

THE *November 1, 2007* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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The Lamb That Was Slain

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Revelation 5:9

Revelation 4 and 5 record a vision that the apostle John had of the throne of God in heaven. Gathered around that throne to adore the living God were twenty-four elders and four beasts or living creatures. In the right hand of the living God, who sat upon the throne, was a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. A search was made to find someone who was worthy to loose the seals on this book and to read it. There was found no man who was worthy. But then John sees in the midst of the throne a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and

seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. He took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne.

In response, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures sang a new song: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

The Lamb that was slain is Jesus Christ. By His death He has redeemed us to God.

Being the Lamb that was slain, Jesus is worthy to take the book and open its seals. That is very significant for our salvation. The new song that the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures sang in praise of the Lamb must also be our song.



Jesus Christ is the Lamb that was slain.

There were many lambs that were slain in the Old Testament for the sins of the people. They were

slain as sin offerings and trespass offerings. All the lambs that were sacrificed, however, were not sufficient to pay for and cover the sins of the people. They were merely types or pictures that looked ahead to the Lamb of God that would with one sacrifice completely atone for the sins of the people.

The great Lamb of God to which all the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament pointed is Jesus Christ. John the Baptist identified Jesus as such at the Jordan River, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

As the Lamb of God, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. He did this at the cross, where He shed His blood. This constituted the perfect sacrifice for sin because at the cross Jesus endured all the punishment of God for sin and did so in humble submission and obedience to God.

By His perfect sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ has redeemed us unto God by His blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.

To redeem is to free one from

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slavery by the payment of a price. Scripture applies this to our spiritual slavery to the Devil and to sin. We are by nature enslaved to the Devil. On account of the fall he has a legal claim to us, so that we are bound to serve him in sin. This is a terrible slavery, which results in our destruction. But with the payment of a price (ransom), we can be freed from this bondage. The price necessary to redeem us is not silver and gold but the enduring of the punishment for sin. This price Jesus paid as the Lamb of God by the shedding of His blood. By paying the price of sin, Jesus has purchased us unto God, so that now we belong to the living God.

Who is this “us” that the Lamb has redeemed?

This “us” is not limited by nationality, language, or ethnic origin. For the Lamb of God has redeemed us out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.

This “us” is limited, however, by the election of God. Some would place no limitation at all on the redemption of the Lamb of God. But God has chosen a people out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. These the Lamb of God has redeemed.



The redemption makes the Lamb worthy to open the book.

John sees in his vision a book that is sealed shut with seven seals. This book represents the living decrees of God for the future. God has eternally determined all things necessary for the establishment of His kingdom. God will establish a glorious kingdom into which He will bring His people—a people taken from all the nations of the world. In this kingdom God will rule His people in His grace so that they prosper under His care and enjoy Him forever. But for that kingdom to come and be complete many things must happen. These events do not simply happen but are all eternally predetermined by

God in His council. That council is represented by the book that John sees in the vision of this chapter.

This book is sealed with seven seals. A seal on a book was to safeguard it so that it will be opened and read only by those for whom it is intended. That this book of the counsel of God is sealed with seven seals indicates that the decrees of God are secret, known only to God and to those to whom God will reveal it.

Whoever receives this book and opens the seals thereof will receive the power and authority to execute the council of God and thus bring to pass the events that will lead to the establishment and completion of God’s kingdom. John sees in his vision that a search is made to find one who is worthy to receive the book and open the seals. To be worthy means to be of equal weight and value. And no man was found worthy to receive the book and open the seals.

Then the Lamb that was slain came forward to claim the book. He alone is worthy. He is worthy exactly because He is the Lamb that was slain and that has redeemed to God those out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. This makes Him worthy because the kingdom that is to be established by the execution of God’s counsel is based on His work of redemption. His work of redeeming the people of God is what makes the kingdom possible and secures the kingdom.

The rest of the book of Revelation deals with the opening of the seven seals of this book and the events that lead to the completion of the kingdom of God.



Because He is worthy to open the book, the Lamb of God is praised with a new song.

This song is sung by the twenty-four elders and the four beasts (creatures) that are gathered around the throne of God. The

twenty-four elders represent the church of the Old Testament and New Testament. The four creatures represent angels (cherubim).

They sing a new song.


Their song is a new song in that it is a new kind of song. It is a new kind of song in that it celebrates something new and different from anything that has ever happened before. One has now been found worthy to take the book of the counsel of God and open it so that He executes the decrees of God that will bring about the kingdom of God. And such a development calls for a new song. The old songs anticipate this, but do not adequately praise it.

This song is a song of praise that acknowledges the worthiness of the Lamb and ultimately glorifies the God who sent Him. This song is sung in heaven from the time that Jesus received the book and continues throughout all eternity. The whole realm of angels (10,000 times 10,000) joins in song to acknowledge the worthiness of the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.

And every creature that is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea also join in with song to acknowledge His worthiness. Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

And the four beasts (living creatures) said, Amen. And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him that liveth forever and ever.

As the redeemed, we too must acknowledge the worthiness of the Lamb. Being part of the redeemed we belong to the kingdom that Jesus Christ has established and that will soon be completed as He executes the counsel of God.

We too must acknowledge the greatness and worthiness of the Lamb in prayer and song. 

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Rome, Dr. Mouw, and Communion with the Saints

Or: Have You Hugged a Roman Catholic of Late

Though the October 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* is commonly considered our Reformation issue, we trust November 1 comes close enough to Reformation Day (October 31) to justify another editorial dealing with an aspect of our ongoing controversy with Rome.

The title of this editorial is occasioned by an article recently written by the well-known Dr. Mouw in *The Christian Century Magazine*, the May 15, 2007 issue, entitled "Communion with the Saints." It is an article that, though presented in a somewhat whimsical, light-hearted fashion, deals with the weighty and historically divisive issue of Rome's practice of praying to the saints.

Dr. Mouw's delightful articles are almost always a good read. He has a way with words. So in this article, beginning already with his title. It is what one might call a *double entrée*. As becomes clear in his article, Dr. Mouw is not so much interested in "communing with the saints" (namely, praying to various saints in glory), as he is concerned with the "communion of the saints," namely, relationships between 'Christians' living now on earth. And so the 'saints' that Dr. Mouw primarily has in mind are we Protestants and our Roman Catholic counterparts. What has happened to our communion on earth? Is it not regrettable that such a secondary matter as prayers to the saints should stand between good saints on earth all these years?

What becomes plain from the article is that you can add the name of Dr. Mouw to the pile of Protestants of 'name' who are set upon renewing ecclesiastical relationships with Rome. Dr. Mouw has decided to lend his considerable charm, writing ability, and place of influence (President of Fuller Theological Seminary) to this common cause, thereby adding his considerable weight to doing his 'little part' in working towards reunification between 'estranged brethren.' Not that he expects this to take place all at once, of course. That would be unrealistic. Dialogue must take place first, suspicions must be allayed (knowledgeable church leaders taking the lead here), and things that have sadly divided us as Protestants and Roman Catholics must be addressed one by one, so that in time they can be laid to rest. This the good Doctor sets about to do in the matter of prayers to the saints. And he does so in the most irenic of spirits, as you might expect, which simply makes the article that much more troubling as far as we are concerned.

In a most disarming manner Dr. Mouw suggests that perhaps praying to departed saints is not so unspiritual (and evil) as we Protestants have tended to view it. Dr. Mouw briefly traces his own development in learning to appreciate this long-standing Romish practice. Early on in his career he firmly opposed it, viewing it as bordering on idolatry. And, be as-

sured, even now he still worries "that focusing on the saints in heaven can draw attention away from the God who alone is worthy of worship." Still, over the years, his judgment has softened. Perhaps, as an astute Romish theologian pointed out, it is really a case of differing perspectives: Protestants tend to think more in terms of soteriology (salvation), while Catholics tend to think in terms of ecclesiology (the church); and so the one group of Christians turns naturally in prayer to Jesus our only Savior, while the other group turns to thoughts of fellowshiping with the saints. Primarily it is a matter of perspective. As a result we tend to talk past each other. So simple!

But even more, consider the following argument: is praying to (or striking up a conversation with) the saints in glory to intercede for us really all that different from our practice of asking various friends to pray for us when we are "facing some special sort of crisis"? We Protestants do so regularly. "Well then...what is wrong with also asking friends who are already in heaven to take up our cause before the divine throne?"

An interesting perspective. Almost I am persuaded!

The trouble is, there is this one 'minor' difference between the two approaches, namely, the one is the practice of asking a fellow saint to pray for oneself, while in the other, the Romish, one prays to a fellow saint for blessing and grace. And

this is no small difference. Prayer, after all, is an evidence of trust. And that implies that *not* to pray to a certain God-ordained Mediator, but to try another avenue instead, betrays a lack of trust in *Him!* Cut it any way you will, what the congenial Doctor is suggesting is that it is all right to put one's trust in the departed saints; but not only that, he implies as well that praying to dead saints may in some instances be more effective than addressing one's living Lord.

Upon further reflection, I hereby recant!

In distinction from Dr. Mouw's perspective (a perspective increasingly popular among contemporary Protestants) is that of the old Reformers, men who left Rome behind, fully familiar with its abominations. John Calvin comes to mind. His assessment of the practice of calling upon the saints is of an altogether different caliber from that which Dr. Mouw offers for our consideration. A few quotes from Calvin's *Institutes* are sufficient to indicate what he thought of the whole practice, as well as of those who recommended such. The following quotes come from Book III, Ch. XX, which chapter is devoted to the subject of Prayer (H. Beveridge edition):

In regard to the saints who having died..., if we attribute prayer to them, let us not imagine that they have any other way of supplicating God than through Christ who alone is the way, or that their prayers are accepted by God in any other name. Wherefore, since the Scripture calls us away from all others to Christ alone, since our heavenly Father is pleased to gather together all things in him, it were the extreme of stupidity (sic! –kk), not to say madness, to attempt to obtain access by means of others, so as to be drawn away from him without whom access cannot be obtained (Art. 21, p. 168).

A little further down the page, Calvin adds,

But if we appeal to the consciences of all who take pleasure in the intercession of saints, we shall find that their only reason for it is, that they are filled with anxiety, as if they supposed that Christ were insufficient or too rigorous. By this anxiety they dishonor Christ, and rob him of his title of sole Mediator, a title which being given him by the Father as his special privilege, ought not to be transferred to any other.

Calvin's point here is that praying to the saints betrays a lamentable lack of confidence in Christ Jesus, our Elder Brother and Lord, as if others might well be more sympathetic and compassionate than He. How insulting, then, to God the Father Himself, who gave His only begotten Son for this very purpose.

But even beyond that, Calvin warns of the idolatry that is sure to follow and has been part and parcel of Rome's practice since ancient times. Having just spoken of litanies in which "every kind of honor is paid to dead saints, [but] there is no mention of Christ," Calvin writes:

But here stupidity has proceeded to such a length as to give a manifestation of the genius of superstition, which, when once it has shaken off the rein, is wont to wanton [excess] without limit. After men began to look to the intercession of saints, a peculiar administration was gradually assigned to each, so that, according to diversity of business, now one, now another, intercessor was invoked. Then individuals adopted particular saints, and put their faith in them, just as if they had been tutelar deities. And thus not only were gods set up according to the number of the cities..., but according to the number of individuals [praying].... At length vast numbers have fallen into the horrid blasphemy of invoking them not merely as helping but presiding over their salvation. See the depth to which miserable men fall when they forsake their

proper station, that is, the word of God (Art. 22, pp. 169, 170).

Words such as "stupidity," "superstition," "gods set up," and "blasphemy" from the pen of Calvin ought to cure any Reformed man from minimizing the scope of evil inherent in Rome's practice of praying to the saints. It ought to give every sober man pause before suggesting that it really is not so terrible as you have been told. "Here! Take a bite! Not so bad tasting as you were led to believe, is it? Now, why don't you run along and try to persuade others of your suspicious relatives to give this harmless practice a try too."

Where, and from whom, have we heard words like that before!

No, we find no delight in what the congenial Dr. Mouw suggests in connection with prayers to the saints.

Recently, I came across something preached by the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in Toronto in the mid-1970s. He knew well the movement afoot in his own British Isles and in North America to work towards ecumenical relations once again with Catholicism. He was alarmed. The following words are lifted from a sermon based on Ephesians 6:11, dealing with the wiles of the Devil:

There are certain things happening at the present time which make it imperative that every intelligent Christian should know something about Roman Catholicism. There are movements afoot, and meetings taking place which are trying to bring a kind of rapprochement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism: and there are people who rejoice in this and say that it is a wonderful thing that we are beginning to draw together again, and that we can cooperate in certain respects, and that this is a wonderful manifestation of the Christian spirit....

My contention is that the increase in Roman Catholicism is due to one thing only, and that is a weak

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and flabby Protestantism that does not know what it believes. That is why I spend my time in giving positive teaching. But my text compels me to deal with this—the ‘wiles of the devil’—the activities of the principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, the spiritual wickedness in high places....

What, then, are we looking at? We are looking at a system; and I would not hesitate to assert that this system, known as Roman Catholicism, is the devil’s masterpiece! It is such a departure from the Christian faith and the New Testament teaching, that I would not hesitate with the Reformers of the sixteenth century to describe it as “apostasy”...as a kind of total departure from the Christian truth.

You remember that the apostle has told us that it is one of the characteristics of the devil himself that he can transform himself into an angel of light. So can this Church. There is no limit, there is no end to the various ‘guises’ in which she can appear. Here in this country she appears as highly intellec-


tual and encourages her people to read the Bible; in other countries she prohibits their doing so, and is not only not intellectual but is deliberately encouraging to superstition.... Here she seems to be tolerant, ready to listen and to argue and to concede and to be friendly; in other backward countries she is utterly intolerant, vicious and vile in her persecuting zeal—but still the same body, the same institution, the same people. That is my evidence for saying that [Rome] is surely the devil’s masterpiece.

Words forever timely. They ring as true today as they did when first spoken. If marking the Reformation means anything, it should mean thanking God for delivering us from Rome’s stifling and deadly embrace. Suggesting a return, as if Rome has changed, is folly itself. The only ones who are changing are Protestants.

As for the sub-title to this editorial, *Have You Hugged a Roman Catholic of Late*, it is occasioned by Dr. Mouw at the end of his article remarking how St. Francis has

taught him how an unexpected hug can make a big difference at times. The implication is that a few more hugs, and a few less harsh words towards Rome, would go a long way in making everyone’s day (and future) brighter.

Well, coming from rather affectionately demonstrative stock myself, I have no principle objection against hugging a Roman Catholic, or their sympathizers, for that matter. But with what words? These—“My friend, I am praying for your immortal soul. But not to Mother Mary, St. Peter, or St. Paul, I assure you. That would be worse than useless. May you be delivered from such nonsense. Rather, I am praying to that one only Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus. His intercessions have power with God. No one else.”

That is the spirit of the Reformation. We still count God’s enemies as ours. Rome has not changed. She is still the mother of harlots (Rev. 18:4-6). We pray *for* acquaintances within her membership, not *with* them. 

Letters

Eight Big Lies

My thanks to Mr. Cal Kalsbeek for his comments [cf. September 1, 2007 *Standard Bearer*, p. 474] on Joel Belz’s *World* magazine article entitled “Seven big lies.”

Mr. Belz should have listed *eight* Big Lies! The first being the lie about Scripture itself. The lie

that the best manuscripts were found in a jar in Egypt, and in a trash can in the Vatican—as put forth by the liars Wescott and Hort in the 1880s and accepted wholesale by “Reformed Christians” such as B.B. Warfield, et. al. *This* is why all the other lies have been so

readily accepted by our modern age. Once the Scriptures were put in doubt as to their absolute authority, liberalism won the day. May God help us to return to truth in the near future, or we, like old Israel, will be destroyed.

Al Salmon
Moorestown, NJ 

Secretary’s Annual Report 2007

Mr. John Buiter

At the end of the 83rd year of existence of the Reformed Free Publishing Association and the continuous publication of the *Standard Bearer*, we can again report to the association and our readers that we have been enabled by God’s

providential care to continue giving a witness to the “Reformed truth,” the purpose of our organization. We give thanks to our heavenly Father that He has made this possible for another year. He made this possible above all by the work-

ing of His grace and Spirit through many persons. In this annual report I would like to touch upon the many ways God works to provide for the continuing work of the RFPA in the publishing both of our magazine and of our books.

The name Reformed *Free* Publishing Association was chosen to represent the fact that the association was *free* of the control by any church group or any other than the members of the association. Free from control also means free of financial support through budget of churches and synods. It has been necessary over the years to support the work of publications by free gifts from interested individuals and free voluntary church collections.

As you will learn from the financial report of the Board Treasurer, our financial situation is excellent, thanks in great part to the continued giving of our supporters and the efficient operation of the RFPA. The RFPA has been able to function with a minimum of paid staff. Almost all the paid staff works part time and at a non-competitive wage and benefit level. A good share of the work of the RFPA is on a volunteer basis. In this secretary's report I would like to focus on this facet of our year's work and the operation of the RFPA.

First of all, the writers of the various rubrics in the *Standard Bearer* do the work of producing articles on a voluntary basis, organized each summer for the coming publication year. This means that the material for the coming publication year is already committed by the various writers. The editing and organization of the *Standard Bearer* is done on a voluntary basis. This takes commitment on the part of all the contributors to the cause of the Reformed truth. We express public thanks for the dedicated work of our writers. We especially thank the Doezemas, Don and Judi, for their work in editing and organizing the publication. Above all we thank God that He works in the hearts of so many for this worthy cause.

As is typical of most non-profit organizations like the RFPA, it takes many volunteers to maintain and manage the activities of the or-

ganization. This is also true of the Board of the RFPA. Your board members meet monthly as a board and also monthly on one of the sub-committees of the Board. This involves a number of evenings each month, with various assignments as part of the committee work outside the actual meeting times. We are thankful that each year we find association members who are willing to serve on the Board. The Board would like to thank our four retiring members for three years of dedicated work. They are: Tom Bergman, Justin Koole, Jeff Terpstra, and Jim VanOverloop. We also encourage others to join the association and be available and willing to serve on the Board.

All who listen to this annual report or who read the published report of the Board secretary have a part as a "volunteer" in the organization. Your continued support of the RFPA in its publication work by being a *Standard Bearer* subscriber and/or being a member of our Book Club is valuable to our operation. Your gifts to the *Standard Bearer* or to the book division through church collections and individual gifts have made our continued operation possible for another year. In this time when many religious publications are having circulation and financial problems, we are thankful for the generous support voluntarily given by you our readers and association members.

Above all we thank our Heavenly Father that He works in the hearts and minds of so many of our supporters that they willingly give of their time and money for the cause of publishing the "Reformed truth." Without the work of God's grace, our cause would fail. "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him," Psalm 34:8.

For many of the details of the activities of the RFPA during the past year I refer you to our report to the members in the form of the newsletter called the *RFPA Update*.

Look for your copy soon. More information and pictures are on our website www.rfpa.org. There you can find much information about current publications. The project to host a searchable database of the *Standard Bearer* on the web site continues. Copy is currently available back to the 1963 publication year. Look us up.

One item to report is the first complete year of operation out of our new building in Jenison. This has proved to be a real convenience for our operation. It provides a single location for meetings, storage, shipping, and mailing of the *Standard Bearer*. This has made for a very efficient operation, but has increased our cost, since in the past we received much free use of space elsewhere.

In the past year there has been a substantial increase in the mailing cost of magazines and books. Due to these increases the Board has decided to raise the subscription rate to \$21/year for domestic subscriptions. This is the first rate increase since 1995. Even with the rate increase, we are still dependent on your voluntary giving to cover about half of the cost of the magazine.

As we close another publication year and look to the coming year, we give thanks for God's faithfulness to the cause and thank all you supporters who contribute with gifts of your time and money.



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Redeemed with Judgment: A Reformed Perspective on Isaiah

History

The history of this book goes back some forty or more years. In 1959 HCH (as I will respectfully refer to my father) was appointed professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, a post that he held until his death in 1989. In addition to his seminary duties, and because of a shortage of pastors in the PRCA, he preached regularly in the churches. Especially during the 1970s and 1980s he concentrated his efforts on the prophecy of Isaiah, to the point that it became a maxim that if HCH was preaching, the congregation would hear Isaiah. Particularly during the last year of his life, while on assignment to the Australian province of Tasmania, he made and preached many sermons on the last chapters of the prophecy, sermons that have never seen the light of day in the USA.

His many years of sermonizing have left the church with a legacy of 125 sermons, 49 of which are contained in the first volume of *Redeemed with Judgment*, with 76 more to follow in the second volume.

Mr. Hoeksema is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church. This article is the text of his address to the RFPA at their annual meeting on September 27, 2007. Mr. Hoeksema is editor of Redeemed with Judgment, a collection of sermons by the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema on the prophecy of Isaiah. Volume 1 is now available.

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I have often been asked why HCH chose Isaiah for the focus of his preaching, and today I regret never having asked him. A number of times he expressed his intention to write a commentary on Isaiah when he retired, which obviously never happened, and which does not really answer the question why he chose Isaiah. I am not sure that there is a definitive answer. Could it be because of the relatively difficult nature of the prophecy? HCH liked a challenge. Could it be because not very much good, exegetical, Reformed work has been done on the book? Could it be because he always sought to develop Old Testament history and theology with a view to its application to the New Testament church, and that Isaiah is eminently suited for this purpose? Could it be because of the messianic and almost New Testament-like character of much of the prophecy? Perhaps all of these reasons are pieces of the motivational puzzle; but for whatever reason, he did what he did.

After his death in 1989, there was talk of possible publication of his work, perhaps in book form. For reasons unknown to me, nothing ever came of this. However, with a view to this possible project, my late mother and I were able to collect approximately 60 sermon tapes of his Isaiah sermons from various churches, and steps were taken to preserve all of HCH's sermon outlines. Then for many years nothing happened, although the RFPA contacted me periodically to reaffirm that I still had possession of all the materials.

In 2003 the RFPA requested that I do further research into the possibility of publishing HCH's sermons in book form. I was able to obtain additional sermon tapes until I acquired approximately two thirds of the 125 sermons verbatim. The RFPA requested samples of edited sermons, both taped and non-taped. I provided these, and based on them, the RFPA commissioned me to produce this work. Since then an edited manuscript has taken shape. The conventions of the spoken word have been edited into the conventions of the written word, and sermons were reconstructed from HCH's outlines. The manuscript has been copy-edited, revised, corrected, and proofed by RFPA staff and helpful volunteer readers. The result is *Redeemed with Judgment*.

Character

It may be interesting to the reader to know a little of the character and content of these sermons.

HCH typed his sermon outlines on 5 x 7 note cards, usually about ten cards per sermon. On the first card was the text in as many as three languages—English, Hebrew, and Dutch, the Psalter numbers of his choosing, and handwritten notations regarding when and where he preached the sermon. His outlines were logical, precise, and detailed, which enabled me to reconstruct non-taped sermons with a good degree of confidence in the faithfulness and accuracy of my work. HCH followed the Reformed homiletical model of an introduction, followed by two or more divisions of his theme, which makes it

easy to follow his development and explanation of a given text.

By means of editorial comments I have attempted to connect and unify these sermons into something of a cohesive whole. With minor exceptions, HCH preached them in random order, without discernible rhyme or reason, and often with little apparent connection to other sermons. Although each sermon can certainly stand alone on its own merits, by means of occasional remarks I have sought to group them and establish some of the missing connections.

Effort has been made to publish the highest quality book possible. The reason is that the content demands our best effort. This point bears emphasis. You who are members of the RFPA and who support this work should know this. Over the last several years the RFPA staff has developed and codified guidelines and procedures for publishing books that are second to none. Recently a house style document has been formulated as the standard for all its publications. And this is as it should be. We have a tremendous message—the Reformed faith according to the Scriptures. Is it not proper, then, that our form should match our content?

Speaking of content, several points are noteworthy.

First, these sermons are written predominantly in the present tense, even though Isaiah lived and worked some 2700 years ago. HCH almost always preached them in the historical present tense, perhaps in an effort to make the history come alive for the church of today. He takes God's people by the hand, as it were, and leads them back to the times and circumstances of the prophet in order to make his message relevant to our lives today. By his use of the present tense, he makes the timeless words of Isaiah applicable to the church of the New Testament.

Second, these sermons are exegetical and expository. As I have

worked with them over the years, this, above all else, has struck me. HCH never imposes his own preconceived ideas upon a text, and never tries to make it say something that it does not say. He never has an axe to grind, and never uses a passage as a rack on which to hang his hat. Sometimes this results in unexpected explanations and applications. But always he submits himself to Scripture, often explaining the original Hebrew, and invariably follows where it leads.

Third, his sermons are historical. HCH resisted the temptation to jerk a text out of its historical context and immediately apply it to the New Testament church, as is done by many today. Rather, he was careful to develop his sermons against their proper historical background. In so doing, he had the knack—which few have—of making the milieu of a time and culture very different from our own come alive by reducing it to timeless matters of universal doctrine and life.

Fourth, HCH's sermons are logical and clear, and therefore easy for the average reader to understand. He had the gift of every good preacher—to place a text into its historical context, to synthesize and express concisely its main thought, to break it down into its component parts and explain each of them, and then to put them all back together into a unified whole. One of the clearest examples of this is his explanation of the concept of "the day of the Lord," found in his sermon on Isaiah 12:1. In addition, HCH loved to set up a seemingly insoluble problem or apparently contradictory situation and then solve it one step at a time. The careful reader will appreciate this and will recognize and take to heart his good instruction and education.

Fifth, his sermons are applicatory. Some of them are quite doctrinal, and in them is good instruction for the church of Christ. Some of them are much more subjective and practical. But in either instance (and without implying a

false antithesis between doctrine and life) they are never without application to the lives of God's people of the new dispensation.

Purpose

I have become aware that some have expressed the sentiment that HCH's exposition of Isaiah is intended only for the learned among us—professors, ministers, and scholars—because of its difficult subject matter. I wish to emphasize that nothing could be farther from the truth. It is certainly true that Isaiah is not the easiest book of the Bible to understand. It is also true that ministers, professors, and scholars may read this book with great profit to themselves. But anyone who says such things speaks from ignorance: it is exactly *not* the purpose of this book to be obscure and difficult. According to my understanding, the RFPA is not in the obscurity business, but is instead in the business of spreading the Reformed faith in a clear and understandable manner.

Great effort has been expended to make sure that in every respect this work will be understandable and clear to the average saint, just as HCH's preached sermons were. Therefore, at every step of the editing and publishing process, great care was taken to insure the clarity of these sermons to God's people. The impetus behind this effort is not merely a matter of common sense, although this is certainly a factor: it makes no sense to publish a book that no one will read. Rather, the motivating factor is to be found in the fact that Isaiah is the most significant and important of all the Old Testament prophets. This is evident from the fact that in the New Testament Scriptures he is quoted more often than all the other prophets combined. Rightly he is called the "gospeller" of the Old Testament.

To reinforce my point, allow me to give a few random examples from HCH's exposition. Some of them are taken from the first vol-

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ume, and some from the second, which should be in print several months from now. Do you know what fitches and cummin are? Read the sermon on Isaiah 28:25. What is Isaiah's vision of world peace? Read the sermon on Isaiah 2:4. Do you want to know about a boasting axe and a self-exalting saw? Read the sermon on Isaiah 10:15, 22, 24. HCH says, "Bel had a stroke, and Nebo had a heart attack." What does this mean? Read the sermon on Isaiah 46:1. Do you want instruction on the origin of evil? Read the sermon on Isaiah 45:7. What is the idea of organic predestination? Read the sermon on Isaiah 43:4. What is the covenant of peace? Read the sermon on Isaiah 54:9, 10. What comprises proper Sabbath observance? Read the sermon on Isaiah 56:1, 2. Examples could be multiplied, but the point is clear.

Theme

Many commentators suggest numerous themes for Isaiah's prophecy. They include: God's absolute sovereignty and greatness; God's holiness; the sinfulness of man, rooted in pride and rebellion against God; the inadequacy and condemnation of formalistic worship; God's faithfulness to His promise of redemption; the election of Judah; the future perfection of the messianic age; the preservation of the remnant; comfort for the church of God; the idea of servanthood, based upon the concept of the servant of Jehovah.

All of these suggestions have some degree of merit, and all of these ideas are present in the prophecy. Many, if not all, closely approach the truth. But all of them are incorrect or inadequate to one degree or another because they do not comprehensively state the theme of Isaiah's prophecy. The reason for this failure is the lack of a unifying and cohesive covenant concept, which in both its negative and positive aspects underlies the prophet's message.

The theme of the prophecy is

to be found in the prophet's own words in Isaiah 1:27: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness."

This is the explanation of and the solution to understanding the difficulty of this book of Scripture. Isaiah is admittedly one of the more difficult books to understand. The primary reason is that it very abruptly alternates, without transparent reason, between words of judgment and condemnation and words of blessing and promise. Many there are who stumble at this phenomenon because they are not sure who it is that the prophet addresses.

Examples may be cited from the very first chapter of the prophecy. In verses 10-15, the Lord thunders judgment upon Judah. Make no mistake: Jehovah speaks here not to the wicked, but to the church, when He says this:

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offering of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yes, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

But suddenly in verse 18 the Lord says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

In verses 21-24, again addressing the church, Isaiah exclaims:

How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, and thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Therefore saith the LORD of hosts, the mighty one of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies.

Then, in sharp contrast, we read in verses 25-27:

And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

How can this be?

The answer is to be found in the organic idea of the church as the servant of Jehovah, a concept that plays a prominent role in the prophecy and underlies it throughout. There is in Judah, the church, a twofold seed. Not all is Israel that is called Israel. In Judah is the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, as well as the true spiritual seed of Abraham. Though the whole is called "church," there is nevertheless distinction. This explains the theme of the prophecy: Zion is redeemed with judgment. This does not mean merely that judgment *accompanies* redemption, as the word *with* might imply. The idea is rather that Zion is redeemed *through* judgment, that is, *by means of* or *in the way of* judgment. Thus, to natural Israel, the carnal, reprobate majority, come words of impending judg-

ment, curse, and doom, while at the same time to the remnant according to the election of grace—true, spiritual Israel—come words of promise, salvation, and blessing, in such a way that the judgment of the wicked *is* the salvation and purification of the church.

Such is the biblical and Reformed understanding of Isaiah, as HCH often reiterates.

Reformed Nature

The Reformed nature of this work bears emphasis. Thousands of religious books are published each year. Many of them are generally evangelical, and many are not worth the paper on which they are printed. There are even fewer decent expositions and commentaries published. In this environment we are consistently and distinctively Reformed in our publications, something that is true also of this book.

I suggest that this is true in two ways.

The first is from a doctrinal viewpoint. Negatively, HCH consistently opposes all misinterpretations of Isaiah, especially the postmillennial and premillennial views, which are the rule among commentators. Positively, he sets forth the doctrines of the Reformed faith—not abstractly or theoretically, but as they are derived from Isaiah’s prophecy. Thus, he emphasizes the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God in all things, particularly in the salvation of Zion and the subservience of all things to that purpose. He upholds the doctrine of divine double predestination, not in the sense of equal ultimacy, but in the organic sense that reprobation serves election. He holds high the complete and totally sufficient sacrifice of Christ, the servant of Jehovah, as the only way of salvation. Examples could be multiplied, but suffice it to say that he clearly sets forth the doctrines of grace.

Second, HCH is Reformed in his approach. He does not bother to refute at length those who place

themselves above Scripture. He could have, but he does not waste his time with detailed contradiction of heretics. Instead, he assumes the inspiration, infallibility, and absolute authority of Scripture. This is Reformed. Further, he takes an organic approach to the prophecy. This is unique to the Reformed faith, and solves problems that others cannot reconcile. This organic idea, together with the concept of the covenant, is the unifying principle of his exposition. Still more, his sermons are Reformed because they speak of the comfort of God’s people. The truth of the assurance of salvation and the preservation of the saints is a current issue in the Reformed community; many there are who seek to weaken, compromise, or destroy this significant aspect of our salvation. Although at the time that he preached these sermons he could not have anticipated or known anything about this current controversy, continually he contradicts the Arminian notion that there is no divine assurance of salvation. As HCH is fond of pointing out, Isaiah is a comfort book for God’s people.

Let those who deny this salient truth of the Scriptures hear the voice of Isaiah echoing down through the ages in these sermons!


Incentive

The Reformed nature of these sermons ought to be an incentive to us to read this book. This is not a coffee-table book—a symbol of piety for all to see but none to read. Nor should it be parked in a bookcase along with other RFPA books. Because it speaks to God’s people who live at the end of the ages, it is meant to be read—perhaps as part of family devotions, which will result in growth and enrichment in the Scriptures.

Second, this book ought to be an incentive to all of us to carry on the work that a small group of men began in the 1960s, and that has grown over the decades. We have something that few others in the

whole world have—the God-given and Spirit-driven Reformed understanding of the Scriptures. This in itself is an incentive to carry on the work, because—to borrow a phrase from the prophet—we are a voice crying in the wilderness. In so doing we ought to have a sense of urgency. At this time in history we still have the ability to disseminate the Reformed faith through many means, not the least of which is our books. But when we see the storm clouds of repression gathering on the horizon—as we do if we are aware of current events in the light of biblical prophecy—then we understand that we have been given a window of opportunity to spread the gospel. Because we live in the end times, that window will soon close. Let us therefore labor while it is yet day, ere the night comes, in which no man can work!

Finally, we have an incentive to pass this work down to our generations—just as the ant who gathers her food in the summer against the coming of winter. The current RFPA staff is not getting any younger, and the day is not far off when new blood must take over this work. Parents and teachers, are you listening? If you have children or students who show a good aptitude for the English language and an interest in this work, please encourage them to contact the RFPA. We will be glad to introduce them to this rewarding work.

Thus, as members of the faithful church of Christ, read and get knowledge so that you may be equipped to resist the apostasy that is already rampant in the church and that marks the end times, in order that you may be faithful to your calling to stand fast. Continue this good work, and pass it down to your generations. In this way the church of Christ—the cottage in the vineyard, the hut in the garden of cucumbers, the small remnant according to the election of grace—will be preserved, to the eternal praise and glory of our covenant God. 

Contacts in Russia

On Monday, July 16, we flew from Frankfurt, Germany to Moscow. Our Air Berlin flight arrived in Moscow at about 5:30 P.M. We were met at the airport by Mr. Renat Ilyasov and Mr. Alexander Makeev. Mr. Makeev is an elder in the Moscow congregation of the Evangelical Reformed Church Union of Russia or ERCUR. The ERCUR is the denomination that invited us to come to Russia. Renat Ilyasov was to be our guide and translator during our time in Russia. In those capacities, Renat proved to be an invaluable aid to our work.

Some readers of the *Standard Bearer* may recognize the name Renat Ilyasov. He has translated some Protestant Reformed materials into Russian. In fact, since our trip, he has completed the transla-



Renat and Masha Ilyasov, with children (l. to r.) Marianna, Rosalea, Veronica, and Markus

Mr. VanDerSchaaf is an elder in Faith Church in Jenison, MI, and a member of the synodical Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC). This article and the one that preceded it in the October 1 issue of the Standard Bearer give an account of a recent visit by representatives of the CC to contacts in Germany and Russia in July of 2007.

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tion of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's tract *The Gospel* into his native tongue. Renat was introduced to the Protestant Reformed Churches by an American who is familiar with our churches, but who is not a member of the PRCA. Renat and his wife, Masha, are from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and are now living in Russia in the city of Nizhny Novgorod. On Monday evening we took an overnight train from Moscow to Nizhny Novgorod in order to visit with Renat and Masha and their four lovely children. On Tuesday, and on other occasions during the week, we discussed with Renat means by which he could help to spread the Reformed faith in Russia. Renat is a talented man who is well grounded in the truth and has a great zeal to disseminate the Reformed faith.

From Nizhny Novgorod we boarded our second overnight train, this time for Kazan. We spent two nights and three days in Kazan as the guests of the ERCUR congregation in that city and of its pastor, Valery Kevorkyants. The ERCUR congregation consists of about 25 people and has two elders and a deacon in addition to their pastor.



I should briefly introduce the Evangelical Reformed Church Union of Russia. The denomination is approximately fifteen years old. It consists of three congregations in three widely separated cities: Moscow, Kazan, and Omsk. The ERCUR holds as creeds the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, and the Westminster Confession. Pastor Kevorkyants recently founded a seminary in

Kazan, although it is not a denominational seminary as the seminary of the PRCA is.

Although there were Reformed congregations in Russia as far back as the seventeenth century, there was virtually no organized Reformed presence in the Soviet Union from 1918 until the fall of communism around 1990. There is now official toleration of religions in Russia, and the three congregations of the ERCUR make good use of their newfound freedom. They are serious in their efforts to evangelize. However, toleration does not mean the same thing in Russia as it does in the United States. The state still exercises a good deal of control over churches in the form of permits and licensing requirements. Every region has its Ministry of Religion, and churches that are considered "new" experience particular difficulties if they want to have their own church buildings or their own seminaries. It can be very complicated for a congregation simply to obtain a place in which it may legally meet. One of the first questions that members of the congregations in Russia and Uzbekistan would ask us was, "What relationship do the Protestant Reformed Churches have with the government?"



In Kazan, Prof. Dykstra gave presentations on two evenings to members of the ERCUR congregation. On the first evening he introduced the PRCA, giving a brief overview of its history, beliefs, and denominational life. On the second evening, he spoke on the doctrine of the covenant. On both oc-



The ERCUR congregation of Kazan, Pastor Kevorkyants at the right

casions there were 15-17 members of the congregation present, and each presentation was followed by lively and beneficial question and answer sessions. During Prof. Dykstra's speech on the covenant, it became apparent that many of the issues relating to the covenant were new to the people. Perhaps we should have expected that. Among this small group of Reformed believers we met one couple who had been members of a Pentecostal congregation only six months before. We also met a sister and brother who had recently come out of Islam. The people were not less attentive for all that; and one of the elders remarked afterward that what Prof. Dykstra said was consistent with what they had been studying on unconditional salvation. We asked the man what he had been studying. He said that Pastor Valery and the consistory had been reading together Calvin's *Institutes* and portions of H. C. Hoeksema's *Voice of Our Father's* that had been translated into Russian.

We are grateful to Pastor Valery and to his congregation for their hospitality to us during our three days in Kazan, and for the opportunity they gave us to introduce the PRCA and to discuss the truths of the covenant with them.

One of the unexpected treats of

our week in Russia was the opportunity we had to meet Pastors Rinat Fazliev and Dilshod Abdullaev. These two men flew from Tashkent, the capital of the country of Uzbekistan, to Kazan in order to meet with representatives of the PRCA. Pastor Rinat leads two small congregations that together make up the Evangelical Reformed Church Union of Uzbekistan or ERCUU. This group has no official ties to the ERCUR.

Pastor Dilshod leads an independent congregation in Tashkent that holds the Westminster Confession as its creed. Recall that Renat Ilyasov is also from Tashkent. He led one of the ERCUR congregations there until he moved to Russia. All three men were introduced to the PRCA at about the same time. They spent much time together discussing doctrine and growing together in the Reformed faith. We spent hours with Pastors Rinat and Dilshod as they asked us good, perceptive questions on doctrine and practice.



Pastors Dilshod Abdullaev and Rinat Fazliev and Mr. Renat Ilyasov

Many of these questions had to do with the doctrine of the covenant and the topic of the covenant of works, and with divorce and remarriage. The two men demonstrated a deep-seated love for the truth and eagerness to learn, and they revealed their love, as pastors, for the people in Uzbekistan whom they are called to lead. After our discussions, they and Renat continued to talk among themselves until the small hours of the morning.

From Kazan we took our last overnight train-ride, back to Moscow. We arrived about 8 o'clock Saturday morning. After checking into our hotel, we had time to see Red Square and the Kremlin. That afternoon we met with Elder Alexander Makeev of the Moscow congregation of the ERCUR. Elder Makeev had questions for us on the life and walk of Protestant Reformed people.

The next day, Sunday, was our last Lord's Day in Europe. We attended the worship service of the Moscow congregation. We had underestimated the time that it would take to reach the meeting place of the congregation, and so we arrived a half hour late for the service. The congregation of about 20 people graciously waited until we arrived before they began the service.

The congregation meets in a small, third-floor apartment. There is no sign. One must simply know the address and then press the doorbell in order to request admission. We noticed that the windows would be closed when the congregation sang Psalms. We were told that the congregation had to avoid giving any annoyance to the neighbors. Although the congregation has the right to meet, it is not able to find a place that was properly zoned for a church gathering. If the congregation's worship services irritated the neighbors, then the neighbors might



The ERCUR congregation of Moscow, Pastor Zoltanovich at the right

complain and have the group pushed out of its meeting place.

The congregation consists of families and of single people. Here also we met people who had come to the Reformed faith through great difficulty. Some of the members were married, but the Holy Spirit had not worked in the hearts of their spouses.

The service that we witnessed was conducted in the Russian language. Renat summarized the sermon for us. The congregation uses the Psalms of Geneva for its worship, as does the ERCUR congregation in Kazan. The congregation's two elders are Mr. Alexander Makeev and Vladimir Lotsmanov, who is a professional translator. It was Mr. Lotsmanov who translated portions of H. C.



Prof. Dykstra in discussion with a member of the Moscow ERCUR

Hoeksema's *Voice of Our Fathers* into Russian.

After the service Prof. Dykstra introduced the PRCA to the congregation. Then there was a time for questions and answers between us and leading members of the congregation.



What were our impressions of the ERCUR? The members of the denomination appear to be united on basic Reformation truths, such as predestination. Also, the members of the ERCUR are active in sharing the Reformed faith with family members and acquaintances. It must be remembered that the entire denomination is relatively young and exists in a country whose Reformed tradition was destroyed by communism. The ERCUR is made up almost entirely of first generation believers. Some believers in this denomination have advanced farther than others in their progress to a consistent understanding of the Reformed faith. Also, members of the denomination have come to the Reformed faith by various means. We met two brothers who were introduced to the Reformed doctrine of predestination by American Christian

Reconstructionists. One of these men was influenced by Reconstructionism. Thankfully, this brother was willing to listen as Prof. Dykstra showed him the Bible's teaching on the last things.

On Monday, July 23, we made the two-hour metro and bus trip from our hotel to the Moscow airport. Our eleven-hour plane trip brought us back into Grand Rapids just before midnight on the same day. Because Moscow is eight hours ahead of us who live in America's Eastern time zone, and because we gained time by flying west, Monday was about a 32-hour day for us. We were happy to be greeted by parents, children, and grandchildren at the Grand Rapids airport.

Was our trip to Germany and Russia of benefit to our churches? We believe the answer is yes. We met with representatives of churches who are sincerely committed to the Reformed faith and who want to be able to spread the knowledge of the truth in their lands. We met people who had come to a knowledge of the Reformed faith when they began to read the Bible. We met others who discovered the Reformed faith when someone gave them a copy of a Reformed creed. Some of these people have given up much of




This picture of Mr. Tanetschek, his wife, Mirijam, and their two sons was inadvertently left out of the article on "Contacts in Germany" (October 1, 2007). Mr. Tanetschek is one of the two elders in the Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church in Giessen, Germany.

what this world has to offer for the sake of the gospel. Others have borne the reproach of Christ for their confession. We were reminded that God has used the materials that are produced by the

RFPFA as a means to spread the knowledge of His truth. This is also true of the website of the PRCA.

We urge our readers to remember to pray for the church univer-

sal, being reminded that God has His people in every nation. And may each of us, as God grants us occasion, be ready to invite our neighbor to read with us the Reformed creeds, and the Bible. 

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

■ Persecution in Iraq

When we think of Iraq, we likely tend to focus upon the war against terrorism, the military involvement against al-Qaeda. We may think of the on-going internal strife among the largely Muslim populations – Shiites versus Sunnis. We may forget or not be aware of a relatively small portion of the Iraqi populace that is Christian and caught in the middle of the turmoil there. Brothers and sisters in Christ and their families are suffering grievously in Iraq. They are being abducted, held for ransom, tortured, sometimes put to death. Many are compelled to flee the country. Mindy Belz reports on the chaos and fear being sown by terrorists among churches in Iraq in an article entitled “Kidnapped” (*World*, May 19, 2007):

Every day a dozen – and more – Iraqis are reported kidnapped or missing. Every morning police vans arrive at Baghdad hospitals bearing the dead bodies recovered overnight, a gruesome collection of often tortured and beheaded kidnap victims. For al-Qaeda in Iraq and its splinter groups, kidnapping Iraqis has become their stock in trade, a way to make money collecting ransom, but more importantly, a way to sow chaos and fear on the streets.

The number of Shiites and Sunnis kidnapped dwarfs the number of Christians abducted,

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but Iraq’s tiny Christian minority has not escaped this particular brand of terrorism. Five Baghdad clergymen were kidnapped between July and December 2006. All were released after ransoms were paid. Last October a Syrian Orthodox priest was kidnapped and beheaded in Mosul.

Pastor Maher Dakel of St. George’s Anglican Church in Baghdad disappeared in 2005, along with his wife and son, all believed to be kidnap victims, although no ransom demand was delivered nor have their bodies been recovered....

... Five months ago, St. Peter’s Seminary and Babel College, which serve Iraq’s Chaldean Christian community, closed their joint Baghdad campus and relocated to northern Iraq outside the city of Irbil after the third kidnapping of a staff member in five months. One victim, Chaldean priest Douglas Yusuf al-Bazy, had finished conducting mass at St. Elijah’s parish and was driving on Baghdad’s al-Kanat highway when four cars surrounded his vehicle and forced him to pull over on a Sunday morning last November. He was blindfolded at gunpoint and pushed into the trunk of his car, he told Compass Direct news service.

Eventually he wound up in an insurgent safehouse in a Baghdad neighborhood, where his captors turned up the television volume before they questioned and tortured him. They beat him with a hammer, kicked him until teeth fell out, and burned his mustache with cigarettes. Most of the time he was bound and blindfolded, and received little food and water. Released after nine days, he required hospital care in Baghdad

and eventually went to Italy for reconstructive surgery....

... Iraq’s Christian community finds itself particularly vulnerable to organized, militant kidnapers. Al-Bazy says he believes he was targeted for kidnapping because he is regarded as part of a community seen as intellectual, not easily intimidated, and in some cases closely tied with the West. Shiites and Sunnis may be fighting each other in Iraq, said regional church leader Sami Dagher, “but keep in mind, we are hated by both.”

Dagher, president of the Alliance Church of Lebanon and director of a humanitarian relief center serving Iraq, said the intimidation of Christians in Iraq is working. The CMA church in Baghdad at one time was the largest and fastest-growing church in the city, with 800 people attending its Sunday morning service in war time. Now attendance has dropped to about 400.

In Baghdad’s Dora district, home to historic churches and some predominantly Christian neighborhoods, seven churches have either shut down completely or reduced services to about once a month. Islamist groups have gone door to door to evict Christian families. They blackmail them to pay an exorbitant tax, to become Muslims, or to leave, said Dagher.

As a result, many Christian families across Iraq are leaving. Of approximately 1.2 million Iraqi refugees living in Syria, Dagher believes the majority are Christians....

In *MERF* (Middle East Reformed Fellowship) *News*, May 2007, Lisa Atallah provides an up-

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date on the "Hardships Facing Iraqi Christians." She reports:

Pastor Ikram Mehanny served the large Arabic-speaking congregation in Baghdad, Iraq for many years. He described his last weeks: "These are most difficult days for all in Iraq... involved in a vicious war which no one even imagined.... The international media cannot even begin to describe the sufferings experienced by all. The impact of death is felt by more and more families, civilian as well as military. Still, most of the ones getting killed or maimed every day are innocent civilians. There is constant fear; especially for those who have no militia protection. There is no relief from this day or night. One does not know when a bomb will explode, while seeking to fetch drinking water or lining up for bread outside any bakery. And that is not all. There is the fear of kidnapping—not just on the street; any knock at the door carries the risk of being some money-hungry armed group who drags men, women, or children from their homes.... Most of our people have had to run away for their lives—most to Syria, where they are not required a visa and the cost of living is less exorbitant. Others have gone to Jordan or Turkey, some go to relatives in villages of northern Iraq, under the control of the Kurds...."

Anonymous phone calls that often precede house kidnappings made the Baghdad church elders persuade Pastor Ikram and his family to return to his Egyptian homeland as soon as secure transport could be arranged from the Baghdad church compound to the airport. A handful of church families remain—most cannot afford the expensive transport protection money to escape the misery of life in Baghdad. The militias know these have no money to ransom. But because of the insecurity, most don't dare to venture out for church activities....

... Elder Yousif Al-Saqa reports from Baghdad: "... I am sure prayer is what keeps us going.... We know that our sover-

eign God cares and knows best. He is our refuge and our hope in this life as well as in the life to come...."

Latest reports are that the situation in Baghdad has deteriorated even more, with intentional attacks upon Christian families, who are being forced by extremists to leave their homes. Their houses are then occupied and all their belongings confiscated. As Lisa Atallah put it, "Our Iraqi brethren continue to suffer great trials as a defenseless minority in a country which has become desperately poor and lawless."

With our peaceful, secure existence here in North America, persecution and its accompanying hardships are difficult for us to imagine. But I believe it is incumbent upon us to make ourselves aware of the tribulation that God's people experience in many places. And it is incumbent upon us to pray for our fellow saints who suffer for the cause of the gospel of Christ. Sometimes we can be so narrow in our prayers – concerned only with our own personal needs, our family, our congregation, our denomination. We must not stop there. We confess "an holy catholic church." Let us be sure to pray for that church, especially as she suffers for Christ's sake!

■ Abortion in the Headlines

Certainly a noteworthy news-story in recent months has been the United States Supreme Court decision that upheld the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act that the Congress enacted and President George W. Bush signed into law in 2003. In a landmark, five-to-four ruling in *Gonzalez v. Carhart*, on April 18, 2007 the U.S. high court took this decision. Rory Leishman, National Affairs columnist in *The Interim* (Canada's Life and Family Newspaper), comments in the June 2007 issue:

In reasons for the majority in *Carhart*, Mr. Justice Anthony Kennedy described partial-birth abortion (also known as intact dilation and evacuation) as a procedure in which an abortionist typically delivers all but the head of a living baby from the womb, before piercing or crushing the baby's skull so the head can pass through the cervix.

Kennedy agreed with the finding of the United States Congress that: "Implicitly approving such a brutal and inhumane procedure by choosing not to prohibit it will further coarsen society to the humanity of not only newborns, but all vulnerable and innocent human life, making it increasingly difficult to protect such life." On this basis, he upheld the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, which makes it a criminal offense punishable by up to two years' imprisonment for an abortion doctor to perform a partial-birth abortion, unless the procedure is "necessary to save the life of a mother whose life is endangered by a physical disorder, physical illness or physical injury."

The Parliament of Canada should take note. Thanks to the calamitous judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Morgentaler*, 1988, Canada is the only democracy in the world that has no law governing abortion. If a mother decides, for whatever reason, that she no longer wants her pre-born baby, it is lawful in Canada for an unscrupulous abortion doctor to kill that baby at any time during the pregnancy, right up to just a few seconds before birth....

...Our judicial rulers in Canada profess to be enlightened and compassionate, yet none shows any disposition to agree with the judgment of the United States Supreme Court on the urgent need to curtail at least the horrors of partial-birth abortion. What a shame and what a pity.

In the same issue of *The Interim*, The World Briefs column reports from Beijing under the headline, "Forced abortions in China":

In late April, National Public Radio in the U.S. reported that dozens of women in southwest China had been forced to have abortions even as late as nine months into the pregnancy. While Beijing's one-child policy limits urban couples to one child, sometimes families can have a second child and pay a fine. NPR reported that some women in Guangxi Province were forced to abort their first child because they were unmarried. Liang Yage and his wife Wei Linrong had one child and believed that they would be able to keep their second child after paying a fine. But on April 16, when Wei was seven months pregnant, 10 family planning officials visited her at home. They informed her she had to have an abortion. Wei recalls an official telling her, "If you don't go (to the hospital), we'll carry you." The couple report that the waiting room at the maternity ward in nearby Baise was full of women undergoing forced abortions and sterilizations....

Another disturbing article reported by *The Interim* concerning abortion was entitled, "Amnesty International admits to adopting a pro-abortion policy." Gundrun Schultz and Paul Tuns report:

Amnesty International has finally admitted it has adopted a new policy supporting abortion. After pro-lifers exposed the organization's secret adoption of a pro-abortion position in early May, AI officials admitted May 9 that the human rights organization would begin lobbying for abortion to be decriminalized globally.


Widney Brown, senior policy and campaigns director, told Reuters that the board of AI agreed on the policy change in April. The human rights lobby group had previously held a position of neutrality on abortion, although it has always opposed forced abortion. However, over the past year, AI has worked to expand its definition of "sexual and reproductive rights."

While the agency has said it is not supporting abortion as a human right, but simply addressing "particular circumstances" surrounding rape situations or endangerment to women's health, in fact the policy calls for a moratorium on all criminal penalties against abortion. " 'Decriminalization' means the removal of all criminal penalties (including imprisonment, fines and other punishments) against those seeking, obtaining, providing information about or carrying out abortions," the document states.

The new policy puts AI, the largest human rights organization in the world, at odds with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which states that every child "needs special safeguards and care, including legal protection, before as well as after birth."

Brown denied that Amnesty had attempted to keep the new policy a secret. "There's simply no reason for us to 'publicize' policy issues," she said....

... Multiple international organizations and religious leaders objected to the agency's proposal to begin championing abortion rights after it was first publicized two years ago. Reports from Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have suggested widespread opposition to Amnesty's proposed abortion advocacy among grassroots supporters.

Other headlines could be mentioned – "Force Doctors to Commit Abortions, says U.S. Group," "Ads said to promote sex-selection abortion," "Early Abortifacients Now Prescription-free in B.C.," "Planned Parenthood Continues U.S. Slaughter." Not much of this news is good news. May we never cease to be shocked and grieved by the scourge of abortion. 

Special Article

Rev. Ronald Hanko

A Brief History of the Afscheiding (2)

Hendrik de Cock

De Cock was the oldest of the Secession leaders, the first to take an active stand against unbiblical doctrines and practices in the state church; the first to be disciplined; the first, with his congregation, to secede from the Dutch Reformed Church;

and also the first of the leaders to die, for he saw only the beginnings of the Secession, dying already in 1842, just eight years after its beginning and at the young age of 41. His history is the history of the early years of the Secession.

As is often the case with church reformation, the Secession began with a reformation in the life and

Rev. Hanko is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington.

Previous article in this series: October 15, 2007, p. 30.

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soul of de Cock. So desperate were conditions in the state church that de Cock learned virtually nothing of sin and grace and of salvation through Jesus Christ, in spite of his upbringing in a nominally Christian home, his attendance at Christian schools, and his graduation from the University of Gronigen as a candidate for the ministry of the gospel.

During the early years of his ministry he preached a modernist gospel and later judged himself to have been at that time an unconverted man. To bring him to a knowledge of himself, of the truth, and of the Savior, God used the testimony of an elderly farm worker, Klaas Kuipenga, who told de Cock, "If I had to add one sigh to my own salvation, I would certainly be lost." This happened at a time when Kuipenga was receiving instruction from de Cock in a private catechism class in preparation for church membership. So, by God's grace, the teacher became the student.

God also used two pamphlets by Count Van Zuylen Van Nijeveld, "The Only Deliverance" and "Reformed Doctrine," as well as Calvin's *Institutes* to teach him the Reformed faith. Until discovering the *Institutes* in the study of a fellow minister, de Cock had not even known of them. Through Calvin he became acquainted with other earlier Reformed writers and discovered the Reformed creeds as well when a copy of the Canons was given him by an elderly widow in his congregation,¹ and which, to his dismay, taught doctrines that he had never learned, even as a seminary student.

He had been in the ministry ten years and was serving a rural congregation in Ulrum in Gronigen at the time of the Secession. In Ulrum his preaching of the gospel attracted crowds who were not hearing the gospel elsewhere. Some of the visitors asked him to baptize their children, since they could not in good conscience have them baptized in the liberal congregations to which they belonged.² This, as

well as his preaching of the gospel, his writings, in which he referred to several liberal ministers as "wolves in the sheepfold of Christ," and his opposition to hymns led to his suspension from the ministry in 1833.

In spite of many injustices he submitted to his suspension for a year. When the authorities refused to allow the Rev. H. P. Scholte to preach for him at the time of the death of his infant daughter, de Cock and his consistory saw that their only hope lay in secession. So it was, that on October 13, 1834, an "Act of Secession," signed by two elders and three deacons, was presented to the congregation in Ulrum and signed by 140 members and heads of families representing 247 souls (only eight members did not sign). This act was quickly followed by the secessions of Scholte, Brummelkamp, Meerburg, Van Velzen, and others, all of whom were also deposed.

de Cock continued to suffer for his convictions and actions, as did the other leaders and their congregations, enduring harassment, fines, imprisonment, and slander. He had twelve soldiers billeted in his home in Ulrum, was subsequently forbidden to preach in his congregation there, was expelled from his home, had his worship services interrupted, was attacked and thrown into a thorn hedge by a mob while returning from a meeting, and spent three months in prison. He died before the persecution eased.

Persecution

What de Cock suffered was the lot of all the seceders. One minister, a Rev. H. J. Budding, was fined 40,000 florins (\$25-30,000). When the seceders were unable to pay their fines, which most of them were unable to do, their possessions were seized and sold, often on the Lord's Day, so that their possessions could not be repurchased. So severe was the persecution that it was noticed in other

countries. A French periodical carried the following notice in 1839:

Holland, which owes its praise and prosperity especially to this that it received to its bosom with affection all Christians persecuted for their faith, now furnishes a spectacle of savage persecutions for the faith. Deeply deplorable is it to witness such events taking place under the rule of the House of Orange-Nassau which has demonstrated so many services to the Gospel and religious liberty.³

The seceders bore this persecution patiently for the sake of the gospel, but its severity led many of them to emigrate to the United States. Van Raalte said many years later:

I am happy that I followed the voice of my conscience, even though it cost me a great deal. On the other hand, it grieves me considerably that in my own fatherland now stirred up by the Hervormde Synod and the Netherlands government and citizens, I was fined, tormented by having soldiers quartered in our home, thrown into prison, and throughout the years had filth and stones thrown at me as though I were the scum of society.⁴

The persecution eased when William II became king in 1840, but by that time many were thinking in terms of emigration, and it was not long after that two of the leaders, Scholte and Van Raalte, along with thousands of the seceders, left for the United States. Persecution was not the only factor in their departure. A potato blight had destroyed the crops in the Netherlands, and the poverty of the ordinary people led them to seek a better living elsewhere, but what they suffered was used by God to transplant the Reformed faith to our own country.

Subsequent History

Besides persecution, especially three things characterize the years

following the Secession: growth, emigration to America, and divisions among the seceders themselves. In 1840, the seceders numbered more than 6000 members, but were still a very small group in the Netherlands. The leaders of the state church and the government comforted themselves with the fact that the seceders were the poorest of the people and a minority. That would change when in 1886 Abraham Kuyper led another, larger, and more politically influential movement out of the state church, but neither numbers nor political influence have anything to do with God's approval and blessing:

[de Cock's] followers were, for the most part, the poor, the uneducated, the despised, the ignoble of the land. For all that, they were the godly, the pious, the upright who genuinely thirsted for that one true heavenly Bread which is Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵

The seceders soon recognized the need for an educated ministry and especially for ministers who would continue to stand for the truths of God's Word. Brummelkamp and de Cock were appointed in 1839 to teach those who aspired to the ministry, but de Cock died soon after and Rev. T. F. de Haan was appointed in his place. A theological school was finally established at Kampen in 1854.

Persecution by the authorities led many to emigrate, and colonies were established in Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin in the period from 1845-1880. Some 13,000 Hollanders went to America during that time, and the majority of the them were secession people. There they initially aligned themselves with the Reformed Church in America, but many soon left because of apostasy in that denomination and formed the Christian Reformed Church.

After persecution waned and ceased, the seceders gained govern-

ment recognition, established their own Christian schools, and continued to stand for the truth. In 1886 Dr. Abraham Kuyper led another movement, some 100,000 people, out of the state church. Having come to recognize the Secession of 1834 as a true reformation of God's church, Kuyper and his group eventually sought union with the Secession churches, and in 1892 that union became a reality. Four hundred Secession churches and 300 congregations that followed Kuyper joined to become the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Reformed Church).

This union did not come easily and was for many years incomplete in that there were serious doctrinal differences between the two groups. Individual congregations and members continued to be identified for many years as belonging to one or the other group. In fact, the churches and people of the Secession were identified as the "A" group and the Kuyperians as the "B" group within the denomination. Each maintained its own theological school and kept itself separate from the rest. The Protestant Reformed Churches owe much to both groups.

There were also divisions among the Seceders themselves. The new churches and their leaders fell into two groups or branches, a stronger and more doctrinally sound northern branch (de Cock and Van Velzen) and a weaker southern branch (Brummelkamp and Van Raalte).⁶ As a result of these divisions, there was much disagreement and infighting among the leaders of the Secession and a number of permanent breaks. Scholte was deposed by the Secession churches and after emigrating to America remained independent. Van Raalte, after emigrating, remained in the Reformed Church in America, when many of those who had followed him to America joined the newly established Christian Reformed Church. In 1838 in the Netherlands, as a result of the

divisions over the question of government recognition, a new denomination was formed, *De Gereformeerde Kerken onder het Kruis* (The Reformed Churches Under the Cross), the churches in which the Netherlands Reformed Congregations have their roots.

The differences among the seceders were many. Scholte disagreed already in 1833 with de Cock's decision to baptize infants from other congregations. There were differences over hymns, some being completely opposed to their use and others having a more tolerant attitude. Those who formed the Churches Under the Cross believed that the Secession churches had gone too far in agreeing to government regulations that allowed them to be officially recognized. There were differences about which church order ought to be used, about clerical dress, and about lay preaching. There were serious doctrinal differences as

1. de Cock later published the *Canons*, another act for which he was vilified by his enemies.

2. The Form for the Administration of Baptism asks parents whether they "acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?"

3. Peter Y. De Jong, "The Dawn of a New Day," in *The Reformation of 1834* (Orange City: Plum Publishing, 1984), 33.

4. Henry S. Lucas, *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), II, 510.

5. Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Grandville: Reformed Free Publishing, 1999), 357.

6. It was through this weaker, southern branch that the doctrine of the well-meant offer and a conditional covenant found their way into the Secession churches. Brummelkamp especially was responsible for introducing the theology of the well-meant offer of the gospel into the churches.

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well over the covenant and baptism, the nature of gospel preaching, and millennialism (Scholte was premillennial in his eschatology).

Of these divisions Van Raalte later wrote:

The dissensions among the believers in the Netherlands caused me constantly a deep sorrow. They were harder for me to bear than the persecution; they de-

prived me of all enjoyment of life and made me afraid of life.⁷

Through all these changes, God preserved and built His church, as He continues to do today and will do until our Savior returns. We who have our roots in the Secession can be especially thankful, for it is through this mighty work of grace that God has given us our own existence as churches and has

given us a rich heritage of truth. May we, remembering those who fought and suffered for the faith then, continue to fight for the truth today, showing the same willingness to suffer reproach for Christ's sake and for the truth's sake.

... to be continued. 

7. Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 39.

Contribution

Rev. Richard Smit

Genesis Protestant Reformed School

On March 9, 2007, the members of our Genesis Protestant Reformed School Society in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, decided to set September 4, 2007, as the goal for the opening day for a new elementary school. By this decision, we had committed ourselves to a very ambitious and daunting task. Nevertheless, we realized that we would be totally dependent upon the Lord's will and help for the accomplishment of this goal. By faith the board and society pressed forward in the confidence that the Lord would provide all that was needed to obtain the goal, if it was His will.

Six months later, on Tuesday, September 4, 2007, the Lord providentially and amazingly made it possible for the Genesis Protestant Reformed School to begin with two teachers and thirty-six students in grades 1 through 9.

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

Surely, this day would never have been possible without the Lord's help. The Lord has blessed us with many covenant children. The Lord provided us two qualified teachers: Mr. Rick Span, who teaches grades 4 through 9 and serves as administrator for the school, and Mrs. Sharon Bevaart, who teaches grades 1 through 3.

The Lord provided the equipment, the books, and a curriculum. The Lord has provided the financial means to support the operations of the school.

The Lord amazingly provided a place to house our new school. At first, we intended to share the church building of our Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church. This



Mrs. Sharon Bevaart and Grades 1-3



Mr. Rick Span and grades 4-9

seemed workable, but it was not ideal. In the last couple of weeks before the opening day of school, a vacant church building of the Free Reformed Church in Lacombe became available for the school to rent. After a busy two weeks of cleaning and preparation by many workers, young and old, the rented facility was ready by the opening day to house the school. For now, this facility will serve adequately the needs of the school until it is possible to construct a new school building on land adjacent to the church building and parsonage of our Immanuel PRC.

This historic day in the cause of parental, Christian, Protestant Reformed, and covenantal education in Canada began with a convocation chapel. Parents, excited


children, grandparents, and supporters assembled together at 8:30 A.M. for a time of singing Psalter numbers, prayer, and for a meditation upon Scripture, presented by Rev. Richard J. Smit.

Rev. Smit spoke to the students and teachers from Nehemiah 4:6, "So built we the wall... for the people had a mind to work." Rev. Smit pointed out some parallels between the work that Nehemiah did and the work that our parents did, and the challenges that they endured in order to establish and begin our new school. He showed that just as God had given Nehemiah and the people the heart to work together and the necessary tools to build the walls of Jerusalem, so God had given graciously to our parents a mind and heart to

work together in their covenantal instruction and, for the spiritual construction of the wall of the future church, to use together the tool of our new school. It was a spiritually profitable time for the consecration of the school year to the service of God's kingdom and covenant.

The school has enjoyed overwhelming support from our fellow saints throughout the Protestant Reformed Churches by many, many words of encouragement as well as by generous financial gifts towards the general operating expenses of the school and towards the new building fund. We give humble and hearty thanks to our God for what He has done and for the support of our brethren with whom we share a conviction for Protestant Reformed, Christian education. Truly, Jehovah has remembered us in His mercy (Ps. 136:23).

Now, with God's blessing and according to His will, we look and press forward with much labor and prayer to another first for our new school: the completion of our first year of school on June 19 with a graduation ceremony planned for Friday, June 20, the Lord willing.

May our heavenly Father bless our feeble and weak efforts, here in Lacombe and in all our PR elementary and secondary schools throughout the western and midwestern U.S.A., so that the tools of our own schools may serve the spiritual construction of the future generations of the church in the fear of Jehovah and in our goodly heritage of the Reformed faith. 

Report of Classis East

Held at the First PRC, Grand Rapids, MI, on Wednesday, September 12, 2007, with a continued session on Wednesday, September 26, 2007.

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 12, 2007 but had to continue in session on Wednesday, September 26, 2007 to finish its business. Each congregation was represented by

two delegates; Rev. G. Eriks was the chairman of these sessions.

At issue with the classis were three appeals from members of the Grace PRC relative their pastor's homeschooling his children. Two

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of the appeals were treated by the classis, a third was not considered to be legally before the classis since it was judged that the matter was not finished by the appellant and his consistory.

Classis did not uphold the remaining two appeals. The first appellant contended that, in keeping with what he believed to be the requirements of Article 21 of the Church Order, his pastor's homeschooling was not an acceptable practice and, further, that his consistory should work with his pastor to send his children to a Protestant Reformed Christian school. Classis did not uphold this first appeal, on the ground that the appellant misinterpreted Article 21 of the Church Order. The appellant argued incorrectly that Article 21 requires that all families, regardless of circumstances, must send their children to our schools, and consistories must work with these parents until their children attend these schools. The intent of Article 21 is, rather, that the church (consistory) promote good Christian schools, not force them, and urge parents to use these schools, not coerce them, and that the preaching regarding the demands of the covenant should be done persistently, in a wise and timely manner.

The second appellant asked the consistory to require that their pastor reenroll his children in our Christian schools so that peace in the congregation could be restored. This appeal was not upheld, on the ground that such an action by a consistory would improperly require their pastor to act against his conscience. Homeschooling falls within the area of Christian liberty; no member, not even an officebearer, may be required to act against his conscience on a matter of Christian liberty, though in certain instances an officebearer's holding to his conscience may jeopardize his office; therefore the consistory may not seek to restore peace in the congregation by forc-

ing their pastor to enroll his children in PR schools against his conscience.

But classis was not finished. Classis adopted advice to the appellants' consistory on two matters raised by the consistory to the classis: 1) that classis uphold their position on home schooling and 2) that classis uphold the right of their pastor to educate his children at home. Classis decided to deny the consistory's request to uphold them in these matters.

The grounds adopted by classis (summarized and paraphrased):

1) The consistory's decision that their pastor has the right to educate his children at home is based on a wrong interpretation of Article 21 of the Church Order. The consistory believes the focus of Article 21 to be that there be good Christian schools, so that believers who need the aid of Christian schoolteachers do not have to send their children to public schools.

The consistory's position described above was judged by classis to be a wrong interpretation of Article 21 of the Church Order. In the first place, Article 21 of the Church Order, said classis, both in its original form (schoolmasters) and in its present form (schools), refers only to parental Christian schools or Christian day schools. Secondly, Article 21 not only mandates consistories to see to it that there are good Christian schools established and maintained by the community of Reformed believers but also requires the consistories to see to it that the parents have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant, and to urge parents to use these schools if at all possible.

2) The consistory's decision that their pastor has the right to educate his children at home is based on the erroneous position "that there are no principles or biblical reasons that would serve as grounds for the consistory to prohibit officebearers of the church

from homeschooling their children even when Christian day schools are available." The error is that of not recognizing the principle that a consistory member is bound to observe Article 21 of the Church Order. Article 21 is binding on all consistories of the Protestant Reformed Churches and requires every minister and elder to promote the establishment and use of good Christian schools in community with other Reformed believers. An officebearer who does not send his children to good Christian schools, when they are available, and gives no valid reason for his action (so that the consistory can give these reasons to the congregation) cannot effectively fulfill the duties required of every consistory member by Article 21. Officebearers must be examples to their congregation.

3) The consistory's decision that their pastor has the right to educate his children at home is based on the erroneous view that their pastor's appeal to his conscience must be decisive in their decision. The deciding factor should be the *reason(s)* why the pastor does not use the good Christian schools. The validity of these reasons is to be judged by his consistory. One's conscience may be weak for lack of knowledge or it may be defiled by our sinful natures, so it may not be decisive in this matter.

Classis then advised the appellants' consistory to take the following actions (summarized): 1) to require their pastor to give reason(s) for not sending his children to our schools and to judge whether these reasons are valid; 2) to address the issues that hinder their pastor from sending his children to our schools, so that, if possible, his children may return to these schools; 3) should the consistory find the reason(s) for their pastor's actions to be valid, the consistory should inform the congregation of the nature of the reason(s) given by their pastor for homeschooling his children, and 4) should the consistory

find their pastor's reasons for his homeschooling of his children to be invalid, and should they be unable to convince their pastor to use the good Christian schools, then the consistory is to inform classis of this fact and to present to the classis how they intend to proceed.


In its last action regarding the appeals and advice to the consistory involved, Classis appointed a special committee to as-

sist the consistory in implementing these decisions should they desire such help.

In other business, Classis approved pulpit supply for the Faith PRC daughter group now meeting. Classis was in closed session to deal with a matter of discipline. Classis also adopted a letter to be sent to the former members of Covenant PRC informing them of the

decisions of Synod 2007 regarding the grounds for their dissolution and encouraging them to seek other Protestant Reformed congregations as their church homes.

Expenses of classis amounted to \$2010.70. Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 9, 2008 at the Georgetown PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

The Doon, IA PRC called Rev. Carl Haak to be our churches' next missionary pastor to the Berean PRC in the Philippines. Rev. Haak was led of the Lord to decline this call.

From a trio of the Revs. Allen Brummel, Steven Key, and Ronald VanOverloop, the Edgerton, MN PRC extended a call to Rev. Allen Brummel to serve as missionary in Sioux Falls, SD. On Sunday, October 7, Rev. Brummel announced his acceptance of that call.

Congregation Activities

As a denomination, we give thanks to our heavenly Father for providing our churches with another pastor. Mr. Clayton Spronk gave a good testimony of the gifts for the ministry before the delegates at Classis West on September 5. He was ordained into the ministry of the Word on September 7 and then installed as the second pastor of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL. That next Lord's Day, September 9, Rev. Spronk preached his inaugural sermon, choosing as his text, James 1:5-8, under the theme "Asking God for Wisdom." As churches we pray that God may

give Rev. Spronk a long and fruitful ministry and make him a clear and shining light of His glory.

The consistory of the Hull, IA PRC gave approval to requests from various members of their congregation to transfer their membership papers to Calvary PRC upon the date of their organization, which will take place, the Lord willing, October 11 at Hull. The current list now includes a total of 43 families and 7 individuals, for a membership of 180 souls.

Since this is the first time we have mentioned the name of our newest daughter congregation on the back page of the *Standard Bearer*, we can also add that earlier this summer, as plans began to take shape for the daughter congregation, they had opportunity to vote for a church name. Voting narrowed down the list of possible church names to three: Calvary, Emmanuel, and Zion. Subsequent voting then narrowed it down even further to Calvary.

On Sunday, September 9, the daughter congregation of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI held its first worship service in the Music Room of Heritage Christian School. After many months of planning and pre-Sunday jitters, the core group was thrilled to be joined by approximately 90-100 visitors from either Faith or other PRC congregations. Prof. Russell Dykstra preached for them in the morning

on Lord's Day 39 with the theme, "Honoring all God-Given Authorities." Prof. Ronald Cammenga preached in the evening on I Kings 16, with the theme, "The Spirit of the Age." For those interested in attending the daughter church, they are meeting in the Music Room at Heritage Christian School, with services at 9:30 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. Nursery is provided at both services and there is a time for coffee and fellowship after the morning service.

The younger members of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to a Labor Day outing on September 3. A hike up Sumas Mountain and canoeing and a cookout at Silver Lake Park were planned for the first half of the day, with a dinner get-together at the home of one of Lynden's members for later in the afternoon, for those not so young members of Lynden who did not hike or canoe.

The council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC recently hired a company to install a "wire loop" around the perimeter of the inside of their church. This means that if a member of Hudsonville has a hearing aid, the hearing loop amplifies and sends the sound signal directly into their hearing aids. The sound heard by a person wearing the hearing aids is often described as "crystal clear." The noise of the fans, AC, background noise, and other distracting sounds are elimi-

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

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nated, and all one hears is the voice of the person speaking from the microphone.

Sister-Church Activities

You might be interested to know that our sister church in Ballymena, NI, the Covenant PRC, now has 95 different languages and about 650 translated pieces on their website (www.cprf.co.uk). The top languages are Portuguese (258), German (65), Italian (28), Russian (24), Spanish (22), Dutch (18), French (17), Filipino (11), and Ukrainian (10).

Mission Activities

Our denomination's mission field in Spokane, WA, under the care of the Loveland, CO PRC, the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship, moved its place of worship effective September 16. On that


date the Fellowship began meeting at a new building at 330 W. Indiana. This new location is just north of downtown at the corner of Indiana and Washington. The Fellowship had been meeting in the Spokane Valley, and they will now be more centrally located in Spokane. This will better meet the needs of the Fellowship as a whole as well as their evangelism work in Spokane.

Seminary Activities

The Theological School began classes the last week in August. This year's student body is one of the largest in the history of our school. The Lord has given us ten students from four different nations: the USA, Australia, NI, and the Philippines. God be praised for hearing our prayers for more laborers!

Denomination Activities

The League of PR Adult Bible Study Societies held their annual Mass Meeting to start the Bible study year on September 18 at the Hudsonville PRC. Rev. Garry Eriks, pastor at Hudsonville, spoke on "The Profaning of God's Name."

The Hope Heralds presented their annual summer concert at the Grandville, MI PRC Sunday evening, September 9. They followed that concert by traveling to the Kalamazoo, MI PRC on September 11 and presenting a concert there to kick off the Fall Bible study season for Kalamazoo's congregation, and then the next day, the 12th, they sang at the chapel service of Covenant Christian High School. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC wish to extend their sincere Christian sympathy to three families in our congregation following the passing of a loved one.

To Lyle and Mary VanRavensway and family who lost their father and grandfather,

MR. ADRIAN VAN RAVENSWAY.

To Daryl and Greta VanMaanen and family and to Shane and Tamara Davelaar and family following the loss of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. WILLIE (HENRIETTA) DAVELAAR.

May they with us find our comfort in God's Word as it is recorded in Psalm 121:1, 2: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

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

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Hudsonville Ladies' Society expresses Christian sympathy to Mary Poortvliet in the death of

BARBARA BERKOMPAS.

"The LORD redeemed the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" (Psalm 34:22).

Heath Bleyenbergh, President
Donna Boven, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

November 2007

Date	Topic	Text
November 4	"To Protect and Provide"	Ephesians 5:23
November 11	"Wives, Be Subject to Your Own Husbands"	Ephesians 5:22-24
November 18	"I Will Magnify Him with Thanksgiving"	Psalm 69:30-32
November 25	"A Beautiful Example of Fearless Submission"	I Peter 3:5, 6