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Confessing Our Sure Refuge in God

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Psalm 91:1, 2

What a song of blessed assurance and confidence. What a security and safety is confessed here. Well may we take these words upon our lips, utter them in faith, knowing in whom we believe. These words can come forth from our lips only if they are in our hearts by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Then will we put on the new man in Christ, and with joy live according to the will of God in all good works. As such we will understand the profound significance that all things are out of God, through Him, and unto Him.

This shout of security can be

the portion only of those who have the God of Jacob as their refuge. This man is truly blessed, for he has an abiding dwelling place. Yes, a secret dwelling place, a home, with the Most High God. Therefore he is assured of a constant abiding place.

What a blessing to know that one dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. It does not matter what or who may rise up against him, for he knows that he is safe and secure. God is for him, therefore nothing can be against him. As the apostle Paul writes to the Romans, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We immediately see what a rich confession we have here. Since this confession concerns God, it must be as rich as God is rich and wonderful. The object of our faith makes our faith rich in content. The psalmist illustrates this by the many terms that he uses to depict the richness of the Lord in relationship to those whom He protects. Various names are used to express this richness of confidence.

There is, first of all, the name

Jehovah (LORD), which all by itself is very rich in meaning. No name reveals God's covenant faithfulness more clearly than this name. It was revealed to Moses in the wilderness when Moses received the commission to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. In faithfulness to His promise, God will bring His people to the promised land.

Jehovah also reveals God as the eternal God, with whom a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. This, in turn, reveals that He is unchangeable. "I am Jehovah (LORD), I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

As the I AM, He is the self-existent One, who did not become, and who never has an end. God was never young, and He will never be old. He simply is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As such He dwells in His people as in the burning bush, without consuming them in His wrath or chastisement. When all seems darkest, then His faithfulness to His covenant promise will be revealed most strikingly. Then is the time of deliverance, when He shall reveal His strength

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in the time of our weakness. Israel was in complete bondage, but God, with ten mighty plagues, delivered them. This He did for His name's sake and for His promise.

Jehovah has chosen His people from eternity. He will keep the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Because of His faithfulness there remains even until this day a remnant according to election, that a faithful church shall serve Him even until the end. Because He is Jehovah, salvation is of grace.

The second name by which He is called is the Most High. When one looks at all the gods of the nations, at all of the history in which man would exalt himself, and at all the demon forces, one readily sees that God is the Most High. He really cannot be compared. God is GOD. Incomparably He is exalted in His own excellency and greatness. When we are surrounded by foes that would destroy us, it is comforting to know that God is the Most High. None can measure up to His strength and might. The great and the small, the good and the bad, the fruitful and the barren years, health and sickness—over all these things He rules by His providence.

Third, He is the Almighty. He is not only faithful, but He is able. It is not simply that He has a power and strength that is greater than all strength, but He is the strength that is the strength of all strength. This strength He gives to the weak of God's children. We need not fear the pestilence, which is the manifestation of Jehovah's power as He performs His mighty judgments over the wicked. That same power will lead us, through much tribulation, to learn the lesson of patient dependence upon Him.

This is our confession. That means that we say the same thing concerning Jehovah as He says to us concerning Himself. And it means that we say this from the *heart*, because we believe it. This is worship, our reasonable service of God. This confession must be

taught to our children in the home, in the school, and in the church. They, too, must learn to confess this, that He is our strong tower and our great refuge.

This confession, then, will be a personal confession. I will open my mouth concerning what Jehovah means to me. I will tell the praises of Him who has called me out of darkness into His marvelous light. The psalmist does not say that *men* will boast in God, but that *he* will do this. Just note the personal aspect here. He speaks of the Lord, of Jehovah, as MY GOD. He is MY strong tower; in Him will I trust.

My confession will be that Jehovah has made me His own in sovereign election. I did not choose Him, but He has chosen me, that He may bless me in Christ Jesus with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, that I should be holy and blameless before Him. I will say of Jehovah that He is also the God of my children. He keeps covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations. I will say that in Christ He has redeemed me and brought me into His secret pavilion in Zion above. He has called me, justified me, and glorified me, and will conform me completely to His own image in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

He is my refuge. He has a secret place prepared for me. This is a place that the ungodly cannot find and to which he will not flee. I have a secret place with the Most High God. This is under the blood of Calvary. Here is the never-failing love and mercy of God. With boldness and assurance I take my refuge there in the secret place prepared for me with the Most High.

Then the psalmist adds this, that He is my strong tower. He is my pavilion where, with the Lord, I am safe. Here I need not fear, for He is near.


Oh, what unspeakable comfort! I am persuaded that neither death,

nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to reach me in this secret place of the Most High or in the shadow of the Almighty. We may be accounted as sheep for the slaughter, being killed all the day long, yet nothing is really to our hurt. We are more than conquerors, for even then He shall send His angels to keep us in all our ways.

If this is our personal confession, then we will make this confession public. "I will say of the Lord." I will speak of the Lord to others. I will tell others all about the great and secret place of refuge, which is the Lord. I will say of the Lord: MY GOD. He says in His law, in His covenant words: "I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt." As the covenant faithful God, as Jehovah, He also says: "I will be unto thee a God, and ye shall be my people. I will be unto thee a Father, and ye shall be unto me sons and daughters."

Having these great and precious promises, we personally and collectively turn unto all men and speak of the greatness of God, and especially do this in the midst of the congregation. In the midst of the congregation I will say: "In Him will I trust. I will not fear what man shall do unto me. He will make my needs His care, for He is a faithful God in whose shadow I may dwell safely and securely."

I will say this to my children. I will point them to the faithful Jehovah and have them too confess that the Lord is our refuge, our strong tower, and thus bring them by the nurture of the Lord under the shadow of the Almighty, in the secret place of the Most High.

Thus we confess our sure refuge in our covenant God in wars and in rumors of wars, in pestilence, nakedness, and the sword. For this God is our God; He will be our God even unto death. 

Gambling, A Growing Danger



n editorial on gambling?

Yes, indeed. Because, as they say, "These days it is all the rage."

Casinos are opening all over the place (sooner or later there is bound to be one near you); lottery tickets are available as you buy your groceries or pump your fuel (and who cannot afford \$2? Not much risk there); or turn on your TV on Saturday afternoons and find that networks that used to carry football games now broadcast poker tournaments—with announcers yet—turning it into a game of audience participation. I understand that cable TV has at least one channel dedicated exclusively to poker tournaments to be watched anytime day or night. And how many among us these days do not subscribe to cable? Everywhere you turn, gambling seems to be the entertainment interest of the day.

I suppose it should not surprise us, not in days of affluence, when money is easy to come by—throw a little there, lose a little here, and who is hurt? Still plenty left for bills, the collection plate, and tuition besides. And with affluence comes free time, and with free time, boredom. What to do? Put some money on the table, risk a chunk of what you have, and suddenly the game takes on new interest. Now there is some risk involved, a little suspense, a little adrenaline flow. One has something to lose, or something to gain. And now a basically meaningless game and mere passage of time suddenly mean something. One is hooked. It is difficult to go back to life with no risk, with little suspense. How

boring. Shuffle the cards, deal them again. I am sure I can recoup my loss.

You have heard of the "curse of affluence"? Well, the upsurge in participation in gambling is a manifestation of it, without a doubt.

The question is, is it affecting us?

I am inclined to say, "You bet it is," but maybe it would be more appropriate to say, "Without a doubt." And hence this article—to have us look once again at something that our grandparents viewed as the temptation of the Devil himself, that for which they had a healthy fear, which healthy fear I fear we may well be losing. And if we do, a certain "perspective" will not be the only thing we stand to lose, but a lot, lot more.

There was a time when our old Dutch forbears would not even allow "playing cards" into the house. They had a name for them, "devil cards." They associated them with one thing, games of chance that invariably involved money—the means of trade of professional card sharks who used their tricks to bilk the 'simple' out of their hard earned wages and then send them home with little more than the clothes on their backs. And because the temptation would be to use these cards to the same end once you had them in the house and developed cleverness of mind, keeping one's distance from them was the policy they preferred.

We are way beyond that—"devil cards" indeed! Games involving cards, even "playing cards," are common in our circles—

to be used innocently to pass the time. And in itself, we might argue, certainly not wrong, no more so than playing dominoes, as long as that's all it is—a friendly game.

And yet, maybe those old forbears were on to something when they put card playing (games of chance) in the category of dancing and worldly entertainment. And, in these days when gambling and games of chance are all the rage, maybe it is time we reconsider their fears and reexamine ourselves as well.

We raise all this because reports filter in that more and more, for Christian young people and couples, the card game of choice is poker (with its variety of styles), and not 'just' with poker chips (worrisome enough in itself), but for money. What fun is it if there is nothing to lose? First, of course, just those loose coins everybody has sitting around in some jar or other. Yes, and then what? Dollar bills, and in time, what size those? Just how common is this mentality becoming among our own people, young and not so young? One has fears.

And if not poker, then the endless assortment of lottery games—just a ticket or two. Who's to know the difference? Just as long as one does not risk too much, it is harmless. So it is argued. But is it?

What has alarmed many religious and social workers today is the hard evidence of this troubling rise in gambling—not only in society at large, but amongst the youth in particular. An article entitled *Gambling—You Bet Your Life*, written by The Counseling and Mental Health Center of the University of

Texas, reports that a study conducted by *Time Magazine* indicated that

...there are nearly eight million compulsive gamblers in America, one million of whom are teenagers. An Illinois criminal justice professor found eight times as many gambling addicts among college students as among adults. Closer to home, a study by the Texas Council of Problem and Compulsive Gambling found that teenagers and young adults are at much greater risk for developing serious gambling problems than are adults.

We are speaking here of an addiction as real and powerful as addictions to alcohol, to drugs, and to pornography itself. Reason for concern I say, especially when money has been easy to come by, when everywhere one turns, lotteries and gambling are being promoted—legalized by the government, no less, and when one can justify losing a bit of money here and there, because, supposedly, it will not affect one's ability to support what needs to be supported anyway.

The state itself has decided to promote gambling. It aids and abets the industry in the interests of raising revenues in a supposedly painless way. Instead of increasing taxes, just legalize gambling and make money off licensing and taking in a hefty percentage of the winnings. And it is all justified in the name of benefiting from excess money that so many have and would spend on other entertainment anyway. Why not direct it to the coffers of the state, under whose supervision everything will be clean and safe, and even be put to a good use—public education, for instance?

However, to justify gambling in the name of being harmless entertainment rings hollow. Study after study has shown that in areas where casinos have been built not only does crime escalate and pros-

titution increase, but so do bankruptcy and divorce rates, as do the number of suicides. In an article entitled *Gambling*, Kirby Anderson of Probe Ministries underscored this:

The social impact of gambling is often hidden from the citizens who decide to participate in legalized gambling. But later these costs show up in the shattered lives of individuals and their families. Psychologist Julian Faber warns, "No one knows the social costs of gambling or how many players will become addicted... the states are experimenting with the minds of people on a massive scale." Families are torn apart by strife, divorce, and bankruptcy. Boydon Cole and Sidney Margolius in their book, *When You Gamble—You Risk More Than Your Money*, conclude: "There is no doubt of the destructive effects of gambling on the family life. The corrosive effects of gambling attack both the white-collar and blue-collar families with equal vigor."

Note the phrase, "*the destructive effects of gambling*." Its destructive effects upon communities and the family are well documented. Such consideration all by itself should dissuade any serious-minded believer from attempting to justify gambling in any shape or form, be it wagers large or small. The evidence is clear, God's judgment rests upon the practice.

The state and its social workers would like us to believe that gambling is evil only if it gets out of hand, if one becomes addicted, what they call a "compulsive gambler." Otherwise, it is innocent entertainment.

But the state is wrong. Gambling in all its forms is of the Evil One, and is sin against God. Let's be clear about that.

In the first place, gambling is

theft. For a Christian it amounts to a steward betraying his Master's trust. Everything we have is God's (down to those coins in the cookie jar), given to us with His kingdom in mind. God does not loan us His goods so that we can put them at risk to be lost at the turn of a card or the tearing open of a ticket selected at random. On the judgment day we will have to give account of what we did with the goods He gave us, and for how we used them. Somehow I have a hard time imagining that telling the Lord we squandered at the gaming tables such and such an amount of His goods because we needed a little excitement in our boring lives is going to be acceptable. Bored with life? As a Christian? How can that be? Find some useful Christian service to engage in. There are plenty of cries for help, opportunities for giving rather than taking.

And do not think that arguing, "But I didn't lose, I won!" is an improvement. Not only was the mere willingness to risk the Lord's money at the gaming table an audacity, but for you to have won, others had to lose. And God is going to be pleased with our taking that which was not theirs to be wagering in the first place?

Secondly, gambling involves a trifling with God's sovereignty and providence. The world may talk all it wants about good or bad luck, but we know very well that it is God who controls all things—according to Scripture, the casting of the dice themselves. And so we proceed in the hope that God

will use His sovereignty for my financial gain by means of a foolish game of chance—a believer willing to use God's sovereign providence so that self may be enriched—and that, mind you, at the expense of the neighbor, those who played

...gambling is theft. For a Christian it amounts to a steward betraying his Master's trust.

and lost, whose loss I hope God will make my gain. And often what men lose is much, much more than they can afford. Is it to be imagined that others pocketing such a loss is counted by the Lord as lawful gain?


And let no one argue, "But I took money from the state, or a gaming house, institutions that can afford it." Where do you suppose their money came from? Where else but from the fools who gambled it away, which money was never theirs to begin with, and some now destitute as a result.

And thirdly, gambling and the lottery is governed by a spirit of covetousness. What one has is not

enough. One wants more, the jackpot at stake. But one wants it without having to work for it. One hopes to gain something for nothing as it were, or for as little as possible. Instead of being content with what one has, or laboring to earn one's living, one hopes for wealth by some turn of chance, some good fortune, a lucky draw. It is the language of idolatry, not of the Christian faith.

And do not discount this covetousness inherent in every man's nature. The state does not. It is exactly this knowledge that has prompted the state to legalize gambling, to enter the lottery business, and prey upon its own citizens.

The state is counting on this aspect of human nature, expecting to use it to its own financial advantage. It knows greed and covetousness will prevail and will bring millions of dollars into its coffers. If even the godless state knows the power of this side of human nature, we should more so. Instead of playing with this fire, we must flee it, like Lot fleeing the cities of the plain.

The words of the apostle are always timely: "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:10). 

Special Articles

The Covenant Doctrine of the "Fathers of the Secession" (2)

Prof. David Engelsma

The Radical Departure of Pieters and Kreulen

In 1861, two ministers, K.J. Pieters and J.R. Kreulen, introduced into the Dutch Reformed churches of the Secession of 1834 a doctrine of the covenant that was both new to these churches and a radical departure from the accepted doctrine of the "fathers of the Secession." The two preachers set forth their novel doctrine in a book titled *Infant Baptism*.¹

Banishing Election

The purpose of the book, and

the fundamental characteristic of the covenant doctrine it advocated, was the cutting loose of the covenant from God's decree of election. The book denied that election governs the covenant of grace, particularly with regard to the baptized children of believing parents. Election does not determine membership in the covenant of grace; the objects of the gracious covenant promise; inheritance of the blessings of the covenant; or abiding in the covenant, so that the baptized child at last enjoys eternal life in heaven.

According to the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, God establishes the covenant of grace with all the baptized children alike, so that all alike are in covenant communion with God. He extends His gracious covenant promise to all the children alike. All the children alike are heirs of the covenant

blessings. But all the baptized children alike can fall out of the covenant, separate themselves from covenantal union with God in Christ, become objects of the dreadful curse of the covenant instead of the gracious promise, forfeit the covenant blessings, and perish everlastingly in hell.

For election does not govern the covenant.

Already on page six of their book, the two preachers in the denomination that was then called the Christian Separated Reformed Church² denied that the Reformed Baptism form speaks of "an eternal covenant membership on the part of the elect, in the head, Jesus Christ" and that the phrase, "sanctified in Christ," in the first question of the Baptism form refers to "the elect in Christ."³

Election simply has no place in

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this supposedly Reformed doctrine of the covenant and infant baptism.

So much is this the case that when the authors were compelled by their theological foes in the churches of the Secession to reckon with the teaching of Romans 9:6-13, they explained Romans 9 in such a way that election has nothing to do with the salvation of some baptized children in distinction from others who go lost. Pieters and Kreulen posed the question this way: "Is not the universality of the promise for the entire visible church in conflict...with that which the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 9:6-13?" Their answer was that there is no conflict between the universal, gracious promise taught by themselves and the apostle's doctrine in Romans 9, because "the gracious promise given by God to Abraham's seed in His covenant did not absolutely and unconditionally guarantee participation in the blessings of the covenant."⁴

The problem both for Paul and for Pieters and Kreulen was the perishing of so many Israelites in light of the covenant promise of God that He would be the God of Abraham's seed. Search the passage as they might, the two Dutch theologians could not find election in Romans 9 as the solution to the problem, although election accompanied by reprobation is the apostle's solution: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand" (v. 11). Rather, they found the solution in a conditional promise, about which the apostle says not one word. The implication is that the reason why some children of Israel were saved was not election, but their own performance of the condition upon which the promise depends for its fulfillment.

The covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen utterly banished divine election from the baptism of children and therefore from

the covenant. "Let us then regarding Baptism forget about eternal election and establish that the promise of the covenant is bestowed and offered as the revealed counsel of God and refers to every baptized [child] in the visible church without any exception."⁵

Universalizing Grace

The goal of this rigorous rejection of election, as also the necessary implication, was the universalizing of the grace—the *saving* grace—of the covenant. In the covenant theology of Pieters and Kreulen, God is gracious to all the baptized children alike, indeed to all the members of the visible church, including many who nevertheless perish. This doctrine is, on its very face, the contradiction of the fundamental Reformed doctrine of irresistible, or efficacious, grace, as authoritatively confessed in heads three and four of the Canons of Dordt—the doctrine that is at the heart of the Reformed controversy with Arminianism.

Desperately trying to maintain some semblance of Reformed orthodoxy, in a denomination of churches that only twenty-seven years earlier had separated and suffered on account of the gospel of sovereign grace, Pieters and Kreulen concocted a distinction between "objective" grace and "subjective" grace. "Subjective" grace, they argued, is the inner working of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. The two Dutch ministers assured their readers that they denied "subjective" grace in all baptized children.

But they vehemently affirmed an "objective" grace of God toward all baptized children without exception. Although they never defined this "objective" grace, it is clear from their writings that God's "objective" grace is His attitude, or disposition, of loving favor toward all baptized children. In this attitude of favor, God wills and desires the salvation of all children without exception. He expresses

this will of salvation, and thus His "objective" grace, by promising and offering covenant salvation to all the children alike at their baptism.

God's "objective" covenant grace does more, according to Pieters and Kreulen. It bestows covenant salvation upon all the children "objectively." By the sacrament of Baptism, the "objective" grace of God makes all the children heirs of the salvation that is in Christ, especially the forgiveness of sins. Those who eventually perish therefore "disinherit" themselves. They "disinherit" themselves of the inheritance of covenant salvation that had very really been theirs.

Pieters and Kreulen were bold in their assertion that the (saving) covenant grace of God in Jesus Christ, be it "objective," is toward and upon all the baptized children without exception.

Regarding the statement in the Reformed Baptism form concerning the infant children of believers, "so are they again received unto grace in Christ," the two Dutch Reformed ministers insisted that the reference is to all the baptized children without exception, those who perish as well as those who are saved. They explicitly denied that this gracious reception of children is governed by "election in Christ."⁶

All of the baptized children without exception are "heirs of the

1. The full Dutch title is *De Kinderdoop volgens de Beginselen der Gereformeerde Kerk in Hare Gronden, Toedieningen en Praktijk. Op Nieuw Onderzocht, Beoordeeld en van Vele Schijnbare Zwaarigheden Ontheven* (Franeker: T. Telenga, 1861). All quotations from this book, as well as from the other Dutch writings, in this article are my translations of the Dutch. The book has not been translated.

2. The Dutch is *Christelijke Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk*.

3. Pieters and Kreulen, *Infant Baptism*, 6.

4. *Ibid.*, 28, 30.

5. *Ibid.*, 48.

6. *Ibid.*, 56.

kingdom of God and His covenant in this sense that they possess this [the kingdom and its riches—DJE] in the promise and one day would possess it in actuality, if they do not despise this promise by unthankfulness and thus disinherit themselves by unbelief.”⁷

So rich, and real, is the covenant grace of God toward all baptized children, according to Pieters and Kreulen, that the wonderful blessings for which the prayer after Baptism of the Reformed Baptism form gives thanks to God are the possession, “objectively,” of all the children without exception. These are the blessings of the forgiveness of sins, reception by God through the Holy Spirit, and adoption unto children. Implied is that Christ has died for them all, for the prayer thanks God that “thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins, *through the blood of thy Son Jesus Christ*, and received us through thy Holy Spirit, as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children.” In this prayer, the congregation thanks God “for the benefits which the Lord *objectively* gave and promised to her and to her children in His covenant.” Pieters and Kreulen meant *all* of the baptized children of the congregation without exception.⁸

As circumcision testified to all Israelites in the Old Testament, Esau as well as Jacob, so Baptism seals and assures to all baptized children without exception that God “will[s] to give them...the benefits of salvation.”⁹

Resistible Grace

Although the covenant grace of Pieters and Kreulen is very broad—universal within the visible church—it is strikingly, and ominously, ineffectual. It assures the salvation of no one. Many baptized children to whom God is thus gracious lose this grace, fall out of the covenant of grace, and “disinherit” themselves of the riches of salvation bestowed on them by the

gracious promise. Even though, in the language of the prayer after Baptism of the Reformed Baptism form (which Pieters and Kreulen applied to all baptized children), God forgave all their sins through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ, they perish everlastingly in hell.

A Conditional Covenant

The reason, according to the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, is that the covenant, the covenant promise, membership in the covenant, and covenant salvation are conditional. They themselves raised the question, “Why,” in view of the universality of the covenant promises, “does it then happen that the great promises which are signified and sealed by Baptism remain unfulfilled in the majority of those who are baptized?” Their answer was the conditionality of all the promises:

The cause why this is the case [namely, that the covenant promises go unfulfilled most of the time—DJE] must absolutely *not* be sought in this, as if on God’s part the promises were given to the one and not to the other. But the cause is found in this, that the divine promises are not given, signified, and sealed *unconditionally* in Baptism.

The condition is the “demand” upon the baptized child that he believe and repent. “Without this [the performance by the child of the demanded condition—DJE], God is not held to His promises, to fulfill them.”¹⁰

Significantly, Pieters and Kreulen declared that conditionality is the very “nature of the covenant.”¹¹ Since the covenant with believers and their seed is essentially the same as the covenant with Abraham, also Jehovah’s covenant with Abraham was conditional. “This promise [to Abraham in Genesis 17:7—DJE]: I am your God and the God of your seed...as a *covenant promise* include[ed] a demand and condition.... [It was not] *abso-*

lute, so that it had to be fulfilled in Abraham’s descendants....”¹² For Pieters and Kreulen, the covenant was a contract between God and Abraham, between God and the believer, and between God and the baptized child—*every baptized child*—consisting of the conditional promise on God’s part and faith as the demanded condition on the child’s part. And the fulfillment of the promise depended upon the performance of the condition.

A few years after the publication of his and Kreulen’s book *Infant Baptism*, Dominie Pieters wrote a series of articles in *De Bazuin*, magazine of the churches of the Secession, on the meaning of Baptism according to Question and Answer 69 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In this explanation of the Catechism, Pieters taught that all baptized children alike are “in God’s covenant of grace...according to God’s gracious ordinance.” In His grace to all the children, God promises salvation to all the children alike “without distinction and without reservation.” “God,” Pieters continued, is “faithful and true,” so that He “does not speak empty words, but always surely and certainly fulfills what He promises, *unless the baptized child upon growing up despises and rejects this divine promise by willful unbelief.*”¹³

The covenant promise of God often goes unfulfilled!

In all these instances, God does *not* “surely and certainly” perform what He promises!

By His failure to fulfill His promise, He shows Himself unfaithful and false!

The reason for this appalling state of divine affairs is that in the covenant the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ is conditional. Salvation in the covenant depends, not upon the electing God, but upon the willing sinner—in this case, a totally depraved infant child.

This is the Arminian heresy, condemned as heresy once and for all by the Synod of Dordt, applied to the covenant.

Pieters and Kreulen themselves recognized that their covenant doctrine inevitably drew the charge of “Remonstrantism,” or Arminianism. They attempted to ward off the charge by distinguishing “condition” in their covenant doctrine from “condition” in Arminian theology. They contended that in their theology of the covenant “condition” is merely the means by which the covenant child receives salvation. They added that it is the grace of God that enables a child to perform the condition.

Does someone say, in this manner there comes a *condition* into the covenant of grace, without which one does not become a partaker of the salvation promised in the covenant? Be it so, still the question really is, what does one here understand by a *condition*? If you take this word in a *legal* sense for something that man does by his *own* power, something that gives him a merit, upon which and because of which he would become partaker of the benefit contained in the covenant of grace, who would then give his assent to such an idea? But if one understands by a condition the *means* that God ordained by which man becomes partaker of the salvation of the covenant in God’s way, and *without which* he shall never enjoy this [salvation], then faith is surely a condition in the sense of the *means* by which (not: because of which or on the basis of which) the member of the covenant becomes partaker of the blessings of the covenant of grace. It is *only* in this sense that we believe and teach, as the Reformed church has always done, that faith is the *condition* of the covenant of grace.¹⁴

It is true that orthodox Reformed theologians have referred to faith as the “condition” in the covenant, although the “Three Forms of Unity,” which were the creeds of Pieters and Kreulen, not only do not speak of faith as a “condition,” but also explicitly reject this teaching. The Canons of Dordt deny that faith is a condi-

tion either of election or of salvation. When orthodox Reformed theologians spoke of faith as the “condition” in the covenant, they meant that faith is the means by which God realizes His covenant promise to the elect and by which He gives the elect the blessings and salvation of the covenant.

But it is false that in the covenant theology of Pieters and Kreulen “condition” functions only as a means. On the contrary, “condition” functions radically differently from a means. In the covenant theology of Pieters and Kreulen, the condition (which is faith) renders a general, or common, or universal, gracious promise effectual in a few children; is the reason why some remain in the covenant, in distinction from many others who fall out of the covenant, and fall away; and accounts for the salvation of some, in the context of a gracious will, or desire, of God for the salvation of all.

In the covenant theology of Pieters and Kreulen, as in that of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the men of the Federal Vision, covenant grace, which is wider than election and, indeed, cut loose from election altogether, becomes effectual in the salvation of baptized children, not by the efficacious power of the grace itself, but by the performance of a condition by the child. Thus, the covenant, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation do, in fact, *depend upon* the condition, that is, upon the will and work of the child.

It makes absolutely no difference whether the child performs the condition in his own strength or with the help of God’s grace. In both cases, the covenant depends upon the will and work of man.

In his biography of Anthony Brummelkamp, Melis te Velde notes that critics of Pieters and Kreulen in the churches of the Secession condemned the doctrine of the covenant of the two ministers

as “attributing a decisive role to the believing of man,” which is “Remonstrantism.”¹⁵ The critics were right.

Orthodox Reformed covenant theology, that is, a covenant theology that is faithful to the truth of sovereign grace as confessed by the Canons of Dordt, holds that God has a favorable covenantal attitude toward (“objective” grace) and works His covenantal salvation within (“subjective” grace) the elect children of godly parents. The means by which they know His favor and receive His saving operations is faith, which is itself a benefit of the covenant promise and

7. Ibid., 58, 59.

8. Ibid., 67, 68 (the emphasis is theirs).

9. Ibid., 31.

10. Ibid., 48 (the emphasis is theirs).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 28 (the emphasis is theirs). They added, confusing the issue, “even though it were the case that they [Abraham’s descendants—DJE] possessed neither faith nor godliness.” What Reformed theologian ever taught that the “absolute” (that is, unconditional) promise to Abraham would be fulfilled in Abraham’s seed “even if it were the case that they possessed neither faith nor godliness”? Orthodox Reformed theology teaches that God fulfilled the “absolute” (that is, unconditional) promise to Abraham *by giving* faith and godliness to the seed of Abraham. Besides, Pieters and Kreulen ignored that, according to Galatians 3:16, the “seed” of Abraham is Christ. Was also the covenant promise to Abraham concerning Christ conditional?

13. K.J. Pieters, “*Eenige Opmerkingen over de 69e vr. En antw. Van den Katechismus*,” *De Bazuin* [magazine of the Secession churches], 12 Mei 1865 (the magazine is not paginated; the emphasis is mine—DJE).

14. Pieters and Kreulen, *Infant Baptism*, 55 (the emphasis is theirs).

15. Melis te Velde, *Anthony Brummelkamp* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1988), 285.

worked in them by sovereign, particular covenant grace.

The covenant does not depend on the will of the covenant child, whether with or without the help of grace. Rather, the covenant depends squarely and wholly on the electing God.

The covenant is a covenant of grace.

It is not a covenant of *condition*.

"A New Opinion"

"Liberated" Reformed theologian C. Veenhof acknowledged that "with the publication of their book, the two Frisian preachers [Pieters and Kreulen]...opposed Van Velzen concerning the doctrine of covenant and baptism."¹⁶ But Van Velzen's doctrine of covenant and Baptism was that of the "fathers of the Secession," and, therefore, that of the churches of the Secession, for almost thirty years, from the very beginning of the Secession.

A colleague of the two ministers, who opposed their covenant doctrine, H. Joffers, charged that the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen was "a new opinion" in the churches of the Secession. The reason for his own book on infant baptism, he informed his readers was that

in recent years a new opinion about infant baptism and the [Reformed Baptism] form has surfaced in our church [the Christian Separated Reformed Church], namely, that all children at baptism are *objectively* in the covenant of grace, which pernicious opinion seeks to rob the parents of the comfort and certainty that they are able to have from the baptism of their children."¹⁷

Joffers referred, of course, to the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, recently introduced into the churches of the Secession by their book *Infant Baptism*.

Readers might have challenged Joffers' charge that the covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen was "pernicious." Joffers was confident that none could challenge his description of the covenant doctrine of his two colleagues as a "*new opinion*" in the churches of the Secession.

In the person of Simon Van Velzen, the "fathers of the Secession" condemned the new and radically different covenant doctrine of Pieters and Kreulen, and defended the old covenant doctrine of the Secession of 1834—a doctrine in which election governs the covenant.

... to be continued. 

16. C. Veenhof, *Prediking en Uitverkiezing* (Kampen: Kok, 1959), 66.

17. H. Joffers, *De Kinderdoop, met zijn Grond en Vrucht* (Kampen: S. Van Velzen Jr., 1865), 3 (the emphasis is his).

A Brief History of the Afscheiding (3)

The Character of the Movement

The Secession of 1834 was for the most part a movement among the lowest and poorest of the Dutch people. Even the ministers of the Secession were not from the higher classes, but for the most part from the middle class. Kromminga says:

The National Synod of the established Church is said to have

comforted itself with the numerical smallness of the secession. The seceders came then and for years continued to come from the humbler walks of life. But, though numerically and economically weak and lacking in social prestige, the group developed a spiritual power that in course of time astounded its adversaries. The spring of that power was their common love for the Reformed doctrine and their loyalty to the Reformed formularies (creeds) as founded on the love of God.¹

There are several reasons for this. First, from a human point of view, these were the people who had nothing to lose by leaving the state church, and it was for this

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same reason that many later left for America. This is in harmony with the words of Jesus, "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). Second, and from the viewpoint of God's purpose, it is always the case that He gathers His church for the most part from among such people as the seceders, the lowest and poorest, "that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:29).

This was beautifully illustrated in another way at the time of the Secession. Prior to the Secession there had been men, many of them from the nobility and all of them

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influential in the Netherlands, who had protested the apostasy of the state church. They were part of a movement known as the *Reveil* (Revival). Among them were men such as the poet Isaac da Costa, who wrote "Grievances against the Spirit of the Age" and was Scholte's mentor; William Bilderdijk, a prominent lawyer, whose teachings de Cock was later accused of promoting; William de Clercq, poet and financier; and Groen van Prinsterer, secretary to the King and founder of the Anti-revolutionary political party in the Netherlands.

These men, some of whom showed sympathy for the Secession or protested the persecution visited on the seceders, all remained in the state church. Just after the Secession had become a reality, Scholte wrote:

That evening, I called on my old friend and brother Da Costa, with whom I had always agreed as had many others, although now on the thing that had happened (Secession) he differed completely from me. My actions and intentions had been completely misunderstood by him.²

Da Costa's pamphlet had stirred the Netherlands with a call for return to God's Word, but he himself would not follow when the way was that of suffering, reproach, struggle, and ignominy.

In the providence of God, it had to be that way. As the same writer says:

What would have happened had the men of the *Reveil*, or all who looked for the Kingdom of God, joined the *Afscheiding*? No doubt the *organization* would have been looser, the *doctrines* less sharply defined.³

It was the deep spirituality, the strong piety, the thirst for the truth among the common folk that God used to preserve His church during the dark years before the Secession and to kindle anew the flame in the hearts of men like de Cock and even

to bring about their conversion. It was these poor folk who were willing to lose everything for the kingdom's sake, who suffered cruelly for their faith, but who carried the lamp of truth in their own land and on to the new world, even to places like South Africa.

The Secession of 1834 also illustrates the teaching of Scripture regarding the preaching of the gospel, that it is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16), for the Secession was about the preaching of the gospel more than anything else. It was a desire for gospel preaching that brought crowds to Ulrum to hear de Cock, that made the people of the Secession endure patiently the suffering that was their lot, and that led these common folk to support their leaders in leaving the state church, in emigrating to the United States and in struggling to establish and maintain a new denomination.

There is no evidence that de Cock was an especially gifted preacher or skilled orator. That is only to say, however, that the power of the gospel is not in excellency of speech or wisdom (I Cor. 2:1), but in God, who sends the gospel, and in Christ, who speaks to His people through it. It was not the man the people followed, but the truth as it is in Jesus.

It was this desire for the gospel that led to extraordinary efforts to preach and hear the truth.

In several cases "when soldiers and the rabble made it impossible for Seceders to meet on land" they held their services on the water:

This happened at Oud-Loosdrecht on June 9, 1837, where H.P. Scholte planned to preach and baptize. The military prevented any service from being held, and therefore it was decided to gather on the lake in the ship of brother N. Pos, who made it available. At 8 A.M. the church ship sailed with the parents on board, as well as their children who were to be baptized. They

were gaped after by the soldiers who had been called to arms! From all sides the members of the congregation converged on the ship in small boats. Scholte also went on board and preached twice that Sunday, entirely without interference. A week later he preached and served Communion on board a ship on the *Zuider Zee*.... [But] finally, even these gatherings on water were prevented.⁴

Because the gospel is the spiritual food and drink, the life and health of His people, God preserves it in every age, and when it seems that the voice of the gospel has been silenced, God raises up out of obscurity men to feed His sheep and to lead them in the green pastures of His Word. The gospel is, after all, the gospel of *His* grace and glory!

The Secession, then, was a work of God, and its beginnings and survival were a miracle of grace. The Secession had its roots in the work of God's grace in the hearts of those who remained faithful and remembered the truth during the long, dark years before the Secession. It sprang to life by a work of grace in the heart of de Cock and the members of the Scholte Club. It survived persecution, internal strife, emigration, and other difficulties by grace alone, for both leaders and members showed themselves to be sinners. There was, as one writer puts it, "considerable strange fire on the altar,"⁵

1. D.H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 87, 88.

2. Lubbertus Oostendorp, *H. P. Scholte* (Franeker: T. Weaver, 1964), 73.

3. Oostendorp, *H. P. Scholte*, 73.

4. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 92.

5. Homer C. Hoeksema, "The Sesquicentennial of the *Afscheiding*," in the *Standard Bearer* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1984), 60, 197.

but God uses weak means to accomplish His purpose and work His will, as was abundantly proved in those difficult years:

Had the Secession been a work of man, surely there would have been nothing left of the delivered church but bits and pieces. But God is faithful; He kept His work alive, although He allowed Satan and man to do many things, so that it would be apparent that the liberation and preservation of the Church is *His* work, and so that whoever boasts might boast not of de Cock or Scholte, Van Velzen or Brummelkamp, but boast only in the Lord.⁶

The seceders themselves saw this and must have sung with special fervor the words of Psalm 118 from their Dutch Psalters:

Jehovah is my strength and tower,
He is my happiness and song;
He saved me in the trying hour,...
Hence shall my mouth His praise prolong.
The voice of gladness and salvation
Is in the tents of righteousness;
There do they sing with adoration,
The Lord's right hand is strong to bless.⁷

The Lessons

What are the lessons to be learned from the history of the Secession of 1834? There are many lessons to be learned, including the importance of the lay members of the church and their love for the truth; the importance and necessity of the preaching of the gospel; the high cost of following Christ and the Word of God; the importance of creeds in the church, for it was through them that the doctrines of Scripture lived in the hearts of the faithful in the years prior to the Secession; the truth that the church is reformed and always reforming; that the false church always hates and persecutes the faithful;⁸ that

government control of the church of Jesus Christ is never to be tolerated; and the fact that God uses weakest means to do His will. Of some of these lessons we have already spoken.


That faithfulness to God and His Word has a price was proved first in persecution and then also in the unimaginable difficulties faced by those who emigrated. Van Raalte is said to have broken down and cried during one worship service the first winter after coming to the United States, and asked, "Lord, shall we all perish?" The question may well be asked, therefore, "How many descendants of the Secession today would endure the persecution that their ancestors endured for the sake of their confession?"⁹

The principal lessons of the Secession, though, are two. The first lesson is that, having been graciously preserved by God and blessed by Him beyond what anyone would ever ask and think, those who have been so blessed must remember what God has done for them, must cherish what He has given them, lest they lose everything. That is what has happened in many of the denominations and churches that have their roots in the Secession of 1834. Among too many of them the creeds are again neglected and forgotten, the doctrines of the creeds and Scripture despised, the gospel changed again into powerless moralizing. In the Netherlands the churches of the Secession now tolerate evils that would not have been dreamed of in the state church before the Secession, and the country is a moral ruin. That is a lesson for us as Protestant Reformed

Churches: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

The other lesson is that God, who chose His church in eternity, redeemed her in Christ, and gave her His own Spirit, will never forsake her, but gathers, defends, and preserves her by His Spirit and

Word from the beginning to the end of the world (Heid. Cat., 54). He preserved His church then; He will do so in these dark days. And when those darkest of all days come, as they must, then too He will not forsake His own, but will cause the light of His truth to shine in their hearts and through them in

the world until that grand day when the darkness is dispelled forever and the rising Sun of righteousness comes with eternal healing in His wings. 

The question may well be asked, therefore, "How many descendants of the Secession today would endure the persecution that their ancestors endured for the sake of their confession?"

6. Quoted in Nelson D. Kloosterman, "The Doctrinal Significance of the Secession of 1834," in *The Reformation of 1834* (Orange City: Pluim Publishing, 1984), 37.

7. *The Psalter*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 380, 381 (#427, 2).

8. The Belgic Confession of Faith states in Article 29, "As for the false church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry."

9. Homer C. Hoeksema, "Act of Secession or Return," in the *Standard Bearer*, 60, 222.

■ “Tenured Bigots”

Such is the title of a telling article by Mark Bergin in *WORLD* magazine (August 18, 2007). It is common knowledge that the institutions of higher learning in North America are dominated by professors who have little regard for, or are openly hostile toward, traditional values and Christianity. That would appear to be especially true with regard to evangelical (including Reformed) Christians. Bergin contends that statistics now confirm that most faculty members do not like evangelicals, and that they are not ashamed to admit it. He reports:

David French has known for years that college campuses are bastions of anti-evangelical bias. He knew it when he served on the admissions committee at Cornell Law School and watched his colleagues ridicule evangelical applicants as “Bible thumpers” or members of the “God squad.” He knew it during his tenure with an education watchdog organization that routinely challenged university speech codes bent on silencing evangelical viewpoints. He knew it when he shifted into his current role as director of the Alliance Defense Fund’s Center for Academic Freedom, a position from which he’s filed numerous lawsuits on behalf of victimized evangelical students.

But only now can French declare with certainty that his anecdotal observations accurately represent a widespread statistical reality. In a recently released scientific survey of 1,269 faculty members across 712 different colleges and universities, 53 percent of respondents admitted to harboring unfavorable feelings toward evangelicals.

“The results were incredibly unsurprising but at the same time vitally important,” French told *WORLD*. “For a long time, the academic freedom movement in this country has presented the academy with story after story of outrageous abuse, and the academy has steadfastly refused to admit that the sky is blue—that it has an overwhelming ideological bias that manifests itself in concrete ways. This is another brick in the wall of proving that there’s a real problem.”

Unlike much of the previous foundation for that proof, this brick hails from a non-evangelical source. Gary A. Tobin, president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research, set out to gauge levels of academic anti-Semitism compared to hostility toward other religious groups. He found that only 3 percent of college faculty holds unfavorable views toward Jews. In fact, no religious group draws anywhere near the scorn of evangelicals, Mormons placing a distant second with a 33 percent unfavorable outcome.

Tobin was shocked. And his amazement only escalated upon hearing reaction to his results from the academy’s top brass. Rather than deny the accuracy of Tobin’s findings or question his methodology, academy leaders attempted to rationalize their bias. “The prejudice is so deep that faculty do not have any problem justifying it. They tried to dismiss it and said they had a good reason for it,” Tobin told *WORLD*. “I don’t think that if I’d uncovered bigotry or social dissonance about Latinos, women, blacks, or Jews, they would have had that same response.”

Cary Nelson, president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), told *The Washington Post* that the poll merely reflects “a political and cultural resistance, not a form of religious bias.” In other words, the college faculty members dislike evangelicals not for their faith

but the practical outworking of that faith, which makes it OK.

Other prominent voices from the academy have suggested that the anti-evangelical bias does not likely translate into acts of classroom discrimination. Tobin intends to test that claim with a subsequent survey of 3,500 students in the coming academic year. My guess: “You can’t have this much smoke without some fire,” he said.

French can readily testify to that....

...In another landmark case at Missouri State University, junior Emily Brooker objected to an assignment in which students were asked to write their state legislators and urge support for adoptions by same-sex couples. The evangelical social-work major was promptly hauled before a faculty panel and charged with maintaining an insufficient commitment to diversity. The panel grilled Brooker on her religious views without her parents present, convicted her of discrimination against gays, and informed her that to graduate she needed to lessen the gap between her own values and the values of the social-work profession.

The Alliance Defense Fund sued Missouri State on Brooker’s behalf, pressuring the university into dropping the discrimination charges and paying for Brooker to attend graduate school. An independent investigation into the incident found such widespread intellectual bullying throughout the university’s school of social work that investigators recommended shutting the program down and replacing the entire faculty....

...Robert Shibley, vice president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), told *WORLD* his organization can hardly keep up with intellectual intolerance and free-speech infringements against evangelical and conservative groups. “College campuses overall are not living up to the ideal of having a marketplace of ideas, of having true intellectual diversity to go

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along with racial and religious diversity," he said. "In too many cases we see groups—evangelical Christians and conservatives, primarily—face sanctions or punishments that are more severe than those of groups with other viewpoints. Or they're punished for things that other groups wouldn't be punished for at all."

How sad, how shameful, that while almost all of America's first colleges and universities were established as Christian institutions, in our day the faculties of these institutions, and many others, are free to inject their anti-Christian biases into the classrooms. One would presume that, of all people, university professors would be guardians of academic freedom and tolerance on campus. But tolerance is often a one-way street. Tolerance and political correctness apply in all areas other than Christianity.

What is worse, political correctness has also invaded many religious institutions of higher learning. In private Christian (even Reformed) colleges, students maintaining strict biblical, confessional convictions are sometimes belittled or harassed.

We must make every effort to prepare our young men and women for what they may face on the college or university campus. Unsuspecting young students may be especially vulnerable to indoctrination in political correctness and to attack by anti-Christian bigotry.

■ No Heart for Special Children

Many of us have been privileged to see and experience the blessings of a child, or adult, with special needs—physical or mental disabilities. Very often such a child has a very special place within both the home and the congregation. Though there are challenges and sometimes very real hardships involved, the blessings

of our covenant God abound.

But in the culture of death in which we live, increasingly such special children are not permitted to see the light of day. Medical technology, which is often a wonderful means for good, is increasingly used for evil. And prenatal testing frequently leads to abortion, which is used as a "disability prevention measure." Joni Eareckson Tada explains in a poignant article in *WORLD* (September 15, 2007) entitled: "Down Syndrome Dangers":

Every year we look forward to Doug volunteering at family retreats that we hold for disabled children and their moms and dads. He is young and athletic, a senior in college, handsome, articulate, and intelligent. The kids love him (and so do a few girl volunteers). When he first began volunteering, we assigned Doug to a little boy with Down syndrome. The two hit it off wonderfully. This energetic young man possessed a knack for relating to the boy; from that year onward, he always asked to be assigned to children with Down syndrome and their parents.

Recently Doug said, "Joni, when I get married, I hope that my wife and I will have a child with Down syndrome." I was startled, but chalked it up to youthful idealism. Since then, I have come to see that Doug meant what he said. He observed a special joy in children and adults with Down syndrome, as well as a godliness that strengthened his faith. He could also tell these children blessed the lives of the moms and dads to whom he administered over the years.

I thought of Doug earlier this year when the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists began recommending broader prenatal testing for Down syndrome among younger pregnant women. Up until this year, they recommended that only older women who were pregnant be tested. But now, *all* mothers-to-be are routinely tested. The results? Over 90 percent of pregnant women

who are given a Down syndrome diagnosis choose to have an abortion.

This breaks my heart....

...I am *deeply* concerned about this trend. Abortion is now used as a "disability prevention measure." The effort to eliminate Down syndrome translates into the worst kind of social engineering: the annihilation of an entire group of people who are precious. Our alternative: Accept the love and the God-blessed joys of raising a child—a life—that God has given. Jesus says, "*Bless the little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*" Even children with Down syndrome.

A person with Down syndrome may never understand how to keep up with the Joneses or how to get over his head in debt. He or she may never be clever enough to sneak behind his spouse's back and look for an illicit affair (yes, men and women with Down syndrome do marry, and some of those marriages are honest-to-goodness models to neighbors and friends). They won't be cunning enough to know how to cheat, weave lies, or how to stab a friend in the back. People with Down syndrome may not have driver's licenses, but then again, neither do I—and I get around quite well for a quadriplegic.

That new ruling by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is a sad reflection of the growing premise in our society that a person is "better off dead than disabled." Human beings are no longer being treated as people, but as *things* that can be dispensed with, altered, aborted, or euthanized. The medically fragile—whether the elderly, the unborn, or the children Doug serves—are left exposed and vulnerable in a society that has lost its moral bearings, its *heart*.

The wish of "Doug," in Joni's article, that he and his wife might one day have a Down syndrome child, called to mind the following statement of Gertrude Hoeksema to her husband, "If any child other than our own could have been our

daughter, it would have been Lori." Lori was one of God's special children with multiple, both mental and physical, handicaps that Mrs. Hoeksema was able to mentor and instruct in Scripture for a few years. The beautiful story is told in her book *Lori* (Reformed Free Publishing Assoc., 1987). If it's been a few years since you've read this book, pick it up and read it again. If you've never read *Lori*, purchase the book and have your heart touched.

Several weeks ago, in the Grand Rapids, MI area, many were able to attend the annual "Special Needs Program" held at Faith PRC in Jenison. I personally have not had the privilege of attending this program, due to the great distance involved, but I've heard much

about it. I know that a requirement for attending is a handkerchief or a good supply of tissues. For to hear numerous saints, both children, young people, and adults, who have various "special needs" speak and sing God's praises brings tears to the eyes of the most stolid of God's people.

May the spirit of the age in which we live, which would avoid or dispense with those who are less than "perfect," inspire us to wholeheartedly support the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education, to volunteer our time to help out on the periodic outings of the special needs saints, to remember with prayer and acts of kindness families blessed, but also burdened, with special needs children.

Take the time, make the effort, to greet and get to know these "special" fellow saints.

For our covenant-keeping God also has among His children these "special" children. As Gertrude Hoeksema related concerning Lori, "The Lord took her through the valley of death to be with Him so she could say her favorite words to all eternity: 'I belong to Jesus.'" The words of Christ apply: "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:5, 6).

May God give us a heart for "special" children. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Arie denHartog

Covenant Life in the Home (1)

Intend in the next few installments to write on the above stated subject. I am thankful for the occasion for new study of this subject and pray that our presentations will be of spiritual benefit for those who read these articles.

The home is, we believe, the wonderful creation of God. It was created by God in the beginning when He created the world and all things in it. We have, I am sure, heard many times that the home is the basic institution of all human society. This truth is worthy of repetition. All other institutions that in the providence of God arose in human society have developed naturally in the course of time from the home: the broader family of

several generations, tribes and clans, and finally the nations of the world. All these institutions are greatly influenced by the family even today.

God created man a personal and social being. It is, as God said, not good for a man to be alone. We are to live together in harmony and peace in God's creation. We are dependent on each other, and we have a moral obligation to care for one another and serve one another. There is joy and blessing in living together as God has made us. The first and great commandment is that we love God, and the second is like unto it, that we love our neighbor.

The beginning of the home was God's creation of marriage. God created man male and female. He made both male and female after His own likeness. He joined man and woman together in the inti-

mate and mysterious union of marriage in which the lives of two of God's people are molded together into one. When God establishes a marriage, these two human individuals are no longer two but one. God intended that in marriage man and woman live together in the joy and blessedness of friendship and fellowship in their home. There in the home, husband and wife have the calling to support and encourage each other, nourish and strengthen each other, in the service of the Lord. The home is the place where this couple ideally spend most of their time and should enjoy the intimate life that God intended marriage to be. The very way in which God prepared each partner in marriage established the order for the home. God created man to be the head of his wife and the wife to be his help, suited exactly to complement him

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and fulfill his need. God formed the woman out of the very flesh and blood of man himself. All of this was done by the wonderful work of God to establish the order of the covenant home for all time and to prepare for the life and happiness and well-being of the covenant home.

The home was further developed when God gave covenant children to Adam and Eve. We know of course that these children were not born until after the fall. God intended that the institution of the home should be the place where covenant children are born and raised and nurtured and prepared for human society. It is the place where children are to be trained to establish their own covenant home someday. It is the place where children must learn to live in broader society outside of their homes.

We do not know whether Adam and Eve lived in any kind of a house in the garden of Eden. Probably not. We might say, however, that the whole of the garden was the home of Adam and Eve. The blessedness of that home for Adam and Eve before the fall was that it was the place where they experienced a living, personal knowledge of God their Creator and enjoyed fellowship, communion, and friendship with the infinitely blessed God, the source and fountain of life and of all good. Together Adam and Eve had the calling to be friend servants of God, by exercising dominion over God's creation and dressing and keeping the garden. We can only imagine how exceedingly blessed this was for Adam and Eve before the fall.

The covenant life of Adam and Eve was grievously affected by the fall. The fall brought great trouble for marriage and the family. The curse of God came upon Eve as wife and on Adam as husband. The curse for the woman would mean that her desire would be towards her husband and he would rule over her. In pain and sorrow

she would bring forth children. Because of the curse of God and the sin that followed upon it, wives would rebel against their God-given husbands. They would forsake the home for fame and glory and achievement in the world independent from their husbands and the home. They now imagine that in the ungodly and sin-cursed world there is greater opportunity for the satisfaction and fulfillment of their pride and lust and worldly pursuits than in the home.

Adam, too, came under the curse. This would affect the very way in which he would live with his wife. Fallen man is filled with lust and pride. He is self-centered, careless about others, seeking only the satisfaction of his own lusts and pride, living only for his own glory in the world. All of this militates against marriage and life in the home. After the fall, man can no longer live in close communion with his God-given wife. The pride and enmity of their sinful nature soon causes division and strife in their relationship. The curse on Adam and all men born from him would result in that the rule over their wives would be unloving and tyrannical and even cruel. They would strive to subjugate their wives, making them virtual slaves in their homes, while they served their own interest and satisfied their evil lust. In the most dreadful scenario, husbands verbally and even physically abuse their wives. Sometimes violence in the home becomes so awful that husbands even murder their God-given wives. Because of man's corrupt nature after the fall, it is surprising that he can at all live in marriage.

Sexual unfaithfulness and perversion came from the fall. Sex was intended by God to be the source of deep satisfaction and joy and to promote intimacy between a married man and his God-given wife. The fall perverted the act of marriage. All this perversion is the wrecker of marriage and home life.

It makes covenant home life virtually impossible. It changes that which God made personal and beautiful and most intimate, exciting, and joyous to be wretched and life-destroying, the source finally of deep resentment, hurt, and bitterness. The immorality that the world so much glories in is the cause of man's shame and debasement and destruction of human society. The most dreadful human wretchedness and enmity and division follow from this great evil of fallen man.

After the fall, Adam and Eve brought forth children in their home according to God's mandate for marriage. But they would do so in pain and sorrow. Adam and Eve would not only bring forth God-fearing children such as Abel and Seth, but they would also give birth to a wicked Cain, who in the days of his youth would so hate his own brother that he would rise up to murder him. Can we imagine the sorrow and anguish this must have brought to the home of Adam and Eve!

Most of juvenile delinquency comes from the tragedy of the home situations in the world. This in turn results in violence and crime in the streets of our cities. Few worldly-wise engineers of human society are willing to trace the evil of our modern society to the dreadful evil that is prevalent in homes all over our land. These great evils are seen not only in the homes of what might be called the low-livers of society but also in the homes of those considered the educated and the cultured and the refined. Even the homes of the world's marriage counselors often are miserable and wretched, though they try to hide this.

Over the years, worldly men have proposed changing the structure of society and replacing the home with other institutions, perhaps those in which all men live communally together. It is said that marriage and the family are archaic institutions that must be

abolished. They are irrelevant and perhaps even detrimental to the great society of peace and brotherhood and human greatness that men envision. The public schools have replaced the home to instruct the new generations of youth in the common philosophy of the world and hopefully solve the problems of human society and nations. History has again and again shown the disastrous consequences of the corruption of the divine institution of the home and the attempts to replace the institution of the home that God created, with arrangements of human society invented by man's folly.

God in covenant mercy gives and maintains the covenant home in the midst of this corrupt and evil world for the benefit of His people. The fellowship of God Himself, and the knowledge of Him and of His love for His people, are and can be by His wonderful grace be experienced in the life of the covenant home. These covenant homes are of vital importance for the development of genuine Christian character and of truly Christian society.

The home was considered of greatest importance for the lives of God's people in the days of the Old Testament. Think of the home life of the patriarchs, many of whom lived in tents all the days of their lives and were pilgrims and strangers in the world. Think of the beautiful illustration of home life in the days of Abraham, when God sent His messengers to commune with Abraham and Sarah in the opening of their tent in the cool of the day. God Himself visited the covenant home of Abraham and Sarah, to make known the secrets of His covenant and to comfort them with the blessed hope of the promised Messiah that was to come.

When the nation of Israel was established in the land of Canaan, the home would be of greatest importance. The strong emphasis on home life would distinguish the

nation of Israel from all the pagan nations that lived around her. So Moses the man of God, before he was taken to heaven, gave extensive instruction for how covenant homes were to be established and maintained in the promised land. This instruction is given throughout the book of Deuteronomy. The Psalms sing of the blessedness of the life of God's people in marriage and the home. Think especially of the description, in Psalm 128, of the blessedness of the man who fears the Lord.

In the New Testament, we find much instruction concerning marriage and the family and home living. Strong and truly Christian homes would have a great influence in society and stand in stark contrast with the ungodly world. They would shine as glorious testimonies of the power of the grace and Spirit of Christ Jesus in the lives of men and women and children. Strong and truly Christian homes would serve greatly for the nurture of future members of the church of Jesus Christ. In these homes they would learn of their own calling and responsibility in the church of Christ. They would learn about their place in the communion of the saints and their calling to love one another. They would learn how to remain steadfast to the Lord even in times of great adversity and persecution.

The home is the place where God's people spend most of their time. Ideally, as God intended, the home is the place where they experience most intimate fellowship and communion with one another. Married couples, if the Lord so wills, live many days and months and years together in the covenant home. In the home they make their purposes and plans for their whole life together. There the married couple bear together the joys and sorrows of life, the prosperity and adversity, the health and sickness that God in His providence sends. In the home the married couple share the kitchen, sitting together

around the dinner table; they relax together from the weariness of life in the living room; and they enjoy the holy intimacy of love and faithfulness in the undefiled marriage bed. In the home the married couple spend the exciting and vigorous days of youth, and in the providence of God the home will be the place where they will still be living together in old age. Every stage of life will have its own experiences, its own joys and sorrows and troubles.

Ideally the covenant home must be the place of shelter and refuge in the midst of an ungodly world. It must be the place of retreat and quiet and peace and relaxed life, away from the busyness and stress, confusion and competition, of life in the world. In an impersonal world, where men live in enmity and careless disregard for one another, the covenant home is the place for personal life and care for one another. The home must be the sanctuary of God in the midst of the temptations and ungodliness of the world. In the home we must learn what it truly means to be holy and separate. There we must be equipped to resist the devilish temptations and ungodly lusts of this evil world that threaten to destroy our life in the world.

Children are born and raised and nurtured in the covenant home. Their whole character and personality must be nurtured and developed in the home. Their whole godly perspective on life must be learned during the days that they are in their covenant home. They are in the home from the time they are helpless little babes in their mother's arms, through the days of joyful and carefree childhood and the days of youth, and finally, hopefully, to the days of adulthood, the time of full maturity, responsibility, and independency. In the home, covenant children must be equipped and prepared for life on their own in the world. They must have the pattern for establishing, the Lord will-

ing, their own covenant home. Home life must prepare covenant young people for the careers that God has called and gifted them for.

One of the most amazing passages in all of the Scriptures giving instruction about what covenant life in the home should be is the one found in Deuteronomy 6: 6-9. In the series of articles I intend to write for this department in the *Standard Bearer* I want to look carefully at this passage. We will do some exegesis of this passage and try to make some application to life in our homes today. We will also use some of the concepts of this passage to elaborate on specific subjects of covenant life in the home.


Everyone could of course read this passage in his own Bible. But maybe it is good for me to quote it right in this article: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine

house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

Some would immediately say that this passage was written in a day when the culture was so different from that in our modern world. Therefore there is little relevance of what Moses said to Israel many centuries ago for us who live in 2007. We hope to show in coming articles that this is a great mistake. There is much that we can learn from this Old Testament passage for covenant home life in our modern times and culture.

The life of the covenant home must flow forth from the love of God. This is clear from the instruction that introduces this whole passage, in Deuteronomy 6:5. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Love for God cannot be something cold and formal. It is not a mere emotion or sentimental feeling. We must love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. This love of God and for God must be the mighty, controlling, and inspiring principle for all covenant life in our homes. This love must not be merely talked about but lived and experienced and put into practice in our covenant homes.

If we are to have covenant homes in reality, there must be constant instruction in the statutes and commandments and ordinances of the Lord, our covenant God. For all these must govern the covenant home. These commandments of the Lord must be known and fully understood by parents. They must be carefully taught to the children in the home. They must be followed, practiced, and lived by. There must be relaxed time and opportunity for the instruction and nurture of children in these things. We shall return to all these things in coming articles. 

Strength of Youth

Rev. Garry Eriks

Seeking the Living Water

This section of the *Standard Bearer* has been and continues to be written for the young people in the church. The title, "The Strength of Youth," emphasizes the spiritual strength that God has given to our young people. This spiritual strength is renewed through the study of God's Word. God has given the Scriptures to be our faithful guide in life. To encourage you young people in the study of God's Word, I plan to write my articles so that

they can be used for meditation on the Word of God. I plan to include passages of Scripture and some thought questions that you can use in your personal devotions. You may want to take the time to write out answers to these questions for your own benefit. This will be beneficial because it forces you to think more about the questions and it aids in better evaluating your own spiritual thoughts. Parents, I would humbly request of you that you encourage your teenagers to read the passages of Scripture for their personal devotions.



Passages to read and consider: John 4:7-30; Jeremiah 2:9-13; Isaiah 55:1-3

As Christian young people in this wicked world you have the calling to fight against sin. This is the same calling God has given to your parents, grandparents, and all the members of the church. The battle is fierce and the enemies are strong. Those strong enemies are not only *without* (the wicked world, Satan, and his host of fallen angels), but also *within* you (your own sinful flesh). The world of sin and Satan has an ally within you, your flesh, which is so powerful. These ferocious enemies without

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and within want to enslave you to sin. They want you under the tyranny and bondage of sin.

God calls His people to fight against sin in the power of His grace. The Word of God teaches there is only one thing more powerful than this enemy—the power of God’s grace in the hearts and lives of His people. Thanks be to God for giving this powerful grace, which is the strength of all God’s people. As those saved by grace, you are called to fight against sin.

The Scriptures provide different strategies for fighting against sin. One such strategy is the calling to seek the living water (this is the calling found in the passages listed above). The Word of God calls you young people to seek the living water that is found alone in Jesus Christ. When you seek this living water, you will not seek the impure waters found in this world. The waters of this world cannot satisfy, but the living water gives true satisfaction. My desire is that you learn from Scripture what it means to seek the living water.



In John 4:7-30 Jesus speaks of two kinds of water. The first kind of water is the water that the Samaritan woman drew from the well, which does not quench spiritual thirst. The second is the water that Jesus gives to His people. This water quenches thirst eternally.

Jesus teaches in John 4 that the water the Samaritan woman drew from the well cannot quench spiritual thirst. No matter how much the woman drinks of this water, she will be thirsty again. So also there are many things you may desire that will not quench your spiritual thirst. You may seek to fill your closet with clothes and shoes, with the misconception that this will bring you happiness. You may attempt to seek fulfillment in your life by gratifying your flesh. Gratifying the flesh is satisfying sinful passions and urges. The reason for gratifying the flesh is to search for

something that satisfies. It is an attempt to feel good and find happiness. Jesus teaches that satisfaction cannot be found in following sinful desires. They are poor substitutes for the living water.

The Samaritan woman is an example of this. After Jesus spoke to her about the living water that He gives, the woman asked in verse 15, “Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.” Then Jesus said to her, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” Why did Jesus command her to do this? The following verses answer this. She responded, “I have no husband.” Jesus answers that she said rightly, because she had five husbands and she was married to the sixth (v. 18). Why did Jesus bring this up? She was searching for satisfaction and happiness in these marriages, but she did not find it in these unlawful marriages.

True spiritual satisfaction and happiness cannot be found in anything other than the living water of Jesus Christ. The world promises you satisfaction and happiness in partying—drunkenness, drugs, and music. The world says happiness is found by fulfilling your sexual desires outside of marriage. In our day, people turn to food for comfort and happiness. Others think happiness is to be found in having a thin body or bulging biceps. Excellence in academics and sports offers you happiness. The list is endless. Notice that some of these things are not wrong of themselves. But they become wrongly elevated in our minds so that we think they have the ability to provide true happiness and satisfaction. But they cannot.

The Word of God makes clear that anything other than the living water of Jesus Christ will not satisfy. The things of this world promise to satisfy and quench your thirst. Drunkenness, drugs, music, movies, and much more promise to quench your thirst. They promise to satisfy and provide the happi-

ness that you long for. Honestly, these things seem to provide what you want—but only for a little while. Soon you discover that these things cannot truly satisfy.

The things of this world can never satisfy, because they are temporary. We know this from our own experience of hunger and thirst physically. We eat and drink to satisfy our hunger and thirst. This is not wrong. But after a few hours we are hungry and thirsty again.

Sin is totally incapable of satisfying us and bringing happiness. This is the very nature of sin. Sin cannot bring lasting happiness because it enslaves and ends in death. Remember that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). It promises to satisfy, and this is why we keep going back to sin. The result is that sin becomes habitual in our lives when we seek happiness in it. This means we repeat sinful activity, thinking it will provide true happiness. This is what Ephesians 4:19 teaches: “Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness (every kind of impurity—GJE), to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

But the Scriptures expose sin for what it is. Seeking satisfaction in sin is like seeking to quench your thirst with sewer water. Would you go to the Grand River in Grand Rapids for a drink of water after a storm, when millions of gallons of raw sewage spilled into the river? Would you quench your thirst by drinking out of the toilet? Why seek satisfaction and happiness in the sewer-water of sin?

Isaiah 55:2 asks an important question: “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” This passage shows the vanity of seeking and laboring for what does not satisfy.

Thought questions: 1) *From what water have you been drinking to find*

satisfaction and happiness? 2) Are you looking for satisfaction in the wrong places? 3) How have you spent money or worked for that which does not satisfy?



Isaiah 55:1 says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." We are commanded to come "to the waters." Verses 6 and 7 further explain: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near...." Those who thirst come to the waters by seeking the Lord.

Where will these waters be found? Isaiah 55:3 says, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." When the passage says "incline your ear" and "hear," God is saying that this living water is found in His Word. The source of this water is God. He pours out the living water in the preaching of the gospel and in the Holy Scriptures. You receive the living water weekly under the preaching of the gospel. The living water is found when you read the Scriptures before bed. What gives true refreshment and satisfaction is the Word of God!

We know where this water is found, but what is this water? Jesus explains more fully in John 4:13, 14: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The water that satisfies is the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ. This water satisfies because it meets your greatest need. Young people, do you know what your greatest need is? It is not to be popular. It is not all A's on your

report card. It is not a good time. It is not to have a cell phone, car, iPod, computer, and a closet full of clothes. Your greatest need is deliverance from sin. This is why the water of Jesus Christ satisfies. It is living water. This water gives life. This alone brings true happiness.

This water gives life because Jesus Christ alone saves. He suffered and died on the tree of Calvary, bearing the curse of God in our place. All the wrath of God we deserved for our sins was poured out on Him, so that He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The living water that flows to us is the assurance that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. What can give you more joy than knowing this?

Jesus Christ has made us alive through the work of His Spirit. The tyranny of sin has been broken by the powerful work of Christ's Spirit in your hearts and lives. This does not mean you do not sin anymore. This means sin no longer reigns! There is a power greater than the power of your sin. This is the power of God's grace in you. What joy! As a child of God saved by grace you have within you the power to overcome sin. This is not your own power, but the power of the cross working in you. Jesus Christ is a constantly flowing spring of water, giving strength to overcome the power of sin in your lives.

This well of water giving life brings you everlasting life. Jesus Christ gives the living water of preservation until you are finally taken home. In Jesus Christ, you have everlasting life. This is the life that quenches your thirst and satisfies. Young people, do you know this life and seek this life?


Thought questions: 1) What sins has Jesus Christ given you grace to overcome? 2) To what sins are you still clinging and need to pray that God will give you strength to overcome?



When seeking the living water that is found in Jesus Christ, you will not seek satisfaction in other things. While seeking satisfaction in the things of this world or in a life of sin, those things become the focus of life. These things become extremely BIG in life. When you try to find happiness in these things, you will give heart, mind, soul, and strength in this pursuit. But when the focus is turned to Jesus Christ and seeking the living water that is found in Him, there is a change in what you think about. You do not dwell in your mind on those things, but on Christ. You leave those things behind because your mind is stayed on God.

Although we know that everything we need is found in Jesus Christ, it can still be a great struggle for us to leave the other water behind. But more and more in the Christian life you must leave that sewer-water behind and seek the living water found in Jesus Christ. This is the spiritual activity of the child of God fighting against sin.

Those who seek the living water then have their minds fixed on Jesus Christ. Is your mind fixed on Jesus Christ? Throughout your life, may you be thinking more about Jesus Christ and the living water found only in Him. Remember John 4:14: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Seek the living water!

Thought questions: 1) What have you learned about yourself spiritually from these passages of Scripture? 2) What have you learned about Jesus Christ from this lesson and from these passages of Scripture? 3) What does Jeremiah 2:13 warn you about? 

How Far Does Freedom of Religion Extend?

The First Amendment addresses the constitutional limitations on government power in matters of religion. The First Amendment provides simply that the government may not: 1) make any laws establishing a religion, or 2) limit the free exercise of religion. Several of the articles appearing under the “Church and State” rubric in recent years have discussed the First Amendment in terms of the first clause, known as the “Establishment Clause.” Establishment Clause cases typically deal with the issue of whether the government is directly or indirectly sponsoring a particular religion by allowing government funds or property to be used to express religious beliefs, such as a display of the Ten Commandments in a courthouse.

The clause following the Establishment Clause is known as the Free Exercise Clause. Cases interpreting the Free Exercise Clause deal with allegations that the government, through laws or other means, is somehow restricting citizens from exercising their religion. The Supreme Court recently decided a case dealing with the Free Exercise Clause. While the facts at issue in this case are unlikely to arise in Reformed churches, a review of this case is helpful to understand this area of constitutional

law and its implications for us. The case also sheds light on the current status of a federal law known as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993,¹ which was intended to preserve religious liberties.

The case was *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao Do Vegetal*.² The O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao Do Vegetal (UDV) is a Christian Spiritist sect based in Brazil, which attempts to blend indigenous Amazonian and Christian beliefs. At the time the case arose, there were approximately 130 members of this sect living in the United States. For communion, this group uses a sacramental tea called hoasca, which is made from two plants native to the Amazon region. One of the plants contains amounts of a hallucinogen that is a Schedule I controlled substance under the federal Controlled Substances Act. United States customs inspectors intercepted a shipment of hoasca and threatened the UDV with prosecution. The UDV, in turn, filed suit against the government to stop officials from interfering with the UDV’s practice of its faith. The UDV asked the court for a preliminary injunction ordering the government to allow them to continue to use hoasca while the case was pending, until the actual trial could be held.

At the hearing on the preliminary injunction, the government conceded that the application of the Controlled Substances Act to the UDV would substantially burden

a sincere exercise of religion by the UDV. However, the government argued that applying the Controlled Substance Act to the UDV was the least restrictive means available to promote three compelling government interests: first, protecting the health of UDV members; second, preventing hoasca from being diverted to recreational users; and third, complying with a government treaty on psychotropic substances. The UDV presented evidence that the hoasca as administered in communion did not pose a health risk to members. The UDV pointed out, too, that there was no market for hoasca among recreational users and pointed out that there was no evidence of hoasca ever being diverted to recreational users.

The District Court found the evidence presented to be evenly balanced, and did not clearly indicate that either side was correct. The Court found that the burden was on the government to show that the impingement on the UDV’s freedom of religion was justified by compelling government interests. Since the evidence did not make it appear more likely that the government would win at the actual trial, the Court granted the injunction. When the government appealed the District Court’s decision, the decision was upheld by the appellate courts, and ultimately

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1. 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb
2. 546 U.S. 418 (2006)

by the United States Supreme Court.

In affirming the decision of the District Court, the Supreme Court relied heavily on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA). This reliance may have been surprising to some, because the Supreme Court had previously held RFRA to be unconstitutional. In order to understand the significance of RFRA, it is important to understand a brief history of jurisprudence under the Free Exercise Clause.

The Supreme Court first clearly addressed the issue of when the government's interests can allow it to restrict religious practices in 1878. In a case involving a Mormon man accused of bigamy, the Supreme Court explained that laws of general applicability do not violate the Free Exercise of the Constitution.³ In other words, if a law applied to or restricted all religions equally, it would be upheld.

In later years, however, the Court found that for a law impinging on religious practices or beliefs to be upheld, it must be the least restrictive means to accomplish a compelling state interest. Based on this analysis, the court found that the government could not deny unemployment benefits to a Seventh Day Adventist who refused to work on Saturday in the *Sherbert* case, and that it could not require Amish parents to send their children to high school in the *Yoder* case.⁴ For a time, it seemed the Court would carefully scrutinize any impingement on religious freedom to see if the restrictions were really warranted.

Then in 1990, in a case quite similar to the UDV case, the Court upheld a law prohibiting the use of peyote, which was used by Native Americans in worship, but which contained controlled substances.⁵ The Court, in *Employment Division v. Smith*, ruled that if a law was one of general applicability, then there would be no


balancing of the government's interests against the burden on citizens' religious beliefs. Congress responded by passing RFRA to restore the strict scrutiny and balancing tests that had been applied in earlier cases, but the Supreme Court found RFRA unconstitutional because the Congress did not have the power to force states to engage in a balancing test.⁶ In the recent *hoasca* case, the Controlled Substances Act was a federal law, so it appears that the Court was implicitly stating that RFRA was still valid with regard to laws passed by the federal government.

So what is the significance of the *hoasca* case to Reformed believers? The case shows that the court is still willing strictly to scrutinize government laws that restrict religious freedoms. Under the current status of the law, the Court will not strictly scrutinize state laws if they apply equally to all religions, but they will look carefully at federal laws because of RFRA. It is also interesting to note that the Court in the *Smith* case was divided five-to-four, while the Court was unanimous in the *hoasca* case. This may indicate a shift in the Court so that, given the right circumstances, the Court would also apply strict scrutiny to state laws.

While we do not use *hoasca* or peyote in worship, the same legal principles that apply to those cases can affect our own worship. For instance, the Congress has for some time been addressing a "hate-crimes" bill that prohibits certain acts towards homosexuals and others. Some fear that this law or a revised version of it could be used to stifle preaching against the sin of homosexuality, based on the notion that such preaching would be an incitement against homosexuals. Applying the analysis from the *hoasca* case, one could argue that a law prohibiting such preaching would substantially burden a sincere exercise of our religion. The burden would then

be on the government to show that it had a compelling interest in prohibiting such preaching, and to provide evidence supporting its claims. At this point, however, it does not appear that a state government would have to pass the same criteria for a law restricting religious beliefs to be upheld, as long as the restrictions applied to all churches.

Even if a law restricting religion were to be upheld by the Court under Free Exercise analysis, it is possible that it could be found unconstitutional under a First Amendment Free Speech analysis. When the Supreme Court upheld the restriction in the *Smith* case, it seemed to distinguish the case of the Amish parents in *Yoder* by indicating that *Yoder* was more of a case about free speech.

Ultimately, the answer to the question of whether the courts would apply the legal principles in this way depends on whether our sovereign God has chosen this way to preserve our ability to worship Him and to further the preaching of His Word. For the moment, the constitutional law of the land seems to favor more protection of our religious freedom. More and more, citizens and churches who condemn sins such as homosexuality are deemed "intolerant," and the laws passed by legislatures trend towards protecting those who engage in such sins. We must be aware of these developments and be prepared to use the means God has given us under our system of government to maintain the truth in our worship and preaching. *Reynolds v. U.S.*, 98 U.S. 145 (1878). 

4. *Sherbert v. Werner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972), respectively.

5. *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

6. *City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507 (1997).

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada was recently faced with an expensive decision. Their water system failed. In late September their well pump burned out, and as they made plans to replace it, they found that their well had a serious iron bacteria problem, which over time had actually helped ruin their pump. What to do? Clean out the well and install a new pump, or connect to the city of Lacombe's water and sewer service?

While Immanuel considered their options, their buildings were supplied temporarily by a garden hose to a nearby fire hydrant. Of course that would only work for a short period of time, since winter comes early to Alberta, and soon it would be impossible to prevent that hose from freezing up.

After seven weeks for investigation of the sewer and water installation versus repairs to the well, Immanuel's Council informed their congregation that it had opted not to install the water and sewer services because of inability to find an affordable contractor to do the work so near winter. Instead, the well was cleaned out and a new pump installed. The Lord willing, the installation of the town's water and sewer services to Immanuel's buildings will be postponed until next year.

Members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC were invited to a breakfast on Saturday morning, October 27, hosted by the girls of LIFE, or Living in Faithful Encouragement. These young ladies did this as a fun way of fellowshiping with other members of Hudsonville and to raise money for future group activities. By way of a reminder, we

should also add that this group meets five times during the summer for Bible study, fellowship, and fun. Their study this past summer centered on ways Christians use their tongues, and ways we can encourage one another in church by using our tongues. This summer the girls also enjoyed activities like making salsa and casseroles for some church members, washing windows at some of the condos of members of Hudsonville, making flower pens, greeting cards, and enjoying a spa experience.

The congregation at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN invited members from area churches to join them Sunday evening, November 4, after their worship service for an evening of song and fellowship.

Members of the Trinity Christian Bible Study, the group that meets monthly with Rev. J. Mahtani at Trinity College in Chicago, IL, decided to discuss the subject of prayer, using Prof. H. Hanko's book *When You Pray*. This group (so far 15-20 students) also planned to visit the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, where Rev. Mahtani is pastor, on Sunday, November 4. After attending the morning service, the group planned to join Bethel's YP/YA's for a discussion on "Christian Modesty among Men and Women," followed by an "early Thanksgiving dinner" at the parsonage before returning to Bethel for the evening service.

Rev. A. Brummel preached his farewell sermon as pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC the evening of October 28. Rev. Brummel recently accepted the call to serve as our denomination's first missionary to the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD. Rev. Brummel used the Word of God found in Acts 20:32 as his text, and preached on the theme, "Commending You to the Grace of God."

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a lecture on Friday evening, October 26, in their sanctuary. Rev. A. Brummel, our denomination's missionary to Sioux Falls, SD, spoke on the topic, "The Church Called to True Repentance: Martin Luther and the 95 Theses."

The congregation of the Wingham, ON, Canada PRC invited members of their community to a Reformation Lecture at their church on October 26. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on the subject, "The Reformation and God's Covenant of Grace—Laying the Foundation."

The Evangelism Committee of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada planned a Reformation Day Lecture for October 31. Rev. J. Marcus, pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, and Rev. R. Smit, pastor at Immanuel, both presented speeches on "The Voice of God in Creation," which these two men previously presented at the June 2007 Young Adults Retreat.

Members of the churches in Iowa and Minnesota were cordially invited to a Reformation Day Lecture on October 26, held at the First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, S.D. Prof. R. Decker spoke on the topic, "By Faith Alone: The Believer's Assurance of Salvation."

The Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC reminded members of their congregation to make plans to attend their Fall Lecture. Rev. T. Miersma, our denomination's missionary to Spokane, WA, was this year's guest speaker. Rev. Miersma spoke on the topic, "The Deterioration of the Christian Church."

In mid-October, the Evangelism Committee of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL sent out 1,000 brochures to those who live in the neighbor-

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

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hood of their church. Congregation members were also sent a copy and asked if they had read it and if the brochure would help them introduce others to Bethel. In the hope that the brochure would aid Bethel's members in their personal witness, the Evangelism Committee also printed 500 additional copies for personal distribution.

We also remind readers that our Byron Center, MI PRC now has sermon videos, not just audio, but online: www.byronprc.org/27.html.

Mission Activities


The Spokane, WA Mission relocated their place of worship in

mid-September. This move was made to make the mission more centrally located in Spokane and more accessible to the North Spokane area. The move also puts the location closer to where most families who are members now live. In an effort to introduce the mission to the Spokane area at their new location, the Mission hosted a series of lectures on Friday nights, beginning on October 26, over four weeks, under the general theme, "Christian Living in a Post Christian World." Visiting speakers to the field were, Rev. S. Houck—"Who Determines Right and Wrong?" (Oct. 26); Rev. J.

Slopsema—"May We Judge Others?" (Nov. 2); Rev. A. den Hartog—"Is Church Membership Necessary?" (Nov. 9); and Rev. W. Bruinsma—"Is Doctrine Important?" (Nov. 16).

Minister Activities

Candidate Nathan Langerak has accepted the call to serve as pastor of South Holland, IL PRC. He will, D.V., be examined by Classis on December 5, and ordained on December 7.

The newly organized Calvary PRC in Hull, IA extended a call to Rev. Rodney Kleyn to become their first pastor. 

Announcements

NOTICE!

Eastside Christian School of Grand Rapids, Michigan is seeking applicants for a new administrator to start in the fall of 2008. Inquiries may be made to Dan Monsma, dan@monsma-landscape.com or Erin Windemuller, windemuller@sbcglobal.net.

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@randolph-fcs.org. Resumes may also be e-mailed or sent to Mr. Huizenga at Faith Christian School, 611 N Columbus St., Randolph, WI 53956.

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2008, at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 10, 2007.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanksgiving to God, we rejoiced with our parents, **ALBERT and MARGARET OFFRINGA**, in celebrating 60 years of marriage on November 20, 2007. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless them in the years to come. "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- ❖ Don and Jackie Offringa
- ❖ Dave and Carol Offringa
- ❖ Pam (in glory) and Steve Straayer
 - 6 grandchildren
 - 5 great grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Reformed Witness Hour

December 2007

Date	Topic	Text
December 2	"God Has Spoken to Us by His Son"	Hebrews 1:1-3
December 9	"Let All the Angels of God Worship Him"	Hebrews 1:4-11
December 16	"A Virgin Shall Conceive and Bear a Son"	Luke 1:26-38
December 23	"Ponder All These Things in Your Heart"	Luke 2:19
December 30	"Till My Change Come"	Job 14:14