

# THE *August 2008* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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# Make Sure Your Election and Calling

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

II Peter 1:10, 11

**T**hese young Christians needed to be steadfast (3:17), that is, established in the truth. They were troubled by false teachers and scoffers. God's promise concerning Christ's return was being fiercely challenged. As a result they were wondering whether God's promise of Christ's return was ever going to be kept. This shook their faith and their salvation to the core, so that they were beginning even to wonder if they were elect.

In this light we can see why Peter began by assuring them

*Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.*

that they possess the very same "precious faith" that he and the other apostles have (1). Then he reminds them that nothing less than God's power has given them all that they need for life and godliness (3). Also the knowledge of God's great and precious promises ought to assure them not only that they have "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," but also that they have been made "partakers of the divine nature" (4).

There are two ways they can be assured, and thus established and steadfast. First, by remembering the truth of Scripture that they had been taught (1:12-15; 3:2; 3:16, 17). And second, by living their faith and even growing in it by fulfilling the calling that arises from this faith. This they are to do with diligence—make haste. The false teachers are fierce and persistent. So they are to "give diligence" (10), even "all diligence" (5).

That about which Peter wants them to be diligent is the activity of making sure for themselves their calling and election. First,

God elects. Before the foundation of the world God unchangeably purposed, out of mere grace, to choose a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom God eternally appointed to be the Mediator and Head of the elect. God decreed to give these elect to Christ to be saved by Him. As a part of the decree of election God determined effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, giving to them faith, justification, sanctification, preservation, and then glorification. This decree of election is a demonstration of His mercy and is for the praise of His glorious grace (cf. Canons I, 7).

During the course of the earthly life of the elect, God calls them, working in them true conversion. He causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and He, by His Spirit, powerfully enlightens their minds, so they can rightly understand the things of the Spirit, and He infuses new qualities into their will, activating it so they are able to do good works. By this irresistible call the

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#### 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@rfa.org](mailto:tim@rfa.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. VanHerik  
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))

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elect sinners come to Jesus (cf. Canons III/IV, 11).

Both election and calling are gracious works of God on His people. The former, God does in eternity and the latter He does in the course of the lifetime of each elect. This means that God calls us to salvation because He has chosen us. One who is not elected will not be efficaciously called. Because election and calling are God's work, they are forever firm and sure.

Our text speaks of a responsibility that arises out of these works of God in His people. As God calls those whom He has elected, so He continues to work graciously in them, so that normally they gain the assurance of their eternal and unchangeable election. Our text is looking at this assurance: make your calling and election *sure*. The specific language of the original text makes this even more obvious: "make sure for yourselves," that is, make your calling and election sure before your own consciousness.

God does not want His adopted children to be unsure of His relationship to them and of their relationship to Him. No earthly parent wants his child to doubt this relationship. So also the heavenly Father delights to have His children secure in the knowledge of His relationship to them and of their relationship to Him. He wants us to know that He has called and chosen us, and that our salvation is sure and steadfast.

So Peter is not telling the saints to make secure God's works. Rather he is urging them to make sure to themselves that God is working in them. God's works are definite and sure, never indefinite and tentative. Divine election will never fail, and divine calling will never be revoked. But remember that these young Christians were being attacked by false teachers who

challenged the apostles' teachings. The devil loves to make us insecure about God's relationship to us. While he is never able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, he is able to make us lose the assurance of His love.

How do we make our calling and election sure before our own consciousness? Not by inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God (cf. Deut. 29:29). But by diligently doing everything we can to grow in our faith so it bears the fruit of the seven graces listed in verses 5 and 6. We gain the assurance of our eternal and unchangeable election by observing in ourselves (with spiritual joy and holy pleasure) the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God—such as a true faith in Christ, childlike awe of God and of His works, godly sorrow for our sin, and a hungering and thirsting after righteousness (cf. Canons I, 12).

The apostle Peter admonishes these young Christians to be diligent about this duty. About this important matter they ought not procrastinate. They are to "give diligence"—make haste. It is extremely important. We must be constantly conscious of where the devil is attacking. That which he hates the most is the relationship God establishes with His own in Christ. While Satan cannot ever undo God's work, he focuses great attention on destroying our consciousness of that relationship.

One of the reasons the devil hates for us to be sure of God's relationship to us and of ours to Him is the wonderful, enriching fruits produced by the assurance and certainty of our calling and election.

The first fruit pointed out in our text is that "ye shall never fall." This "fall" is a fall into doubt and fear under the influence of the false teachers. Because Satan is always striving

to make God's children lose the sense of their secure relationship with Him, their diligence to make their calling and election sure to themselves also assures them for the future. God will surely bring them into His kingdom. We are to have no worries or fear. God will supply our every need. Jesus will return soon. He will bring us safely home.

The second and related fruit is that they would "be established in the present truth" (12). Then their "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" would not be "barren nor unfruitful" (8). The believer's sense of security is based only on his keeping conscious knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is his Lord. It is when we focus on ourselves and the circumstances of our life that we fall into doubt and fear. But when we remember who is Lord and that He is our Lord, then we are established and steadfast. In God's love abiding we have joy and peace.

The assurance of our calling and election is the certainty of our hope. We will have an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior. We need not fear that if we miss the return of Jesus then we will not be able to partake of His kingdom—something the Thesalonians also mistakenly feared. The kingdom of Christ is ours whether we are alive when Jesus returns or whether we will have died before He returns. We will be welcomed into His kingdom in either case. Of that we need not doubt.

The sense and certainty of our election and calling afford the child of God four things. First, additional reason for daily humility before God. Second, reason to adore the depth of God's mercies. Third, reason to cleanse ourselves. And fourth, reason to render grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great love toward us (cf. Canons I, 13).

Remember these truths (12-15). Remember them, and thus be established in them. Then you will not be easily shaken. Be diligent

to make your calling and election sure to yourself! The winds blown by the false teachers and

scoffers may howl around you, but your faith will be steadfast, built on the solid rock of Jesus, the Savior and Lord. 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Review of a Significant Book—

*Trinity and Covenant: God As Holy Family,*

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

Normally we do not use editorials for the purpose of reviewing and promoting a book. In this case we gladly make an exception, not only because of who authored the book, Prof. David J. Engelsma, who was granted emeritus status at this year's synod following 45 years in the active ministry, the last 20 years of which were devoted to our seminary in the Dogmatics department, but especially because of the book's subject matter, namely, God as God triune, and that in connection with the truth of the covenant. What is more basic to the unique identity of the Christian faith than God as the Triune One, and what to Reformed theology than its covenantal emphasis?

As well, this 'little book,' dealing as it does with the nature of God triune as the covenantal God, takes us, by necessary inference, to the heart of the burning theological issue of our day, namely, what is the nature of God's covenant with man, and in particular with His own people—conditional or unconditional? (cf. chap. 5). This is *the* theological issue of the day. If the professor's reading of Jehovah God's self-revelation through the Son incarnate and the Scriptures is correct, his conclusion, namely, that it is a covenant of the unconditional variety, is difficult to refute.

The undersigned offered a review of Prof. Engelsma's book in the *Reformed Journal* (2007, Spring issue). But, due to what we have stated above, we are convinced this book deserves to be more widely promoted, especially among our own people (as well as others who read the *SB*).

It is the author's expressed desire to inject a lively interest back into the church's confession of the doctrine of God's Trinitarian life, which is to say, confessing it as a doctrine, a revelation of God through His incarnate Son, which has clear practical significance for the whole of the Christian's life in its various relationships. This he is convinced can be done. The Reformed tradition has at its disposal all the theological material necessary for the task (pp. ix, 6, 11), but it can be done only if Reformed theologians can throw off what the Professor calls a "fear of the three," and then are willing to reconsider the truth of God triune with the emphasis being that of friendship, fellowship, and bonds of love—or, if you will, that of Jehovah being the family God in and of Himself (pp. 62 ff.). The author does not claim originality in this notion and insight. It has been set forth by such theologians as Augustine (cf. p. 5), as well as by Bavinck, Kuyper, and Hoeksema. However, the problem, according to the author, is that, other than Hoeksema, and Bavinck

to a degree (p. 11), theologians have been reluctant to seize upon the significance of this aspect of God's triune life and develop its implications accordingly.

Having the courage of his convictions, Engelsma lets the reader know in the opening words of his preface where his criticism lies.

The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the church in the West has not done justice to the threeness of God. There has been fear of a strong, bold confession of threeness as though this would imply, or lead to, tritheism.... This hesitation has kept the church from doing justice to the significance of the Trinity for the Christian life" (Preface, p. ix).

Note the careful wording. The Professor is not finding fault with the ancient and venerable creeds of the church of the West, as though the fathers failed to do their work with the care and biblical precision required. He is in full accord with the great Christological creeds, in fact in fuller accord than Calvin himself was (cf. below), giving some substance to the author's criticism of the much revered "master of theology" and his Trinitarian view.

Nor is it Engelsma's contention that the great theologians of the post-Nicene church have failed to *defend* God's threeness. He acknowledges they have, and

well. But a defense is not the same as *development* (pp. 24, 25).

Rather, it is Engelsma's contention that in developing God's self-revelation as being three divine persons, the fear of the charge of tritheism over the centuries has so dominated the church's leading thinkers that, when it came to following the road along which the truth of God as the great Three in One should have led them, one by one they halted. As a result, the threeness of God became the road less traveled by, or, to use Engelsma's wording, that one aspect of the doctrine of God triune to which Christ's church has failed to do full justice (cf. preface). Failing to do justice to something in theology is not the same as ignoring it all together, nor is it the same as being in error about what one says, but it is bound to have serious consequences as time goes on, and, as should be readily apparent, this is the more true the more central the doctrine in question is. And what doctrine is more central to the life and confession of the Christian faith in the New Testament era than that of God as God triune?

Of special interest is Engelsma's critique of Calvin and his Trinitarian views. Recognizing full well Calvin's valuable contributions to the church's understanding of God as God triune, Engelsma is yet bold enough to lay at Calvin's door primarily the hesitancy of the church of the West to stress the threeness of God within His being. Engelsma asserts that Calvin, for all his orthodoxy on the doctrine of the Trinity, was yet, due to his zeal to safeguard God's oneness and the unity between the Divine Persons, hampered by a "fear of the three!" (pp. 32, 33).

Truth be told, Calvin in his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is certainly not beyond criticism. The reality is that Calvin, for all his orthodoxy, was not happy with, nor in the final

analysis in full agreement with the language of the Nicene Creed. He was at odds with the teaching of the Nicene Creed on the eternal generation of the Son. The Nicene Creed teaches that the Father's begetting of the Son pertains to the very being or essence of the Son Himself. That this is the creed's view is clear from the phrase translated "God (out) of God." This Calvin declared to be a "hard saying." All that Calvin would subscribe to was a generation of the Son's person. As to the Son's essence or deity, He, like the Father, is un-derived. This became known as the *aseity* (the self-existence) of the Son. Calvin's teaching on this matter created no small stir in his own day. John Murray describes it in terms of "the furor which Calvin's insistence upon the self-existence of the Son as to his deity aroused at the time of the Reformation" (*Westminster TJ* 25, May 1963: 141).

On this issue there has been no consensus among Reformed theologians to the present day. There remains room for ongoing discussion.

Where Engelsma stands on this issue is no mystery, namely, in full accord with Nicea. "...the begetting of the Son is the Father's bringing forth of the Son, not only with regard to the Son's person but also with regard to the Son's being" (p. 59). This being his conviction, Engelsma takes Calvin to task. Though Calvin's intentions were good, namely, to safeguard God triune's oneness, it is Engelsma's contention that

So did [Calvin] emphasize that the Son is equal with the Father that he did not do justice to the distinction between them. The *aseity* of the Son tends to blur the difference between Son and Father, as serious an error as subordinating the Son to the Father. The generation of the Son by the Father then becomes a rather meager business, involving the

person only and leaving the essence unmoved and unaffected.

The result is that one comes away from Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity with the impression that the life of God is the existence of the one essence. There is little in Calvin of the life of the Trinity's being happy fellowship of loving Father and beloved Son in the Holy Spirit.... One looks in vain at Calvin's comments on the passages in John's gospel that reveal the eternal communion of the Father and the Son for some explicit recognition of this intratrinitarian fellowship, much less for pointed development of this fellowship (pp. 31, 32).

As a result, in Engelsma's assessment, the Reformed confessions, never straying far from the large shadow cast by Calvin, share the same weakness. Not, you understand, mistaken in their utterances, nor in error, but weak. Though they "emphatically affirm and clearly identify the three distinct persons," yet in the Reformed confessions

...there is no recognition of the meaning of the Trinity for the life of God himself among the persons, nor is there any explicit instruction concerning the essential significance of the Trinity for the nature of the church's life with God or for the nature of the life of believers with each other. The same holds for the Westminster Standards (p. 39).

That Engelsma's above-stated, respectful criticisms deserve serious consideration is underscored by two considerations. First, the evidence of a spreading lack of interest throughout Christendom in the doctrine of the Trinity. As Engelsma points out:

...what Joseph A. Bracken has written about the Roman Catholic Church applies, all too often, to the Reformed churches as well: "Since there was no apparent pastoral value to be gained from an explanation of the doctrine, why should one bore people with

something that in the end they wouldn't properly understand anyway? The net result, however, has been an informal conspiracy of silence among priests in pastoral work about the Trinity and the place of the dogma in the Christian life and worship" (pp. 41, 42).

Who can dispute that what has happened to Rome's priests is happening to Protestant preachers as well?

Second, it is an undeniable fact that the whole drift of Christianity in its apostasy over the last two centuries has been towards the black hole of Unitarianism and its deadening, icy grip (p. 41). This has been especially true of apostate Calvinists in the last couple of centuries. Who can deny it? Might it not be, as Engelsma contends, that this is an inevitable fruit of the church's failure to do justice to the plurality of God in His three distinct persons? The doctrine is soundly formulated as dogma for the church, but where is its practical significance, and how does this glorious truth serve as the Divine pattern for all of life?

Engelsma has written his little book to suggest a way forward in this doctrine so central to the Christian faith.

Most intriguing is Engelsma's treatment of the Holy Spirit and His place in the intra-Trinitarian love life (pp. 70-81). The Spirit's place in the Trinitarian being of God is what is most mystifying and has been least treated in all theological treatises on the Trinity. Here Engelsma, with a certain

boldness, offers his contribution to the discussion of the unique place and activity of the Holy Spirit in His relationship of double procession from the Father and His Son, a perspective that, if not altogether unique and unknown, is certainly 'fresh.' It can be summed up in two brief quotes.

The procession of the Spirit is a single procession from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. Thus, it is the eternal binding of the Father and the Son: Since it is the personal essence of the Spirit that proceeds, the very essence of the Spirit is the bond between the first and second persons (p. 76).

....Scripture reveals the Spirit, not as a third friend, but as the mutual love, the fellowship, who binds the Father and the Son (p. 80).

This, Engelsma is convinced, does justice to the biblical revelation and what was suggested by Augustine long ago (p. 74).

Intriguing!

But, from this reviewer's perspective, requiring further discussion and reflection.

Engelsma's interest in publishing his Master's Thesis in this revised book form (in order to make it available to a wider audience in the Reformed church world) is preeminently practical. This is apparent from Engelsma's concluding chapter, in which he addresses the doctrine of God's covenant with His special creature, man, as that gracious covenant is meant to be a reflection

of God's own intra-covenantal life as God triune.

We ask again, does there loom in the Reformed ecclesiastical scene at present an issue of larger proportions than that of the nature of God's covenantal dealing with man? The Federal Vision controversy raging today presses the issue upon every serious Calvinistic theologian—and every serious-minded Reformed believer, for that matter.

But what kind of covenant? A covenant of the conditional (contractual) variety, or a covenant that is unconditional in both its establishment and its maintenance? That is the question. Read for yourself the author's conviction.

We would urge our readers to purchase the book (and read it!). If you already have, commend it to others. For all its exalted and rarified subject matter, namely, the truth concerning the Trinitarian God of covenantal life, the book is written in a 'down to earth' and most readable style. The professor has the ability to deal with profound and complex theological issues and then to explain them in a straight forward and understandable manner. Anyone acquainted with basic theological terminology should not need a Philip the Evangelist to climb into his chariot to make plain what is being proposed and argued

The RFPA is to be commended for the quality of this little book published. It is a book as pleasing to the eye and hand as its contents are to the believing heart and inquiring mind. 

## Letters

### Prejudicial Preview?

In his preview of Synod 2008 in the June issue Prof. Dykstra gave a one sentence review of a number of appeals. This review was sandwiched by what

amounted to two full paragraphs of his opinion of the appeals. In the first place I am not quite sure it is appropriate that a preview of Synod contain colorful editorial commentary concerning ap-

peals that will subsequently be treated by the Synod. Of more concern to me is that the author let his apparently strong opinion shine through on the matter while presenting very little fac-

tual information concerning the appeals themselves. Perhaps the readership would like to know what is really going on instead of being given only the opinion of the author on the conclusion of the matter.

That aside, I do find it rather unsatisfactory that an editorial in a Reformed periodical boldly proclaims who would be dumbfounded as if this were some kind of argument and should give cause for the appellants to retreat. This is a very nice appeal to our emotions and traditions but his purpose would be better served if he appealed to the Word of God. Tradition is great but it isn't the rock on which we stand.

Reference to the name of Satan as the great divider works against his argument as well. Must the author be reminded what our only weapon against the Tempter is? When division threatens do we look for succor to our traditions or the Word of God?

Paul Hoekstra  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

#### RESPONSE:

Brother Hoekstra's apparently strong opinion comes through loud and clear in his letter. The three paragraphs to which he objects are as follows:

The right of appeal to a broader assembly is also a blessing for the church in many ways. It provides a court of appeal to those who believe they have been wronged, rather than allowing a problem to fester in a congregation without hope of resolution. It enables other wise counselors to examine the issue. It helps safeguard the church from abuse of power. In dealing with appeals, synods must by all means give a fair hearing to the appellants and seek to make wise judgments. Appellants must come with a willingness to listen, and then to abide by the decisions.

This year, six appeals re decisions of Classis East fill 175 pages of the agenda. Much of this is supplementary material.

However, excessively long protests and appeals are not helpful to the assembly or to the cause of the appellant. Concise appeals are. An appellant submitting a long document should expect that an assembly will deal with the central issues, not with every jot and tittle of his appeal.

All the appeals are related to Article 21 of the Church Order and the obligation resting on consistories concerning Christian schools. This controversy would dumbfound the men who laid the foundations for Protestant Reformed schools, and who laid the bricks and mortar of the buildings some sixty years ago. May God grant wisdom to the delegates, and grant that Satan not be able to use this to divide the members of the PRC. Rather, may it be the occasion that leads to a better understanding of the consistory's calling as expressed in Article 21, and a recommitment to Protestant Reformed schools.

Let the reader judge.

— RJD 

### Women in Office — An Ongoing Issue

Annual church assemblies give rise to public discussion on controversial issues. As the readers of the *Standard Bearer* know well, women in office is such an issue. This year is no exception.

Turning to the annual synod of the Christian Reformed Church, we learn that this issue has probably reached its climax with the inclusion of women delegates to synod and the election of one of these women delegates

to serve as the vice-president of synod. True, they still await a woman president, and that seems likely to come in its own time.

The *Grand Rapids Press* has a way of dramatizing these events. In the Saturday, June 14, 2008 copy, Religion Editor Charles Honey writes:

Following the Christian Reformed Church annual meeting of 2006, the Rev. Thea Leunk lingered in the audience after a four-hour debate about women's role in the CRC. She sounded discouraged after what, for her, was yet another disappointing decision.

Delegates to the CRC Synod had voted to remove the word

'male' as a requirement for being a minister or elder. But they also maintained a ban on women serving in the Synod — the CRC's highest rule-making body.

"I've been living with this my entire adult life," Leunk said. "How long do I have to wait?"

Only two years, it turned out.

Today, Leunk is to take her place among delegates in a Synod that includes women for the first time in the CRC's 151-year history.

She will be among 26 women delegates who, with 162 men, will vote on church issues over the coming week.

After a lifetime of waiting as the CRC battled over the women's issue, the pastor of Eastern

*Rev. Kortering is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

Avenue CRC finds the occasion a bit daunting.

"It's going to be scary," Leunk admitted. "We all sense we're going to be very carefully watched and scrutinized. We don't want to appear ridiculous or not up to snuff, not the right caliber of delegate that the guys are."

But her apprehension will be trumped by a more powerful feeling: she added, "More than anything else, it will be gratitude that we are finally here, and a sense of rightness that we belong here."

Then the next day the same writer continues to report:

With one remarkably swift vote, the Christian Reformed Church made history Saturday by electing a woman as vice-president of its annual meeting.

The Rev. Thea Leunk, pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, was elected after finishing second in the vote for president on opening day of the CRC Synod meeting at Calvin College. The Rev. Joel Boot, of Georgetown Township, was chosen president.

Applause greeted Leunk's election by a Synod that includes female delegates for the first time in the CRC's 151-year history.

Some saw the vote as synod's way of celebrating the breakthrough after a nearly 40-year battle for women's full clergy rights.

Leunk pointed the spotlight away from herself, emphasizing her role as one of four officers heading up the weeklong meeting. The Rev. Leslie Kuiper of Wisconsin and the Rev. Laryn Zoerhof of Indiana were elected clerks.

"It's an honor and it's a trust more than anything else," Leunk said following the 10:05 a.m. vote at Calvin Fine Arts Center. "All of us as officers are hoping we can live up to that trust, that's been placed in us to lead the Synod well."

But her smile spoke of a sea change in the CRC.

"Based on the people who have come up to me, it's a day of celebration," said Leunk, who has served on numerous CRC boards and as a Synod deputy at regional meetings.

Sylvia Hugen, a longtime advocate for women in office, found her eyes brimming with tears after the vote.

"It's wonderful, absolutely wonderful," said Hugen, 73, a member of Leunk's congregation.

"I'm ecstatic. This is something we waited for."

Boot, a third-time president, recognized the moment's import in his remarks to more than 180 delegates, 26 of them women.

"Sisters and brothers," said Boot, his voice quavering. "It's been a long time in coming, that phrase, and this is a historic occasion. I consider it a distinct honor and privilege to be part of it."

It was the first time in memory that a first-time delegate was elected president or vice-president.

"I would suspect that would be a rarity, if it ever did happen," said the Rev. Henry De Moor, a church policy expert.

For women like Carol Rottman, simply stepping onto the Synod floor was a first. One of four female delegates from Classis Grand Rapids East, she gazed at her delegate's seat with wonder.

"There always has been that barrier out there," said Rottman, 69, who fought for female clergy since 1975. "Now to be here with a place that's all for me, with my name...."

For the CRC, she added, "It's coming to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, living less in the past and more in the future."

The future looks less promising to those who oppose women clergy on biblical grounds. Kuiper, the Synod clerk, called the meeting, "difficult for me" but promised to cooperate with Leunk and other women.

"I know that we'll work together and work with respect," Kuiper said.

A Byron Township pastor

said he does not oppose female clergy, but worried female delegates will reduce already weak male leadership in a "feminized" church.

"My concern is the men are sitting back and the women want to be more at the power centers of the church," said the Rev. Steven Elzinga, of Pathway Ministries. "Eventually, what are the men going to do? Are they going to be sitting back even more?"

But for most, Synod's opening day had the buzz of history being made. From female delegates saying "here" during roll call to men's and women's voices blending in stirring hymns, it was a new day for the CRC, many said.

"What Synod experienced today was a desire to work together and come together," Leunk said. "I sense a willingness to say, 'Let's find ways to make this work.'"

The Reformed Church of America did the CRC one better. They elected their first woman president of Synod. I quote from the RCA web page:

The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, General Synod vice president, was elected president by the synod at its meeting Monday afternoon.

In her opening speech to delegates, as General Synod president-elect, Bechtel said, "Help me to understand your joys and your challenges, and I will do my best to listen and learn and love."

Bechtel is professor of Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary and attends Hope Church in Holland, Michigan. She has served on the Commission on Christian Worship and as General Synod professor of theology; she preaches and teaches widely and has published several books and Bible studies.

Bechtel told delegates that in her presidential year, she would focus on education, worship, and reconciliation. "I count it all joy to serve God and you in this way," she said.

As a note of clarification: the RCA considers their President of the General Synod an annual position. This is different from most Reformed churches, which treat the offices of synod as positions of service during the actual meetings of synod, and when synod is finished the office also ends. Also, the RCA did have women functioning as president of synod before, but they did so in the capacity of elder delegates. This is the first year a woman pastor was elected to fill this office.

The RCA also elected an Afro-American pastor from New York, the Rev. James Seawood, as vice-president. This was not the first time for this. About 20 years ago the RCA elected their first. The unique combination of a woman president and a black vice-president occasioned many a comparison to Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama. In the RCA it was called "engaging our multiracial at the top." There was some nasty exchange in the public pulse. What offended the Religion Editor in the *GR Press* was this:

What is troubling is their equating overdue cultural change with political expediency. Please. If you take your Bible seriously, why would you hammer the church for seriously trying to serve, and be served by, people of every tribe, tongue, and yes, gender? Of course, anyone holding church office, whether president or pastor, should be fully qualified to do so. But, certainly, it's a plus if that person enriches the church with new perspectives and expressions of faith by virtue of what they have experienced differently from white guys like me.

In contrast to the CRC and the RCA is a report from the PCA, the Presbyterian Church of America.

A little background information may be helpful. You may know that last year, 2007, the PCA decided "to terminate our

recognition of the Christian Reformed Church as a church in ecclesiastical fellowship immediately." This was in response to the CRC decision to allow women in office. The PCA bans the ordination of women to any office, but allows churches to appoint women to assist the male deacons, and permits them to be called "deaconesses." The OPC, last year, likewise broke off ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC over the women in office issue.

This year the PCA faced the women in office from within their own churches. I quote from their web page:

#### GENERAL ASSEMBLY REJECTS DEACONESS STUDY COMMITTEE

On Wednesday, June 11, 2008, the PCA's General Assembly voted to reject an overture that recommended forming a study committee to discuss the issue of women deacons.

"This is not a new area of study," said Fred Greco, who served as the chair of the Overtures Committee, which recommended that the General Assembly dismiss the deaconess overture. "There is plenty of existing material on the subject, and our Book of Church Order is clear (that ordained church officers are to be men)."

Greco also expressed concern that further study of this issue would polarize advocates on either side—causing deepening division in the church.

Bryan Chapell, who presented the minority report on this issue, disagreed.

"We have to listen to one another," said Chapell, who serves as president of Covenant Theological Seminary. "We have to be willing to talk about difficult things without fear of demoralizing the church. We must get people together in the same room to talk about difficult issues in an atmosphere that's not highly charged."

The minority report recommended that a committee comprised of theologians on both

sides of the issue—including Tim Keller, Phil Ryken, Ligon Duncan, and Jimmy Agan—meet together over the coming year to come to a Scriptural understanding of deaconesses. After an hour of debate and multiple motions from the floor, the minority report was eventually defeated.

Fred Greco urged continued discussion about this issue, but at the local level. "We recommend that the church address these issues constitutionally, through presbyteries working in a local context and raising up amendments for General Assembly. There are venues for this discussion to take place in a less confrontational, more grassroots way."

During the debate on the floor, a number of commissioners spoke to those in the minority, especially the rising generation of PCA leaders.

"We need to celebrate the young men who want to dive into the PCA and study these issues," said Mike Khandijan of Chapelgate Presbyterian in Maryland.

"It's not the issue before us, but *how* we deal with the issue before us," said Joe Novenson of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian in Tennessee. "That's part of the Reformed tradition, and how we have addressed issues in the past."

And another pastor spoke directly to women, "There's much we need to do—we're failing to love fully half of the body of Christ," said Jonathan Inman, pastor of Grace and Peace PCA in Asheville, N.C. "I'm sorry for the ways the church has offended women and often been unaware of it."

In the end, a majority of the Assembly voted to follow the recommendation of the Overtures Committee, comprised of 80 ruling and teaching elders, who debated the overture for five and a half hours on Tuesday before making their recommendation to answer Overture 9 in the negative. (Overture 9, submitted by the Philadelphia Presbytery, recommended that the General Assembly "erect a study committee on deaconesses" to determine

whether the election of women to the office of deacon is contrary to the Book of the Church Order, and to determine more clearly the role of women in diaconal ministry.)

A number of things come to mind as to how we react to this annual confrontation within churches over women in office.

One thing is that it is rather staggering how persistent the advocates of women in office are. There are all sorts of reasons for this, of course, but one conclusion is clear, they will not stop until they accomplish their goal of having women in office. Even though the PCA stands strong in rejecting women in office today, and we thank God for that, it is discouraging to read of the presence of opposition and the lack of effort to convince each other that it is wrong. The deliberation seems to go in the direction of how to talk it out; and, if history speaks, the more talking advocates of women in office do, the more influence they have. Talking and discussion are not the answer, careful study of God's Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to work is crucial for a solution.

A definite pattern arises when you study the history of the struggle of the place of women in the church. The *GR Press* made a telling timeline of the CRC. 1927—Johanna Timmer appointed to faculty of Calvin College, later director of Kuiper College; 1933—Johanna Veenstra dies from appendectomy while serving as pioneer missionary in Nigeria; 1957—Women allowed to vote on budgets and other local church issues (at congregational meetings); 1973—Synod gets 80-page report on women in office, defers action; 1977—Committee for Women in CRC is launched to advocate women's ordination through voices of Joan Flikkema, Carol Rottman,

and others; 1978—Synod enables women to become ordained deacons; 1978—Marchiene Rienstra, graduate of Calvin Seminary, applies for ordination as minister but is denied (she leaves the CRC and is ordained in the Presbyterian Church); 1979—Synod repeals its 1978 decision about female deacons; 1984—Synod reinstates female deacons; 1990—by a 99-84 vote after 8 hours of debate, Synod enables women to become ordained elders and ministers; 1992—Synod reverses 1990 decision about female elders and ministers; 1995—following more reversals in 1993 and 1994, Synod reinstates women elders and deacons; 1996—Ruth Hoffman, pastor of First Toronto CRC becomes first woman ordained minister; 1996—Mary Hulst, pastor of Eastern Ave CRC becomes first woman ordained minister in USA; 2007—Synod ratifies 2006 decision to remove word "male" from requirements for office, and enables women to serve as delegates to Synod.

Did you observe the progression; women in missions—women at congregational meetings—women deacons—women elders and ministers—women at Synod?

Interviews recorded by Press reporters of those men and women who advocate women in office focus entirely on women's gifts, equality of the sexes, changing times, and most of all hermeneutical practices that allow for biblical interpretation that contradicts the clear and simple reading of the text. Opponents cry in tears that the Bible gives authority in the church to the man and forbids it to the woman. It means nothing to advocates for women in office because their method of interpreting the Bible allows for it. This makes them so persistent and convinced. They have an allegiance to the Bible, and they are convinced that their interpretation of the Bible

not only allows for but calls for women in office. This makes one tremble in holy anger because they pass off the lie for the truth, and in the name of faithfulness to the Bible introduce into the church evil practices. Ultimately this is blindness from above. It is God's judgment upon unfaithful church leaders.

At the same time, it makes us grieve. God's Word is the product of the Holy Spirit, His gift to the church. Nothing grieves the Holy Spirit more than to see the church distort His Word and turn the truth into the lie. It is Satan's ultimate victory. We take our cue from the Spirit of God. We do not gloat in the apostasy of any church. We grieve with the Spirit. We pray for repentance and turning from evil. We rejoice with those who have the courage to stand for the truth against all opposition, even to the point of forsaking an unfaithful church.

We must dedicate ourselves to the Spirit's work. While some distort the Bible, we must concentrate more faithfully on interpreting the Word of God in agreement with the Holy Spirit's purpose. Not only that, we must with great courage and zeal declare the gospel from our pulpits and in our mission fields. We men who are called to office must be filled with passion and a burden for the souls and well-being of men and women. This includes encouraging our godly sisters, who have a wonderful place of service within the family of God, apart from the office of minister, elder, or deacon.

The Holy Spirit works within the order He has ordained. That is His promise and our motive to obey.



Henry Danhof (4)

## The Pastor of Dennis Avenue CRC

**A**fter nearly four years of labor in Sully, Iowa, Henry Danhof accepted a call to Dennis Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.<sup>1</sup> At the time, the Dennis Avenue congregation was in mourning. Early in the year of 1914, God had taken Dennis Avenue's pastor, Rev. J. A. Kett, by death. The consistory decided not to call a new minister right away, in order to give the congregation a proper interval to grieve. The congregation waited nearly half a year to begin calling a new pastor, and Rev. Danhof accepted their call in the summer of 1914. He was installed by Rev. J. Groen, and on August 9 he preached his inaugural sermon from I Corinthians 2:12-15.

While in Grand Rapids, the Danhofs were blessed with the birth of their third and fourth children, Ralph and Theresa.

Like the Danhofs, the members of Dennis Avenue were immigrants from the Netherlands. Their native language was Dutch, and they had maintained the use of their mother tongue in their worship. The consistory had taken the stand that the Dutch

<sup>1</sup> The Dennis Avenue CRC moved away from Dennis Avenue in the 1950s and is now called Mayfair CRC. Most of the information for this article comes from various anniversary booklets of Dennis Avenue/Mayfair CRC.

*Rev. Lanning is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.*

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language ought to be used for the three worship services each Sunday, as well as for all of the catechism classes and the Sunday School classes. At one point, the consistory even made a note in their minutes that it "regrets to observe that the Sunday School is using the English language almost exclusively without previously conferring with the consistory."<sup>2</sup>

Not everyone was pleased with this insistence on the use of Dutch, however. A committee from Dennis Avenue met in order to investigate the possibility of forming an English-speaking congregation in the city. Sherman Street CRC was investigating the same possibility, and sent a letter to Dennis Avenue's consistory asking whether such a congregation would be desirable. This work bore the fruit of a request from Dennis Avenue's committee that English services be held in a rented facility under the supervision of Dennis Avenue's consistory. The consistory refused to approve this request, and the services would remain in the Dutch language for the time being.

Which language to use in the worship service was not the only issue that Danhof and the consistory would have to face during his four years at Dennis Avenue. Some of the other issues they faced were rather minor, although they give an interesting peek into the life of a Christian Reformed

<sup>2</sup> *Dennis Avenue Minister Biography: Rev. Henry Danhof*, p. 2. This biography can be found in Henry Danhof's file at Heritage Hall, the archives of Calvin College's Hekman Library.

congregation of the day. For instance, an elder at Dennis Avenue was one of the first members to purchase an automobile. When the time for family visitation came around, Danhof had the pleasurable experience of riding through the countryside to visit the members of the congregation who lived outside the limits of the city. So much did Henry appreciate this means of transportation that he reported to the consistory that the elder who owned the automobile was "entitled to remuneration for the use of his car involved in family visiting in the country."<sup>3</sup> Another change in the American culture of the day was the United States government's decision to institute Daylight Savings Time. The congregation of Dennis Avenue complied with this measure and adjusted her church services accordingly. Another issue Dennis Avenue faced had to do with smoking. In a day when smoking was common, the consistory found it necessary to admonish the congregation to keep the church property clean, especially the rear of the church, where the men would smoke. An entry in the minutes laments that "cigarettes caused the church to become filthy!"<sup>4</sup>

But there were far more serious issues that Danhof and the consistory had to face during this time. For one thing, the congregation of Dennis Avenue had to be warned against the evils of the labor union. One of the members

<sup>3</sup> *Dennis Avenue/Mayfair Centennial: 1893-1993*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Dennis Avenue Minister Biography: Rev. Henry Danhof*, p. 2.

of the congregation was a member of the Cigar Makers Union. He was nominated for deacon by the consistory, and then elected as deacon at the congregational meeting. However, the consistory refused to install him into office until he resigned from the union. Danhof preached against union membership as well. In a sermon on Revelation 13:11-17, he "referred to the 'worldly unions' as a 'sign of the times.'" A different union member in the congregation was offended at this remark, but the consistory "advised the brother to break with the union."<sup>1</sup>

Another serious issue of the day was the false doctrine of premillennialism. Not only Dennis Avenue, but the entire Christian Reformed denomination was threatened by the premillennial teachings of one of its ministers, Rev. Harry Bultema. His book, *Maranatha! Eene Studie over de Onvervulde Profetie (Maranatha! A Study of Unfulfilled Prophecy)*, advanced his own brand of dispensationalism, that is, that Israel and the New Testament church were two separate peoples, and that Christ was the king only of Israel, not of the church. Other ministers in the denomination voiced their opposition, but Danhof was one of the leaders in criticizing Bultema, using the pages of the Dutch periodical *De Wachter* to expose Bultema's error. In fact, so great was Danhof's opposition to Bultema's premillennialism that it could be said, "Danhof had been one of Bultema's chief critics in 1917."<sup>2</sup> It was this incident, among others, that caused the congregation to remember Danhof as "a fearless debater and a formidable

defender of the truth."<sup>3</sup> The result of this conflict was that Harry Bultema was admonished by the CRC Synod of 1918 that his views were in error, and a later Classis deposed him.

Henry Danhof was also busy with pastoral work during his four years in Dennis Avenue. One of the families had a young child who was sick. The sickness was severe enough that a nurse was required to live in the home and care for the child, but the family could not afford it. Rev. Danhof kindly suggested to the deacons that they help the family in procuring a nurse for the child. Danhof also cared for the young men of the congregation who were fighting in the war. These were the days of America's entrance into World War I. Forty-five men and one Red Cross nurse in the congregation left to fight in the war while Danhof was at Dennis Avenue. Danhof and the consistory made a formal visit to these members and presented them with a small Bible. Danhof's concern for the servicemen of the congregation would show up later during World War II as well, after Danhof had moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan. Danhof took it upon himself to write letters to all of the troops from the congregation who were abroad.

By this time, Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema knew each other. There is no record of their first meeting, but Hoeksema sat under Danhof's preaching for a time in Dennis Avenue while Hoeksema was a student in the seminary. Apparently, Danhof had some influence on Hoeksema already at this early date. A man from Danhof's church in Kalamazoo would later recall that Hoeksema once called Danhof "his spiritual father." Another man recalled that Rev. Danhof "started Rev. Hoeksema thinking about the matters that became the

issue of the controversy" in 1924.<sup>4</sup> The acquaintance that Hoeksema and Danhof enjoyed at Dennis Avenue would soon become a closer relationship as they stood shoulder to shoulder in 1924 to oppose the false doctrine of common grace. This good beginning to their relationship would make the split between the two men and their congregations all the more grievous in 1926.

What stood out above all during Henry Danhof's time in Dennis Avenue was his preaching. Christian Reformed people from all over the city of Grand Rapids would travel to Dennis Avenue to hear Danhof preach. Some came because Danhof could be flamboyant and would often generate considerable excitement during the worship service. For instance, Rev. Danhof would not tolerate anyone sleeping in church. One Sunday, there was a man who appeared to be fast asleep, his head bowed down toward the ground. In reality, the man had a problem with his neck that resulted in that particular posture. Danhof called to the man to wake up. There was no response, whereupon Danhof called to the man's neighbor, "You over there, with the red hair, wake that man up. Give that man a poke."<sup>5</sup> Another time, the elders approached Danhof with the criticism that he was not emphasizing repentance strongly enough in the preaching. He promptly proclaimed at the beginning of his next sermon, "Repent, REPENT, REPENT! Will that be enough, brothers?"

But it was especially Danhof's emphasis on the sovereignty of

<sup>1</sup> *Dennis Avenue Minister Biography: Rev. Henry Danhof*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> *Dennis Avenue Minister Biography: Rev. Henry Danhof*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Historical Perspectives of the Protestant Reformed Churches: Interviews with Men Who Have Lived the History*, Rev. Steven R. Key (unpublished set of interviews, 1985), pp. 83, 91. The first quote is from Rev. Key's interview with Mr. Adrian Alphenaar. The second, from the interview with Mr. Homer Kuiper

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. From the interview with Mr. Charles Pastoor.

God's grace that drew the people of God to hear his preaching. The congregation of Dennis Avenue knew him as an able defender of truly Reformed doctrine. In fact, although Danhof left Dennis Avenue already in 1918, his preaching bore much fruit in that congregation as late as 1924. The fruit was that, during the com-

mon grace controversy of 1924, many members left Dennis Avenue for what would become the Protestant Reformed Churches. They remembered the preaching of their former pastor, Henry Danhof. They were well versed in the truth of God's sovereign grace. Their familiarity with the Reformed faith, as taught by Danhof, meant that they could not

go along with the common grace taught by the Christian Reformed Church.

In 1918, Danhof received a call to a CRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which he accepted. His work in Dennis Avenue had come to an end, and the stage in Kalamazoo was being set for the greatest battles of his ministry. 

## Fighting the Enemy Within

**W**ith the enemy at its borders preparing to invade, a country sounds a call to arms. Who will answer that call? Not the elderly. Not the fathers and the mothers. Not the children. Those expected to respond to that call to arms and those who will be drafted in time of war are the young men. The young men can leave their stations of life, their jobs, and their homes to take up the cause of defending their country. Their strength of youth is great for this warfare, to fight against the enemy.

Your calling, Christian, is to use the strength of youth the Lord gives you to fight against your spiritual enemies. God has given you a place in hostile territory where you represent His cause. In that place He gives you the strength of youth to take up arms in this spiritual warfare. Your calling is to use the Lord's strength to hold your own in this warfare. You must maintain yourself as a representative of God's cause in the world. Your

calling is to resist your enemies' efforts to destroy you. Your calling is also in that resistance to persevere in the worship and service of your God.

In this warfare you must first identify your enemies. Then you must know something of their tactics and strategies. You must know their ways and means. Two of those enemies are easy to identify: the world and the devil. Scripture identifies them to you. You can see them. You have experienced their power and their ways. You know their temptations. You know that the battle against them is great. They are outside of you and your nature.

But there is another enemy that is not so easy to identify and is therefore more difficult to fight. This enemy is also identified in Scripture. This enemy is given different names: the flesh, the old man, sin, the body of sin, the body of death (Rom. 6:6; 7:18, 11, 24, 25; Col. 3:9). This enemy is most difficult to identify because it is *within* you. It is in your nature, exercising its influence *within* your soul, your mind, your heart, your will, and your body.

This enemy within you once exercised complete dominion over your whole nature. Without the grace of God, your deprav-

ity held complete sway over you. It commanded; therefore you thought, you spoke, and you acted out. That way is the way of the unregenerate, and that way was your way by nature.

By the grace of God, you have within you a new nature. The Holy Spirit has regenerated you and given you a new heart, a new man, a spiritual, heavenly life. The influence of this new man runs through your whole nature: your heart, soul, mind, will, and body. By the power of this new man you think, say, and do what is pleasing to the Lord. By this power you believe, you see and seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This new man now has the seat of power in your heart.

This work of God, however, has not completely driven out or destroyed the old man, your depravity. Your depravity now has been given second place, having been driven from its position of command and control. But it is still within you, and still it works in your members, leading you into sin.

That enemy is most treacherous. It will cloak itself within you. It will hide itself. It will promote its evil ways under good motives or good appearance. It

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Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

will persuade you to do good works in order that men might see them and give you praise. It will take someone's compliment of a God-given gift and turn it into pride.

Your depravity is treacherous also because it knows how you think. It knows your weaknesses and when you are at your weakest. It will also take every temptation that comes to you from the devil and the world and will pull you toward those temptations, making them attractive to you.



You must know that one of the chief tactics used by your depravity in this spiritual battle is the cloaking of itself. It will disguise itself under good motives. It will seek to justify evil means by a good end. It will retreat into the hidden corners of your heart, and operate in its hidden depths. It will minimize its presence and power. The result of this cloaking is that you minimize this battle or even deny its existence.

There are two ways of denying this battle that you are called to fight. The first way out is to deny your depravity. That denial is not as far removed as you might think. There are doctrines that much of the church uses to deny depravity. There is the doctrine of Arminianism and the doctrine of perfectionism. Sin is only rarely talked about, if ever. You will not hear sin mentioned in sermons; you will not hear sin mentioned in prayers. Confessions of sin and petitions for forgiveness are dust-covered antiques. They were perhaps useful long ago, but no longer in today's world.

Those denials of depravity are easy to see and refute. However, you must think of a denial that is much closer to you. Whenever you think of sin as being only "out there" in those other churches, or among those "other people," or in the world, you forget something. You forget that sin

is within *you*. You forget that in you is the same root of sin bearing its fruit in all the vile iniquity found in this ungodly world. Whenever you see or think about the world's ungodliness, you must feel a sense of shame and abhorrence in yourself, the conviction of your own depravity. That conviction must lead you to humble yourself before the cross of Christ, seeking forgiveness by His precious blood.

The second way of denying this battle you are called to fight is to think that *all* you are is your depravity. You think that you *must* sin and that all you *can do* is sin. You think that you are incapable of doing any good. When you think about your sins, you tell yourself that you cannot help it, and you might even defend or excuse yourself before God. "The devil made me do it!"

That way of thinking is very dangerous.

That thinking is false. That thinking ignores the truth of regeneration, of conversion, and sanctification, the work of the Holy Spirit to *make* you holy. That thinking ignores the truth of II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." That way of thinking also denies the one glorious and blessed exception given in Lord's Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "...except we are born again by the Spirit of God."

That you can possibly fight your depravity, that you can see its evil, and that you can confess it before God as your sin are marks that you are regenerated. You have been born again by the Holy Spirit of God. You have been converted and you are sanctified. By these gifts of God's grace you have become a new creature. By these same gifts you are able to fight against your depravity.



This battle is both defensive and offensive. This battle is defensive in that your depravity is always working to take back what it lost in your regeneration: government over your human nature. Before regeneration your depravity held sway over your heart, soul, mind, and body. Regeneration, the gift of the resurrection life of Christ infused into the depths of your heart, broke that horrible bondage of sin. Your depravity now works to take back that lost territory. Your depravity also looks for emptiness and gaps to exploit. When there is nothing to do, or when you tell yourself there is nothing to do, your depravity then begins its operations, leading you into temptation and evil. It works to bring you back into bondage to sin. Your defensive work against your depravity is to resist these impulses of your depravity.

One of the most powerful weapons in this defense is the Word. First, use the Word to identify your depravity. Read and study a passage like James 1:14, 15. See where the warnings of Scripture are concentrated. Consider the examples of sin in the lives both of saints and of sinners. Trace them down to their root of depravity. Second, use the Word to rebuke yourself. When there is need, administer to your depravity the rebuke of Christ to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23). Third, find through the power of the cross your separation from sin. See in the death of Christ the heinousness of sin, including your depravity. Your esteem and value of the cross will make sin all the more abhorrent and repugnant. See in the cross your own death to sin according to Romans 6:6-14; 7:4-6; I Peter 4:1-3; Galatians 2:20; 6:14.

This battle against your depravity is also offensive. You

must take action to drive your depravity further from that point of control in your heart and life. This action is, first of all, to identify the corners of your mind and heart in which that enemy still lurks. From where does your depravity launch its assaults? What are you thinking about, and where are you, when you feel yourself tempted? These are the times, places, and subjects where you need the Word of God. Use that Word to discern those places and times that provide the temptation your depravity uses. Then flee from them and avoid them. If these places and times are not at fault, then find in them opportunities to exercise yourself in the things that are new, the work of Christ in you.

Another offensive aspect of the battle is to promote the presence and the influence of the new man within you. Turn your thoughts toward good (Prov. 11:27). Take delight in good things (Phil. 4:8). Spend your time reading and meditating upon Scripture (Ps. 119:97). Fill your mind and heart with the praises of God in prayer and worship (Ps. 146:2). Witness to those

around you of the truth of God's Word and its power in your life (Ps. 119:46). Give weight to that witness by doing good works (Ps. 37:3). By doing those things you train your mind and your heart to run according to what is new in you by the grace of God.



Here is where the battle rages: within you, within your heart and soul. This is a battle for territory, the old nature to regain what was lost, and the new nature to keep and advance from what has already been taken. This battle is great and this conflict is fierce. Before you is relentless, vigorous warfare! Required is discernment to see the battle wherever it rages. Necessary is spiritual strength to fight it, applying your strength always *for* the new, and always *against* the old.

The battle is within you, but rest assured that you cannot destroy yourself in the process! You are no longer to identify yourself with your depravity. Those things are old. They are passed away. You must instead identify yourself with the new

man, all that you are in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). Without that new man given in grace to you, the only thing in you is the old man. Such would make not only victory impossible, but even the battle. You can fight only as the work of God's grace is in you, giving you eyes to see this battle within.

This battle is great. It requires discernment to identify the enemy. It requires all the spiritual strength you can muster in defensive and offensive engagements. At times in the conflict you may think you are losing. In those times you may despair of ever gaining the victory over your depravity. Know even then that God's grace is working to keep you in the struggle. Through His grace, always mighty over evil, you will overcome.

As you fight and as you overcome temptation, give thanks to God. Be thankful to Him for the battle itself. Be thankful for your place in this battle, given you by God's grace. In this battle you have assurance of final victory. God's grace will keep you in this battle and will give you the complete victory. Fight on, then, in the strength of your youth! 

## Historical Introduction to Dispensationalism (5) Rejecting the United States As the New Israel

**T**he first four articles in this series were to give an overview of certain aspects of dispensationalism, by summarizing what they predict is going to happen in the near future, demonstrating how they have capitalized on recent world

events to promote their system, pointing out some of the folly to which dispensationalism ultimately leads, and showing how their central distinction between Israel and the church ends up effectively dividing the Scriptures into two different books to two

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

Previous article in this series: June 2008, p. 391.

different groups of people. We proceed now briefly to consider some of the ideas dispensationalists were rejecting, when dispensationalism arose in the nineteenth century.

We begin by considering the “America as Israel” thinking that by the nineteenth century had been present in the United States for quite some time, and in a certain sense is still with us today. Since the early days of this country, many have argued that promises to Israel were going to be fulfilled in the history of America. This thinking dispensationalists rightly rejected. But then they erred in the other direction, when they insisted that these prophecies were to be fulfilled not in Christ and His church, but in a future earthly nation of Israel.

#### **A Postmillennial View of the United States as Israel**

During the so-called Great Awakening (1735-1760), post-millennialism became more popular, especially through the teachings of Jonathan Edwards, the well-known Congregational preacher in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards saw Northampton to be “a city set on a hill that cannot be hid,” which would serve as a beacon to the world, showing to everyone the road to follow to become a true Christian commonwealth. In his judgment, the large number of emotional “conversions” he witnessed indicated “the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind.”<sup>1</sup> He believed he was seeing the beginning of a great

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 71.

revival of religion that was going to spread to all nations.

Then came the victories on the battlefield—first during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), and then in the American Revolution. Many at this time equated victories for the colonies with victories for the kingdom of God. Timothy Dwight, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, speaking at Yale three weeks after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, said that history would reach its climax in America, in the fulfillment of “that remarkable Jewish tradition” of a thousand years of “peace, purity, and felicity.”<sup>2</sup>

In later years Dwight went further, and compared America’s expansion westward with Israel’s conquest of Canaan—even going so far as to suggest that this would amount to the final historical fulfillment of God’s promise to give Israel the promised land. Thus Old Testament Israel was said to be a type—not of the church—but of America. And the death of native Americans was likened by some to the destruction of the Canaanites.

Americans were by no means the first to consider themselves to be the present-day counterparts to Old Testament Israel. Many in England and other European countries have done the same. But America seemed by many to be better fit for such a comparison.

Undoubtedly the people of any nation would like to think that God has chosen them to exercise dominion over the other nations. Such carnal dreams have been used to unite the people of a nation, and give them confidence as they go out into battle. So obviously it is very appealing to people in our own country to hear that God Almighty is on the side of America, and that His prophets have said that the United States

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

is destined one day to rule the world.

#### **A Historical Premillennial View of the United States as Israel**

But the postmillennialists were not the only ones maintaining that promises to Israel were going to be fulfilled in America. In 1854, Samuel Davies Baldwin, a Methodist minister and president of a college for women in Tennessee, wrote a 480-page book in which he attempted to prove that Old Testament prophecies were going to be fulfilled in the United States. The tide of immigrants flowing into the United States, said Baldwin, was a fulfillment of the prophecies that spoke of all nations being gathered together and blessed in “Israel.” And Ezekiel 38, which speaks of the forces of Gog coming against Israel, were said by Baldwin to be referring to a Russian-led alliance of European nations that was soon going to invade the United States, who then would annihilate them.

Baldwin was not a postmillennialist, but a premillennialist. He was what we would call today a historical premillennialist, who differed markedly from the dispensational premillennialists that would come later. So although he spoke of Armageddon happening soon, he saw the United States as the nation that was going to emerge victorious from this battle and reign with Christ during the coming millennial age.

In his work, Baldwin explained what principle of interpretation he was following to come to such conclusions:

To appreciate in any degree the arguments of our entire work, it must be kept constantly in view, that prophecy is of two kinds—the clear and the obscure. The former needs no explanation; to know the true import of the latter demands the greatest skill, and its exact meaning can be known

only by fulfillment coinciding with some one of the plurality of legitimate expositions, of which the specific prediction is, *a priori*, susceptible. By far the greater portion of prophecy is *intentionally* obscure. The obscurity proceeds from the ambiguity of terms used, or from symbols; the language of symbols is always determinate and simple, but realization is essential to their application to their subjects; ambiguous terms, from the nature of the case, admit of a plurality of senses, *a priori*. To determine which of these meanings was the divine intention, and at the same time to show an unequivocal fulfillment in the end, necessitates the following rule: any *legitimate, a priori*, exposition of an obscure prophecy, with which future events clearly coincide, is thereby determined to be the intention of the prophecy, and such coincidence is fulfillment. The great point of importance, then, is to be certain that our *a priori* expositions are legitimate, and a rule to test such legitimacy is demanded. The rule is this: any exposition not opposed to the context, nor to the nature of things existing before fulfillment, must be considered legitimate.<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, the author's use of the term *a priori* makes this statement a bit hard to understand, but the general meaning I understand to be this: Many prophecies of Scripture are intentionally obscure, which means that before the prophecy is fulfilled there will be a number of legitimate expositions of the text. No one can tell for sure which of these legitimate expositions

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Davies Baldwin, *Armageddon: or, The overthrow of Romanism and monarchy; the existence of the United States foretold in the Bible, its future greatness; invasion by allied Europe; annihilation of monarchy; expansion into the millennial republic, and its dominion over the whole world* (Cincinnati: Applegate & Co., 1964), revised edition, pp. 79-80. I have eliminated a few commas in this quote, to make it easier to understand.

is the correct one until after the specific event takes place that fulfills the prophecy. But once this event does take place, then we can know for sure which one of these explanations was correct.

Having stated his rule for interpreting prophecy, he then proceeds to comment on Isaiah 60:9, which reads "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far." Baldwin argues that the term "isles" refers to the United States, and that "the ships of Tarshish first" was a reference to the discovery of America by the ships of Spain, which opened the way for many of God's people to come to America and form a new nation in "the isles." Furthermore, he adds:

Now we do not claim that our exposition is the only one of which the text is susceptible, but simply that it is legitimate; this claim must be admitted, because it is in accordance with the rule stated above, and therefore cannot be denied.<sup>2</sup>

So first he invented a rule for interpreting prophecy, and then he interpreted passages in accordance with his own rule, and stated that his interpretation could not be denied, seeing as it was in harmony with his rule. This is the method that has been repeatedly used to get the Scriptures to say what people want them to say. Different people come up with different rules because they want the Scriptures to say different things. Often it is actually the case that a person's goal is first, and then his rule for interpreting prophecy is second.

### The Discourses of Fountain Pitts

The popularity of this kind of thinking is illustrated by two discourses given by another Ten-

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

nessee Methodist minister, with the unforgettable name of Fountain Pitts. These discourses were delivered in the United States Capitol by invitation of several members of Congress, on February 22, 1857 (the anniversary of George Washington's birthday). The first discourse began in the morning, and the word concerning it traveled rapidly, so that when the afternoon session began, the Capitol was reportedly filled to overflowing.<sup>3</sup>

His discourses, entitled "The United States of America Foretold in the Holy Scriptures" and "The Battle of Armageddon," contained arguments similar to those used by Baldwin. For example, commenting on Daniel 12:11, which reads, "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days," Pitts maintained that these days ended on July 4, 1776, at the very hour that the Declaration of Independence was signed. Pointing to prophecies in Ezekiel that referred to the promised land as being located between two seas, he argued that this clearly seemed to fit the United States, rather than Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

Although Fountain Pitts acknowledged that there was much wickedness in America, he still insisted that Americans were "the very best people on the face of the earth."<sup>5</sup> A statement that undoubtedly many would make about their own country.

### Dispensationalism Arises with a Different View of Israel

But then, especially after the Civil War, the rising tide of theological liberalism that dominated the churches and seminar-

<sup>3</sup> Boyer, pp. 84-86

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

ies of this country, coupled with the increasing secularization of society, provided the opportunity for the rise of a different premillennial view. Many professing Christians found it hard to believe that a country characterized by such worldliness and theological liberalism could be God's special people, destined by Him to rule the world. People pointed not only to rising crime rates, but also to the growing rejection of the authority of Scripture. In times such as this, many professing Christians rejected the notion that promises to Israel were going to be fulfilled in prosperous days for America. And thus dispensational prophesying about the imminent return of Christ and judgment coming upon all nations, including the United States, became more believable.

Dispensationalism's insistence on a "literal" interpretation of prophecy was another factor that

made it appealing. The incorrect methods used by not only post-millennialists, but also historical premillennialists, were rejected by dispensationalists. Instead they insisted that promises to Israel were going to be fulfilled not in America, but in a literal return of the earthly nation of Israel to the earthly land of Palestine. Thus while rightly rejecting one error, dispensationalists fell right into another.



It is important to remember that as new ideas arise, the old ideas often do not completely go away. We must not think that this view that prophecies recorded in Scripture are going to be fulfilled in the United States is long gone. Many of us remember how President Ronald Reagan, for example, liked to refer to our country as "a city set upon a hill." Similarly, when citizens in our country rapturously sing "God Bless America," they are often thinking

of our country as the one special nation blessed by God more than any other. And in a day of warfare on earth, it is easy to fall into the thinking that American troops in foreign lands are fighting for God's cause in the midst of this world. So when we sing "His wide dominion shall extend from sea to utmost sea, and unto earth's remotest bounds His peaceful rule shall be" (Psalter number 194), we must beware lest we also fall into this same carnal thinking.

Furthermore, we must remember that postmillennialists and premillennialists (whether dispensationalists or historical premillennialists) all err when they speak of a promised earthly kingdom of God. The church is God's holy nation, a kingdom of priests, and we who by God's grace are citizens of this kingdom seek the things that are above where Christ right now is sitting and reigning as King at the right hand of God. 

## Translated Treasures

# Not Anabaptist But Reformed (9)\*

By Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema

## Chapter 4. The Confessions and Common Grace (2)

*[In the first part of this chapter, Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof have rejected Van Baalen's assertion that they misuse the Reformed confessions. Jan Karel Van*

*Baalen, they wrote, accused them of removing from the confession what they did not want, namely, the doctrine of common grace. On the contrary, the authors point out first that the term is used only once in the confessions and there it is put upon the lips of the Remonstrants (Canons III/IV, Rejection of Errors). Second, they demonstrate that the confessions do not teach the doctrine even in places where the promoters of common grace would certainly place it. Why is it that the confessions do not speak of common*

*grace, they ask? Their explanation follows.]*

**W**ell then, my explanation of this fact is that the fathers avoided the term on purpose. The term had a bad aura for them. They did not want it. Therefore they speak of natural light and of the gifts that have remained, but they intentionally speak nowhere of common grace. This explanation leaves nothing to be desired for clarity, don't you agree? It

\* 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: July 2008, p. 427.

is a completely different way of reasoning than that which you attributed to us, brother!

But this still has to do only with the term “common grace” (*algemeene genade*), and we do not like to quarrel over words. After all, Dr. Kuyper criticizes the term as such and therefore he prefers to use the word *gratie*.<sup>1</sup> If it had to do only with a term, then you can be sure we would not have been so insistent that, with our view of common grace as it has been further developed in recent times and powerfully promoted among us, we have taken such a dangerous path. It has to do with principles, not terms.

So now return to our confessions. Where do they speak of the process of sin being restrained? Indeed nowhere. Certainly you will not claim that, according to our Reformed confessions, we must believe and preach that sin is restrained in its course, will you? Where do our confessions say that natural man is improved by a certain operation of common grace in the understanding, will, and inclinations—so much so that he shall be able to perform good? Nowhere. Where do our confessions identify the few remains and the natural light as grace, much less as common grace? Nowhere. Where do our confessions discuss a covenant of common grace that was concluded with Noah? Nowhere.

Rev. Van Baalen, you have exhausted yourself to show that our confessions do speak clearly about this doctrine. But it is in vain, brother. Of all these main topics of the doctrine of common grace, which we have summarized above, our confessions do not speak at all. And in some places they are decidedly opposed. In the strongest possible terms the confessions contradict the claim that natural man can still do good out of the power of

<sup>1</sup> The Dutch word means “grace” and is a synonym of *genade*. Ed.

common grace. And if it comes to the question of natural light, our confessions teach that thereby natural man performs some civic justice and reveals some regard for virtue, but that he renders this light wholly polluted even in natural things and holds it under in unrighteousness.

Rev. Van Baalen, you claim that a confession is almost always born out of conflict and that the conflict in those days had little to do with this point, and that, therefore, common grace is not mentioned as we might wish it to be. But we ask once again, if that claim is true, why then does the term appear only in the rejection of errors and never, where you would certainly expect it, in the positive development of the doctrine?

My answer you know. All by itself this reality stands diametrically opposed to your claim. And besides, why is not any trace of this “important doctrine” to be discovered in our Heidelberg? Why not in our Confession of Faith? Why, Rev. Van Baalen, must you resort to claims that you simply snatch out of the sky, as for example, that we deny the doctrine of Providence as it is developed in Lord’s Day 10? You simply say that, but you do not prove it. You do not demonstrate at all how this should necessarily follow from our view.

This has never been expressed by us. Why is this term, which is supposed to be a fundamental doctrine of our faith, a Boaz of God’s temple (sic! VanAndel)<sup>2</sup>, used only when placed on the

<sup>2</sup> In a work entitled “The Foe Within the Gates,” Professor H.J. VanAndel of Calvin College identified the two pillars of the temple of God’s truth as the doctrines of particular grace (Jachin) and common grace (Boaz). (See I Kings 7:21.) Herman Hoeksema preferred to identify these two pillars of God’s truth as the doctrines of God’s sovereign grace and God’s covenant (cf. *Believers and their Seed*, RFP, 1971, p. 9).

lips of the Remonstrants? And why does this remarkable phenomenon occur that you, and others who think they must do battle with us, raise the exact accusation that we push the doctrine of election too strongly? Why is it that you quote the text “God wills that all men be saved” in such an Arminian fashion?

You see, brother, all of this is characteristic. Our fathers avoided that term because it had the flavor of the Remonstrants. And you fight so strongly against the denial of common grace with a pamphlet that also here and there exhibits a tone that makes us fear the worst.

This may also serve as the answer to the “excellent words” which you quote from Rev. J. Groen out of *Onze Toekomst*. You find basically the same reasoning for common grace that Rev. J. Groen wrote at that time in *Onze Toekomst* in the pamphlet that B. K. Kuiper published in connection with the Janssen case. Both want to maintain and defend through common grace the “neutrality-viewpoint” of Dr. Janssen. It will not be unknown to you, brother, that Rev. G. Doekes, well known in the Netherlands, has condemned this use of common grace in the Dutch *Wachter* as definitely un-Reformed. There he condemned the pamphlet of B. K. Kuiper and made known in terms even less mild that no good, concerning form or content, could be found in that booklet. Perhaps without even knowing it, he condemned at the same time also the writing of Rev. J. Groen in *Onze Toekomst*.

Moreover, let the following suffice for this point:

a) That we have never ever denied natural light as it is interpreted by our confessions. We do deny that many in our day, including and especially Dr. Janssen, follow and maintain this point of our confessions.

b) Under the positive de-

velopment of this natural light, what Rev. Groen is pleased to quote (see page 66 of Rev. Van Baalen's pamphlet) is not all that is said. The Canons include the fact that natural man is not even capable of using this light aright in natural things, but holds it in unrighteousness and in various ways renders it polluted.

c) Without any reservation we fully endorse Articles 13 and

14 of the Belgic Confession and Lord's Day 10. If Rev. J. Groen claims that this is inconceivable without believing in common grace, and you quote this with such approval, then the burden of proof is still on you, is it not?

d) We have never ever denied that God is an overflowing fountain of all good gifts.

Finally, let it be said that this entire chapter makes a poor impression on us. All kinds of things are dragged in which have absolutely no connection to this doctrine. In exactly this way the brother has left the impression that it is pretty well impossible to demonstrate that the doctrine of common grace was ever included in our confessions. Truly, this chapter is a complete failure! 

*In His Fear*

*Rev. Richard Smit*

## *The Fruit of the Spirit (5): Peace*

**F**ollowing love and joy, the next aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, according to Galatians 5:22, is peace. Like love and joy, peace is also a significant part of the believer's life. In fact, I believe that it would be fair to conclude that peace is very precious to you, dear reader. We would be most miserable, wouldn't we, without the peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7) and without the blessed enjoyment of that peace with those in our earthly relationships.

True peace is not the illusive peace of the world. The illusiveness of the world's peace is seen among those nations and peoples who have been at war with each other for many years and whose attempts at peace have only failed to yield reconciliation and an end to hostilities. The world will admit that in spite of its failures to broker lasting

peace between warring nations and between warring groups in society, and in spite of civil unrest in many places, yet man can find a way out of his mess of strife, hatred, envy, and war. Generally speaking, we hear the world proclaim that peace for man is what he can create on the foundation of his own wisdom, goodness, and righteousness. Man boasts that he can and will find solutions to his problems. He will build his kingdom of righteousness and peace in this earth.

Although the world boasts optimistically of an inevitable coming new world order of human peace, yet "there is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Is. 48:22; 57:21). The reality is that the world of sinful and corrupt man is like the troubled waves of the sea: ceaselessly restless. That is true because man is by nature at war with God and refuses to confess that he is unrighteous and guilty. He willingly ignores the fact that he stands under the condemnation and curse of God and is the recipient of God's wrath, which, even today at the end of the ages, He does reveal from heaven upon

all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). Under that relentless firestorm and in the grip of that blasting typhoon of God's wrath, what real, lasting, unconquerable, and restful peace can man have?

The world has no true peace. One day it will have its worldwide, earthly peace in the kingdom of the Antichrist. Nevertheless, even while the world lives in tumultuous enmity against God, it remains under the billows and waves of God's fierce wrath, which will cast the unrighteous down to eternal destruction and endless, spiritual unrest.

By nature, that is where we would be too, except for the grace of God towards us in Christ Jesus. By nature, we could have and desire no real peace. By nature, we were enemies of God and at war with Him. Our sins are expressions of that spiritual violence and warfare against God's sovereignty and authority. By nature, we do not want peace with God, but war with Him in order to destroy Him, if that were possible. Our daily sins testify of that spiritual enmity and war against God and

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*Rev. Smit is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.*

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our neighbor. Certainly, you and I may not have murdered anyone in a dimly lit, back alley, under the cover of a dark and rainy night. Nevertheless, we have slain our thousands, and our hands, unless washed clean by the blood of Christ, would be permanently stained with the blood of thousands, slain by our biting words, cruel gestures, envious thoughts, and murderous actions. For all our bullying, hostile confrontation, bitter envying, and all that is symptomatic of our enmity and warfare against God, we deserve not peace, but endless unrest under His curse.

Since true peace does not have its source in us, but in Christ alone, we rejoice that unto us, who are of ourselves unable to have, desire, and enjoy peace, Christ proclaims the wonder of His peace for us and in us. Unto His beloved church He proclaims, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you..." (John 14:27). Jesus does have the authority and power to say and to give unto His church this peace because He is the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). He has established this peace, and He gives this peace unto His eternally chosen church by His Holy Spirit.

What is this peace? This peace is fundamentally the peace of being right with God. We know that if one is not right with God, he stands before God under condemnation on account of his unrighteousness and guilt before the law. However, one who is right with God stands before God under no condemnation. He who is right with God is justified before God. He is justified before God, not because of his own righteousness, for he has none, but because of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God imputes to us through faith alone. Because we are justified by God, we stand in a relationship before God in

which He is not at war with us, and we are not at war with Him. Instead of the war that we deserve, there is for us only peace with God. That peace is the blessed fruit of our justification (Rom. 5:1).

The dearest part of this knowledge of our peace with God and, at the same time, the part that surpasses our understanding, is the fact that although our sins testify that by nature we were enemies of God, yet God is not at war with us. Though our sins are more than we can count, and the guilt of those sins piles up to an altitude beyond the height of Mt. Everest or its neighboring lofty peaks, God justifies us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He declares us righteous and innocent in His sight on the basis of the obedience of Christ. He makes us partake of that blessing through faith alone. He views us as those who were never at war with Him but always delighted in peace with Him. In turn, we learn through justifying faith that God is delighted in us and is not at war with us, but is at peace with us.

What is so amazing is that to establish this peace God made Christ to suffer the vengeance of His eternal wrath. What is amazing about this peace is that even while we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10), Christ died for us. While we were by nature so at war with God that we were guilty of the crucifixion of Christ, yet Christ so loved us that He died for us and reconciled us unto God by His very own atoning death. Therefore, God by the wonder of His grace has reconciled us unto Himself in peace by the blood of the everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20). In His covenant, God is at peace with us, holding us in the position of His favor always. Do you see now why peace is described in Philippians 4:7 as the peace that passes all your understanding?

True peace for us is that knowledge and assurance that all our sins are washed away in the blood of Christ and that God sees us not in our sin but in the righteousness of Christ alone. True peace for us is the knowledge and assurance that God is our heavenly Father, who will always be at peace with us all the days of our life.



That peace is so dear to us because we have learned and continue to learn its great value in our present afflictions. Especially in time of afflictions that are sharp, sudden, deep, or drawn out, we are prone to wonder if God is at peace with us and whether we still are in the position of His favor. We need to be reminded constantly by the truth set forth in Romans 5:1-5. This section of Scripture begins by declaring the great fruit of our justification by faith alone: peace with God! The passage continues to show that, being so justified and at peace with God, we stand in the position before God's throne of His favor and grace. Since we stand always before the face of God in that grace in peace with Him, what then can our tribulations and afflictions be, but servants for our salvation and for our spiritual growth! For that reason, the apostle Paul could "glory in tribulations also" (Rom. 5:3a). By faith he could do that because he knew that these things worked the blessed fruit of patience, experience, and an unashamed hope in the God who afflicts us for our eternal good and who, all the while, is at peace with us.

Or there may be times in our life when the guilt of past sins begins to trouble our souls. We may endure sleepless nights, or nights with very little or restless sleep, because a troubled soul and mind are embroiled in the memory and stinging guilt of

past sins. Precious is this peace when by faith we are led by the Spirit in the way of confession and an ardent looking to the perfect and complete atonement of Christ on His cross, offered not just for others, but also for us personally.



This knowledge of peace with God will appear to others as a spiritual calm in the midst of calamity. While our life may be turned upside down outwardly, yet in this inner, spiritual peace with God, we receive whatever His hand gives us in life with contentment, patience, and trust. We trust that God, who looks upon us in His attitude of favor and who is at peace with us, does all things well.

Now, we do not always experience and live in this aspect of peace as we ought. We stand worthy of the rebuke of Jesus: "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). The historical occasion for that rebuke was the disciples' lack of faith and trust in God and Jesus while they and Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee in a gale that was for the disciples unprecedented. The ship was filling with water and Jesus was sleeping, and the disciples, being terrified, were quite certain that they

and Jesus would perish. While they in reality had no reason to be fearful since the only begotten Son of God was with them, they doubted whether Christ really cared for them and would do anything to save them. In that unbelief, they had no peace, but only great fear.<sup>1</sup>

Are we really any different? In the face of catastrophe and crisis, quickly gone is the conscious knowledge and assurance of the truth that God always beholds us in His grace and has thoughts of peace towards us always for Christ's sake. Easily gone is the inner and unshakable confidence of peace that God will work out for good all and even our worst tribulations. How we need the Spirit of Christ to work in us that inner peace and rest in our souls in which we know that Christ is for us, with us, and in us by His Spirit in the bond of His everlasting peace.

As a result, for the believer, there is a refuge of rest and peace in the midst of this tumultuous

<sup>1</sup> For an essay on how this incident in Jesus' earthly ministry, recorded in Mark 4:35-41, applies to our peace, please read Mr. Don Doezema, "Chapter 4. Peace," *Jesus Beauty Shining in You* (Grand Rapids: Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies, 1989), pp. 39-44.

life. There is a place in this life that is unconquerable from the violent waves of ungodliness that the world pours out in order to destroy the church. There is a place for the Christian soldier to go in the heat of the spiritual battles of this life against the violence of sin and ungodliness. There is a place near at hand to which we may run in time of trouble and find restful refreshment for our souls.

That place of blissful refuge and unconquerable protection is under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty. In that place there is neither terror nor fear, but only that satisfying peace with God (Ps. 91:1-5). Let us enter that place in prayer and in worship to our heavenly Father faithfully and daily.



The outgrowth of this blessed peace with God is our peace with one another. Scripture shows that the enjoyment of our peace with God affects our relationships with our spouses, children, fellow believers, and all whom God is pleased to bring upon our pathway. In our next article, the Lord willing, we will consider how this peace of God ought to rule in our hearts and lives (Col. 3:15).



## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

Mission Awareness Day was held at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI Saturday, June 14. AIM (Active in Missions) organized the day, where members of our congregations were able to meet our

domestic missionaries, learn of recent mission developments, share ideas, and hear presentations from different Evangelism Societies, the Reformed Witness Hour, Philippine Missions, and others, about the spread of the gospel. Devotions started the day around 9:30 and then 12 sectionals were available to choose from in different time slots, with coffee midway through the morning, and, at noon, an

ethnic meal of white and fried rice with 5 different toppings, or Subway subs for those who preferred traditional American food. Thanks to AIM for providing a good activity for us and our families.

At the request of the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches and with the approval of his consistory, Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, preached June

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

22 and 29 in Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin, PA. Over the past several years the DMC and our Eastern Home Missionary, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, have periodically been providing pulpit supply for this congregation that is showing interest in the PRC.

Seminarian Vernon Ibe and his wife, Melody, members of the Berean PRC in the Philippines, spent time this June visiting the Doon, IA PRC, the calling church for the mission field in the Philippines, and other area churches. Part of that visit included a presentation, at the Hull PRC on June 23, of the exciting story of God's saving grace as it was experienced in the Ibes' lives. This evening provided a unique opportunity to witness their account of being called "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:19).

#### **Congregation Activities**

**P**rovidence PRC held its organizational meeting on June 18 at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. This included elections and installation of officebearers (3 elders and 2 deacons). For the present time Providence will continue to meet at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville for their weekly worship services. We could also add here that at a recent congregational meeting Faith PRC approved a gift of \$300,000 for Providence, their daughter congregation. \$150,000 was given upon organization, to be followed by \$75,000/year, this year and next. In addition, the interest this sum has earned was given as a startup General Fund for Providence. May God's blessings rest on this new congregation.

The Council of the South Holland, IL PRC has approved the plans for a new church building as proposed by their New Church Building Committee. A special congregational meeting was

scheduled for June 30 at Peace PRC to consider a number of proposals from their Council.

Members of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were encouraged and reminded to get rid of any of their unused or unnecessary items by donating them to a congregation-wide garage sale held at their parsonage on June 18 through 20. Proceeds went for Edmonton's upcoming Family Conference.

The ladies of the Grandville, MI PRC were reminded to plan for another lunch-in-the-park day on June 18 at Wedgewood Park in Grandville.

The Hudsonville, MI PRC has experienced a baby boom this year. Due to the many new babies in their congregation, Hudsonville has moved their Infant Nursery to a more spacious room on the other side of the church. Their previous Infant Nursery is now a Nursing Mother's Room, meant for women and infants only.

The Fellowship Committee of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI invited their congregation to enjoy some refreshments each week after their morning worship service while Sunday School is in session. Members were welcome to use the back yard of the parsonage for seating and fellowship.

This summer members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to participate in a Summer Bible Memory Program. This year's program will run from June 22 to August 10, with recitation until August 17. The program focused first on God's Comfort and Care for His Covenant People (4 wks.), and then on the Praise, Honor, and Glory that Belong to God Alone (4 wks.).

Members of Georgetown also joined together Sunday evening, June 22, after their evening service, for a farewell supper for Seminarian Cory

Griess and his wife, Lael, members of Georgetown, who anticipated leaving at the end of June for a six-month internship in the Hull, IA PRC.

Plans are also well under way in Hull for the arrival of Cory and Lael at the end of June. A home has been found, but other than major appliances, it was in need of all other items for daily living. Hull's congregation was asked to donate as many of these items as they could.

#### **School Activities**

**T**his past spring, many of our sons and daughters reached important milestones in their lives with graduations from various schools. We extend our congratulations to them all. A special note goes out to Prof. B. Gritters, of our seminary, who graduated in May from Calvin Seminary with a Master of Theology degree (Th.M). Prof. Gritters did his thesis on the study of the history of the mission work of the PRC since 1924. We also congratulate Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh, who successfully sustained his oral examination before synod this June and has been declared a candidate for the ministry in our churches, eligible for a call on or after July 12, 2008. Finally, we congratulate the first graduating Grade 9 class of Genesis PR School in Lacombe, AB, Canada, who graduated June 20.

#### **Minister Activities**

**W**e rejoice with Rev. Richard and Tricia Smit and family in the birth of their son and brother, Ryan Lee, on June 8.

Sunday, June 29, the Calvary PRC in Hull, Iowa extended a call to Rev. Kenneth Koole to become their first pastor. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene at the Peace PRC in Lansing, Illinois on Wednesday, September 3, 2008, at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, August 4, 2008. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Peace's clerk: Mr. Barry Warner (219) 322-9773 or [barry.t.warner@cognis.com](mailto:barry.t.warner@cognis.com).

Rev. Richard J. Smit, Stated Clerk

### NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, 2008 at the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 9, 2008.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 13, 2008, our parents and grandparents,

**NORWIN and JANE BROWER,**  
will celebrate 50 years of marriage.

We are so thankful to our heavenly Father for the many years He has blessed them with abundant blessings. Their godly example and instruction in the fear of God have been a constant blessing to us. We are so thankful for the years of love, devotion, and sacrifices they have made.

It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His sovereign love and care.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

☼ Greg and Vicki VanOverloop

Ross VanOverloop  
Bryant and Dee VanOverloop  
Sydney and Ashlyn  
Jordon and Alyssa VanBaren

☼ Rick and Ronda Wieringa

Blake (and fiancée Lindsey Terpstra),  
Trenton, Jori

☼ Brad and Ruth Brower

Austin, Brendan,  
Alexzandria, Colton,  
Danielle, Sammantha,  
Annikkah

Hudsonville, Michigan

### NOTICE

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Church will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on September 19, 2008. If you plan to attend, please call Ray Ezinga at 970-667-5702 or email [tammyjvan@aol.com](mailto:tammyjvan@aol.com).

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents,  
**DONALD and BONNIE  
HOKSBERGEN,**

as they celebrate 40 years of marriage, on August 2, the Lord willing. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the many years He has given them, and the blessings they have received from His hand. By God's grace they reared us in a Christian home, leading us by example, and bearing, when necessary, the rod of reproof. We thank them for the many acts of love, and the sacrifices they have made throughout the years. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to preserve and bless them in the years ahead. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

☼ Mike and Teresa Potjer

Annika, Cassandra, Zachary, Naomi  
(and four in glory)

☼ Craig and Heather Hoksbergen

Colton, Deanna, Jayden, Shawna,  
Dustin

☼ Kent and Sandee Hoksbergen

Cole, Clay

☼ Andy and Amanda Moss

Blake, Alicia

Hull, Iowa

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC extend their Christian sympathy to elder Jim Regnerus and his family in the death of Jim's mother,

**MARTHA REGNERUS.**

May the family find comfort in the words of Revelation 21: 4: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Rev. David Overway, Pres.

Jim Hoogendoorn, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the PRC of South Holland express Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Edward VanderMeulen and family, Mr. and Mrs. Ryan Regnerus and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Homer DeJong and family in the sudden death of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother,

**MRS. MARTHA REGNERUS.**

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73:24, 25).

Rev. N. Langerak, President

Bert Worries, Clerk

## Reformed Witness Hour

August 2008

Date	Topic	Text
August 3	"Our Divine Potter"	Romans 9:21
August 10	"Go, and Sin No More"	John 8:1-11
August 17	"Turned From the Truth"	II Timothy 4:3-5a
August 24	"Craving Knowledge"	Proverbs 1:7
August 31	"Knowledge vs. Knowledge Plus Love"	I Corinthians 8:1-3