

THE *February 1, 2008* STANDARD BEARER

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Forgiveness with Confession

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Psalm 32:5

Psalm 32 was written by David. It was occasioned by his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah.

This sad chapter in David's life is well known to us. While his armies were on the field of battle, David took Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, in adultery. When Bathsheba conceived, David tried to cover up this sin by making it appear as though the child was Uriah's. He did this by calling Uriah home from the battlefield. When this failed, due to Uriah's devotion to the Lord and his king,

David arranged for his death on the battlefield.

For almost a year David lived in this sin.

He confessed this sin and found forgiveness only when he was approached by the prophet Nathan with the woeful tale of the rich man who stole his poor neighbor's sheep.

In Psalm 32 David celebrates the blessedness, or happiness, of the sinner whose sins are forgiven by God. This is expressed in the opening verses of the Psalm. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

In verse 5, which we consider in this meditation, we learn that David found this forgiveness only in the way of proper confession of sins. For a long period of time he had hid his sins. This had brought untold misery and grief to him. But when he confessed his sins, he found forgiveness.

We too are sinners. We too must learn to confess our sins in true repentance, as David learned. Then the blessedness of forgiveness will be ours also.



A foolish hiding!

David uses three different words for sin that demonstrate its true character.

First, there is the term "transgression." This describes sin as an act of rebellion against God that leads one to overstep the boundaries of God's law.

The next term is "sin." This means to miss the mark, signifying that all sin is a failure to achieve the goal that God has set before us, which is the honor and glory of His name. The implication is that sin dishonors God.

Finally, there is the term "iniquity." Its original meaning is perversity, i.e., that which is twisted and perverted. It is often used to express the fact that sin renders us guilty before God, which is the idea here.

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These terms are all closely related. Sin is an act of rebellion against God's authority and law. This causes one to miss the mark of the glory of God. And that renders one guilty before God and worthy of punishment. Thus David speaks also of the iniquity of his transgression, i.e., the guilt of his sin.

This accurately describes David's sin. David rebelled against God's law and overstepped the bounds of God's commandments by taking the wife of another in adultery and then also killing her husband to cover it up. By this transgression David certainly failed to honor and glorify God. He committed adultery and murder as the Lord's anointed. This brought shame to himself and to the Lord. And it all rendered him guilty before God, worthy of punishment.

This is also a proper evaluation of our sins. Our sins are acts of rebellion against God. We overstep the bounds of the law. Through our sin we miss the mark that God has set for us, i.e., to glorify God's name. And our sin always renders us guilty before God, worthy of punishment.

David speaks of hiding his sin.

To hide means to cover and thus to conceal.

Sometimes this word is used in the context of forgiveness, as it is in verse 1 of this Psalm, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." In this case the covering of sin is the covering that God provides in Jesus Christ and that serves as the basis for forgiveness.

But to cover sin also means to cover up sin, in the sense of hiding and concealing it from others.

For a long time David sought to cover sin in that sense. Rejecting and despising the covering that God provides for sin, David in his pride sought rather to cover up his sin.

He sought to cover it up from others. This explains his actions

with Uriah. First, he brought Uriah from the battle so that it would appear that the child of adultery belonged to Uriah. When that failed, he arranged the death of Uriah in battle. But it was all to cover up his sin from the sight of men.

But David also concealed his terrible sin from himself. This is suggested by his response to the report of Uriah's death, "The sword devoureth one as well as another" (II Sam. 11:24). Sin is often accompanied by self-deception, which leads one either to justify his sin or to minimize the seriousness of it. This is what David did, so that in a sense he concealed this sin from himself.

And ultimately David thought to hide his sin from God. The contrast this verse makes between hiding his sin and acknowledging his sin to God places this on the foreground. In his own self-deception, David thought that he could somehow hide his sin from God. According to Psalm 73:11 the wicked say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" In the deceitfulness of sin, David convinced himself of the same.

We must be careful not to hide our own sin, as did David. David's sin and his covering up of that sin came from the same source—the pride of his sinful nature. We possess the same vile nature that leads us in pride to sin and inclines us to hide our sin, as did David.



A proper confession!

David speaks of confessing his sin.

According to this passage, David both acknowledged his sins

to the Lord and confessed them. These are very close in meaning. That David acknowledged his sins means that he showed them to the Lord. That David confessed his sin means that he pointed them out to the Lord.

This is contrasted to David's hiding of his sins. Before, David had hid his sin from God. Now he showed God his sins. You can neither hide from God what you have done, nor show God something about yourself that God does not already know. And so we understand that David expresses what happened within his heart. At one time he sought to hide his sin from God—foolish and impossible as that may be. But now all self-deception and denial are put away and he shows God all that he had done.

Notice that David confessed his sins to the LORD. In the KJV the term "LORD" indicates that in the original there is the name "Jehovah."

Jehovah is God's covenant name. It indicates that God has established a wonderful covenant with His people. It emphasizes that God is always faithful to that covenant, even when we are not.

The covenant of Jehovah is the friendship He establishes and maintains with His people in Jesus Christ. Within the covenant, Jehovah becomes the friend of His people, and as their friend He saves them from all their sins. He forgives all their sins. He delivers them from the power of sin to live a new life of loving obedience to God that results in intimate fellowship and friendship with God. He provides for all their needs and brings them one day to eternal glory.

To this faithful covenant God, Jehovah, David confessed his sins. He did so with a view to being forgiven by God and reconciled.

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With Jehovah, there is a proper covering for sin. This is the perfect sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. David could see this only in a picture, the sacrifices. What was only pictured in the Old Testament became a reality through the death of Christ on the cross. To that covering David clung, as he sought forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

To this covering we also must cling, to find forgiveness and reconciliation.



A blessed forgiveness!

The Lord forgave David. His sin had been treacherous, scandalous, devastating. Yet the Lord forgave him.

There is forgiveness with God!

Forgiveness consists in this, that God no longer imputes to us (holds us accountable for) our sins. In fact, He deals with us as though we had never sinned.

What a blessing this is. Without forgiveness there is only the wrath of God's punishment. We are cast away from God's presence. There is only a fearful looking

ahead to the day of judgment, when we will fall into the hands of an angry God. But when God forgives, there is the joy of reconciliation with God. There is the blessedness of God's friendship and fellowship. There is the peace of God's care and protection. There is the certain hope of everlasting life with God.

And the basis for this is that God in Christ has carried our sin away at the cross.

This forgiveness David found in the way of his confession. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

For many months David neither acknowledged nor confessed his sin. What a miserable time this was. David describes this time of impenitence in verses 3 and 4. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah."

This will be the experience of every child of God who foolishly lives in impenitence.


But when David confessed his sin, the Lord forgave him.

This passage emphasizes that God's forgiveness was quick and complete. God forgave David as soon as he resolved within himself to confess his sins. This is the way God always works. We often forgive grudgingly or slowly. But God is quick to forgive those who confess their sins to Him with a genuine heart.

And God does that because proper confession of sin is an act of faith that leads one to cling to Jesus Christ. God's forgiveness is based solely on the perfect work of Christ to atone at the cross. Whenever we cling to the cross in true confession, God quickly forgives.

Let us also cling to the cross daily.

In the power of the cross let us fight against sin, both around us and in us.

But when we in weakness fall into sin, as did David, let us cling to the cross in true confession. Without exception we will find forgiveness and all its blessing. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Seeking the Unity of the Church (2)

Believers in all lands confess with one voice that the church of Jesus Christ is one. Confessing this unity, they are obliged to pursue this unity earnestly. The confession of faith—I believe one holy, catholic church—is a dead confession if there is no activity of faith that ac-

companies it. James condemns the man who claims to have faith, but neglects to demonstrate it in assisting his needy brother or sister (James 2:13-26). So likewise, one who confesses the oneness of the body, but neglects to seek the unity, is at fault.

The previous article asserted that the pursuit of church unity is a heritage of the Reformation. The reformers were, in fact, outstanding models for the church today in their love and labors for the one church of Christ.

Martin Luther, known as the man who started the Reformation that resulted in the division between Protestants and Rome, was in no way responsible for dividing the church of Christ. Schism was the last thing Luther had in mind. Out of love for the church he earnestly desired her *reform*, to be sure. He and thousands upon thousands of sixteenth-century church members knew that all was not well in their church. But Luther's love for her cannot be questioned. "The church shall be

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my fortress, my castle, and my chamber," he confessed.

Luther went out of his way to stress the unity of the church. In his commentary on Genesis 17, where God promises that one people will come from Abraham and Sarah, Luther comments:

This appellation serves to praise the unity of the church, for God does not want a large number of churches. It is for this reason that He unites all nations in such a manner that one is their father, namely, Abraham, and one is their mother, namely, Sarah, and that thus their descendants, even though they are spread over a very wide area, become indivisible and remain in perfect unity, with the result that just as there is one God, so one church is to be gathered from many kings and peoples, whose father is Abraham and whose mother is Sarah.

In one of Luther's printed personal prayers, he reflects on the church:

I believe that throughout the whole wide world there is only one holy, universal, Christian church, which is nothing other than the gathering or congregation of saints—pious believers on earth. This church is gathered, preserved, and governed by the same Holy Spirit and is given daily increase by means of the sacraments and the word of God. I believe that no one can be saved who is not in this gathering or community, harmoniously sharing the same faith with it, the same word, sacraments, hope, and love.

In his ninety-five theses and subsequent writings Luther touched on the heart of the Romish error of works righteousness. That he was hardly seeking to divide the church is evident from his humble letters to his superiors, including the pope. His appeals fell on deaf ears. The pope excommunicated Luther while Luther was trying to help the church.

In spite of his ill treatment by the Romish church, when various attempts at reunion were proposed—usually by political rulers—Luther was willing to participate to the extent that he could. In these efforts to heal the schism, Luther wrote documents setting forth the truth that alone could unify. Luther was not alone in these efforts. Luther's close friend Melancthon, as well as the reformers Bucer and Calvin, all participated in conferences called by the emperor in 1540-41 for the purpose of peace and reunion of the Protestant and Catholics.

Luther would risk his life for unity in the church. When he was in hiding in the Wartburg castle, fanatics in Wittenberg were forcing radical changes in the church, which resulted in divisions. Luther came out of hiding to restore peace to the church in Wittenberg.

Luther participated in another notable effort to maintain unity within the Reformation—the Conference in Marburg in 1529. A bitter dispute had arisen between Luther and the Swiss theologians led by Zwingli over whether the body of Christ was physically present in the bread of the Lord's Supper. Increasingly caustic treatises were published by both sides. Nonetheless, when a Protestant prince wanted to make peace for the sake of unity (politically), the Lutheran and Swiss theologians agreed to meet. The proceeding did not go well and threatened to divide the groups even more. The disagreement over the Lord's Supper was sharp and the exchanges not always cordial. Yet, prevailed upon by the prince, Luther wrote up fifteen articles that, in the end, all the main parties signed. They agreed on fourteen central issues that the Protestants often debated with the Roman Catholics, such as the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, and His death and resurrection. They were united on original sin, justification

by faith, the operation of the Holy Ghost and of the Word of God, baptism, good works, confession, civil order, and tradition. And in the last article on the Lord's Supper, Luther presented the main points of agreement before stating their one disagreement. He ended the document:

And although at this time, we have not reached an agreement as to whether the true body and blood of Christ are bodily present in the bread and wine, nevertheless, each side should show Christian love to the other side insofar as conscience will permit, and both sides should diligently pray to Almighty God that through his Spirit he might confirm us in the right understanding. Amen.

In the subsequent years, the consciences of some did not always permit a great show of Christian love, partly because Luther failed to distinguish between the Swiss reformers and the fanatics, and partly because some of the Swiss theologians had a weak view of the sacrament. Still, there were further efforts to heal the breach. One entry of Luther's "Tabletalk" includes the following (April 22, 1538):

On April 22 the Swiss Master Simon set out with a letter from Luther and the following advice: "Go in peace and pray to God for sincere unity! However, this is my counsel to all who thirst after unity, that they make every effort to put an end to the controversies, that they teach the people as plainly as possible without the noise of disputations and raillery, even as we for our part speak gently, and that they do not stir up strife again under any circumstances, for we have been vehement enough. Let us now grow up!..."

All this makes it plain that Luther loved and desired the unity of the church of Christ.

Luther's "only truly congenial disciple," John Calvin, was also a

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lover of the church and defender of her unity. As noted earlier, when the emperor called conferences with the goal of reunion of Protestants and Rome, Calvin was present to defend the Reformed faith. But by the time that Calvin was a pastor, the separation was established, and Rome was manifesting all the marks of the false church. Calvin could only call the faithful out of her.

The unity of the church was very important to Calvin. This is plain even from the definition he posits in his reply to Cardinal Sadolet. Writes Calvin:

Now, if you can bear to receive a truer definition of the Church than your own, say, in future, that it is the society of all the saints, a society which, spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by the one doctrine, and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord. With this Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.

Calvin describes the church universal in his *Institutes* (4.1.9). He writes:

The Church universal is the multitude collected out of all nations,

who, though dispersed and far distant from each other, agree in one truth of divine doctrine, and are bound together by the tie of a common religion. In this way it comprehends single churches, which exist in different towns and villages according to the wants of human society, so that each of them justly obtains the name and authority of the Church....

Calvin agreed with Luther that the two key elements of the true church are preaching and the sacraments. "If they have the ministry of the word, and honor the administration of the sacraments, they are undoubtedly entitled to be ranked with the Church" (*Institutes*, 4.1.9).

Where these are found, Calvin maintained, it is a grievous sin against Christ to forsake her.

"[N]o man may with impunity spurn her authority, or reject her admonitions or resist her counsels, or make sport of her censures, far less revolt from her, and violate her unity. For such is the value which the Lord sets on the communion of his church, that all who contumaciously alienate themselves from any Christian society, in which the true ministry of his word and sacraments is maintained, he regards as deserters of religion (*Institutes*, 4.1.10).

Calvin lived in harmony with what he taught. His love for the church is evident from his self denial when he accepted the call to help Farel in Geneva, though he longed only to be a scholar surrounded by books. After less than three years, the Genevan authorities ordered Calvin and Farel to leave. When Calvin's supporters rejected the new pastors and threatened to withdraw from the church in Geneva, Calvin remonstrated with his backers. He counseled them to maintain the unity of the church in Geneva, so long as the ministers preached the truth and rightly administered the sacraments.

The troubles in Geneva—both in church and city—did not go away, and eventually the city magistrates asked Calvin to return. Calvin initially refused even Farel's pleas with the reply, "I would prefer a hundred other deaths to that cross, on which I should have to die a thousand times a day." Yet he relented when letters continued to come insisting that only with his return could peace be restored to the church and city of Geneva.

As we shall see, this desire of Calvin for unity extended to all the churches of the Reformation.

... to be continued. 

Letters


On Receiving the Word

I wish to make a few remarks about Rev. Daniel Kleyn's article on "Receiving the Preached Word," in the January 1, 2008 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

I do believe it was a fine article, although I think that a bit more could have been said. There was much said about how we should listen to the Word. That we should be quick to learn and

slow to speak is very, very true. But I was wondering why Rev. Kleyn did not say anything about the calling of the pastor to prepare himself, by much study, to bring the Word in such a manner that the saints gathered there have no just cause to criticize. I am well aware of the danger that human pride and arrogance can cloud proper listening to the Word. Pray that we

may ever humble ourselves under His mighty hand. But, again, I do believe brother Kleyn might have also admonished his fellow laborers to put forth diligent effort in their difficult work to bring the Word in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord and for the edification of His saints.

Fred Ondersma
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The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (8)

We have seen that the Lord's Supper has been instituted for sincere believers, and that all others are forbidden to partake of the sacrament. Those sincere believers are clearly identified by Holy Scripture, so that as we examine ourselves there can be no mistaking the signs of whether we belong.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 81 summarizes the biblical description of those proper partakers with three significant characteristics.

The Proper Partakers

In the first place, sincere believers are "those who are truly sorrowful for their sins."

Notice, the Lord's Supper is not for those who are perfect. The sincere believer is not one who is perfect. After all, Christ came not to save the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance.

The Lord's Supper was instituted for redeemed sinners and therefore for those who are truly sorrowful for their sins. Such sorrow is not merely a sorrow that comes from being caught and being sorry for yourself. It is not merely a matter of coming to grips with the effects that your sins have had upon others. When you are truly sorry for your sins, you are sorry because of the great offense you have committed against God. It is a sorrow because of the breach you have made in the relationship between you and your chief Friend, the Holy One who has saved you.

Sorrow for the offense against God, the God whom you love—that is true sorrow for sin. That must be our sorrow if we are to partake of the Lord's Supper to our spiritual benefit.

In the second place, a sincere believer not only knows the need for forgiveness, but also trusts that his own sins are forgiven him for the sake of Christ.

We need that forgiveness. Surely we need that forgiveness! Our sins rise up against us, prevailing day by day. So we know the same experience as the psalmist. We cry to God, not as a matter of custom or superstition, but out of our heartfelt need, as a matter of spiritual hunger and thirst, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" If you do that, then you are ready to partake of the Lord's Supper.

So complete is that sacrifice of Christ and the forgiveness of sins, that even our remaining infirmities are covered by that death of our Savior. We need not daily to offer Christ for the forgiveness of sins. We desire rather to offer ourselves in thankfulness to God for this great salvation He has given us in Christ!

For that reason, thirdly, sincere believers "also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy." This stands to reason. The one who is truly sorry for his sins, who seeks after God, who sees the forgiveness that is only in Christ's perfect sacrifice and shed blood, is one who also wants to be sanctified. He fervently desires to be pleasing in God's sight!

That is also inevitable. This is an inseparable part of the life of the Christian, and therefore of the proper partaker of the Lord's Sup-

per. That is a matter of sincere Christianity.

The insincere person will continue to walk in bitterness and enmity toward his neighbor. But the sincere believer knows the calling of love, and fervently seeks to live that way, finding it impossible to partake of the holy sacrament when walking in hatred and sin.

The sincere believer knows his own weaknesses and sins, and desires to have his faith more and more strengthened, and his life more holy. Coming to the table in that way, you can partake of the Lord's Supper with the spiritual fruit that your faith is indeed strengthened, and you receive the assurance that you are a partaker of Christ's life.

Necessary Oversight

There is one more matter that must be taken into account in the consideration of the proper administration and partaking of the Lord's Supper, and that is this: the seriousness of the holy Supper and its sacred nature requires that the church, through her elders, defend the proper administration of this ordinance of Christ.

While each individual partaker has the calling properly to partake and carefully to examine his own heart and life before coming to the Lord's table, the elders of the church also have a duty to guard the table.

In many churches today there is no guarding of the table by the elders.

Many churches just say, "Come." Even in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches, you will find a general invitation to partake of the Lord's Supper when the sacrament is administered. All

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confessing Christians are welcomed to the table. The responsibility for their partaking and for their life is left entirely to them.

But that individualistic invitation is not the Reformed conception.

The Reformed faith always views the church organically. The Reformed faith, therefore, emphasizes the *unity* of believers in the fellowship of the Lord's table. That unity is to be under the oversight of the elders ordained and instituted by Christ.

A careful consideration of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth demonstrates that truth and shows that participation in the Lord's Supper may not simply be left to the individual.

We partake as *one body*. And when God's covenant is profaned by one member, His wrath is kindled against the whole congregation! That was evident in Corinth, as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 11. There is a historical setting to what Paul writes there concerning the sacrament. The church at Corinth had been guilty of profaning the Lord's Supper! The congregation had allowed sinners to come to the table without regard to repentance. They had left it to the individual, as a matter of individual conscience. And those living in fornication (I Cor. 5) still thought it was quite all right that they partake! Seeing the gross profanation of the Lord's Supper by the Corinthian church, the apostle gave explicit instruction in chapter 6 that the church is called to make judgments and to remove those who walk in impenitence. The church must make that judgment through the elders, whom God has appointed for the oversight of the church.

The failure to do so led to the apostle's description in I Corinthians 11:30: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Notice that. He does not say, If only each man would judge himself as an individual. That also

is true. But "if *we* would judge ourselves." There must be a certain watchfulness for one another. That is part of the communion of saints. And where that is not done, the whole congregation comes under the judgment of God for its corporate guilt in knowingly allowing an impenitent sinner to profane the sacrament. Those who would breach the fellowship by their sinful walk must be excluded.

How is the oversight of the church exercised?

If Scripture does not allow for "open" communion, where anyone may partake who confesses to be a believer, what is the alternative?

Attendance at the Lord's Supper must be *closely guarded*.

In this connection the apostle makes an important point in I Corinthians 10:16-17. There he points out that the Lord's Supper also symbolizes the unity of the one body of Christ *that is partaking of it*. He is not speaking of the unity of the *whole church* throughout the world. He is speaking of the unity of the *congregation*. He returns to the same figure in chapter 12 when he refers to the local congregation in Corinth as the body of Christ.

From this we learn that the Lord's Supper brings to expression the unity that the members of a particular local church, the body, have in Christ their Savior. That is why each local congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper, administering the sacrament under the oversight of her own elders. We do not all gather in one huge gathering in Jerusalem once a year, as the Jews used to gather for the Passover. Rather, the Lord has instituted the sacrament as a symbol of unity for each local congregation.

That is why the Lord's Supper may never be separated from the

local church and its ministry of the Word. The Westminster Confession, in chapter 29, Article 3, states explicitly that the Supper is to be given "to none who are not then present in the congregation."

What does this mean, then, for visitors?

It does not mean that no visitors may be admitted, although it must be remembered that the sacrament is not primarily for visitors, but for the congregation itself.

But it does mean that any visitor who will partake must be able to express his unity with the particular congregation where the sacrament is being administered.

That unity is a unity in the truth, first of all. That is seen already in our confessions of faith. When we come to years of discretion, and confess our faith as members of the church, we confess before God and the entire congregation our unity in the faith. So in our own

Protestant Reformed Churches the question is asked, "Whether you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?" To that we answer with a heartfelt, "Yes."

That is the entire basis for our unity as a congregation—the truth of the gospel as taught here in this Christian church.

If we do not believe that, if we do not agree with that, we will *detract from* the unity of the church. We will bring schism to the table of the covenant. That is why the elders must be certain that those who will approach the Lord's table with us are one in the faith.

The elders have to answer for any whom they will admit to the

...the Lord's Supper brings to expression the unity that the members of a particular local church, the body, have in Christ their Savior.

table. They are able to do so easily with their own members, for they know them. But for visitors, there must be proper grounds for admitting them. Historically it was the practice in Reformed churches to admit only those visitors who came from sister congregations and brought with them an attestation, i.e., a written testimony from their consistory that “they are members in good standing.” If people came without such an attestation and there were no witnesses to their being members in good standing of a sister congregation, or if they came from some church of which the elders had no knowledge, they would not be permitted to partake.

That is not to judge the hearts of the visitors concerned. It is not even to enter judgment over the church from which they come. It is simply a confirmation of the teachings of the inspired apostle that the sacrament is, first of all, for the local congregation and un-


der the oversight of her elders; and secondly, that the elders cannot be expected to take responsibility for those people whom they do not know, nor of their churches. If they were to admit them to the table, leaving it up to the individual conscience, they would be making a mockery of the oversight with which God has charged them, and of the unity of the church.

The Twofold Effect of the Sacrament

Just as with preaching and baptism, there is a twofold aspect of the sacramental operation of God, a saving and a condemning operation. In the administration of the sacraments, as well as the preaching, the minister functions as the mouthpiece of God, and God accomplishes His own sovereign good pleasure, whether in saving or in hardening. And in the partaking of the Lord’s Supper the congregation acts: believing, eating and drinking with the mouth of faith; or not be-

lieving, and eating and drinking judgment to themselves.

The unbelieving who partake profane the sacrament by taking to themselves that which was instituted only for the faithful. They profane the covenant of God by taking to themselves the signs of the covenant and making God appear as if He were the Father of the wicked. So they trample underfoot the blood of Christ, not discerning the Lord’s body, and treating the elements as if they were mere bread and wine. The consequence is that they are hardened and condemned.

But for the believer who partakes properly, conscious of being a partaker of the covenant of grace, the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace whereby God nourishes and strengthens his spiritual life. There we find joyful fellowship in the life that is ours in Christ Jesus. That is communion, the blessed sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. 

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant Doctrine of the “Fathers of the Secession” (4)

Controversy over the Covenant (concl.)

Simon Van Velzen was not the only minister in the churches of the Secession in the Netherlands of 1834 to oppose the new covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen. A younger colleague, who had embraced the

doctrine of the covenant of the “fathers of the Secession” and was zealous for the gospel of grace, also condemned Pieters and Kreulen’s covenant doctrine as heretical. He was H. Joffers, minister of the Christian Separated [Dutch: *Afgescheidene*] Reformed Church at ’s Gravenhage. Joffers criticized the doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen in a little book titled, *Infant Baptism with its Ground and Fruit*.¹

With reference to the teaching of Pieters and Kreulen that many children to whom God makes His gracious, solemn promise of salvation are, in fact, not saved by the promise, Joffers charged that “these

expositors fall into one of these two evils: [either] that God has bound the blessings of the covenant to conditions; or that these expositors present God as a deceiver, who promises something to many, but does not give [it to them].”²

To Joffers, as to the “fathers of the Secession,” the teaching that

1. The Dutch title is *De Kinderdoop, met zijn Grond en Vrucht* (Kampen: S. Van Velzen Jr., 1865). The book has not been translated. All quotations from the book, as well as from other Dutch writings, are my translations.

2. H. Joffers, *De Kinderdoop*, 7.

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the covenant depends upon conditions was as grievous an evil as making God a deceiver.

Joffers pointed out that the doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen implied the falling away of those who were once in the covenant:

According to their view, members of the covenant fall out of the covenant and perish, which is not possible according to Isaiah 54:10, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee."³

Fundamental in the controversy over the covenant in the churches of the Secession, as it is fundamental in the controversy over the covenant in Reformed churches today, was the explanation of the phrase in the Reformed Baptism form, "our children...are sanctified in Christ." With all defenders of a conditional covenant, that is, a covenant that is not governed by election, Pieters and Kreulen explained the phrase as referring to all baptized children without exception. The holiness, therefore, cannot be the inner cleansing and consecration to God worked in the hearts of the infants by the Holy Spirit. Nor can it be the unique covenant holiness of the elect children in Jesus Christ, their head, as Van Velzen taught. Nevertheless, it is a real covenant holiness bestowed upon every baptized child, by virtue of the gracious covenant promise. Therefore, according to the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, it is a covenant blessing that can be lost. Pieters and Kreulen called this an "objective" holiness.

Joffers charged that this explanation of the first question of the Baptism form sins against the firmness of the covenant of grace and, therefore, against the faithfulness of the covenant God, for "an *objective* holiness that can be lost contradicts the firmness of the cov-

enant of grace, according to Isaiah 54:10."⁴

Joffers condemned the covenant doctrine of his two colleagues, which suspended the covenant and its salvation on conditions, taught the falling away of saints, and made God a liar, as heresy. The covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, wrote Joffers, is "something new, introduced by the devil, and [it] opens the way to a real and total apostasy from the covenant of grace, which is impossible according to Is. 54:10 and Jer. 31:33."⁵

What especially distressed Joffers was that the covenant doctrine of the two ministers robbed God's people of all comfort of salvation. It did so, particularly, by explaining the second principal part of the Reformed Baptism form as referring merely to an *objective* covenant salvation. The determination of Pieters and Kreulen that the covenant not be governed by election forced them to explain the second principal part of the doctrine of Baptism in the Reformed Baptism form as teaching that Baptism merely seals to all baptized persons, adults as well as infants, an *objective* membership in the covenant, an *objective* redemption, and an *objective* sanctification. But these "objective" blessings of the covenant are non-saving and losable. In the theology of the two Dutch ministers, Baptism no longer functioned to seal covenant salvation to anyone, infant or adult. Baptism was no longer a means to give precious assurance of covenant salvation—in the *experience* of the believer and the child of the believer.

Against this destruction of the assurance of salvation in the covenant, Joffers responded with indignation, comparing the covenant

theology of Pieters and Kreulen to the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.

That view [of the covenant] yawns wider than the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, through the mouth of which the three young men were thrown into the fire of that fiery furnace. For according to their view, they throw the members of the covenant through the door of "objective" out of the right to life, out of life itself, and out of the possession of any blessings of salvation into or under the wrath of God.⁶

Let no one miss the significance of this objection. Every doctrine of the covenant that separates the covenant from election makes assurance of salvation impossible for the baptized members of the covenant. Only election affords assurance of salvation.

Joffers warned his two colleagues "that they not continue with such a way of treating [Baptism and the covenant], so that it not happen to them that they be killed by the fire of God's wrath, as happened to those men who threw the three young men into the fiery furnace

and were killed by the sparks of that fire."⁷

In a devastating paragraph, Joffers responded to the mockery of Pieters and Kreulen, that the covenant doctrine of Joffers and Van Velzen was hardly a "hundred years old." Suppose this is true, said Joffers,

then they [Pieters and Kreulen] are still obliged to acknowledge that that view is a hundred years older than their "objective" view, which [Pieters and Kreulen] have drawn from their novelty-produc-

Every doctrine of the covenant that separates the covenant from election makes assurance of salvation impossible for the baptized members of the covenant.

ing pen now four years ago [with the publication of their book, *Infant Baptism—DJE*]. They are also obliged to acknowledge that the view which they mock has more support in the history of the church than their “objective” view. For that view, that all baptized children of the church are “objectively” in the covenant of grace, is an “unchurchly” and unbiblical doctrine.⁸

No one could deny that the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen was a new doctrine in the churches of the Secession, indeed a new doctrine in the tradition of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

The main purpose of Joffers’ book was not the exposure of the false doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen. The main purpose was a positive explanation of the orthodox, biblical, and Reformed doctrine of infant baptism and the covenant. Joffers was defending the doctrine of the “fathers of the Secession.”

Fundamental to this doctrine is the close relation between covenant and election.

The covenant...is secured to eternal election as is evident from Rom. XI:7, “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”⁹

The covenant of grace is established by God with the elect, with them alone, emphatically with them alone.¹⁰

The non-elect have no part in the covenant of grace.¹¹

“Secured to eternal election,” the covenant is unconditional, that is, does not depend upon the faith and obedience of the baptized child.

Against [the teaching that God makes His covenant conditionally with all the baptized children], we assert that God has not made the covenant of grace with man under conditions, properly so called, or that this covenant depends

upon the faith and conversion of man. Rather, God has established His covenant of grace with the elect without conditions, properly so called, and promises unilaterally to give everything that is promised in the covenant of grace as pure grace.¹²

Especially dear to the heart of Joffers was the truth that the promise of the covenant is certain and trustworthy to every one to whom God makes the promise.

Everything He promised, He gives. To this, the elect assent in the time of love, and this assent the Lord has promised, and that He will operate upon the hearts of the elect to this end, as is written in Jer. XXXI:33, “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” This operation upon the heart unto the assent to, or reception of, the covenant of grace and its promise God promises and gives, not to the entire [nation of] Israel and their children head for head; nor does God promise and give this to the entire, external, evangelical church with their children. But God promises and gives that only to His elect, who are the “children of the promise, who are counted for the seed,” according to Rom. IX:8.¹³

This doctrine of the covenant assures every member of the covenant, in whom the promise of the covenant creates a true and living faith in the promising God, that he or she will be preserved unto everlasting life. There is no falling out of the covenant, no falling away of covenant saints unto perdition.

As certainly as the fire of the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar had no power upon the three young men, to destroy them, so certainly also has the fire of God’s wrath lost its power upon the baptized children

who are in the covenant of grace, so that it cannot destroy them to all eternity.¹⁴

Joffers presented his view of infant baptism and the covenant as the prevailing, if not the *only*, doctrine of the churches of the Secession prior to the publication of the book by Pieters and Kreulen in 1861. He had no doubt that his readers would acknowledge this, including Pieters and Kreulen. Nevertheless, Joffers recognized the popularity of the doctrine he was opposing. In the brief period of four years, “that view has much influence in our church.”¹⁵ Joffers expected strong opposition to his doctrine: “Although I have fully anticipated that my view, set forth in this little work, will meet with much opposition and many adversaries in our church at first, nevertheless this has not deterred me from responding to the pernicious view referred to [that of Pieters and Kreulen—DJE].”¹⁶

Joffers was hopeful regarding the doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace, which has its source in and is governed by God’s eternal election of grace: “[I] expect that my view will remain standing firm in God’s church.”¹⁷

3. Ibid., 6.

4. Ibid., 42.

5. Ibid., 18.

6. Ibid., 29.

7. Ibid., 30.

8. Ibid., 20, 21. The Dutch original of “has more support in the history of the church” is: “meer kerkelijkheid in de geschiedenis bezit.”

9. Ibid., 36.

10. Ibid., 6.

11. Ibid., 19.

12. Ibid., 7.

13. Ibid., 7.

14. Ibid., 30.

15. Ibid., 3.

16. Ibid., 4.

17. Ibid.

God has not put his expectation to shame. The covenant doctrine of the “fathers of the Secession” has always been maintained in the Reformed churches of the Dutch tradition. That it remained the dominant view in the Dutch Reformed churches standing in the tradition of the Secession is plain from Herman Bavinck’s treatment of the covenant in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹⁸ It is boldly and joyfully confessed today by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

Opposition to the new covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen was not limited to a war of books and magazines. A ruling elder in the churches of the Secession, happily named G. Vos, protested the doctrine of his colleagues in the ministry to a Secession synod. This was the Synod of Franeker (1863).

Vos’ protest charged the two Dutch preachers with “heterodoxy” in their book on infant baptism and the covenant. Their doctrine of a covenant of grace with all baptized children alike, dependent on a condition the children must perform, was, in Vos’ judgment, a denial of the gospel of grace: “I may not tolerate that grace must be bought from God by a condition, and, therefore, the covenant of grace is to be compared with a business-contract for buying a house or some other property.”¹⁹

The Synod of Franeker rejected Vos’ protest. By no means did it enthusiastically adopt the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen. Deliberately, it cautioned the members of the Secession churches that it did not want to be judged as holding that the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen “is in all respects the most correct expression of the sentiments of the Reformed Church.” Nevertheless, the synod decided that it “is not able to condemn the brothers [Pieters and Kreulen] as being in conflict with the confessions of the Church.”²⁰

E. Smilde was right, that this synodical decision was a “compromise.”²¹

“Liberated” Reformed theologian C. Veenhof was also right, that the decision recognized the new covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen as “confessional.”²²

The compromise-decision of the Synod of Franeker, no doubt taken in the interests of peace in the churches—always a powerful force at the major assemblies—was destructive. It sanctioned a doctrine of the covenant that cut the covenant, the covenant promise, covenant grace, covenant perseverance, covenant salvation, and the covenant faithfulness of God loose from election. It set the covenant on the basis of children’s performance of a condition.

By refusing to judge between the two radically different and mutually antagonistic conceptions of the covenant, it opened up the Reformed churches to fierce controversies and agonizing schisms. One thinks of the schism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the 1940s and of the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1950s.

By tolerating, if not approving, the conditional covenant doctrine, it paved the way to the heresy of the federal vision, which denies justification by faith alone and all the doctrines of grace as confessed by the Canons of Dordt, now troubling many of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America.

In the minutes of the Franeker Synod, “father” Van Velzen had recorded that the decision of synod on “this weighty matter” was contrary to his advice. Joffers saw to it that the minutes contained the notation that he “protests against the [decision of synod—DJE], that a little book with a strange doctrine, which...is in conflict with the first question of the Baptism form concerning the infant children of believers, shall be tolerated in our Church.”²³

As is invariably the case with compromising major assemblies—miserable creatures!—the Synod of Franeker neither settled a fundamental doctrinal issue (as synods

are duty-bound to do), nor brought peace to the churches (as synods are peculiarly privileged to do). The strife over infant baptism and the covenant continued unabated, as is evident from the fact that the articles by Pieters and Van Velzen in *De Bazuin* and the little book by H. Joffers referred to previously in this series on the doctrine of the covenant of the “fathers of the Secession” appeared *after* the decision of the Synod of Franeker in 1863.

The issue of infant baptism and the covenant appeared again on the agenda of the Synod of Amsterdam in 1866. The Reformed churches of North Holland overtured that “synod declare itself concerning the doctrine and practice of Holy Baptism, so that there come an end to the strife between its objective and subjective meaning and sealing.”²⁴

Unable to reach agreement and unwilling to decide between the two opposing views, the Synod of Amsterdam contented itself with a decision that called on all the ministers to restrict themselves to the language of the confessions in treating of infant baptism and the covenant.

How unsatisfactory, indeed impossible, this decision actually was appears in the treatment of it by the “liberated” theologian C. Veenhof. Veenhof celebrates the decision as allowing both of the conflicting doctrines a place in the Reformed churches. Whereupon, he promptly interprets the language of the confessions as teaching a gracious, conditional covenant promise to all, that is, the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen.²⁵

Scholars of the Secession of 1834 have spoken of the “tragedy of the Secession.” They referred to the doctrinal controversies that racked the Secession churches.

The scholars are mistaken. The controversies were not a tragedy. They were the necessary, if painful, struggles of living churches, recently brought to life out of the spiritual death of Arminianism and modernism, growing to maturity and developing in the “knowledge

of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13).

There was a "tragedy of the Se-
cession."

The tragedy was that churches
born of the gospel of sovereign,
particular grace were so soon be-
witched by a doctrine of the cov-
enant that made the grace of God
powerless, the will of man decisive,
salvation uncertain, and the prom-
ising God deceptive.

The tragedy was the acceptance
of the conditional covenant doc-
trine of Pieters and Kreulen.

... to be concluded. 

18. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed*

Dogmatics, vol. 3, ed. John Bolt, tr. John
Vriend (Baker: 2006), 193-232. See
also my review article, "Herman
Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Volume
Three: Covenant and Election," *Pro-
testant Reformed Theological Journal* 40,
no. 1 (April 2007): 83-95.

19. G. Vos, quoted in C. Veenhof,
Prediking en Uitverkiezing (Kampen: J.
H. Kok, 1959), 173.

20. *Ibid.*, 80.

21. E. Smilde, *Een Eeuw van Strijd
over Verbond en Doop* (Kampen: J. H.
Kok, 1946), 49.

22. Veenhof, *Prediking en
Uitverkiezing*, 81.

23. *Ibid.*, 81, 82. Having noted
Joffers' protest against the synodical
decision approving the doctrine of a

conditional covenant, Veenhof com-
mits the illicit, but effective, logical fal-
lacy of "poisoning the wells." In a
footnote that goes on for three and a
half pages in small print, the "liber-
ated" theologian demonstrates that
Joffers was "harsh," "brutal," "rude,"
and "fanatical." The student of church
history recognizes these qualities as
virtually the attributes of all those men
whom the Spirit of Christ has used to
preserve the truth of the gospel in time
of departure. One can easily imagine
the Galatian errorists describing the
apostle Paul by these epithets. See
Veenhof, *Prediking en Uitverkiezing*,
174-177.

24. *Ibid.*, 83.

25. *Ibid.*, 85-87.

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

The Deacons' Relationship to the Consistory (4) The Consistory Meetings to Which Deacons Are Added

The working relationship of
the deacons to the
consistory (elders and pas-
tor) is evident, in larger congrega-
tions, in the church's council. The
council is the body comprised of all
officebearers in the congregation
(pastors, elders, and deacons),
which body undertakes all the work
of the congregation that is not spe-
cific to any particular office. In our
last article we explained what is in-
cluded in the work of the council,
and what it means that the deacons
are involved in that work.

In some congregations there is,
strictly speaking, no council, but
only a consistory. In such congre-

gations all three special offices are
found, but the elders do not meet
with the pastor as consistory to rule
the congregation, and then also
with the deacons as council to care
for the work of the congregation
that is not specific to any particu-
lar office. Rather, all three offices
meet together in the consistory
meeting. The deacons are added
to the consistory.

This raises questions regarding
the work and authority of the dea-
cons that were not raised when we
treated the deacons' involvement in
the work of the council. Does this
adding of deacons to the consistory
mean that they do the work of the
elders? Has God given them the
authority to do the work of the el-
ders?



From early on, Reformed
churches in the Netherlands have

permitted the deacons to be part
of the consistory. We referred to
this history in our first article of
this series (August 2007) to dem-
onstrate that the Reformed
churches understood the need for
a working relationship between the
three offices. Let us briefly call at-
tention to this history again in light
of our current purpose, to show
that the Reformed churches have
permitted deacons to be part of the
consistory.¹

1. All quotations from the Dutch
Reformed synods are taken from Ri-
chard R. DeRidder's translation of
*Ecclesiastical Manual, including the de-
cisions of the Netherlands Synods and
other significant matters relating to the
government of the churches* (originally
authored by P. Biesterveld and Dr. H.
H. Kuiper), Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin
Theological Seminary, 1982. I will not
give page references.

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sin.

Previous article in this series: Janu-
ary 15, 2008, p. 184.

At first the Dutch Reformed churches used the word “consistory” in such a way that deacons were always included. The Synod of Emden, 1571, declared in its sixth article: “In each church there shall be meetings or consistories of ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, which shall be held at least once every week at a place and time that each congregation shall deem most suitable and convenient.”

Clarification of this point was sought, and the Synod of Dordrecht, 1574, decided: “To clarify the 6th Article of the Synod of Emden, the minister of the Word, elders and deacons shall constitute the consistory. Furthermore, the ministers and elders shall meet and the deacons shall also meet by themselves to handle their own affairs concerning the poor. However, in places where there are few elders, the deacons may be admitted according to the desire of the consistory.”

Since 1574 the Reformed churches in the Netherlands have clearly stated that the consistory is composed of ministers and elders. Article 28 of the Church Order approved by the Synod of Middelburg in 1581 stipulates: “In all churches there shall be a consistory, consisting of ministers of the Word and elders, who shall meet at least every week....” The church order of the national synod of ’s Gravenhage, 1586, made the same distinction: “In every church there shall be a consistory, consisting of ministers of the Word and elders.”

Though clear on this distinction between consistory and deacons, the same synods permitted the deacons to be part of the consistory under certain circumstances. The Synod of Middelburg permitted churches with few elders to include deacons in the consistory “as often as the consistory needs their advice and help. Besides, they shall ordinarily be allowed there if they fulfill both the office of eldership and

diaconate.” And the Synod of ’s Gravenhage said: “Where the number of elders is very small, the deacons shall be included in the consistory.”

The Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619, adopted the Church Order that Reformed churches have used since. Article 37 originally read: “In every congregation there shall be a consistory consisting of ministers of the Word and elders....” This is substantially the same requirement as is found in the Protestant Reformed Church Order today. Then, Article 38 of the Church Order of Dordt required: “It is understood that in places where the consistory is to be newly established, the same cannot take place except with advice of the classis. And where the number of elders is very small, the deacons shall be included in the consistory.” In 1905, when the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands adopted a revised church order, this last sentence was moved to Article 37, and revised to read: “Whenever the number of the elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulation; this shall invariably be the rule where the number [of elders, DJK] is less than three.” In 1914 the Christian Reformed Church adopted this revised church order, and the PRC inherited it when they became a separate denomination in 1924.

To sum up the view of Reformed churches: the consistory is comprised of ministers and elders. Under certain circumstances, the deacons are added to the consistory—that is, the consistory is then comprised of ministers, elders, and deacons. Those certain circumstances are spelled out: when the number of elders is small.



Against this position of Reformed churches, two arguments are lodged, from opposite directions.

The first is that the deacons should be part of the consistory *always*, not only when the number of

elders is small. Those who take this position point to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession: “We believe that...there must be...elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church.”

In answer to this argument, we point out that in every church, the deacons *do* work together with the pastor and elders—either in the consistory, or in the council. Reformed churches who do not add the deacons to the consistory are not in violation of Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, for in them the deacons meet with elders and pastors in the council.

Furthermore, VanDellen and Monsma write in response to this argument: “But let it be noted that in Article 30 of the Confession we declare by whom the Churches ought to be governed, and that in the Church Order we stipulate how the work of the office-bearers is to be executed.”² That is, in the Belgic Confession Reformed churches confess that the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon must be found in churches. In our Church Order, we spell out in more detail what the work of each office is, and how each office does its work in relation to the other offices. The Confession does not touch on these points; therefore, the Church Order does not contradict it.

The second argument is that the deacons should *never* be part of the consistory. The deacons are an office distinct from the elders, with a distinct work; to make them part of the consistory is to require them to involve themselves in the work of the elders.

Our answer to this also is twofold. First, we have already argued in our second article in this series (November 15, 2007) that the deacons must work with the elders and pastors because the three offices in the church manifest the one office of Jesus Christ, with its three aspects. Cooperation between the offices is required.

Second, more to the point of

the smaller congregations in which the deacons are added to the consistory, Reformed churches also maintain that there must be at least two elders and at least one deacon in every congregation. "A consistory, in order to be a consistory, must have at least two elders; there must be a plurality of elders. The Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1624, declared that one elder and one deacon do not constitute a legitimate consistory."³

Two elders are required; more than two is better. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). But in the smaller congregations there are not always more; then the deacons are added to the consistory so that as many authorized men (officebearers) as possible might have a say in the church's government.

Remember, too, that in smaller congregations there are few deacons—in very small congregations, only one deacon. But one deacon cannot do the work of the diaconate alone. He can take collections alone, perhaps; but to assess need and distribute money or gifts to the needy requires at least two. Part of the reason, then, why the deacons are added to the consistory is so that the deacons also can do their work in conjunction with other officebearers.



When the deacons are added to the consistory, they are given the full right to be involved in all discussions regarding the work of the elders, and to vote in matters that pertain exclusively to the work of the elders, such as discipline.

Church polity experts have long raised and debated this question, both in the history of Reformed churches generally and in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The esteemed Rev. Ophoff seems to have changed his own view on the matter. In an early volume of the *Standard Bearer*, he wrote:

when this rule is followed [the rule regarding adding deacons to the consistory, DJK], it is manifestly the desire of the Church Order that the deacons be admitted not as a body that belongs to the structure of the body of elders, but merely as an addition to this body, an addition with an advisory vote. Even when this rule is followed the body of elders remains the council proper, the only body in the church vested with the right to regulate, to fix by vote, matters of discipline and doctrine (vol. 8, p. 44).

However, in his manuscript entitled "Church Right," he wrote:

Hence, if the deacons are added to the consistory they thereby are made elders and thus are elders in addition to their being deacons.... For if the deacons are added to the consistory, they have decisive vote in all matters and likewise the elders. It really means that the elders, in addition to being elders are also deacons and that the deacons in addition to being deacons are also elders. A deacon cannot function as an elder if he is not an elder."⁴

It seems, then, that at first Rev. Ophoff considered deacons, when added to the consistory, to have advisory vote only, because they were not elders; and later said that they had a true vote because by being added to the consistory they were made elders in addition to being deacons.

Rev. VandenBerg took the position, as apparently Rev. Ophoff had at the first, that the deacons are not elders, and so must be given only an advisory vote (SB, vol. 35, p. 381).

Taking the stand that when deacons are added to the consistory they become fully a part of the consistory, with the right to speak to and vote in all matters that come before it, are Prof. Cammenga (SB, vol. 69, p. 226) and Prof. Hanko (*Notes on the Church Order*, p. 67), as well as VanDellen and Monsma (*The Church Order Commentary*, p.

166). The *Standard Bearer* has published a detailed and capable defense of this position written by Mr. Martin Swart (vol. 75, pp. 185-187, 206-208).

The point we are making is that when deacons are added to the consistory, they are given the authority to be involved in the work of the consistory.

It is good that, as much as possible, the ones going on family visitation, making discipline calls, and doing other work that is specific to the elders' office, are themselves elders. But the deacons, when added to the consistory, are permitted to enter into the discussion of this work, and vote on matters that pertain to it. The deacons may even assist the elders on such calls in emergency situations. Perhaps a congregation has only two elders, and one of them is seriously ill or taken in death. While the congregation waits for that elder to recover or be replaced (assuming these are real possibilities), the deacon may assist the other elder in the work of his office.

The reverse is true, too. Situations might arise in which it is necessary for an elder, in conjunction with the deacon(s), to enter into the work of the deacons. I did not say that the elders as a body take over the work. Rather, that an elder assists the deacon(s) in the work that belongs to the deacon's office, either if a congregation has only one deacon, or if it has more than one but one is incapacitated for a time.

By this explanation of the relationship of deacons to consistory,

2. VanDellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), p. 165.

3. Rev. Ronald Cammenga, "The Consistory," *Standard Bearer*, vol. 69, p. 226 (February 15, 1993).

4. "Church Right" is an undated syllabus published by our seminary, prepared for use in teaching Church Polity. The above quote is also found in *Standard Bearer* vol. 35, p. 381.

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we maintain the distinction in offices, arguing that the elders must be busy in the work of the elders and the deacons in the work of the deacons. But we also avoid another danger—the danger that, if God in His providence should remove an officebearer from active

labor in the congregation, the work of an office does not get done, because only one elder or deacon is left. The work of the church must get done. It must be done by officebearers. When necessary, and with the consent of the consistory

as a whole, the work of the elders may be done by a deacon in conjunction with an elder, and the work of the deacons may be done by an elder in conjunction with a deacon.

This will promote good order in smaller congregations. 

Origins of the PRC

Rev. Andy Lanning

Henry Danhof (2) Danhof's Early Years

No one observing Henry Danhof's early years in the Netherlands as they unfolded would have concluded that young Henry would someday be a leading figure in the Reformed scene in America. Instead, the conclusion would have been that Danhof was likely to be swallowed up by the hard circumstances of his life: he was an orphan at a young age, he became a lowly shepherd tending a flock of sheep, and he had very little formal education. In the words of I Corinthians 1, Henry was a weak thing, a base thing, a despised thing in the eyes of the world. And weak, base, despised things are dismissed as unimportant and useless by the reasoning of men.

But God's reasoning is different. He is pleased to use what men dismiss to accomplish His own good pleasure. So it was with Henry Danhof. God used this man, whom everyone would have overlooked, as one of the ministers who would give shape to the Protestant Reformed Churches. Although

Danhof would leave the PRC and become independent soon after being expelled from the CRC, God was pleased to use him to give early direction and a lasting doctrinal foundation to the PRC.

So how did Henry Danhof's life unfold? He was born on May 1, 1879, in Uithuizermeeden, a town in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands.¹ Henry was the fourth child of six born to Klaas and Trijntje Danhof. His birth was a special source of joy to the family, since a number of children before him had died at birth. The family was never wealthy, although Henry's father worked hard hiring himself out as a day laborer in Uithuizermeeden.

Like several other families of the day, the Danhof family faced questions of church membership. For Reformed families in 1879, there were two main options. On the one hand, there was the state-controlled Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*). It was in this church that Klaas Danhof, Henry's father, was raised. On the other hand, there were the churches of the Afscheiding. These were churches that had separated from the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1834 under the leadership of Hendrik De Cock, H. P. Scholte, Simon Van Velzen, A. Van Raalte, and others. Because of the apostasy of the

Hervormde Kerk in everything from a hierarchical church government, to the rejection of the Church Order of Dordt, to heretical, liberal doctrines, the leaders of the Afscheiding reformed the church by seceding from the state church and returning to the Bible, the Reformed creeds, and the Church Order. It was in these churches that Trijntje Ploegman, Henry's mother, was raised. When Klaas and Trijntje met and married, the question of church membership had to be faced. In God's providence, Klaas left the corrupt state church and joined his wife in the local Afscheiding church in Uithuizermeeden. Thus Henry was raised in a faithful Reformed church by his parents.

But God did not give Klaas and Trijntje many years to raise their son, for He soon would call them to glory. By the time he was only nine years old, Henry was an orphan. He had already been without his father since he was six, and his mother died a few years later. There were no family members who were able to take the Danhof children in, which meant that the siblings would have to be split up among other families willing to give them a home. Some of the older children were able to live on their own, but the younger children, including Henry, were sent

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Previous article in this series: January 1, 2008, p. 160.

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away. In those days, the care of orphans was arranged by the deacons of the local church. The deacons would provide for the orphans until they could find suitable families with whom each of the children could live, and would then turn them over to be raised in their new homes. Often, the families who took the orphans in were wealthy farmers who took the girls in as maids and the boys in as farmhands. Henry's two younger sisters were placed together with one family, while Henry was eventually placed with a different farmer in Uithuizermeeden.

Henry was busy in his new home. He was given the responsibility of caring for the sheep that belonged to his new family. Uithuizermeeden is located in the far north of the Netherlands, near the shore of the North Sea. A dike built along the shore of the sea keeps the water from flooding the land during high tide. But when the tide is out, the seabed and the seaweed that grows there are exposed. It was to the North Sea that Henry would lead his little flock of sheep from their home in Uithuizermeeden. When the tide was out, Henry would take his flock across the dike to the beach and watch over the sheep as they ate up the seaweed they found there.

His work as a shepherd in the north of the Netherlands occupied Henry's days from the age of nine until nineteen. Many of the other boys his age were attending school and receiving a formal education. But as an orphan, Henry was expected to work, and his work with his little flock did not leave any time for schooling. It was not that his new family was cruel; this was simply the way orphans were cared for in that day. While this was a tremendous disadvantage, Henry was by no means ignorant, and he did the best he could to educate himself.

Henry's later writings show him to be a man of broad interests

and keen understanding. He was fascinated by many aspects of God's creation, especially the night skies as they shimmered with stars. He also took an interest in the political and social happenings of the day, and was capable of understanding them and explaining them to others. Essays that he wrote in his bulletins in Kalamazoo cover the topics of dogmatics, church history, secular history, physics, the public education system, mythology, and of course astronomy, to name only a few.

This interest in every facet of earthly life must have been present in Henry even as a boy on the beach of the North Sea with his sheep. Did he wish he could have been in school instead? Some have speculated that Henry already felt the call to the ministry while in the Netherlands. But for such a poor, orphaned shepherd without a formal education there was simply no opportunity to pursue such a calling. There was nothing for Henry to do but wait upon the Lord. As a church news article would later reminisce, "Early in life he began to seek the Father who is in heaven, and He mercifully provided for the orphan boy."²

As he grew older, Henry began to turn his eyes toward America. His brother John had emigrated to Chicago already in 1893, when Henry was about fourteen years old. Henry's work as a shepherd apparently brought in a little money, which he saved for his own voyage to the United States in 1898. His brother John helped make arrangements for him, and at the age of nineteen Henry boarded the ship "Obdam" sailing from Rotterdam and left his childhood home for Chicago, where he stayed for a while with his brother John. This was not the last time the lives of John and Henry would intersect. John had two sons, Ralph and Ben Danhof, who both later became ministers in the CRC. Henry was always close to them, and they apparently looked up to their uncle.

A young Dutchman in Chicago in the late 1800s could make a living as a garbage hauler. The Dutch were apparently more interested in the hauling business than in factory jobs, and Henry was no exception.³ He signed on with one of the many garbage haulers in the city and made his living collecting the trash of the city. During this time, Henry was thinking about two of his sisters who were still in the Netherlands, Alice and Annie, and he made arrangements for them to come to the States as well.

By the turn of the century, Henry had moved out of John's house and was living in the town of Summit in Lyons Township on the outskirts of Chicago.⁴ Midway Airport now stands on the land on which Danhof once lived. Henry quit the garbage business and hired himself out as a farm laborer to Martin and Maggie Stob, who also gave him a place to live.

When Henry was 23 years old, God finally opened the way to the ministry for him. Classis Illinois of the CRC declared that they would support a candidate for the ministry to attend Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Henry secured this appointment and

1. Most of the information in this article comes from several phone and e-mail interviews with Sharon Danhof Carpenter, the granddaughter of Henry; a few e-mail interviews with Jan Danhof, a relative of Henry; an article from the August 6, 1914 issue of the *Banner*; an article in the 1993 centennial booklet of Dennis Avenue/Mayfair CRC; and a 1980 church history paper written for Calvin College by Thomas R. Wolthuis entitled *The Protesting First Christian Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan*.

2. The *Banner*, August 6, 1914.

3. Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). p. 576ff.


4. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, p. 559.

moved to Grand Rapids around 1903 to begin his studies in Calvin College and Seminary. He enrolled in the college's Literary Department and graduated in 1907, following which he enrolled in the seminary and graduated in 1910. Henry Danhof— orphan, shepherd, and garbage man— was now a candidate for the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church.

1910 must have been a joyful year for Henry. Not only had he graduated from the seminary, but he also married his sweetheart of six years, Annie Brouwer. Like Henry, Annie hailed from Groningen. She and her parents and siblings had emigrated to Chicago in 1900, where her father

opened up a retail business. Like Henry, Annie was blessed with abundant intellectual gifts. She studied to become a teacher, and was hired to teach in the Englewood Christian School in the Chicago area. The testimony of those who knew her is unanimous in witnessing to her sweet personality and her wealth of energy. She would also later show herself to be an excellent hostess, even opening her home for weddings during the turbulent war years. Once Henry had graduated from the seminary, he returned to Chicago and was married to Annie on July 27, 1910, at the age of 31. All that was left was to wait to see where God would call them.

Henry had much reason to rejoice, but he had no reason to glory in himself. His only boast could be in God, who had led him to this peak in his life. In fact, one of God's purposes in choosing the base and despised things of the world is "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:29).

The Protestant Reformed Churches do well on this point to remember our humble beginnings, and the humble beginnings of the men that God raised up as leaders. We have nothing of which to boast as far as our own power is concerned, but all our boasting is in the Lord. The humble beginnings of Henry Danhof are a reminder to us, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 

All Around Us

Rev. Audred Spriensma

Religion and Politicians, and Voters

Whether one likes it or not, we here in the United States are in another election year. That means that our news on television, radio, and newspaper is going to be dominated with coverage of state primaries, political rallies and debates, and of course political ads, as the political contenders have money to spend. Should we as Christians really care what goes on in that messy business of politics, or keep our noses clear of the stink? What does separation of church and state mean? In an election season suffused with religious references, a recent nation-wide poll found that while most respondents say "moral values" are important to their vote, many have grown tired of politicians' "talk of faith and prayer." A newspaper cartoon displayed political contenders

wearing "Christianity" on their sleeves. What does it mean?

Over the past twenty years, religion has elbowed its way decisively to the front of presidential campaigns. In 1960, John Kennedy pleaded with Americans to treat his Roman Catholicism as irrelevant (as it undoubtedly was in his life and politics!). Jimmy Carter opened the door wide, with his public profession of being "born again." Ronald Reagan successfully courted evangelical Christians in the campaign, though he advanced little of their agenda as president. Bill Clinton and Al Gore, both Southern Baptists at odds with their denomination's conservatism, frequently flaunted the importance of their faith. And George W. Bush sold himself in part on the strength of his personal journey from sinner to suppliant. As a 'born-again Christian' now sits in the White House, one of the more likely democratic replacements wants voters to know that she prays.

Laurie Goodstein, in an article in the New York Times entitled "Politicians Talk More about Religion, and People Expect Them To,"

points out that in a past New York Times poll (July 2004), 42 percent of those surveyed said they welcomed candidates discussing the role of religion in their lives. But 53 percent said religion should "not be part of a presidential campaign." By comparison, the pollsters noted, in 1984 only 22 percent of Americans agreed that presidential candidates should discuss the role of religion in their lives, while 75 percent said it should not be a part of a presidential campaign.

In a poll taken by the Pew Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 31 percent completely agree that a president should have strong religious values. The Pew Research Center, in an article entitled "Religion and Politics: the Ambivalent Majority" (Sept. 20, 2000), came to the conclusion that while 70 percent of voters want the president to be a person of faith, there is widespread discomfort with politicians or presidential contenders who talk too much about their religious beliefs.

In the Republican presidential debate, there was an exchange be-

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tween former governors Mitt Romney (Mass.) and Mike Huckabee (Ark.) about the role of religion in the public square. Romney said, "We have a separation of church and state. It served us well in this country. This is a nation, after all, that wants a leader that is a person of faith, but we don't choose our leaders on which church they go to." Huckabee replied, "I said in general—and I would not say this tonight to any of us—when a person says, my faith doesn't affect my decision-making, I would say that the person is saying their faith is not significant to impact their decision process. I tell people up front, 'My faith does affect my decision process.' It explains me. No apology for that." Illinois senator Barack Obama wrote in an article in USA TODAY entitled "Politicians need not abandon religion" (July 10, 2006), "My faith shapes my values, but applying those values to policy making must be done with principles that are accessible to all people, religious or not. Even so, those who enter the public square are not required to leave their beliefs at the door."

While there is separation of church and state, there cannot be a separation of one's faith system from the moral guidelines that he follows. Our moral values are not neutral but arise out of a faith system, whether it be true faith or a false faith belief. But are all faith-talk and religious references in political speeches what they appear? David Kuo, a conservative evangelical and former Bush administration official, wrote a new book: *Tempting Faith*. In this book he claims that officials in the Bush White House would humor Christian leaders to their faces, but smirk and roll their eyes behind their backs. Kuo called for conservative Christians to show their frustration by going on a "fast from politics."

In the past, more Americans regarded the Republican Party as the protector of religious values. It

was called the religious right. But the religious right might have to make room for the religious left. Vicki Haddock, in the San Francisco Chronicle (Nov. 5, 2006), quotes an advertisement poster in North Carolina of a popular former college basketball coach, Dean Smith, "I am a life-long Baptist and vote for Democrats. Why? Democrats are serious about alleviating poverty." In the same article, Vicki points out how House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco established a 42-member Democratic Faith Working Group headed by South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn, son of a fundamentalist minister. And again, the Michigan Democratic Party met with religious leaders and then revised its platform to address the role of faith. What does all this mean?

Does this mean that the politicians are becoming more religious? Or does it mean that their policy-making is going to be influenced by their faith? Or are politicians more astute about voting blocks and are simply catering to their votes? As writer Vicki Haddock puts it, "The Democrats have not reversed their political direction. Instead they are changing the conversation; talking about core Democratic issues in religious terms. For example, environmental protection is 'creation care.' Progressive tax policies and raising the minimum wage are examples of 'loving your neighbor.' Withdrawing from Iraq is described as following Jesus' beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'"

Christians who have the privilege and freedom to be involved in the political future of their coun-

try would be wise to listen carefully to the speech of the political contenders, and look beyond their speech and promises to their voting record and actions in the past. "Ye shall know them by their fruits.... Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:16ff.).

If politicians and political contenders should be motivated in their policy decisions by their faith and moral values, should not voters also be led in their choice of leaders by their faith? Do we cast aside our value systems, and simply vote Republican or Democrat? Do we vote for the most sincere Christian political contender? Does a sincere Christian make a good political leader? Few would doubt Jimmy Carter's religious convictions. But was he a good president? Would we desire a dispensational Southern Baptist to take his dispensational views into his policy decisions in the Middle East? Jason Ehrenkrook, in an article "Tracking the Religion of Politicians" (Dec. 15, 2007), writes that Huckabee was happy to have the endorsement of Tim LaHaye, author of the popular *Left Behind* series of novels. While some view these stories as science fiction, political contender

Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister, considers them a "compelling story written for nontheologians."

Can we know whom to vote for? Should we bother voting? There are those who would take an anabaptistic position of world flight, and take no interest in the messy realm of politics. These men and women do not care to cast their votes.


If politicians and political contenders should be motivated in their policy decisions by their faith and moral values, should not voters also be led in their choice of leaders by their faith?

Shame on them. While it is true that it is God in His providence who sets up rulers in high places, and these leaders are His servants (Rom. 13), we are not passive. God has in His providence placed us in a nation where we have the freedom to elect our officials to their offices. Shall we leave that business to the ungodly alone? Does not God place our leaders in their positions through the election process? Exercise, then, your right and duty!

In a Gallop Poll in January 2007, 84 percent of Americans consistently say religion is very or fairly important in their lives. Yet most, 67 percent, say that their religious beliefs play only an occasional role in helping them decide what to do in their lives. And only 38 percent say religion has the same influence

in their voting decisions. Just 22 percent say they frequently rely on their religious beliefs to help them decide how to vote.

As those who are by God's grace citizens of heaven, and by His providence citizens of a nation in which we enjoy the freedom to vote for our political leaders, may we seize the opportunity. Not simply voting a party, not shirking our responsibility, let us listen to the rhetoric, look at the voting record and activity of the contenders, vote according to our religious convictions, led by the Word of God, and pray for those who are placed in office, that as God's servants they will pursue justice, reward those who do good, and execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13). They will have to give an account to God for what they have done.

And as voters, we will give an account of what we have done with our freedom to be involved in the selection of our next president and leaders. Let us not merely wear our Christianity on our sleeves but, acting on our Christian faith and values, seek leaders who will not hinder the church from going about her activity of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and carrying her witness to all nations. We seek leaders who, used by God, will enable us to worship, raise our children in the fear of the Lord, and enable her citizens to live quiet and peaceable lives in godliness. Not sitting by the sidelines, but acting on our faith, we as citizens of heaven are the best citizens in the particular nation that God has placed us in. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

Fragments That Remain

Economy

What think ye, when Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes, did He produce *too much bread* by mistake, so that fragments remained contrary to His intention, and that these fragments surprised Him?

This cannot be so.

What operated with this multiplication in and through Christ was *divine* almightiness. To do what here is done falls outside the range of our human nature.

What God the Lord has put in our power is to multiply grain by agriculture, in the course of months. But it is altogether out-

side of our power, immediately, and in one moment, to multiply bread. This Christ did, and this He could not do except divine almightiness operated in Him. And this divine almightiness cannot work at random, because almightiness and omniscience in God the Lord are one.

Thus you clearly see that at the miracle of the loaves the remnant of fragments was *no* mistake, that it took place intentionally, and thereby the twelve baskets of fragments became to us an instruction on the part of God, as to what we are to do *with what remains*.

The narrative in John shows indeed that Christ Himself was interested in those remaining fragments.

In the hands of the apostles nothing was left over. They had distributed everything.

No, these were remnants left *by the masses*.

Hungry at first, the multitudes had too much. Now they were satisfied and there were leftovers. There was more than they could conveniently consume.

What remained, the multitude evidently had, if not thrown away, at least carelessly left on the ground.

For in what Christ said there was something of a rebuke.

He said: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6:12).

Christ would not have said this if the people had taken the fragments with them, to eat them on the way home. For then they would not have been *lost* but *used*.

What Christ said suggests, therefore, that by the carelessness of the multitude these fragments would have been lost, and against this Jesus sets Himself as against *a sinful something*.

This must *not* be.

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There must nothing *be lost*.

And that nothing be lost, the disciples, and through them the church of all ages, were commanded of the Lord, that always and everywhere the "fragments that remain" shall be gathered up.



Thanks to the instruction in the Word, our fathers, and no less our mothers, in former generations have understood this well. And in true Christian families it is still the rule, to keep strict guard against this.

You see this in the expression: *'Tis a sin*. An expression which, from Christian homes, was introduced into common use of language, and there lost all meaning, but which originally, and on the lips of our devout forebears, meant: You must not deal carelessly with what remains. For also food that is left over is created of God. And irreverent dealing with what God has made is sin.

Hence it does not do to say: A poor man might have eaten this, or: a famished dog might have had his life saved by it, but rather: You have no right to neglect the fragments that remain, because God created them, they are God's belongings, and lightsomely to play with anything that God has created is sin.

A child of God, at least if he is recipient of this great grace as a Christian of the Reformation to obtain the purest knowledge of the will of his Father, brings everything into relation *with his God*. This relation in which he stands with his God governs all of his life. And by reason of this, he stamps all recklessness or neglect, of whatever it may be, with the name of *sin*.

This was *serious business* with our church fathers. They lived by it. So they understood it and not otherwise. All neglect was felt by them as *sin*, was confessed as *sin*, as *sin* to be atoned by the blood of Christ alone.

This the world still repeats.

Again and again you hear it said among unbelieving people, "'Tis a sin, man, in such weather as this to put on your best clothes!" And so this saying: *'Tis a sin*, is common on many lips.

But on such lips this saying: *'Tis a sin*, is nothing but a stop-gap, almost half an oath. For, *sin* is always taken with reference to God. And he who makes use of anything that is valid only with respect to God, without intending to refer to God, or to think of God, gives himself to the habit of blasphemy.



In what remains, the almightiness of the Creator, but also *His unbounden mercifulness* toward you and your house, is to be revered.

In most families, nothing ever remains over, everything is clean gone, and more would be used if there were more.

If in your family, at your table, in your kitchen, and in your bread-box there is too much provision for one meal, it certainly implies this very great grace, that all your needs are met, that you may eat until you are satisfied, and that God's hand opened itself to you generously. But it also implies the obligation of responsibility with respect to what you do *with what is left over*.

With respect to the kitchen and table, the housemother is the person responsible to God.

She must be on the watch.

God will require it at her hand.

She must watch kitchen and table, and even when she leaves it to her daughters or servants, it is charged to her account.

Not the servant, and not the daughter, but she as housemother has been set over these things of God. First of all with respect to this, that she has to see to it, that there being always more than is needed is no result of careless housekeeping.

Ordinarily she should be able to judge about *how much food*

should be bought and prepared. In purchasing at random, and always buying too much, so that after every meal quantities of food are carried away again from the table, there is guilt of carelessness and of abuse of the Lord's goodness to her house.



Also what is done with the fragments that remain is not a matter of indifference.

Even anxiety about leftovers may cloak the spirit of parsimoniousness.

A housemother who carefully gathers what was left over today, that she may serve it again tomorrow, is right in doing so, provided necessity compels her to do this, or the money so saved is laid aside for the cause of God or for the poor.

But when there is no need of thus saving food, or when money so saved does not go to the poor, the leftovers themselves should go to the poor, as in former days every well-to-do family, where there was always a greater abundance of food than could be used, had some poor family at hand, who took away what was left. And as though this were not enough, they so directed matters that more food was left over, just to be the more generous.

Birds also were cared for, at least in winter. Not from sentimental devotion to animals, but because they were creatures of God, which by God's appointment flutter and sing before us, and should not suffer want, when with us there is abundance.

So must the housemother care for her house, because God has set her over it, and addresses also her with the words: *Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost*.

All food that molds or spoils in the house cries against the housemother, bringing accusation against her before God.



Moreover, this word of Christ applies not merely to *food* and *drink*. It refers as well to *clothes*, to *furniture*, to *ornaments*, to the fragments of your time that are being lost, and no less to what is left over of your *money*.


Nothing is your own property. It all belongs to God, who gives it you for use, and holds you responsible for what you do with it.

What Christ says: "Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost," is the pure Christian principle that stands over against the economic passion of the world.

"Save" is the watchword of our age, to gather treasures for yourself upon earth, to make yourself a proprietor, to bend your energies upon making money. Everything going on outside of God, keeping no count with God, directed to selfish ends, ending in the passion for

material things, nursing the deadly spirit first of the grocer, then of the capitalist, i.e., the spirit that brings money to the man, and after that brings the man *under the money*.

God's child also is frugal, but from how much higher an impulse!

Not to raise himself up in wealth, but to honor God in His gifts. From those gifts of God to do well to the poor. To spend all good things entrusted to him in the Lord's service and to His glory. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

Once again this past Christmas season students of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to contribute towards Heritage's annual Christmas collection. This past year the collection was evenly split between Genesis Christian School in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, and the Wingham PR School Society in Wingham, Ontario, Canada. Genesis Christian School is supported by members of the Immanuel congregation in Lacombe and currently has two teachers and thirty-two students. The members of the Wingham PRC congregation have begun to plan for the opening of a school in the fall of 2008, D.V. They have around twenty-one students who will be able to attend the new school. As you can imagine, both of these schools face tremendous start-up costs and are thankful for the help and encouragement that they receive from fellow saints.

Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI took a Christmas collection this past December for Christian Life Ministries. Chris-

tian Life Ministries supports orphanages and churches in India.

The Eastside Christian Promoters of Eastside Christian sponsored a game night on December 26 at their school. Some games played that night included: tabletop board games, tug of war, dodge ball, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, football, and more. All supporters of Eastside were invited to attend.

Students of the PR Christian School in South Holland, IL presented their annual Christmas program on December 20 at the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. The theme for this program was taken from the *Messiah*, composed by George Frederick Handel.

On Sunday evening, December 16, the Band and Choirs of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI presented their Christmas Concert in the auditorium of Allendale High School.

The junior high students of the Hull, IA PR Christian School and the Northwest Iowa PR Christian School joined together to present their annual combined band and choir concert on December 7 in the Hull PRC.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited members of the other congregations and fellowship in the area to join them for an evening of song

and fellowship at Edgerton's annual Christmas Singspiration on Sunday evening, December 30.

Members of the Loveland, CO PRC were reminded to reserve the evening of December 18 for a soup supper sponsored by their church's Young People's Society.

While reading bulletins from almost all of our churches during the month of December, we came to the conclusion that all of our Young People's Societies arrange to go Christmas caroling to their congregations' elderly, widows, widowers, and shut-ins. What an opportunity to share with the saints of each congregation, whether old or young, the joy of our Lord's first coming. This is our glorious hope, and what a benefit we have that together we can share that joy with others in our various congregations.

The Young People's Society of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA is going to be collecting pop cans as an ongoing fund-raiser. The young people plan to collect cans in the spring and fall of each year. Members of Calvary also had the option to have a young person pick up the cans before the bi-yearly pickup or, still better for the young people, the members could bring their returnables to a local supermarket in Sioux Center, where the young people have set up an account.

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

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At their December meeting, the Council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC approved a request from the Federation Board of our Young People's Societies to host the 2010 Young People's Convention. Hudsonville's Young People also voted to approve this request. So for those of you who like to plan ahead, this year's convention is hosted by the Byron Center, MI PRC; the convention of 2009 by the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville; and the 2010 convention by Hudsonville PRC, D.V.

Congregation Activities

Members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to attend an eight-week series on Evangelism and Witnessing presented by Rev. Jason Kortering. This series of Bible studies began on January 8.

All adults of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI were reminded to set aside the evening of December 18 for their congregation's annual "Christmas Study and Song" celebration. The organizing committee was looking for anyone willing to bring some refreshments or wanting to render a special musical number, or share some thoughts, or perhaps recite a poem, etc.


Denomination Activities

Faith PRC in Jenison, MI served as host, on December 12, for the first Reformed Doctrine class on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Faith has long served as host for the Canons Class taught by Prof. David Engelsma, but by December of last year that group had concluded its study of the Can-

ons and so decided to consider the topic of the Holy Spirit in the ecumenical and Reformed creeds, in the light of the history of the truth in the early church. In so doing, they changed their name to better reflect their new area of study.

Minister Activities

Rev. A. denHartog declined the call extended to him to serve as missionary to the Philippines. The Doon, IA PRC formed a new trio, consisting of the Revs. G. Eriks, W. Langerak, and J. Laning. A congregational meeting was held on New Year's Day and Doon extended a call to Rev. Laning.

Calvary PRC in Hull, IA formed a trio of the Revs. C. Haak, J. Slopsema, and Doug Kuiper. From that trio they voted to extend a call to Rev. Haak. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 8, 2008 our parents and grandparents,

FRED and ALICE HUIZINGA, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the godly example they have set for us and for the years devoted to our covenant instruction. May God continue to bless and care for them in the years to come.

- * Rick and Terri Huizinga
- * Jack and Melissa Huizinga
- * Carol Huizinga (Dan in glory)
- * Doc and Jan Kuiper
- * Larry and Ruth Burgess

21 grandchildren
25 great grandchildren

"Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Ephesians 5:2).

Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to Tony and Bea Talsma in the death of her sister,

DORIS COOK,

and to Stuart and Marilyn Looyenga in the death of his sister,

LOUISE NULL.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. VanOverloop, Pres.
Mike Elzinga, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: 616-453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 27, 2008, in Southwest PRC, at 7:30 P.M., D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 18, 2008, our parents and grandparents,

RON and SHERRY KOOLE, celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for all of the love and support they have shown to us throughout the years. We thank them also for their godly example and for raising us in the truth of God's Word and His commandments. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them in their marriage, and their family with them, in the years to come. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31, 32).

- * Daryl and Jodi Koole
- * Cody and Amber
- * Tom and Kristin Huizinga
- * Ross and Rhonda Zuverink
- * Joel Koole
- * Kevin Koole
- * Jason Koole
- * Kerri Koole
- * Renae Koole
- * Hannah Koole
- * Nathan Koole
- * Emily Koole
- * Zachary Koole
- * Derek Koole
- * Austin Koole

Grand Rapids, Michigan

February 1, 2008/Standard Bearer/215

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Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 13th, 2008, our parents and grandparents,

PETER & EUNICE BOER,

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for blessing their marriage for these 50 years and for their godly instruction they have given us. "...but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

- * Ken and Myrna Boer
Emily, Rhonda, Kent, Karla,
Grant
- * Lewis and Janet DeJong
Joe and Rachel Venema
Isaac
Tim and Laurie DeJong
Joel and Michelle VanEgdom
Levi
Kurt, Phillip, Lanae, Ethan
- * Gary and Beth Visscher
Jeremy, Jennifer, Heather,
Hannah, Jessica
- * Dennis and Joan Boer
Cassie, Colin, Calla
- * Bruce and Kim Boer
Dakota, Levi, Colton, Tanner
- * Geoff and Sherri Penna
Joshua, Seth, Jacob
- * Kelvin and Lisa TenBroeke
Brittany, Kelsey, Tori, Easton
- * Jason and Katy Boer

Zeeland, Michigan

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

Redlands, CA - Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Promoting Sabbath Keeping in the 21st Century

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 20:8

9:00 A.M.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

*The Force of the Fourth
Commandment in the New Testament*

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Pastor, Hope PRC, Redlands, CA

10:30 A.M.-12:00 noon

*Keeping the Sabbath Holy:
Fellowship with God and Believers*

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Pastor, Loveland PRC, Loveland, CO

12:00 noon

Lunch served in the basement

1:00 P.M.-2:30 P.M.

*Resting from Labor: The Fourth
Commandment's Prohibition of Work.*

Rev. Steven Key

Pastor, Hull PRC, Hull, IA

2:45 P.M.-4:15 P.M.

*Calling the Sabbath a Delight:
Recreation and the Sabbath*

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Pastor, Randolph PRC, Randolph, WI

* All past and present officebearers, as well as
all other interested people, are invited to attend.

* After the noon meal, a free-will offering
will be taken to defray expenses.

NOTICE!

Faith Christian School in Randolph, Wisconsin is seeking applicants for a combined first and second grade classroom starting in the 2008/2009 school year. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact Mr. John Huizenga, administrator, at (920) 326-6186 or principal@randolphfcs.org. Résumés may also be e-mailed or sent to Mr. Huizenga at Faith Christian School, 611 N Columbus St., Randolph, WI 53956.

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene at the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, CA, on Wednesday, March 5, 2008, at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 4, 2008. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Hope's clerk, Mr. John Feenstra (909-793-5098), or Hope's pastor, Rev. M. VanderWal (pastor@hopeprc.org). An officebearers' conference will precede the meeting on Tuesday, March 4, beginning at 9:00 A.M. Please make travel plans accordingly.

Rev. Richard J. Smit,
Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Date	Topic	Text
February 3	The Faithful Witness	
February 3	"Our Calling"	Acts 1:8
February 10	"Our Motivation"	Isaiah 43:12
February 17	"Our Limitations"	Ephesians 4:17
February 24	"Our Witnessing"	Romans 10:1