wherewith God loved them, can have mercy upon their enemies, but they can never love the enemies of God.

The same observation, namely that this chapter in Rev. Van Baalen's pamphlet attests to a much too superficial interpretation of Scripture, pertains also to the texts that speak about Ahab's repentance. If one does speak of common grace, it has to do with something entirely different than what is related to us there. But besides, the brother simply quotes without going into any explanation. We would still have to know what the character of Ahab's conversion is and how it stands connected with the second message that Elijah has to bring to the king. That [second] message really comes down to this, that the Lord, when He sees that Ahab goes before His face in sackcloth and ashes afraid from the first message brought to him by the prophet, now announces to the king that the evil that was announced will come upon his

house not in his days, but in the days of his son. All of this had to be explained, but Rev. Van Baalen merely gives the quote.

If we enter into the matter, it is completely clear. Ahab has sinned dreadfully. God thunders in his ears that He will punish him with the utter desolation of his house. Ahab's house shall be eradicated from Israel. A final judgment is thus announced: utter desolation. Now, however, one must understand two things. Scripture teaches that such a final judgment is not executed by the Lord unless evil has become fully ripe. The measure of unrighteousness must become full. This not only pertains to the end of the world, but also to various judgments in the course of history, like the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Jerusalem, which in this way are types of the end. If the Lord causes someone to be cut off, then the measure of unrighteousness is full.

In the second place, it is also a scriptural idea that fear before an announced judgment is evidence that this evil has not yet become ripe. Ahab was afraid at the first message. He trembled before the fearful judgment of God and went around in sackcloth and ashes. Therefore, Elijah must announce that the evil on Ahab's house shall indeed come, but not until the days of his son—something that certainly does not mean that grace is shown to Ahab at the expense of his son, but rather that the evil in Ahab's house shall then have become fully ripe. Then this judgment shall be executed.

Also, the meaning that Rev. Van Baalen attaches to the "giving over" of Romans 1:24, 26, 28 is not the scriptural thought. The brother simply adopts the explanation that Dr. Kuyper gives to this passage. According to this explanation this being given over supposes that God first restrained

sin, held the process of sin in check, but now leaves the operation of sin to itself.

We have all kinds of objections to this explanation. In the first place, we object that it is a completely un-scriptural and un-Reformed idea that God simply leaves something to itself, even if it pertains to sin. God never simply stands around and looks on, to put it crudely, in order to watch something develop.

In the second place, we object that there is no mention of such restraining at all in the context. Paul develops the idea that there has been a revelation of God's eternal power and Godhead in nature since the beginning of the Creation, and that, furthermore, man also could be acquainted with this revelation because of natural light. But man has become foolish in the depravity of his heart, has refused to recognize God as God, and going from bad to worse, has portrayed God as a beast and creeping thing. The waters had coursed quickly in the heathen world. There was no restraining. Thus, the context does not make mention of any restraining.

In the third place, we object that this explanation is also in contradiction to the text that Rev. Van Baalen himself quotes from Acts 17, where it is clearly expressed that God let the heathen walk in their own ways.

And in the fourth place, we object that the expression "given over" never means that God leaves something to itself, but rather it denotes a positive act of God whereby God seizes something and delivers it over. This same word is in fact used for the giving over of the Son unto death (Rom. 4:25), the Son's giving up of Himself (Gal. 2:20), the self-sacrifice of Christ to God for a sweet-smelling savor (Eph. 5:25), and the men who have given up their lives


for the name of the Savior (Acts 15:26).

And thus we could go on. Nowhere does the word presuppose a restraining, but everywhere it denotes a positive act of giving over. So also is it in Romans 1. According to the righteous judgment of God, as punishment for their sin of not wanting to recognize Him, but having portrayed Him as a man and beast and creeping thing, the heathen are taken by God and plunged even deeper into uncleanness. Giving over does not mean to say that God now stands by and does nothing more about it, but rather it looks to a very positive and righteous act of God's rejection.

It is not our concern here to go into the book of Jonah at length. With regard to the history, let it be pointed out that we have the same thing here as was pointed out above regarding Ahab's conversion. Nineveh was also frightened at the thundering voice of God that announced utter destruction. Therefore Nineveh is spared for a while. It is well-known how the city was yet destroyed some years later. But apart from all this, it simply will not do to deal with the book of Jonah as Rev. Van Baalen does. Jonah is prophecy, is it not? You will never understand the right meaning of the book as long as you treat it merely as a piece of history.

Why is Jonah prophecy? Why is Jonah a type of Christ in His burial and resurrection? Why must Jonah go to Nineveh? Why not to Babylon? How is Nineveh, in distinction from Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jerusalem, an image and type in the Holy Scriptures? You see, we must have all of this if we want to give proof for a scriptural idea from the book of Jonah. And the brother does not do that. But you certainly cannot speak of *universal* grace in connection with

something that occurs within a single city, can you?<sup>1</sup>

But that is enough. We can take our leave of this chapter as well. The brother has imagined the matter that concerns us here to be much too easy. He evidently started from the idea that it was a foregone conclusion that Rev. Danhof and Rev. Hoeksema were erring spirits who understood neither the Confessions nor Scripture, or used both in a rationalistic manner. The opposite is true, brother. We want to understand the Scriptures and build along purely Reformed lines. And if you think that by quoting twelve texts, some of which have nothing at all to do with the matter, most of which you do not even explain, and others of which you pass by with a single word, you can just set us aside and present the doctrine of common grace as crystal clear, you are indeed quite mistaken. Your chapter "Against Holy Scripture" is unworthy of a Reformed exegete of Scripture. Your cry, "Once again, acknowledge that you have erred," is well-intentioned and much appreciated, but also very misplaced. 

---

<sup>1</sup> Nineveh stands at the peak of the heathen world and is a picture of the heathen world as God's people must soon be gathered out of it. This is the difference between the meaning of Nineveh and Babylon. Babel is the whore, a picture of the reprobate, antichristian world, from which God's people have to separate themselves. Nineveh is a picture of the world as it is temporarily spared by God in His longsuffering, as the gospel is preached to that world, and God's people must first be gathered out of that world before the end can come. However, all of this will first come to pass after Christ shall have been in the heart of the earth for three days and been raised up. That is why in regard to this, Jonah is the picture of Christ who dies, enters into the heart of the earth, arises, and then is preached to the world of which Nineveh is a picture.

## The Origin and History of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (2)

**I**t was in just this environment that many of the founding members of the EPC were living in the early 1950s. In fact, they came from very diverse backgrounds. It is quite surprising, when one looks back at some of those founding members, to see where they actually came from. They had backgrounds in the Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Brethren, Salvation Army, and Congregational churches. However, the Lord was leading these various people to see that the churches in which they were members were increasingly lacking any real life, any real relevance to the Christian life. They found that many in the churches were simply denying the truth of the Bible. There didn't seem to be any kind of a care for evangelism and for the conversion of sinners.

All of these things caused these people a good deal of distress. They wanted to look for more life and enthusiasm and fellowship. They looked for that amongst others of like mind. This resulted in many small fellowship groups. This was particularly happening in Tasmania. Tasma-

nia is the smallest state of Australia, and a small island. We call it small, but it is about the size of the lower peninsula of Michigan, maybe slightly smaller. In Tasmania there were several centers, several towns, where these fellowship groups started to appear, where people were looking for greater fellowship with each other. They would come together to study the Bible, to have more of a life within Christianity, and then search for ways in which they could go about and convert sinners.

There were those who also joined a parachurch organization, at that time called "Ambassadors for Christ." This was a loosely-knit organization that focused on an emotional message and then an "altar-call": a call to come and make a decision for Christ. They would hold conventions for adults and sometimes youth gatherings. There would be a great deal of emotional singing and an emotional message and then a call for those present to come down and make a decision for Christ. Many came. Many made decisions.

There were also those who joined an organization called the Worldwide Evangelization Society. This Society had a college where they were training men and women to be evangelists for Christ. To join this college, you needed to "live by faith," which meant that you gave away your money, sold your house, and just lived by faith and relied upon

others to support you as you underwent this training. Sometimes husbands and wives together were training to be evangelists in that way.

The spiritual understanding of these different groups was really one that was Arminian and Baptist. They believed it was up to man to save himself—with a little bit of help from God. Jesus started the work of salvation, man was called to finish it off. They knew nothing of the doctrine of the covenant; they didn't know about sovereign, particular grace; they had never heard of Calvinism; they didn't know about having a whole world-and-life view of Christianity; they had no real place for children in the church. The church was simply a gathering, a local society; and that society ought to be ruled by the voice of every member: essentially congregationalism. This was their Christian understanding.

But God was moving in their midst. They recognized that they had a hunger for something more in their Christian life, something obviously that God was stirring up within them. They desired that Christ's kingdom would grow and that they themselves could save more souls. They decided to invite an evangelistic, inspirational preacher from America. He was of the ilk of Charles Finney. He came out and, after twelve months of work with them, lots of emotionalism, and attempting to follow

---

*Dr. Torlach is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia and a student in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*\* Address at the RFPA annual meeting, held September 25, 2008.*

*Previous article in this series: January 1, 2009, p. 161.*

his doctrine and practice, they almost despaired, being left empty, exhausted, and in a state of legalism. They were very eager for the conversion of souls but didn't find much substance in all that was preached by this fellow.

In addition to this, the work that they had been doing in the Ambassadors for Christ, etc. (which resulted in so many people making "decisions") ended up being so much worthlessness. When they started examining what happened to these people, they found that less than one in ten of these people persisted for any time at all in this "profession of faith" that they had made. Quite often, exactly the opposite of what they desired would be the effect. They were so eager for the Christianization of the areas in which they lived, and yet the people who had come forward and made a decision, sometimes the very next day would be regretting what they had done. They then felt very bitter about these people who had forced them to make a decision that they really didn't want to make. Their work-mates would mock them, and they would become even more angry and bitter about the Christians. Their work-mates and their families would be even more convinced that these Christians were "weirdos." This was not the effect they wanted to have in the society in which they lived. What were they doing wrong? They were seeing that what they were doing was not right. But what was it?

This, indeed, is the time that the Lord started to introduce them to Reformed doctrine. This, I think, is the part that applies particularly to the RFPA, because God did this through literature. God worked through solid Reformed literature. One of the first books they came across was Jonathan Edward's *The Religious Affections*, and in this book they

discovered that much of what they had been doing was condemned by this book. They saw, looking at what he had written, that they had been seeking after their own glorification and not God's. They had been relying on their own messages and persuasiveness and not upon the power of God's Word.

From this time, many stopped using the altar-call. Then there were further discoveries to be made: someone came across the Westminster Confession of Faith. Surprisingly, some of these people had even been members in a Presbyterian church and had never heard of the Westminster Confession of Faith! Various publishers, such as the Banner of Truth Trust and the Sovereign Grace Publishers, were starting to produce good Reformed literature, good solid books, such as: B.B. Warfield's *The Plan of Salvation*; Arthur Pink's *Sovereignty of God*; Thomas Watson's *A Body of Divinity*; and Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*. Such books these publishers were starting to republish, print, and have available for people.

As the members of these fellowship groups came across this literature, they were amazed. It cannot be underestimated what effect good, solid, Reformed literature had upon these people. The truth of the Word of God was revealed to them in such a way that it was as if scales that had been on their eyes suddenly fell away. Suddenly they could actually see. Suddenly all the different things they had read so often in the Word of God actually had meaning to them—they all made sense. Suddenly God's glory and brightness shone, with the discovery of the sovereignty of God in all things. The marvel of the Reformed faith that humbled men to the dust and yet, at the same time, gave them such an assurance of their own salvation in the work of Christ alone. It gave

them the feeling that they had never really known God before, that they had never really known Jesus Christ.

A number, it is recorded, spent entire nights, from dusk till dawn, reading and praying over this literature. When they came across these truths, they of course shared them with each other. They passed them on to the different towns and different groups. And these groups would then read this and pass it on to the different members and exchange books. They would get together to discuss these incredible truths and build one another up in this. They devoured literature. They searched for more Reformed writers. And they wanted, more than anything else, to share that beautiful truth with all those round about them. They took up every opportunity they had to talk with others about that new truth, and they seized upon any opportunity to hear more about the Reformed faith.

Right about this time, the Rev. E. Lee, from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), came down to Tasmania, visited there, and spoke at a couple of different conventions. When he came, many of those from the fellowships attended as well, and plied him with all sorts of questions about the Reformed faith. He was very surprised about the eagerness and also about the knowledge of these people. In his report of that visit, he wrote:

Recent movements in Tasmania toward the Reformed faith have gladdened the hearts of all to whom the faith of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin is precious. The writer is able to give first-hand information on the quality and manifestation of the work. That it is the work of God there is no doubt. There has been a tremendous outburst of intellectual activity in the faith of our Lord Je-

sus Christ. It has stimulated and elevated their lives. Christians who have never read a book for years now have moderate-sized libraries with which they appear to be very familiar. Young ladies, as well as housewives, are conversant with the Confession of Faith, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, and the works of the British Puritans. This especially amazed the writer for the interest of ladies is usually centered in the realms of fashion and food, babies, and household furnishings.

He goes on to say,

One of the saddest features of the movement has been their disap-

pointment with the worldliness of the brethren of the Reformed churches. They cannot understand how Christians, especially those who profess the truth which God gave to His church in the Reformation, can waste money on tobacco, on the pursuit of worldly amusements such as the patronage of the cinema where a godless way of life is portrayed and encouraged. They wonder why Christians have an appetite for these things. In consequence, those who have so much to teach them have repelled them. Let me say, in conclusion, that these brethren were a challenge and an inspiration to the writer as he moved among them. They have all the enthusiasm of those who have discovered a wonderful

treasure. Their zeal in spreading the truth is a reflection of this.

Rev. Lee's reference to those who had belonged to other churches reflected where the fellowships were at, at that point in time. The members of the groups had first tried to bring the truth that they had discovered back to the churches of which they were members. But the churches would have none of it: they did not want to know about the Reformed faith. They viewed it as divisive and viewed those doctrines as simply a cause of trouble. They did not even want to hear of it.

... to be concluded. 

## Bring the books...

Rev. Bill Langerak



*The Shack*, by William P. Young. Windblown Media, 2007. ISBN 0964729237. Paperback. 264 pp. Available at [christianbook.com](http://christianbook.com) (\$8.99) or [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) (\$13.49). Reviewed by Joshua D. Engelsma.

**T**he *Shack*, a recently published New York Times best-seller, falls into the genre of Christian fiction. Since being published last year, it has gained widespread support, not merely from the population in general, but especially in the church world. Many churches advertise their discussion groups on the book and promote it wholeheartedly. The book's popularity in the church world warrants a review for Reformed readers.

Rev. Langerak ("Bring the books" editor) is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Joshua Engelsma is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

*The Shack* focuses on the experiences of a certain Mack Phillips. While Mack was on a camping trip with his children, his youngest daughter, Missy, disappears. Evidence is later found in a wilderness shack that indicates Missy was kidnapped and brutally murdered. Her body is not discovered however. Mack becomes consumed by "The Great Sadness" for three years, until he receives a note in the mail, signed by God, telling him to return to the shack. Mack eventually revisits the shack and there spends a weekend living with and talking to three people. They are intended to represent the triune God. Papa, a large black woman, is God the Father. Jesus is a middle-aged Jewish man. And God the Holy Spirit is named Sarayu and appears as a small Asian woman. The out-and-out blasphemy of this portrayal of God is enough in and by itself to condemn the book, but there are several other dangerous, heretical ideas that Reformed readers should be warned about.

While *The Shack* may be a work of fiction, the author has

several underlying purposes in writing this book. Young's chief aim is to present a new and different view of God. He wants to encourage readers to think about God differently. His book poses the question: "What if God is different than what you think?" The God in whom Young wants his readers to believe is a God that is entirely different from the true God of Holy Writ. The God of Young's imagination is a peaceful, all-loving God who has atoned for the sins of the entire human race. After "Papa" says that he hasn't been able to find anyone that he doesn't love, Mack then asks why the Bible describes him as "spilling out great bowls of wrath and throwing people into a burning lake of fire." Papa responds: "I am not who you think I am, Mackenzie. I don't need to punish people for sin.... It's not my purpose to punish [sin]; it's my joy to cure it" (119).

This God that Young envisions and promotes stands in stark contrast to the triune God revealed in the inspired Scriptures. God is not a God that loves every single person and desires


their salvation. Christ has not died for all men. We read in Romans 9:6 that “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” And further, in verse 13 of the same chapter: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” Instead of presenting a new way of looking at God, as the book claims, the author presents a whole new God altogether, a God totally divorced from His Word!

Closely connected with this new view of God is the second, more subversive, purpose of the author. In attempting to find this new God, Young promotes a move away from religion and the instituted church. “Papa” calls religion “machinery” that “chews up people.” He despises all the do’s and don’ts of religion,

and simply wants relationships. The author himself is no longer a member of an instituted church, and neither are the men who published the book. *The Shack* is an attempt to get people out of the instituted church and to make them believe that they can find God and salvation apart from the church and the preaching.

This despicable and blasphemous thinking must not be promoted. For it is “contrary to the ordinance of God,” says our Belgic Confession, Article 28, which clearly and definitively sets forth the duty of all men to bind themselves not merely to a church but to the true church, “out of which there is no salvation.” Not so, says Young.

Readers who anticipate or

hope that this book will give them a new perspective of God or will change their life will be sorely disappointed. The God that this book presents is not the true God of the Scriptures but rather the idol god of the author’s imagination. The author openly denies the fundamental truths of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. It is no wonder the book is wildly popular. A God that loves everyone and doesn’t punish sin or require one to spend his Sunday at church—who wouldn’t want that? Be warned, Reformed believers! The best place for this book is not a treasured place in one’s house and heart, as many in the church world today would have it, but rather in the middle of a blazing fire. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Congregation Activities

We join with the readers of the *Standard Bearer* in extending our congratulations to the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on the celebration of their 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation. This celebration took place December 5 - 7. In addition to the two worship services on the Lord’s Day, led by two former pastors, Rev. A. den Hartog and Rev. K. Koole, there was a special anniversary celebration on Friday evening, which included opening devotions from Mr. Chuck Van Meeteren, Vice President of Hope’s Council and one of Hope’s original members; remarks from Hope’s visiting former pastors, and by letter from Rev. J. Kortering who could not attend; a slide show of the past 75 years, presented by Mr. B. Feenstra, another original member; audience singing; readings; musical numbers from school children;

a quartet; a men’s chorus; and a time for fellowship over refreshments afterwards.

The celebration also included a choir program Sunday evening. The first half commemorated the Lord’s faithfulness to Hope as a congregation, while the second half was Christmas songs. Afterwards Hope enjoyed a nice lunch, featuring a cake that was an exact replica of Hope Church.

By all accounts the weekend was a wonderful celebration of the Lord’s faithfulness. Today Hope is a thriving congregation. In the last couple of years there have been a number of marriages in her midst, so that the congregation now numbers around 60 families, with a number of new, young families.

The “News” has also noted in recent weeks the ever increasing number of Christmas program practices scheduled by all our congregations. These programs are typically presented by the Sunday School students and are enjoyed and appreciated by everyone. Hope Redlands has enjoyed these programs for 75

years, while our newest congregation (Providence in Hudsonville, MI) recently enjoyed their first.

A December bulletin from the Hudsonville, MI PRC contained a thank you from Hudsonville’s Helping Hands Committee. This committee wanted to thank their congregation for all their help, especially in making meals for 2008. Over 185 meals were delivered to families with new babies, to the sick, and to those otherwise shut in.

Many of our congregations are not only able to enjoy Sunday School Christmas programs in December, but also able to enjoy programs presented by their choral societies. The Choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI presented a combined choir concert and singspiration at their church on Sunday evening, December 14. That same evening the members of the Hudsonville PRC Choir presented a concert celebrating the birth of our Savior and King, Jesus Christ. The Choral Society of Grace PRC in Standale, MI presented their Thanksgiving/Christmas program on

---

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

Sunday, December 14, after their evening service.

Members of our churches in West Michigan were invited to a concert presented by the Trinity Mensingers, the Majestic Brass, and With One Voice, on Sunday evening, December 7 at Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. And members of the Faith Choral Society of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their annual Christmas concert of praise to our heavenly Father on December 7.

The Voices of Victory, along with Eric and Crista Phelps on the cello and the piano, presented an inspiring evening of praise to God on Sunday evening, November 30, at Grace Community Church in Hudsonville, MI. A collection taken went to this year's young people's convention.

In December many of our churches also set aside an evening when their congregation spends time Christmas caroling. The time spent singing together usually includes visits to area Health Care Centers or to the homes of widows and widowers and shut-ins in their congregation. The members of the Lynden, WA PRC did just that on December 16. However, Lynden's congregation may be the only one of our churches that has the distinction of singing Christmas carols in two countries on the same night. For the sake of time and distance, the congregation divides into two groups; one that sings at the homes around Lynden, while the other sings at the homes near Sumas and Abbotsford, British Columbia. So not only did the singers need to remember their music, but they also needed to remember their documents for trans-border travel.

The Reformed Fellowship Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited their congregation to an evening of caroling on December 12. Afterwards the congregation was invited to return to church for fellowship around a potluck dinner and games.


### Mission Activities

The Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, South Dakota is currently airing the second commercial that was created by television station KSFY for their use. You can view the commercial on Heritage's website [www.reformedsiouxfalls.org](http://www.reformedsiouxfalls.org). Thirty seconds goes fast! In the first one, Missionary Rev. A. Brummel made comments regarding the covenant and God's taking us into fellowship with Himself. The second commercial directs viewers to God as the Unchangeable Rock and Fortress in the midst of all the uncertainties and change of our times.

The next minister scheduled for pulpit supply in the Berean PRC in the Philippines is Rev. W. Langerak, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Langerak will be accompanied by his parents, Harry and Evelyn

Langerak, members of Hope PRC in Walker, MI. The Lord willing, they will travel there on December 22 and return home on January 13. After this, Rev. R. Van Overloop, pastor at Grace PRC in Standale, MI, is scheduled to be in the Philippines from January 15 to February 2.

### School News

The Student Council of Covenant Christian High School sponsored a Gift Certificate Drive from Dec. 1 - 22 to help those in need in area Protestant Reformed Churches. Supporters of Covenant were asked to remember that not everyone has as many physical blessings as others, especially in this weak economy. To participate, individuals could send money or gift certificates/cards to grocery stores, gas stations, etc. to Covenant. 

## Announcements

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Faith PRC expresses its deepest sympathy with our fellow officebearer, Elder Andy Brummel, and his family in the death of Andy's mother,

#### MRS. EUNICE BRUMMEL,

of Hull, Iowa. "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

Rev. Andrew Lanning, President  
Mr. Peter VanDerSchaaf, Clerk

### NOTICE!!

Rev. VanOverloop's new address and phone numbers:

0-11243 8th Avenue NW,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49534  
Home phone: 616 643-8023  
Study phone: 616 643-8085

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their sympathy to Sarah Knott, Tom and Lois Knott, and Jeff and Cathy Booth in the death of their son and stepbrother,

#### ROGER STOUTEN.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation..." (II Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Sid Miedema, Vice-President  
Dale Bartelds, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Peace PRC extend their heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow members Dan and Jessica Wiersma and children in the passing of their mother and grandmother,

#### MRS. EVELYN POORTINGA.

May they find comfort in the promise of Scripture, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Rev. Clayton Spronk, President,  
Barry Warner, Clerk

**The 2008  
Summer Class Series**  
is now available on CD (\$20)  
and DVD (\$25)

**THE SANCTIFYING  
POWER OF SUFFERING**

Prof. Herman Hanko

*The Meaning  
of Sanctification*

*The Relationship Between  
Justification and  
Sanctification*

*The Process of Sanctification*

*How Suffering  
Works Sanctification*

To order this edifying and  
timely lecture series, please  
contact Ryan Morris at [hoprwc  
@gmail.com](mailto:hoprwc@gmail.com) or write us at:

Reformed Witness  
Committee of  
Hope

Protestant Reformed Church  
1580 Ferndale SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

CD sets from previous years  
also available. See the complete  
list at [www.prca.org/current](http://www.prca.org/current).

**TEACHERS NEEDED**

The Protestant Reformed School  
Society of Wingham, Ontario, Cana-  
da, is planning to start a Protestant  
Reformed school in September 2009,  
Lord willing. We are seeking an el-  
ementary teacher to teach a class of  
16 students in grades K-6. Volunteer  
assistance will be available. We are  
also seeking a teacher for a class of  
9 students in grades 7-12. Teaching  
will be assisted by online curriculum  
for the upper grades. For more infor-  
mation, contact board vice-president  
Mr. Harvey Kikkert at (519)523-4823  
or email [hkikkert@hurontel.on.ca](mailto:hkikkert@hurontel.on.ca).

**NOTICE!**

Classis West of the Protestant  
Reformed Churches in America will  
convene at the Edgerton Protestant  
Reformed Church in Edgerton, MN,  
on Wednesday, March 4, 2009, at  
8:30 A.M. All material for the meeting's  
agenda should be in the hands of the  
stated clerk by Monday, February 2,  
2009. Delegates or visitors who will  
need lodging or transportation should  
notify Edgerton's clerk, Mr. Jim Ver  
Hey ([jverhey@falconpallet.com](mailto:jverhey@falconpallet.com) or  
507-442-4934), for arrangements. An  
officebearers' conference will precede  
the meeting on Tuesday, March 3, be-  
ginning at 9:00 A.M., and its theme will  
be "Catechizing Our Youth."

Rev. Richard J. Smit, Stated Clerk

**NOTICE!!**

All students enrolled in the Prot-  
estant Reformed Seminary who will  
be in need of financial assistance for  
the coming school year are asked  
to contact the Student Aid Commit-  
tee secretary, Mr. Stefan Engelsma  
(Phone: 616-662-9363). This con-  
tact should be made before the next  
scheduled meeting, February 16,  
2009, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Stefan Engelsma, Secretary

CLASSIS WEST OF THE  
PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES IN AMERICA

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

EDGERTON, MINNESOTA

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2009

**"CATECHIZING OUR YOUTH"**

Feed my lambs (John 21:15)

9:00 A.M.

Keynote Address:

**A Historical Emphasis on  
Catechical Instruction**

Rev. Steven Key  
Pastor, Hull PRC (Hull, IA)

10:30 A.M.

**Antithetical  
Catechetical Instruction  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Rev. Nathan Langerak  
Pastor, South Holland PRC  
(South Holland, IL)

12:00 P.M.

**Lunch**

1:00 P.M.

**The Involvement of the  
Elders in Catechism**

Mr. James Regnerus  
Elder, Doon PRC (Doon IA)  
Principal, Trinity Christian High School  
(Hull, IA)

2:45 P.M.

**Practical Applications  
of Catechism**

Rev. David Overway  
Pastor, Doon PRC (Doon, IA)

All past and present officebear-  
ers, as well as all other interested  
people, are invited to attend. After  
the noon meal, a free-will offering  
will be taken to defray expenses.