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Volume 83 ♦ Number 4

Sing Unto the Lord with Thanksgiving

Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.

Psalm 147:7-9

Psalm 147 was composed at the time of the completion of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah. What a blessing of God this was. The completion of the walls brought a peace and prosperity to Judah that she had not known since her return from Babylon.

And so the psalmist called upon Judah to give thanks. "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God."

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

Interestingly, Judah must sing thanksgiving to the LORD not just for the prosperity that came with the restoration of the city walls but also for the acts of mercy He shows the lesser creatures and the creation in general. The LORD gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens that cry. For this also they were to thank and praise God in song.

We too must sing songs of thanks and praise to this same God. The LORD who cares for His creatures and cared for Judah in her need has also provided for us. In response we are called to sing to the LORD songs of thanksgiving.



The psalmist speaks of God's providential care of His creation. God covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth. By the falling rain God makes the grass to grow on the mountains. In this way God provides food for the beasts of the field.

The psalmist makes special mention of God's care for the

raven. This is rather striking, since the raven was considered to be one of the least of God's creatures. The raven is only a bird. Because it is a carrion feeder (eating the meat of dead animals), it was included in the abominations not to be eaten by Israel. It was unclean. Yet when the ravens cry, God feeds them. The raven has a loud, emphatic cry. This is especially true of the young, when they are hungry. God responds to their cry by giving them food.

The psalmist calls attention to God's care of His creation, even of the least of His creatures, to assure us that God will certainly provide for us, His people.

Notice how the psalmist identifies God. He is the LORD. In the original you have the name "Jehovah." This is God's covenant name. By identifying God as Jehovah, the psalmist calls attention to the covenant that God has with His people. In the Old Testament this covenant was with Israel. In the New Testament all who belong to Jesus Christ belong to this covenant, regardless of nationality or ethnic background.

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In harmony with all this the psalmist also speaks of Jehovah as “our God.” This too is covenant language. In the covenant Jehovah is our God, the God who loves us, cares for us, and provides for us in all our need.

It is in this context that the psalmist speaks of God’s care over His creatures in general and His care over even the least of His creatures in particular, the raven. Of how much more value are not we than the animals of the field? Certainly we mean much more to Jehovah than the lowly raven. It was not for the raven or for any of the other animals that God gave His Son to die on the cross. It was for us, that He might save us from our sins and live with us forever. If God provides for the animals of the field, He will certainly provide for us. And if God hears the cry even of the lowly raven, how much more will He not hear our cry and provide for us in all our needs?



From this Psalm we learn how Jehovah cares for and blesses His covenant people.

The situation for Judah was deplorable. Soon after her return from Babylon she had been opposed by the Samaritans. As a result the walls of Jerusalem were not rebuilt. This allowed her enemies to rob and plunder her at will. The situation was so bad that it was reported to Nehemiah that the citizens of Jerusalem were in great affliction and reproach (Neh. 1:2, 3).

Judah cried out to Jehovah her God for help. Jehovah responded by providing Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of the city and secure Judah’s safety. Under Nehemiah’s leadership the people managed to rebuild the city wall in only fifty-two days. And this was in spite of fierce opposition and threat from the enemy. This secured Judah’s safety and prosperity. The psalmist reflected on this in verses 13 and 14. Addressing Jerusalem the

psalmist declared, “For he (Jehovah) hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.”

What a blessing this was. As the psalmist declared in verse 13, Jehovah had blessed the children of Jerusalem by strengthening the bars of its gates. This was a blessing, first, because Jerusalem was now able to dwell securely and enjoy the fat of the land. It was a blessing, second, because now Judah was able to worship Jehovah her God in safety and security. And it was a blessing, finally, in that this new peace and prosperity were tokens of greater spiritual blessings in the heavenly Canaan.

Much of this also applies to the church of the New Testament.

Since we no longer live in the Old Testament, God’s covenant blessings are no longer connected to the earthly land of Canaan and prospering in the land.

But the fact is that Jehovah has prospered us as our covenant God. Our land enjoys unparalleled prosperity. Never have a people prospered as we have in earthly abundance. But, more importantly, Jehovah God has prospered us spiritually. He has given us His Son, Jesus Christ. And in Christ Jehovah God daily loads us with the blessings of salvation. Our sins are forgiven. We have a new life in which we are able to live at peace with God and enjoy Him forever. There is a promise of a better life to come when our earthly sojourn is finished. Yes, God does sometimes send war, sickness, poverty, persecution, and adversity of every kind. Yet He keeps us in the midst of all things. He upholds us and sustains us. He comforts us and even turns all suffering to our profit.

Truly we are a people that are blessed.



In response to all this the psalmist called Judah (and us) to thankfulness.

“Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.”

With these words the psalmist taught us several things about the thanksgiving we are to give to Jehovah for all His blessings.

First of all, the word “thanksgiving” itself teaches us something. It has the basic idea of pointing to. It instructs us that we must show our thanks to Jehovah God by pointing out all the goodness and blessings He has showered on us. To do this properly takes quite a bit of time. Jehovah God has loaded us with so many blessings.

Secondly, we are to thank God in song. We are instructed to sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving. Certainly we are to point out the many blessings of God to others in our conversation with them. And we are to recount these blessings in our prayers. But we are also to do so in song. A thankful people are a praying people. They are also a singing people. And Jehovah has given us the Psalms as an excellent tool to do this. “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms” (Ps. 95:2).

Finally, we are to thank God by praising Him joyfully in song.

Notice that the psalmist mentioned singing praises to the LORD in the same breath that he spoke of singing unto the LORD with thanksgiving. “Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.” God is certainly to be praised by us for His many gifts. These words of praises, whether uttered in prayer or in song, are a proper expression of thanks to God.

And we are to sing these praises joyfully. The psalmist called us to sing praise on the harp. The psalmist added the idea of the harp to emphasize that we are to sing God’s praises joyfully. The harp was used only on festive oc-

casions of joy and never in times of mourning. This is suggested by a comparison of a few Psalms. Psalm 149:2, 3 speaks of the use of the harp in times of great joy. "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing

praises unto him with the timbrel and harp." But in the sorrow of the Babylonian captivity the people of God hanged their harps on the willows. Psalm 137:1, 2 speaks of this. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We

hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." Our psalmist calls us to sing praise upon the harp unto our God. It is a time of blessing in God's grace and covenant. It is a time of joy and rejoicing. Let us celebrate in songs of praise and thanksgiving to our God. 

Emergent Church Movement (2)

As stated in our previous article the word that looms large in the Emergent church movement is the word "postmodern." It is the contention of the movement's leading spokesmen that society has entered into what must be labeled as the "postmodern" era, and only a Christianity that reckons with and understands what has taken place, and then adjusts its approach *and message*, is going to be able to communicate in any effective gospel way to this emerging generation.

They contend that a Christendom inflexibly wedded to its past traditions has little to say to this present society in which it (we) find ourselves. Such traditionalism, they are convinced, characterizes most of twenty-first century Christianity—desiring to be fishers of men, but, for all that, using the wrong kind of lures and bait. Don't be so surprised, then, that you only get a few nibbles, spending whole nights (decades!) catch-

ing nothing. It is time to understand that the deep-sea currents where the schools of souls are found have changed; and so has what attracts and speaks to these multitudes.

The prefix "post" affixed to the word "modern" indicates that these men are convinced that the present emerging generation, so influenced by contemporary culture and its perspective towards life, stands in stark contrast to the age it is now emerging from (labeled "modern"). A seismic shift in thought is taking place in reaction to the preceding age.

So the question—what is it that supposedly sets our "postmodern" generation apart from the modern age preceding it?

D.A. Carson offers the following summary, not so much as his own analysis of things, present vs. the recent past, but as the Emergent movement's view of things.

Modernism [going back to the mid-1800's-20th century] is often pictured as pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral as opposed to the affective—which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control. Post-

modernism, by contrast, recognizes how much of what we 'know' is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and aesthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to be true or right. Modernism tries to find unquestioned foundations on which to build the edifice of knowledge and then proceeds with methodological rigor: postmodernism denies that such a foundation exists (it is 'anti-foundational') and insists that we come to 'know' things in many ways, not a few of them lacking in rigor. Modernism is hard-edged and, in the domain of religion, focuses on truth versus error, right belief, confessionalism; post-modernism is gentle and, in the domain of religion, focuses on relationships, love, shared tradition, integrity in discussion (*Becoming Conversant With the Emergent Church*, p. 27, Zondervan).

Not exactly an unbiased assessment of past and present. Whether it is fair and accurate is another matter. It reminds me for all the world of the nursery rhyme concerning the difference between little girls and little boys. Little

Previous article in this series: November 1, 2006, p. 52.

girls (*post-modernists*) are sugar and spice and everything nice, but when it comes to little boys (those naughty moderns) ... well, that's another thing entirely. Be that as it may, there is little doubt that Carson accurately delineates how the leaders of the Emergent movement perceive things.

What is plain is that the Emergent church movement is a reactionary movement, and the above quote makes plain, as well, just what brand of Christianity the Emergent church is a reaction against (what they want no part of), namely, the confessional, creedal sort.

As far as the Emergent church movement is concerned, a seismic shift in thought is taking place in culture, and the resulting tsunami of change is a good and necessary thing—high time to sweep away 'hard-edged' modernism with its lust to be right and in control, shot through with rationalism and closed to any further discussion. It is time to open up a new chapter in Christianity and to move on to newer and better things.

Postmodernism is viewed as a necessary correction of the recent modern, scientific age.

Our quarrel with the above assessment of things is not whether it can be argued that our present culture is undergoing a significant change, together with how society thinks and perceives things. We will grant such. Call it postmodernism if you will. Rather our quarrel is with setting forth this change in terms of being something commendable and attractive, and with describing our present culture as the above quote does, namely, as something that is ever so interested in "*relationships, love, shared traditions, and friendly discussions.*"

Stuff (or perhaps better—fluff) and nonsense! Unless you mean by that—*relationships* without lifetime commitments or keeping one's vows; *love* without any restrictions or boundaries no matter how perverse; and *friendly discussions* that

lead to no definite conclusions other than "I am OK, you are OK. Let's talk some more about this tomorrow." And certainly, never a reproving word.

Such is hardly commendable, be the main terms ever so warm and fuzzy. But such is the age in which we live. Such is the mentality that the church is called to address and to which we must bear witness.

This present age has a ruling spirit, we grant. It is not so difficult to discern and state. In a nutshell, it is a spirit that refuses to acknowledge any absolutes. Pronouncements of "Thou shalt nots" are not in our present culture's vocabulary and absolutely go against its grain. We live in a society that views as the height of presumptuousness anyone pretending to know or claiming to have the authority to tell others what the truth is (or what is good, and what is evil) in any area of life. They point out that scientific man once thought himself capable of laying out everything according to scientific, economic, and social *laws*—dogmatic pronouncements settling once and for all what was foundational and right. But such has proved a mirage. All that the egotistical, dogmatic pronouncements made by the generation of recent past has produced is a society filled with more strife, tension, and estrangement from each other than ever before—settling nothing. And so a society disillusioned with what the past has produced seeks to justify itself in rejecting certitude and absolutes across the board.

The Emergent church movement declares itself committed to making contact with such a generation, and to reviving its interest in and commitment to a biblical, Christ-centered faith. They are resolved to making Christianity vibrant and attractive to the unchurched once again.

On the surface, a worthy goal. But a question remains—how will one go about doing this, with what

approach and gospel, especially if one is misreading this present generation to begin with? What do you call a vibrant and attractive Christianity? Attractive to whom, and at what cost?

It is here the deep-rooted errors of the Emergent church movement and its preachers come to the surface.

The Emergent leaders are guilty of a misdiagnosis of the recent, modern church age—not, mind you, in diagnosing the *symptom* of the problem. Here they are correct. Certainly, as they point out, a spiritual deadness settled over twentieth century Protestantism, a deadness characterized by an indifference to the Scriptures, wedded to an increasing listlessness in worship and any interest in listening to what passes for preaching, which indifference, in turn, has resulted in a deplorable lack of knowledge of God's Word, and with that, lives of church members that are virtually indistinguishable from the out-and-out worldling. Shades of pre-Reformation Rome! Time for Reformation and spiritual revival indeed.

With all that we could not agree more.

The misdiagnosis is not in identifying the symptoms, this pervasive deadness and indifference to God's Word in what calls itself Christendom these days, but in what the Emergent leaders consider to be the *source and cause* of these soul-withering symptoms, namely, truth set forth in creedal form and commitment to what is called "confessional truth."

There is, of course, a huge assumption in such a diagnosis, namely, that by-and-large twentieth century Protestantism was committed to maintaining doctrinal propositions and accuracy as set forth in her confessions, and therefore what brought about the lamentable deadness in Protestantism and emptied her churches of life and of being an effective witness to society was her adamant adher-

ing to these confessional statements as “The Truth.”

A poorer misreading of what has gutted Protestantism over the past century and a half and rendered her members listless and indifferent towards spiritual things there could not be.

To be sure, the deadness and indifference to God’s Word by so many self-professed Christians has taken place in churches that have confessions, mainline Protestant denominations that historically are known as “confessionally-based” churches. But that is a far cry from proving that the cause of this deadness to God’s Word as a living, life-transforming reality is the churches’ insisting that their members (and preachers!) remain doctrinally orthodox and sound.

In fact, twentieth century church history proves just the opposite.

Deadness, indifference to God’s Word, and a great ‘emptying out,’ to say nothing of a muting of any witness to surrounding society, set in when churches that were once confessionally sound decided to allow her preachers to call into question the fundamental truths these confessions set forth. To put it simply, room was made for liberalism—that aggressive, mutant, anti-truth virus let loose in the body of the church in the late 1800s.

It was not the truth’s fault, or, if you will, truth set forth in biblically faithful and accurate terms, it was refusal to live by or apply those truths to the hearts, lives, and confession of the members, as well as denominations failing to demand this of her preachers and seminary professors in particular.

All one has to do is consider

the history of early twentieth century Presbyterianism, the denominations of Thornwell, the Hodges, Warfield, and Machen, which once were confessionally sound to their core. Read the history of the Presbyterian missionaries who brought the Word of God to China, of what Truths (doctrines) these men with their families believed in and taught, and then consider how the Spirit blessed that work. Talk about the nets filled with teeming multitudes of souls brought to faith and salvation! Talk about impact on the society in which they found themselves! And now are we to believe that it was the commitment of these denominations to doctrinal truth and confessional precision that hindered the members in their lives, their impact upon the society in which they moved, and in being vitally alive and fruitful in missions? Is it sound doctrine and commitment to it as truth that hinders the Spirit in His communicating the Word of God that saves and transforms? As they say, give me a break.

And then consider when it was that this great zeal for the spread of the gospel began to sputter and smoke, and an interest in God’s Word as a rule of life began to blink out—in a word, when the salt of Presbyterianism began to lose its distinctive savor. It is not so difficult to pinpoint. About the time that liberals the likes of the Reverend H. Emerson Fosdick, who disdained mere doctrines (because cold doctrines stood between himself and the PERSON of the his-

torical Jesus, don’t you know!), were given the heart and soul and voice of Presbyterian denominations. That is when. And you think such a mere coincidence? Think again.

When the truth goes out the window, the Holy Spirit and His true fire go with it.

Our point is that, rather than proposing a remedy for this mentality of age-old liberalism, with its deadening effect and its undermining of the authority of God’s Word, the leaders of the Emergent movement are simply continuing the work of those liberal, truth-denying predecessors.

What was the hew and cry of those miserable, dishonest, pious-sounding, early twentieth century frauds in clergy gowns? We are not to be bound by truth as contained in creeds and confessions. Or at least we must be free to interpret them in various ways.

Truth is far too large a thing to be put in propositional form, you know. Christ Jesus Himself is the truth, after all, and He is much too large to be contained in confessional, capsulated

propositions.

That is what the liberals of the by-gone ‘modern’ century and ‘scientific’ age claimed. This is what the Emergent leaders are saying again, almost phrase for phrase.

Not corrective, but continuation down the same path, though perhaps to a slightly different hip-cadence and beat.

This we intend to demonstrate next issue, D. V. 

When the truth goes out the window, the Holy Spirit and His true fire go with it.

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

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Life Without Children

This is the title of a shocking essay by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead for the 2006 “The State of Our

Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America” report. For those who view children as “an heritage of the LORD,” read and weep:

Being a parent has never been easy but today it is a source of growing distress and a rising chorus of complaint. Increasingly, Americans see the years spent in active child rearing as a grueling experience, imposing financial burdens, onerous responsibilities, emotional stress, and strains, on marital happiness. The *cri de coeur* is loudest among the most privileged. For upscale parents, it seems, every step of parenthood, from getting pregnant to choosing the right childbirth method to getting the kids into a nursery school to managing the Herculean task of college applications, is fraught with difficulty, anxiety and a growing sense of isolation from the adult mainstream.

A slew of books and magazine articles by journalists—who also happen to be well-educated, privileged mothers—has given rise to this outcry. But evidence suggests that this view is not limited to this relatively small but influential group. In survey after survey, American parents report lower levels of happiness compared to nonparents. Troublingly, too, married couples now see children as an obstacle to their marital happiness....

Yet this does not mean that younger Americans are rejecting parenthood altogether. Most Americans are, or will become, parents. Most women still want to have at least one child and, ideally, two. In fact 68 percent of Gen X women today are likely to say that having a child is an experience every woman should have compared to just 45 percent of baby boom women in 1979. So strong is the desire for children that some couples endure grueling fertility treatments in order to have a child.

Still, for those who want children, there's a sense of trepidation about entering the child-rearing years: parenthood, they're reminded, can be a rough ride. Today's parents are stressed and depressed; mommy wars are breaking out all over; and motherhood itself is losing its luster. Why? What is happening to the joys of parenthood?

The answer lies in a recent

and dramatic change in the adult life course. For most of the nation's history, Americans expected to devote much of their life and work to the rearing of children. Life with children was central to marriage and family life, to norms of adulthood, and to an adult sense of purpose. Today, however, child rearing occupies a smaller share of Americans lives. An ever-diminishing proportion of the entire adult life course is devoted to the nurture and care of minor children.

At the same time, the non-child-rearing years have been increasing as a share of the expected life course. These years were once considered transitional periods at the entry and exit points of working adult life. Today, however, the expanding no-child-rearing years have become life stages in their own right. Moreover, these years have been invested with positive meaning and purpose. Against the pressures and responsibilities of life with children, the "child-free" stages hold out the alluring prospect of fun, freedom and fulfillment.

The Expanding Years Before Children

Within living memory, it was typical for an American woman to bear a first child shortly after her teen years. Oftentimes, she would then give birth to one or more additional children and, by the time the youngest child reached an age to leave home, the mother was well into what was then regarded as middle age.

Accordingly, the number of her adult years that were occupied by the rearing of minor children could equal or even exceed the number of her adult years that fell either before or after her child-rearing years. But this life course pattern no longer holds. For women who become mothers today, the child-free share of adulthood is longer than it used to be, and the child-rearing share is correspondingly shorter.

Women now postpone marriage and/or motherhood in order to get more years of schooling and work experience before they settle into married life. In

1970, for example, the median age of first marriage for women was not quite 21. Since then the age of first marriage has risen to just short of 26. For women who hold a four-year college degree, the age of first marriage is even higher.

After marriage, moreover, women wait longer before they bear their first child. In 1960, 71 percent of married women had a first birth within the first three years of marriage. By 1990, the percentage had fallen to 37. Thus, after marriage, couples spend a great number of child-free years before they have their first child....

The Expanding Years After Children

Women are also completing their child-rearing years earlier in their expected life course. Thus, just as there has been a decline in the child-rearing share of women in their late 20s, there has also been a decline in the child-rearing share of women in their early 50s. In 1970, 27.4 percent of women, ages 50-54, had at least one minor child of their own in the household. In 2000, that percentage had fallen to 15.4.

One reason is lower fertility. Mothers today are likely to have fewer children than in the past. If a woman had three children spaced three years apart, she would have minor children in the household for 24 years. If she has one child or, as is becoming more common, twins, she will have a minor child or children in the household for 18 years. Consequently, fewer children mean fewer years of child rearing.

Another reason is the extension of adult life expectancy. The end of child-rearing years used to occur close to the end of life itself. And that was true only when parents in the past enjoyed what was considered a long life. Many parents didn't live long enough to see all their children reach adulthood....

The Rise of Two New "Child-Free" Life Stages

Until very recently, the adult life course was thought to consist of two stages: parenthood and old age. Parenthood dominated the

larger share of one's adult life. Old age occupied the lesser share. The years surrounding these two stages were transitional. Life before children was a brief time between the end of formal schooling and the beginning of marriage and family life. Likewise, life after children marked the end of productive adulthood and the beginning of a descent into enfeebled old age....

All of this has changed dramatically. The years of life before and after children are no longer transitional. They represent two distinct and separate stages in the adult life course. Moreover, individuals in the non-child-rearing life stages are highly visible, influential and prized as workers and consumers.

Childless young adults, for example, are exceedingly well suited to life and work in a dynamic society and global economy. They display great facility and comfort with new technologies. Their youthful penchant for experiment, risk-taking, adventure, along with their sheer physical energy, fit the requirements of the 24/7 work world. One of their most desirable attributes is that they are not tied down by child-rearing obligations. They can pick up and move. They can work odd hours and go on the road. They can quit their jobs without worrying about having more than one hungry mouth to feed.

As consumers, too, young adults who do not yet have children represent a highly desirable market segment. A growing proportion of today's well-educated young adults step into high paying jobs shortly after they finish their education. They may have college loans to pay off, but their financial obligations are theirs alone. They aren't yet responsible for others. And their pay-checks and credit cards are stretched to include more than bare necessities. They eat out, go drinking, take vacations, get big screen tvs, join health clubs and buy tickets to sports events and concerts. Even the less well-educated and less well-employed spend money on affordable luxuries for themselves—one reason for the aston-

ishing growth and success of Starbucks....

Finally, the sex lives of the young and old have been liberated from the traditional association with marriage and children. Sex is now part of the fun and freedom of the early adult years before children. Similarly, sex has become part of the pleasures of life after children. Many of today's parents are entering the empty nest years with subscriptions to Match.com, prescriptions for Viagra and hopes for hot new romances.

What the two new life stages have in common is a focus on the self. This does not mean that adults in the non-child-rearing years are selfish. But it does mean that their lives, by necessity as well as by choice, are oriented to self-improvement and self-investment. Indeed, the cultural injunction for the childless young and the childfree old is to "take care of yourself."...

Money Shock

Parents have always had the primary responsibility for taking care of their children's needs. What is new is that those needs are greater today. In a dynamic society and global economy, the task of nurturing, guiding and preparing children for flourishing adult lives requires higher investments of parental money, time and attention than ever before.

Take the most basic needs for food, shelter and schooling. According to the latest estimates from the Department of Agriculture, it will cost \$237,000 for a family with an average income of \$57,400 to feed, clothe, house, and educate one child from birth to age 17. But this estimate, like the three-month summer school vacation, is pegged to an increasingly obsolete way of life. It excludes one of the biggest and increasingly most essential child-rearing costs—a college education. And the cost of college is increasing at more than double the rate of inflation....

Even if parents ignore, or are unaware of, these eye-popping numbers, they can scarcely miss the insistent message that comes to them through the media: namely, children are budget-bust-

ers. The financial service industry urges parents of newborns to start investing in a college fund. The auto industry tells parents they need to buy bigger, safer, and more expensive cars. The toy industry reminds parents that they should purchase games and gadgets that will increase their child's school performance. The travel industry underscores the necessity of a Disneyland vacation....

For many parents today, therefore, the costs of child rearing mean more debt, smaller retirement savings, and greater exposure to economic risks and uncertainties than they would otherwise have. Indeed, if adults cared only about their material comfort, they would be crazy to have children when they could have a more lavish life without children. "Without the multimillion-dollar liability of children," writes journalist Philip Longman, "even young couples of comparatively modest means can often afford big-ticket luxury items. These might include a fair-sized McMansion, two BMWs, and regular vacations to the Caribbean, all of which could easily cost less than raising 2.1 children."

Mommy Shock

There are also psychological costs to child rearing—especially for highly educated women who postpone childbearing until older ages. Victorian brides were shocked by their first experience of sex. Contemporary wives are shocked by their first experience of motherhood. For them, motherhood represents a radical change in the kind of life that they have led during their early adult life and have come to accept as the norm. From the time they are born until the time they give birth, they follow a prolonged and heavily mentored educational path that prepares them for future adult lives of economic self-sufficiency and social independence. This life path has been brilliantly effective in boosting women into the college ranks and then into the professional or managerial workforce. It has also prepared them

for stable marriages by situating them within social networks that increase their chances of marrying someone of similar educational achievement and economic potential. What it has not done, however, is prepare them for the experience of motherhood.

Before motherhood, educated women spend their adult lives very much like educated men. They have absorbing work and personal freedom. Like many men, they identify their self-worth with their on-the-job performance. They depend on the pay-and-promotion recognition that provides a tangible measure of their value as workers. Outside of work, they spend their time in ways that are personally satisfying and intellectually fulfilling. They “own” their time and their life.

Motherhood is an abrupt departure from this pattern. Their time and life are no longer their own. They can’t just pick up and go wherever and whenever they want. Everything that once seemed so easy to do on their own now requires advance planning, lining up a babysitter, checking in at home while you’re out, and famously, feeling guilty about the time spent away from children and spouse. Most of all, they lose the kind of recognition and rewards for outstanding performance that they have come to expect in their work lives. No one gives them a bonus or even a pat on the back for sitting up all night with a sick child or playing peek-a-boo and patty-cake with toddlers all day....

The Cultural Devaluation of Child-Rearing

In American society, there is a popular tradition of paying tribute to the work and sacrifice of parents—and especially the steadfast heroism of American mothers. This tradition is waning. Indeed, if the popular culture were the only source of knowledge about American parenthood, one would quickly conclude that being a parent is one of the least esteemed and most undesirable roles in the society. From the newsstands to the blogosphere, reports of parents behaving badly abound....

Television has long made fun of fathers. Now, in a dramatic departure from television tradition, it has turned to ridiculing mothers. The Unfit Mom has become a reality show staple. In the shows *Nanny 911* and *Supernanny*, mothers can’t get their kids to eat, go to bed, or pick up their toys....

The unappealing image of life with children is all the more striking when it is contrasted with the appealing image of life before children. Television shows like *Friends* and *Sex and the City* have sexualized and glamorized the life of young urban singles. The characters in these hugely popular shows hang out with friends, hook up for sex, and spend enormous amounts of free time in restaurants, clubs, and coffee bars....

Of course, the media images of the non-child-rearing years do not accurately describe the real life experience of most American adults. Life without children is rarely as sexy or liberating as the popular portraits suggest. Nonetheless, fantasy can be more powerful than reality in shaping cultural aspirations. And in this case, the fantasy is revealing: in what is a major cultural shift, the child-free years are portrayed as more attractive, even superior to, the child-rearing years.

Conclusion

We are in the midst of a profound change in American life. Demographically, socially and culturally, the nation is shifting from a society of child-rearing families to a society of child-free adults. The percentage of households with children has declined from half of all households in 1960 to less than one-third today—the lowest percentage in the nation’s history. Indeed, if the twentieth century aspired to become the “century of the child,” the twenty-first may well become the century of the child-free....

The cultural devaluation of child rearing is especially harmful in the American context. In other advanced western societies, parents’ contributions are recognized and compensated with tangible work and family benefits. In

American society, the form of compensation has been mainly cultural. Parents have been rewarded (many would argue inadequately) for the unpaid work of caring for children with respect, support and recognition from the larger society. Now this cultural compensation is disappearing. Indeed, in recent years, the entire child-rearing enterprise has been subject to a ruthless debunking. Most notably, the choice of motherhood is now contested terrain, with some critics arguing that the tasks of mothering are unworthy of educated women’s time and talents. Along with the critique of parenthood, a small but aggressively vocal “childfree” movement is organizing to represent the interests of nonparents.

It is hard enough to rear children in a society that is organized to support that essential social task. Consider how much more difficult it becomes when a society is indifferent at best, and hostile, at worst, to those who are caring for the next generation.

Horrific! Yet, in many respects, no surprise. The entire essay is well worth reading; it is well documented, replete with footnotes. Check it out at: <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/Print/PrintSOOU2006.htm>

The question is: to what extent have we been sucked into this culture of childlessness? To what extent have we come under the influences and the pressures of the carnal, self-centered spirit of this age? Much more than we like to admit.

May God be merciful! And gracious unto those couples who desire to bear children.

But, do we still sing: “Joyful children, sons and daughters, Shall about thy table meet, Olive plants in strength and beauty, Full of hope and promise sweet”? Then let us continue to *live it!!* Let us bring forth the covenant generations till Christ returns. Be not deceived! Children *are* the heritage of Jehovah, our covenant-keeping God.



The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (2) or the Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Although there has been controversy over the relation of the covenant and election in the Dutch Reformed churches from the time of Dordt to the present, the issue was settled already in the earliest period of the Reformation in the Netherlands. It was settled officially. It was settled in such a way that Reformed Christianity, particularly Reformed Christianity in the Dutch Reformed tradition, is bound to a doctrine of the covenant that confesses that election governs the covenant.

The fundamental issue concerning the covenant, namely that the covenant is governed by election, was established especially by two official, binding documents, the "Form for the Administration of Baptism" and the Canons of Dordt.

The Reformed Baptism Form

The Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism" is a very early document in the Dutch Reformed tradition. It dates from before 1574. In 1574, the Dutch provincial synod of Dordrecht approved the form for use in the Dutch churches. This form, as slightly revised by the Synod of Dordt, 1618/1619, is the baptism

form used by the Protestant Reformed Churches in common with most, if not all, the Reformed churches in the tradition of the Reformation in the Netherlands. The charge that an enemy of the covenant doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches made a few years ago in a Reformed periodical, that the Protestant Reformed Churches had changed the form to accommodate their doctrine, was either foolishness or slander. He had reference to the prayer that follows the baptism of the infants. The author of the false charge recognized that the prayer flatly contradicts the notion that the phrase "sanctified in Christ" in the form refers to all the offspring of believers without exception.

The original Dutch text of the form can be found in Dr. B. Wielenga's helpful commentary on the baptism form, *Ons Doopsformulier*, 2nd rev. ed. (Kok, 1920, pp. 17-24). In this and following articles I quote the form as it appears in the *Psalter* used by the Protestant Reformed Churches (Eerdmans, 1988, pp. 85-87), after comparing the English translation with the Dutch original.

This form establishes that election governs the covenant with respect to something that is crucially important both to the covenant itself and to the controversy concerning the covenant within the Reformed churches. Election determines the salvation of the children of believing parents. Indeed, elec-

tion determines who the covenant children of believers are. The salvation of the children of believers is obviously an important aspect of God's covenant. Always the covenant promise is that He will be the God of believers and their children. And the controversy within the Reformed churches over the relation of covenant and election has always centered on the question whether God's covenant grace is for all the children without exception or for the elect children only.

The Reformed baptism form teaches that election governs the covenant with regard to the covenant children and their salvation when, in the doctrinal part, it states:

And although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ.

Elect Infants Received unto Grace in Christ

According to this part of the baptism form, infant baptism is based on, and signifies, the work of God in the covenant of receiving our young children again unto grace in Christ. Their reception unto grace in Christ is the salvation of our infants. To be received unto grace in Christ is salvation. As is implied by the contrast with their natural state of being "par-

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takers of the condemnation in Adam," their being again received unto grace in Christ is our infants' justification. It is also their sanctification, that is, the regenerating work of the Spirit of Christ in their infant hearts, just as their natural condemnation in Adam also involves their total depravity. No one is ever received unto grace in Christ by being freed only from the guilt of sin, without also being cleansed from sin's pollution.

The Reformed baptism form affirms that God bestows this salvation upon our infants *in their infancy*. The thought of the form is unquestionably this: As our infants at the baptism font are "without their knowledge" partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are these infants at the baptism font without their knowledge again received unto grace in Christ. Just as they are, in their tenderest infancy, naturally exposed to the wrath of God by virtue of their connection with Adam, so are they, in their tenderest infancy, the objects of the saving grace of God by virtue of their relation to Jesus Christ in the new covenant.

Thus the form makes plain that election governs the covenant with regard to the salvation of the children of believers. For one thing, to nothing else but God's gracious election can the salvation of infants be ascribed. Infants are not only incapable of performing any act upon which their salvation might depend (they are completely oblivious to what is happening in the administration of the holy sacrament), but they are also by nature guilty and totally depraved. God saves our infants according to His covenant promise, which is founded exclusively upon His eternal election.

Election governs the covenant in this important respect, that election determines and accomplishes God's reception of the infant children of believers unto grace in Christ, that is, the salvation of these infant children, in their infancy.

It is certainly nothing in the children themselves that determines their salvation in the covenant, for they are "partakers of the condemnation in Adam."

It is certainly no condition performed by the children that determines their salvation in the covenant, for when they are received by God again into grace in Christ they are *infants*. The oldest edition of the baptism form had the words "*onze kinderkens*," that is, "our infants" (Wielenga, p. 19). This is the meaning of the translation, "young children," in the *Psalter*. Our infant children are objects of the saving grace of God in Christ, "without their knowledge," at an age when they are not even capable of performing a work, or fulfilling a condition.

Election Determines Covenant Children

But there is another indication in these words of the baptism form that election governs the covenant regarding the salvation of the covenant children. Election determines who "our young children" are, that is, who the children of believers are to whom God makes, and then fulfills, the covenant promise, "I will be the God of you and of *your children*." Natural birth does not make covenant children. But election produces covenant children from the physical offspring of believers.

The baptism form, in the doctrinal section quoted above, speaks of "our young children." As is evident from the quotations of Genesis 17:7 and Acts 2:39 that immediately follow, the form refers to the "seed," or "children," who are the objects of God's covenant promise. "Our young children," in the baptism form, are those children of believing parents whom God had in mind when He said to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations" (Gen. 17:7), and whom the apostle Peter had in mind when

he declared, "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

The form identifies these young children as all those, but only those, who "are again received unto grace in Christ": "our young children ... are ... again received unto grace in Christ." "Our young children," with whom God establishes His covenant according to Genesis 7:17 and unto whom is the covenant promise of salvation according to Acts 2:39, are not all our physical offspring, for all our physical children are not received unto grace in Christ. Only some of the physical offspring of believers are received unto grace in Christ. They are the true, spiritual children of believers. The others, who wickedly refuse to believe in Christ and who transgress the covenant by impenitent holiness of life, are illegitimate children, even as there are spiritual "bastards" within the visible family of God, the church (Heb. 12:8). Which of the physical children of believing parents are "our young children," whom God again receives unto grace in Christ, is determined by election.

The simple truth underlying these words of the baptism form is that the Reformed faith in its earliest period understood the covenant promise to refer to the elect children of believing parents. Election governs the covenant with regard to the important matter of the salvation of the children of believers. Indeed, election determines who the children of believers are, just as election determines who the believers are. Already in 1574, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands incorporated this understanding of the covenant promise and this view of the relation between election and the covenant in their baptism form. Inasmuch as the baptism form is an authoritative document, a "minor creed," to say nothing of its prominence in

the life of the Reformed churches, its understanding of the covenant promise and its view of the relation between election and covenant are binding upon Reformed churches and theologians.

Doctrinal Objections

All objections to this plain teaching of the baptism form are doctrinal in nature. They are not due to a right reading of the clear language of the form, but to a doctrine of the covenant that differs from that of the form. They are not explanations of the form, but contrary views foisted on the form.

One such view holds that the form merely teaches that all the physical children of believers are formally and outwardly set apart from the world at baptism. Election, therefore, does not enter in. This is supposed to be the explanation of the statement that the infants are “again received unto grace in Christ.”

That reception unto grace in Christ is salvation does not need to be *proved* to any student of Scripture, but only *declared*. Besides, if the reception of our infants unto grace in Christ is merely outward and formal, having nothing to do with salvation, so also, according to the contrast in the baptism form, is their condemnation in Adam merely outward and formal, having nothing to do with being lost.

To be condemned in Adam is real lostness!

To be received unto grace in Christ is real salvation!

Another view likes to read the form as though it said, “so *shall* they again *be* received unto grace in Christ, if they fulfill a condition, or if they have a conversion experience, or if they believe.” But the form does not say this. It is not speaking of a possible future salvation of the baptized infants, when they are no longer infants, but grown men and women. Rather, the form teaches an actual, present salvation of the infants, *in their infancy*: “so *are* they again re-

ceived unto grace in Christ.” It speaks of an actual, present salvation of the infants “without their knowledge.” Therefore, to introduce the notion of conditions, or conversion experiences, into the form is absurdity.

Yet another view explains the form as teaching that all the physical children of believers without exception are in some way received unto grace in Christ. Infant baptism signifies and seals covenant grace towards all without exception, or a gracious covenant promise to all without exception, or even a gracious work of God within all. According to those who hold this view, “our young children,” in the baptism form, like the seed of Abraham in Genesis 17:7 and the children of the promise in Acts 2:39, are all the physical offspring of believers without exception. All the physical children of godly parents without exception, therefore, are “again received unto grace in Christ.”

This popular view is the destruction of the Reformed faith at its very heart. It is the denial of the sovereignty and efficacy of the grace of God in Christ. Inasmuch as some of the physical offspring of believers perish, this view teaches the possibility of resisting, losing, and falling away from God’s grace in Christ. Once the child was received by God unto grace in Christ; later the same child was cast away by God from His grace in Christ. It makes absolutely no difference whether this reception unto grace is conceived as God’s favorable attitude towards the child, or as a spiritual power working within the child. In either case, there is a falling away from grace, a falling away from the grace of God in Christ. The grace of God in Christ fails to save some who once received this grace.

Implied also is the failure of the cross of Christ. As the first part of the baptism form teaches, reception unto grace in Christ in the covenant is based on the death of Christ. If

all the physical offspring of believers are alike received unto grace in Christ and if this is the significance of infant baptism, Christ must have died for all the physical offspring of believers without exception. Inasmuch as some of them perish in unbelief, the death of Christ did not actually atone for their sins and secure their everlasting salvation.

This raises the question: according to those who teach that all the physical offspring of believers without exception are received unto grace in Christ, what does determine the salvation of children in the covenant? It cannot be the grace of God, for all are the objects of this grace. It can only be the performance, or non-performance, of certain conditions by the children themselves. And this is the teaching of those who contend that all the children alike are objects of God’s covenant grace. All the children alike are received unto grace in Christ at baptism, but whether any will finally be saved depends upon his performance of certain works, his fulfilling of prescribed conditions of covenant salvation.

Determined to separate the covenant, its grace, promise, and salvation from God’s election, this view subjects the covenant and its salvation to the will and works of the covenant child. Not the will of God, but the will of the children governs the covenant.

If this were the doctrine of the Reformed churches in 1574, when the baptism form was adopted by the provincial synod of Dordt, and in 1618/1619, when the form was adopted by the national synod of Dordt, the Reformed churches would never have condemned the Arminian heresy.

The Biblical Basis of the Doctrine of the Form

The baptism form is right in its conviction that election governs the covenant, particularly regarding the children to whom God makes His covenant promise. In support of its declaration that “our young

children ... are ... again received unto grace in Christ," the baptism form appeals to two passages of Scripture. The first is Genesis 17:7, the covenant promise to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." In Galatians 3:16, the apostle identifies the "seed" of Abraham as Christ: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." In verse sixteen of Galatians 3, the apostle adds that the "Christ" who is the covenant seed of Abraham is not only Christ Himself individually, but also all those humans who are Christ's people: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

The children of Abraham in the Old Testament to whom God extended the covenant promise were not all the physical offspring of the patriarch. They were Christ and those who belonged to Christ by eternal election. The apostle himself applies this truth to the New Testament church: Because you New Testament believers and genuine children of believers are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. On the other hand, no hypocrite in the visible church or reprobate child of godly parents is Abraham's seed, or heir according to the promise, regardless that he is baptized, inasmuch as he is not Christ's.

The second text is similarly clear in identifying the covenant children, to whom God makes the promise of the covenant, as the elect children of believers. The form quotes Acts 2:39, Peter's reaf-

firmation of the promise of the covenant on the day of Pentecost to the New Testament Israel: "For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." As little under the new covenant as under the old is the promise to all the children of believers. Those children of believers in the new dispensation to whom and for whom is the promise of the covenant are all those, and only those, whom God calls: "even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Romans 8:30 teaches that God calls those whom He has predestinated: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." The promise of the covenant in the New Testament is to our children, that is, to as many of our physical offspring as God calls according to His eternal decree of election.

... to be continued. 

Sounding Out the Word

Rev. Carl Haak

Yet Will I Rejoice in God

Are you thankful to God always? Are you thankful at all times and in every situation in your life?

Our God commands us in Ephesians 5:20, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Are there, perhaps, times and situations in your life when thanksgiving is not heard from you in the court of heaven? Is it, perhaps, that your thanksgiving is rooted only in things, rooted only in things going

your way? Or is your thanksgiving to God rooted in an overwhelming gratitude to the God of your salvation?

Can you be thankful in the darkest of days? Can you be thankful if a great personal tragedy would happen to you? Would you then be able to say, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation"?

The Thanksgiving holiday is upon us. The Thanksgiving holiday can be a very dangerous time—very dangerous because thanksgiving can be thought of as something that is a matter of a *day*. Thanksgiving, however, is the *life* to which we are called in Jesus Christ our Lord. If we say thanks only on Thanksgiving Day, if we

put on a thankful appearance just for one day, and if that thanksgiving is not a reflection of the whole of our lives, then we appear as hypocrites before God. If our thanksgiving is rooted only in God's gifts—that is, in the *good* things that He gives to us and not in *all* things—and if our thanksgiving is not rooted in God Himself, then ours is a shallow, superficial thanksgiving. Worse, it is an abomination before God.

A true expression of thanksgiving is found in the Old Testament prophecy of Habakkuk, chapter 3, verses 17-19.

Habakkuk's thanksgiving is an example of true thanksgiving, a thanksgiving that is our duty. Habakkuk's thanksgiving was not

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dependent on or conditioned by external things. It was rooted in God. And it was rooted in experiencing the wonder of God's salvation.

Let us look, for a few moments, at this wonderful thanksgiving.

Habakkuk the prophet is confessing that his thanksgiving will not be infrequent, it will not be shallow, it will not be with starts and stops. It will not be only when things are agreeable. His thanksgiving will be rooted in a profound and personal experience of God's salvation and in the present assurance that God is his strength.

These verses are really the climax of his faith. If you read this prophecy you will learn that Habakkuk did not begin on this high spiritual note. Very briefly, Habakkuk lived at a time of spiritual decline in Judah—most likely during the time of wicked king Manasseh. Habakkuk was a man greatly troubled by what was happening. He wanted to reconcile what he saw with what he believed. He saw that Judah was in a back-slidden condition. She had turned away from God. She had forgotten Him and given herself over to false gods and to evil pursuits. Habakkuk speaks of sin and violence and vice as being rampant among the people of God, while those who ruled over God's people were slack and indifferent. The law of God was not being applied. There was spiritual falling away and moral decline.

He goes on to tell us in the prophecy that he cried, he prayed. And God answered him in an altogether unexpected way. God says, "I have heard you, Habakkuk. But this is what I am going to do. I am going to send evil upon this nation. I am going to send a nation (Babylon) to conquer the land and to punish the people of Judah."

Then, in chapter 2, God goes on to tell him how His ways are always to be reconciled with His holiness and greatness. Now, in chapter 3, Habakkuk is responding to all of this and he is beginning to look

back upon the entire history of God's people. He recalls the great things that God had done. God had dried up rivers and seas. He had destroyed horses and chariots. He had held the sun and moon still. Habakkuk beholds the majesty of God in all of His works, especially that stupendous work in which all His power and wisdom are revealed—the salvation of His people.

Looking now upon Jehovah the God of salvation, Habakkuk makes an amazing promise, a pledge. He says, "Although all around me may be turned into destruction and despair, yet I will rejoice in my God." We have here a man who wrestled with the ways of God, a man who asked the question: "How is it that God can be just ... and yet these things happen?" Here is a man who for a while said, "Nothing seems to make any sense to me." But now his head is clear. He sees the greatness of God. He looks at the past. And he looks at the present in the light of the past, and he sees that God always saves His people in their distress. He always preserves the honor of His name.

So, standing upon that plateau of faith, Habakkuk makes this bold promise: "I will praise Him. Even though all the external supports are knocked away from me. Even if every visible prop holding me up, if every peg of the stool, is knocked away from under me, yet I will stand up and I will praise the Lord my God. And I will do that because I have seen my God. I have seen that His ways are always ways of holiness and faithfulness."

Now, consider that. Habakkuk begins to consider the loss of all creaturely comforts. He considers what it would be like if all the supports of his earthly life were taken away. He imagines one of the dreariest and blackest pictures a person could ever know. He says, "If the fig tree does not blossom." The fig tree was a staple to the people of Israel. Much of their food was dependent on this fig tree. And, Habakkuk goes on to

say, "If the labor of the olive shall fail." The olive tree was to the Israelites what butter is to us. Then Habakkuk says, "If the fields give no meat." He is referring to the corn, the wheat. There is no harvest and nothing is brought into the bins. And "the flock is cut off from the fold." What if the sheep would go out into the pastures and never return again, and what if there would be no herds in the stalls, that is, if the barns would stand empty?

Habakkuk is imagining economic ruin and disaster. He is speaking about circumstances leading to famine and hunger, to crying, malnourished children. If we would put verse 17 into today's terms: Although there be the collapse of the economy, panic in the banks, jobs lost, grocery stores closed, refrigerators empty, pantries barren, savings and investments and property values lost, businesses bankrupt, possessions and cars and clothes gone, left simply with the clothes on our backs. Yet, he says, "I will praise the LORD."

We can hardly imagine that—because we have so much. And we have *always had* so much. But that is what Habakkuk is saying. He is saying, Although my job would be gone, my income cut off, my investments lost, my health ruined, and my loved ones departed from me, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Can you say that? That is true thanksgiving. You say, that is impossible, nobody could do that. How could Habakkuk be confident that he would indeed, no matter how bleak his condition, still praise God?

The answer is this: it was because his thankfulness and praise to God were rooted in God's salvation and in God's strength. And those can never be removed. "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength." The ground, the root, the deepest reason for his thanksgiving was in

God, and in God's faithfulness. Oh, he was thankful for the things that God gave to him. But his thankfulness did not end in, nor was it based on, those things, but in the God who was the giver.

Are you thankful to God? Are you thankful to God as your Savior and your strength? Or are you merely thankful for what He gives you in this life? Do not misunderstand. We must be and we are thankful for His gifts, which are so abundantly lavished upon us. All of it is *given*. All that we have today—not a thread of it is *ours*. And for all of it we are to give Him thanks. For He has placed it in our hands, and we are to use it all as His stewards. But our thanksgiving, to be true and lasting and victorious, must go deeper. It must be rooted in the One who has given it to us. It must ultimately be a profound thanks for God's grace. I will rejoice in the LORD, in Jehovah. He is the inexhaustible source of all my joy. I rejoice because God is my Savior. God has saved me, who did not deserve to be saved. Habakkuk was thankful for the grace of God—that God would save one so lowly as himself and bring him to the heights of salvation.

Not only was this God the God who had saved him, but He was also the God who was his present strength. He says, "He is the God of my salvation and the God of my strength." He has delivered me from the greatest of all woes—my sin. He is the God of my *salvation*. He planned it. He accomplished it. He gave it to me. He will preserve me in my salvation and protect that salvation for me. And this Lord is also my *strength*. That is, He is the one who now empowers me by His Holy Spirit. He is the present explanation of my life. He upholds me. He is present in all of His power to bear me up in this life. When I fall, He picks me up. When I am afraid, He draws near to me. He is my faithful Savior.

It was out of a personal, true,

and amazing experience of salvation that Habakkuk was able to pledge that he would give God thanks always, no matter the external state. He knew that he belonged to the living God and that he would therefore always have a reason to be thankful.

That is thanksgiving. And that thanksgiving is independent of our external circumstances. We, too, must contemplate the fact that one day we will lose all. We may place our dear ones in the grave. We may walk a dark valley of trial. We may be given severe afflictions: headaches, pains, diabetes. We may tremble in the night of personal despair and desperation: mental anguish and depression. But as long as God is our God, a relationship that depends upon Him and His faithfulness, we will still have a reason to praise Him, to rejoice, to joy in the God of our salvation and in the God of our strength.

And so, Habakkuk is exuberant, he is jubilant. He says that he shall praise God with an abandonment, he will rejoice! He shall be like the young calf or cow that, when let out of the barn after the long winter, runs and kicks up its feet in joy. He shall walk, Habakkuk says, upon the high places. The idea is victory, rest, serenity. He will possess a great spiritual joy.

Sometimes this great spiritual joy is reflected outwardly in song and smile and happiness. Sometimes it is seen in tears of sorrow. But, nevertheless, this joy and this thankfulness are unquenchable. They are victorious because they are rooted in the God of our salvation.

Do you know this God? Do you know His salvation, freely given, of His grace alone? Is He your strength? Do you belong to Him? Then what situation is there in which you cannot praise Him? Even if your situation today be one of pain and trial, and the temptation would be great for you to mur-

mur and complain, you have the greatest reason to praise Him. For He is the God of your salvation and your strength. You may say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Let us go back to where we started today. Are you thankful always? Are you thankful in all things? You see, thanksgiving is born in only one place: at the foot of the cross, where God, by His grace, shows you who you are: a fallen sinner. And there He reveals His amazing love and grace in Christ Jesus, His faithfulness and His salvation.

Then you will be thankful, thankful at all times, thankful in every way. Then, no matter the condition of your outward life, knowing God as your Savior and strength you too shall yet rejoice in the Lord your God and praise Him all your days.

May God bless this holy Word to our hearts. 

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Publishing the Reformed Faith – Globally*

Introduction

The original purpose of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is tied to the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches and the common grace controversy. Negatively, it was a response to the reality that the Revs. Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof were cut off from publishing. In the periodicals of the Christian Reformed Church (in which they were ministers) they were not allowed to criticize common grace. Nor were they given opportunity to demonstrate that this grievous error was contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. A number of their colleagues in the ministry were promoting the errors of a general, non-saving grace for all men, elect and reprobate. This error included the supposed desire of God to save all, and His offering salvation to every hearer of the gospel. But Hoeksema and Danhof had no literary avenue for defending the truth over against these serious errors. The RFPA gave them that opening, offering to publish the *Standard Bearer* and their books.

The RFPA therefore has the positive purpose to publish solid, Reformed literature, literature that promotes and defends the Reformed truth. The RFPA purposes to make this literature both available and affordable. Simply put, we want to get the truth out!

Both the existence of the RFPA and the prospering of its labors are

clearly due to God's providence and grace. This organization continues to give opportunity for Reformed writers to defend the truth antithetically over against the lie. The RFPA fills an obvious need today. If in 1924 the existing Reformed magazines refused to print Hoeksema and Danhof, what expectation could we have that a magazine or publisher could be found to publish Prof. David Engelsma on divorce and remarriage or on the unconditional covenant? Or what hope could we have that someone would gladly publish Prof. Herman Hanko's *For Thy Truth's Sake*? And which magazine would print Rev. Kenneth Koole's clear refutation of the well-meant offer?

In His wisdom and grace, God has used the RFPA to publish the *Standard Bearer* for 82 years, as well as to print countless books and pamphlets. God has given many opportunities to print, and to send forth the Reformed faith that we love. RFPA books and the *SB* are read all over North America. For your information, the *SB* goes into 47 states and 7 Canadian provinces. RFPA books are mailed to 49 states and 6 provinces. Organizers of the RFPA over 80 years ago could not have dreamed that God would so use this organization.

If that were not cause enough for thanksgiving, God has opened other doors for the RFPA that have allowed our publications to go into foreign lands and to be translated into other languages. It is to this that I call your attention in this speech. Opportunities abound, so that the RFPA board is faced with many new questions. Is this a good thing? Should the RFPA actively

seek these opportunities? Is this in harmony with the purpose of the RFPA? Are there biblical guidelines to assist us?

Opportunities

The opportunities to publish globally have come to the RFPA in many ways. Some opportunities come in rather natural ways, through channels from which one would expect them to arise. One such channel is the mission work of the Protestant Reformed Churches outside of North America. For instance, the Northern Ireland mission has been extremely active in promoting solid Reformed literature, and that includes the offerings of the RFPA. A look at the Covenant PRC in NI website will show immediately how active this little group has been. They have promoted RFPA books by submitting book reviews to British magazines and newspapers. They have offered free books. They have promoted and sold a tremendous amount of RFPA literature.

As a result, books have gone into many European countries from Northern Ireland. Ten different nations in Europe receive either the *SB* or RFPA books (Austria, Denmark, UK, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovak Republic, and Switzerland, in addition to Northern Ireland).

Then there is the mission work in Asia, particularly in Singapore. Although RFPA literature was not pushed in Singapore to the extent that it was in Northern Ireland, nonetheless, mission work there has contributed to distribution of RFPA books. Mission work in Singapore and related work in Asia has led to the *SB* and books going

* Speech at the RFPA Annual Meeting held on September 21, 2006.

into at least eight Asian countries (besides Singapore, also India, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, South Korea, and New Guinea). A minister in Myanmar regularly translates articles from the *Standard Bearer* into the Chin language and prints it from his own computer—truly desktop publishing. The mission group in the Philippines also receives and distributes RFPA literature.

Distribution of RFPA material has been promoted by the evangelism committees of the local Protestant Reformed Churches. Numerous hard-working, zealous men and women actively seek opportunity to distribute Protestant Reformed literature to their correspondents. These committees offer free pamphlets and books in publications like *World* magazine. They send out free literature to those with whom they correspond. And the requests come in from all over the world—these committees often wonder how someone got their name and address. They receive mail from African counties, from Korea, and from Brazil. Someone writes to one such committee with questions on a topic or a doctrine. The committee responds with a letter and perhaps a pamphlet. As the correspondence continues, these committees freely send other material, including books, to those who show that they are reading and comprehending the material.

PRC evangelism committees are noted for this. It has happened that people from a different denomination refer their correspondents to PR evangelism committees because they know of no other Reformed church that still sends out literature. Such activity is viewed as not particularly exciting—nothing like a huge evangelism crusade. It is considered to be not particularly effective—for who reads anymore in today's society. Nonetheless, that the printed word is still important, and that God still uses it, is obvious from the fact that people still write and request, and

still study the books sent out. Additionally, RFPA books show up in the most unexpected places, and this in turn produces more eager requests from people who thought that no one was publishing this kind of material anymore!

RFPA material, therefore, has been spread to faraway places in connection with missions.

The RFPA board has also made a conscious effort to disseminate our literature. Specifically, they promote subscriptions to the *Standard Bearer* both within and outside of the PRC. They advertise our books in other magazines. They send out books for review to other magazines. Members of the board and staff attend book conventions to promote our books. Even though they are largely ignored by those looking for the light and fluffy fare of feel-good Christianity, others—a few—take note. RFPA representatives have been told, “You people are one of a very few that still publish solid, Reformed books.” When the RFPA is represented at *international* retail conventions, they receive requests for translations of our books in Korean, as well as in some African languages.

The Internet is another factor in the distribution of books in foreign lands. The RFPA has its own website. In many ways it is unique among the sites of publishers. Its uniqueness testifies to the first and controlling purpose of the RFPA, namely, to get the truth out. The evidence for that is that the whole of each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available online to anyone who visits this website—at no charge. In addition, hundreds of back issues of the *SB* are available for reading, and it is the board's intent gradually to make all the back issues available on this site. Visitors to the site can even search these issues of the *SB* for specific topics.

Some time ago a Canadian subscriber to the *Standard Bearer* wrote me an email commenting on an article in an issue that had been sent out only the day before. When I

asked how she had been able to read it, she confided that she regularly reads the *Standard Bearer* on the Internet rather than to wait for her copy to come in the mail two weeks later. There is no way of knowing how many others read the *SB* there—subscriber or no.

The Internet has opened far more opportunities to send literature around the globe. People around the world can access this site—read the *SB*, and order books. Book sales through the Internet average \$1,000 per month, about 20% of which is from outside North America. This amount, of course, is small—a pittance in comparison to the sales of most publishing houses. Nonetheless, an average of \$200 worth of RFPA books is sold internationally monthly.

The result of all these efforts is that the *Standard Bearer* and the RFPA books are distributed in forty different countries around the world! That reality has yielded to another surprising development, namely, that RFPA books are being translated into other languages—Dutch, Chin, Slovakian, Korean, Spanish, German, and Russian.

Clearly, there are opportunities to publish the Reformed faith globally.

Our Calling to Pursue the Goal

Is this our, that is, the RFPA's, calling? I insist that it is, but not in the sense of an official mission work. The *church*, the church as institute, the whole church through the officebearers, has the calling to spread the good news of salvation. This is done through preaching, through mission work, evangelism in the strict sense.

Yet God does use the church organism, filled with the Word, to spread the good news in an unofficial way, often in places where the gospel has not been preached! I Thessalonians 1:8 demonstrates this. Paul wrote to his former mission church and expressed his thanksgiving that the word of the Lord sounded out—literally, echoed

forth—from them. The sound rang out from the church in Thessalonica. Thessalonica is located in the region of Macedonia, north of Greece. The word went forth from Thessalonica into Macedonia and south into Greece (Achaia).

And, Paul added, “also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad!” We must understand that the common people, the members of the church, spread this word of the Lord. This is evident from the fact that Paul writes about “your faith towards God.” No longer did the believers in Thessalonica serve idols. On the contrary, their faith and worship and love were toward God! As a result of their zeal, their lives and speech were like a broadcast from Thessalonica to the surrounding areas. They lived their faith in God—Jesus was their LORD. They lived lives obedient to Him. They talked about the God whom they loved. They witnessed to the truth of the Word of Christ. In this way the truth went forth in all the region of Macedonia and Greece and beyond, so that Paul could write, “We need not to speak anything!”

Today, the RFPA is doing part of what the members of Thessalonica were doing. This is an unofficial work, not a work of the church institute, and not a mission work. The RFPA is an association of believers who desire to spread the truth by means of the printed page. We want to explain the truth. We desire to set forth the riches of the Reformed faith that God has given us—the truth about sovereign, particular grace; about the Reformed doctrine of the covenant; about godliness. We want to publish a defense of that truth, at the same time exposing the error of the lie—the lie of a general, resistible grace, and the lie of a breakable covenant conditioned on man’s faith, with its inevitable fruit of unbiblical divorce and remarriage.

God has given the RFPA opportunities to do so in many places and in many ways. The word spreads

out from Grand Rapids across the United States, into Canada, and into many places in the world. Thus, believers in Germany are reading Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics*, and Russians are studying sections of *Voice of our Fathers*. The Dutch are reading of the Reformed view of marriage, as are Koreans and Slovaks. In faraway Myanmar, virtually closed to Americans, teachers are using Gertrude Hoeksema’s Bible curriculum in the Chin language.

Books and *Standard Bearers* are passed around from hand to hand and from house to house. This leads to individuals writing to local churches for information and literature. They write to pastors and missionaries, to mission committees and the contact committee.

And “we need not to speak anything.” These correspondents have the truth in the literature; they know the truth. Oh, they have questions. They are hungry for more knowledge. But they write because they have been instructed in the Reformed faith and convicted of it through the literature that the RFPA publishes!

Thus the calling of the RFPA is to publish new works, as well as reprinting the old. It is to advertise and to promote the literature in North America, to be sure. However, our calling is also to look to the world, even to the world of non-English-speaking people and lands. Fact is, they are putting the pressure on us. Requests come in to the RFPA board. Some ask for books in their language. Others seek permission to translate a publication. Still others look for financial assistance to translate and/or print.

Allow me to demonstrate this from my experience on the contact committee. Renat is a Russian, a husband and father of four children. As Russian Christians living in Muslim Uzbekistan, they have a difficult life. Renat writes English better than most Americans. He has read much Reformed literature, almost all on the Internet, to which he has access,

for a fee, in a public place. He has been translating Protestant Reformed literature into Russian. (See the website of Covenant PRC NI.) Currently he is working on *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*. He needs financial support. The RFPA board is seeking an evangelism committee that may be interested in supporting his work.

Others in Russia proper cannot afford to print the translation of sections of *Voice of Our Fathers*. They can translate, but not publish, these books.

Indeed, many opportunities exist. Someone in the Netherlands wants to translate and publish *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*.

Much more can be done, for example, in Chinese. On the Internet is a website that lists over 70 Reformed books and pamphlets that have been translated into Chinese. None of them are RFPA publications. A Chinese pastor in Singapore wrote me:

China is booming with many churches sprouting and many hungry for Reformed literature. There are underground presses that publish Reformed books and quite a number were closed as a result of them being found out by the Govt. So, the point I am making is that if RFPA books are published into Chinese it will serve the cause of the Reformed Faith immensely. Furthermore, the Chinese Reformed Churches are crying out for Reformed teaching and preaching.

Encouragement to be Active in this Work

My purpose is to encourage this association (RFPA) to pursue these opportunities wisely, but aggressively!

Specifically, I applaud the RFPA board’s willingness to assist believers in foreign lands by seeking evangelism committees that can finance translation projects. I thank God for the willingness of these committees to assist financially. This is a good work.

The RFPA can continue to be a facilitator by obtaining support for projects from evangelism committees. Perhaps the RFPA board could seek special collections that would be designated for publications of books in other languages. Could the RFPA, perhaps, publish such books and recoup the expenses as is done now with our books in English?

I propose that even more can be done. Obviously the board must be careful not to overextend itself financially or in terms of projects that it cannot do well. But we as association should be giving so much support that the board need not worry about finances. Money is available in our affluent society—God has provided the funds. With such a fund set up, new requests that the board considers to be good and legitimate could be granted quickly, resulting in a new translation and a published work

for believers in distant lands.

The board needs to think in terms of global printing. When a new work comes up for approval, the board, perhaps a special sub-committee, should be thinking globally. They should be considering such questions as: How can it be promoted in foreign markets? Also, what about the possibilities of having it translated and published? They should be thinking: Which countries might profit from this particular book?

Why should this be our concern as RFPA?

The answer, first of all, is that God has given us much. We have a wealth of Reformed literature—we are the envy of many. We possess a solid selection of clear, biblical, edifying books. We *may not* keep them to ourselves. We *may not* keep them only for English readers.

God has also given us much money. Truly, we have an abundance. The RFPA receives generous

collections and donations that support the publishing and distribution of the *Standard Bearer* and books.

Secondly, God has thrust these opportunities upon us. Not long ago many countries were closed to Reformed literature—countries such as Russia, those in Eastern Europe, China, and Muslim countries. Many still are. The “window of opportunity” is small, and in some countries it seems to be closing (I think of Renat in Uzbekistan).

How long will Russia be open? How long China? In many nations in Africa and South America, what freedom the people have is tenuous.

So let us seize the opportunities. We are not doing mission work in the RFPA. However, we have opportunities to get solid Reformed books into the hands of believers in so many countries. For their sake, let us work zealously while it is yet day, ere the night comes, when no man can labor. 

Secretary's Annual Report 2006

Mr. John Buiter

Rev. Herman Hoeksema, in his book *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, makes the following statement:

Although the first issue of the periodical [the *Standard Bearer*] appeared in October 1924, the purpose to publish a paper devoted to the development and dissemination of the Reformed truth was conceived much earlier. In fact, in their brochure: *Om Recht en Waarheit (For Justice and Truth)*, the Reverends Danhof and Hoeksema already announced their intention to publish a monthly paper in which they might develop the truth. Even before the monthly was published, several brethren interested in the cause of Reformed truth had organized a society under the name “Reformed Free Publishing Association” for the purpose of making possible, from a financial aspect, the publication of literature prepared by the two above-mentioned ministers. Through the efforts of this

association the first issue of the *Standard Bearer*, then edited by the Reverends H. Danhof, G.M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema and Mr. G. VanBeek, appeared in October, 1924.

Thus began the RFPA and its publication of the *Standard Bearer* some 82 years ago. Much has happened in those intervening years. The goal of the RFPA, “the publication of literature...in the cause of the Reformed truth,” has been realized not only in the continued publication of the *Standard Bearer* ever since that first issue, but also the continued expansion of the work in publishing other printed materials in the cause of the Reformed truth. Under the providential care of our heavenly Father, that work of publishing the magazine expanded over the years into the formation in 1963 of a special committee (Permanent Committee

for the Publication of Protestant Reformed Literature) to publish books. Then in 1995 that work was merged into the RFPA. Also the original intent of the organization of the RFPA to provide the financial support for this work of publishing the Reformed truth has been blessed over these years by continued financial support for this endeavor.

As we look back at the past year of the work of the RFPA board and its staff, we could list many facts and figures of the work during the times since our last association meeting. This reporting is now ably handled by the RFPA *Update*, which is published and sent to the association members twice a year. You are kept informed of current and soon to be published books as well as news about the circulation of the *Standard Bearer*. Once again we were able to produce four books, three of which

were book club items. The board, through its book and publishing sub-committee, continues to work on future publications so that we are able to maintain this rate of new publications as well as the re-printing of past books that have proved to be of continuing value for the cause.

Perhaps the major activity of the past year to report to the Association was our move into new facilities in Georgetown Township (Jenison, MI). Perhaps you have noticed the new address on your copy of the *Standard Bearer* and mailings from the RFPA. This move is the culmination of many years of development. The final impetus for this move was the request of the denomination seminary that we vacate the part of the seminary building, the lower level, that the PRCA had most graciously made available when our expanding books side of the RFPA needed more and more space. A letter of appreciation was sent to the Theological School Committee for their willingness to have the RFPA book operation as a "boarder" for many years. We should also express our public appreciation for the providential use of their space as our book operation has grown through the years.

The significance of the move into our own building is that the RFPA now has a "home." For many years the work of the RFPA has been conducted in various places—First Church basement, private homes, rented and loaned storage buildings, seminary offices, and lastly in the lower level of the seminary building. The erection of our own building means the consolidation of most of the operation of the RFPA into one building; this includes the business aspects of both the books and the *Standard Bearer*. The mailing of the *Standard Bearer* is now done from the new building. To mark the consolidation of all RFPA business activities out of one office, the board has instituted a unified bookkeeping system. All business transactions are now run

through one set of electronic books, although the two divisions of the RFPA, the *Standard Bearer* and the books are kept separate.

This move and consolidation of the work has resulted in some changes. The Doezemas, Don and Judi, have played an important and integral part in the business aspect of the *Standard Bearer*, such as accounting, subscription base, and mailing. With the move, these business operations have been moved to the new office. The board would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of the Doezemas during their many years of outstanding labors in the running of the business affairs of the *Standard Bearer*. The Doezemas will continue to be involved in the editorial and production part of the *Standard Bearer*. Don continues as the managing editor; Judi assists him and typesets the magazine. We wish them God's continued blessing as they provide valuable service in this aspect of the *Standard Bearer*.

Production of books and publication of the *Standard Bearer* require the dedicated efforts of many laborers in the cause of the Reformed truth. We give thanks to God for His gifts of the Spirit to the many individuals who have contributed to the work of the RFPA, which have made possible the many years of publication. First, we have a dedicated staff: editors, writers, managers, and volunteers who make the work possible. We are blessed with ministers and others who are willing contributors to the various rubrics in the *Standard Bearer*, as well as those who produce manuscripts for our book division. They should be encouraged by your expressions of appreciation and your regular reading and use of their writing projects. Mention should also be made of the men who are willing to serve on the board of the RFPA, giving of their time for the cause of promoting the Reformed truth through the magazine and books. Our prayer is that God will con-

tinue to raise up servants willing and able to continue the work of the RFPA for the years until the return of our Lord and Savior.

Details of the move to the new location were given in the last *Update*, and many pictures of the new facility are available on the RFPA website www.rfpa.org. If you were not able to attend the open house held this spring, you are encouraged to "visit" the RFPA building on the web and see what a fine facility we have. If you do not have a computer with Internet access, find someone who does, or visit your local library and have someone give you a virtual tour. You will also see many other items on our website, including electronic, searchable copies of the *Standard Bearer* going back to the year 1975. This database is being expanded each month as we add more back issues.

When mention is made of all the volunteer work that goes into the production of our magazine and books, mention should also be made of those who assist by financial gifts. Our operations are possible only through the dedicated giving of supporters of the RFPA, as is born out by the annual financial report. We can report that the new building is without debt: the total cost has been covered by special gifts for the project and using funds on hand from giving over the years.

Over the past couple of years we have seen a slow decline in the circulation of the *Standard Bearer*. This is not unique to our magazine but appears to be a trend in this age of "electronic media." Our slight decline has been less than many of the current religious publications. Also the board is aware of this situation and is working to promote wide reading of the *Standard Bearer*. You as members of the association can contribute to this effort by your personal promotion of the *Standard Bearer*.

One of the benefits of the RFPA website and our participation in the Christian Booksellers Convention is the wider international notice of our

publications. Many are taking notice of our faithful production of soundly biblical and Reformed materials. There has been interest in our publications and a desire to translate this material in other languages. Permission is usually given if the group or individual is willing to agree with our translation agreement, which they are asked to sign. This agreement allows them to translate and publish if they give credit to the RFPA as the source and provide us with copies of the fin-

ished product. One of the issues involved with these translation projects is the request for financial help in the work of spreading the Reformed truth. The RFPA is sympathetic to the needs of these groups, but currently is not organized for this type of "evangelism." Here is where others among our supporters, especially evangelism arms of our supporting churches, can work with the RFPA. The board would like to hear from these com-

mittees as to your interest in the support of such projects. You can contact the RFPA office to let us know of your interest.

As we begin another publication year and look back at the past season and 82 years of operation, we can give thanks to our heavenly Father for His faithfulness in providing the means for this work. Our prayer is that He will work by His Spirit to guide us in this work for the cause of the kingdom of God. 

Contribution

What Next?

In God's providence there is a strong prospect of an essentially new situation arising in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

For the next few years the denomination may well be presented with the lack of open existing pulpits or fields for newly declared candidates to the ordained ministry.

Certainly, God may have changes in store that could significantly, even dramatically, affect what may be seen today as lying ahead. He has done so before. But it is possible that with this prospective case, God may be lifting the eyes of the churches to see it as their calling to consider adding to their present labor.

Technically, the churches are not currently sharply confronted with this matter. But practically, the challenge of filling a single open field (missionary to the Philippines), combined with a present candidate and his young family awaiting God's call, at least foreshadows what may lie ahead.

Should there not be some formal consideration of financial aid, and even more, of developing callings, the Lord willing, for such candidates whose commonly expected pastoral ministry may be

forestalled for an extended period? On the infrequent occasion of this situation heretofore, it seems the candidate has been left pretty much on his own, almost with "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled." (Forgive this last if ignorance betrays.) Perhaps a fund could be established along the lines of present seminary students' financial aid. This would be a significant encouragement, both tangible and psychological, not only for today's candidate but also for the five present denomination seminary students and some number of pre-seminary students taking language courses at the seminary.

But a far greater encouragement for these men, and stimulus for the churches, lies in discovering what new, or renewed, work God may have, both for the men and for the churches.

Certainly the establishment of daughter churches, new congregations like Wingham, and those established by mission labors would be obvious work, as such occur. And also there will be retiring ministers, although not many and not soon. But while these posts must be in view, God may also be directing the PRC to other tasks as well, in the prospect of a 'surplus'

of candidates. Directed to what and where and how might be presently unknown. But, surely, inquiring of and seeking for His purpose here is a proper work of the churches.

A single view of the labors of the two domestic missionaries fairly trumpets the idea of how a young, well-trained candidate serving under an older, highly experienced minister could not only contribute a necessary part to an effective mission, but also gain invaluable experience for one whose clear, earnest desire is to set forth the life-giving evangel within the earshot of all, whether that "all" be an established PRC congregation or whether that "all" be the wild and woolly world outside, riotously bent on self-destruction. And why should not such a candidate be ordained as a minister of the calling congregation, entrusted here with the role of evangelist—a scriptural post—working as leader of an established congregation's carrying out its clear gospel mandate?

Thus his work could be either with a congregation's missionary, if there be one, or with the congregation itself to guide actively its own outreach ministry. (Am I going too fast?)

This could even develop into the concept of a cadre approach to mission labors, involving not only the call of more than one minister but the serious enlistment of experienced, committed volunteer laymen, maybe tentmakers, both officebearers and others. By grace-sustained leadership, all these could be combined into a serious, active force that—maybe even uninvited—might send forth the pure truth of the gospel in a way that the general public would be hard put to ignore.

All this as a means to proclaim to as many as possible in these last days the sovereign predestination of our Father in heaven graciously manifest in His self-established, unconditional covenant promise of loving friendship with His elect people.

All this grounded foundationally on the perfect life of God the Son, Jesus Christ, and His substitutionary, sacrificial death for the sins of His people.

All this made alive in the hearts of His people—first by the monergistic regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and then by the Spirit-directed setting forth of the fullness of this truth to His church, preached in His visible, faithful congregations and publicly witnessed to those of His own who may be unknown to us.

All this calling His people, through His grace alone, to show forth their new lives by a committed, though imperfect, obedience in loving thankfulness for His sovereign work of salvation in them.

And what a calling it is to obey His commands even to “go out into the highways and hedges ... into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Depicted here is not an “in your face” force necessarily, but certainly not one to be portrayed as “in a little nook with a little book.” The real “nook” is whatever part of the world lies in striking distance, and the “book” is the Sword of the Spirit that is the Word of God, quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, hardly “little.”

Admittedly this has been what some might call a blustering about and careening off one ecclesiastical pillar to another. The very atmosphere of some “folkways” somehow naturally generates this sort of approach. Unhappily, it sometimes doesn’t survive well in other cultural climates that can quash it unheard.

Try to ignore any bluster or careening.

But don’t ignore the concept.

It is readily applicable on as small a scale as one man being called to the ordained ministry in the church and posted by the calling congregation as evangelist. Every congregation could have one, or not, providing flexibility in the number of openings for ministers and almost certainly leaving none without a call upon graduation.

And if this were basically employed, God may choose to use it as a means of putting it in the hearts of more men to serve Him, both as ordained ministers and as volunteer, even tentmaking, laity.

What a swarm of ideas fly out from this prospect! There is an extraordinary reservoir of spiritual energy, in part potential awaiting kinetic release, being filled to its banks by God’s gifts, heaped up and overflowing, which He has bestowed upon the PRC for three gen-

erations—a profound base of strength in their solid grasp of the truth proclaimed in their instituted churches and lived out organically by its people. All this springs forth from the essence of the covenant, which shows the gracious unity of the church body with its families as the principal structural members. What a wonder is shown by the vitality of this concept—eight generational daughter congregations founded out of the present twenty-eight total, consistent God-honoring marriages, burgeoning parent-controlled schools, vigorously orthodox seminary, doctrinal consistency within the denomination, expanded publishing of sound books and periodicals, and modern electronic communication resources.

All this and more make up a grand spiritual reservoir as God builds His church through the generations. It has been collected, protected, and enhanced for more than eighty years, often through great trials and sacrifices. This spiritual capital must be diligently nurtured and guarded.

But is it possible that some of it may evaporate, unused, unless more is expended than in the past? And while this capital includes cash and bricks, more vitally it is made up of people, young and old, waiting, perhaps unconsciously, for a special call that they too might be spent. That’s the real challenge that may lie in this renewed prospectus of evangelism.

These are but a few thoughts designed to encourage other thoughts, and even some action. All this in innocent ignorance of what others, better able, may already be thinking and doing.

Joel Sugg,
Katy, Texas 

Report of Classis East

Report of Classis East meeting in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 2006 and in continued session on Tuesday, October 10, 2006 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

Classis East met in regular session on September 13, 2006 at the Southwest PRC. All churches were represented by two delegates. Also present were the delegates *ad*

examina from Classis West because of the examination of Pastor-elect Andrew Lanning.

There were two main issues before the classis at this meeting: 1)

the peremptory examination of Pastor-elect Andrew Lanning, who had accepted the call from our Faith PRC, and 2) the consideration of the instruction of Synod 2006 to encourage our Covenant PRC to disband.

Pastor-elect Lanning successfully sustained his classical examination and, by this date, has been ordained and installed as a minister of the Word and sacraments at the Faith PRC. Classis expressed its gratitude to God for providing another pastor for a congregation that has been vacant for some time.

The second issue could not be resolved by this session of classis. Classis appointed a committee of pre-advice to guide them in their work, but no consensus was reached as to the direction the classis should take.

Classis therefore asked this committee of pre-advice to continue its work and report at a continued session of classis to be held on Tuesday, October 10, 2006.

At this continued session on October 10th, the committee submitted its advice (twice, because it was resubmitted). Classis eventually took a decision to send a committee to help Covenant understand that they have come to a point that it is wise for them to disband. Thus a new committee was formed to assist Covenant's consistory, should they decide to disband. Classis also adopted a resolution that, should Covenant decide to disband, the remaining families and members be encouraged to join one of our existing Protestant Reformed congregations.

This was not an easy decision for the classis to take. Decisions were taken carefully; a positive tone pervaded the session. The final resolution was to express to Covenant classis' gratitude for their steadfastness over the years.

Classis also decided to overture Synod 2007 to rescind grounds a, b, c, and f used by Synod 2006 in its instruction to Classis East to encourage Covenant to disband (cf. Acts of Synod 2006, Articles 34 and 36). Classis judged these grounds to be establishing a bad precedent in dealing with small churches.

Classis will meet next at the Hudsonville PRC on January 10, 2007.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

Michigan weather in October can be either warm and sunny with trees full of splendid fall colors, or quite the opposite: cold, wet, and gray. Thankfully, members of the First PRC in Holland, MI scheduled an overnight camp-out at Hoffmaster State Park near Muskegon for one of those warm, sunny weekends—October 6 & 7. Twelve men, along with sixteen boys ranging in age from teenager to as young as two years old, enjoyed time together for First's annual Men and Boys Camp-Out. These 28 campers enjoyed lots of good fellowship together, as well as lots of good food. In fact, according to Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor at First, and a camper, the main activity of the overnigher was simply cooking and eating (these were male campers, after all), with hobo pies and other campfire food served until well after midnight, followed by a hearty breakfast in the morning. When they weren't eating, the campers found time for a hike to

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

the Lake Michigan shore after dark, as well as time for another hike in the dunes the next morning.

Members of the Wingham, Ontario PRC were asked to reserve Friday evening, October 6, for a concert featuring the Voices of Victory, a PR men's quartet from Grand Rapids, MI. This concert was held at Westfield Church.

A recent notice placed in the bulletin of the Byron Center, MI PRC reminded the "News" of just how much time and effort now goes into the planning of our denomination's annual young people's convention. This notice was asking members of Byron Center to express their interest in serving on various committees needed to assure the success of the week-long gathering of our churches' young people—not for the summer of 2007, but for the summer of 2008, some 20 months from now. Certainly a reminder of just how large an undertaking it has now become for our various congregations to support young people's conventions both with their time and money.

And from our advance-notice department, the "News" also wants to remind our readers of the next British Reformed Fellowship Conference scheduled for 2008. This conference

will be held, the Lord willing, July 25-August 1, 2008 at The Share Centre, Co. Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, and will look at the work of the Holy Spirit, with Prof. D. Engelsma and Prof. H. Hanko as the main speakers. The Share Centre is located right on the shore of beautiful Upper Lough Erne, and all of Share's facilities have been purposely built for guests with disabilities. More information, including colored pictures, is available at www.sharevillage.org.

Evangelism Activities

The congregation of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI sponsored a public lecture on Friday evening, October 13, at their church. Their pastor, Rev. R. Kleyn, spoke on the topic of "Biblical Family Worship in the Home." During this fall lecture, Rev. Kleyn explained that we should worship God, not only in church, but also in our homes. After the lecture there was time for questions, followed by fellowship and refreshments.

This fall the Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC is offering a free kit of pamphlets for business owners to display in their cus-

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tomter reception areas as a way to exhibit their faith when customers visit their business. This kit of pamphlets covers three areas of the Christian walk. Three cover the area of the family, three look at some basic beliefs of the Christian faith, and three cover the subject of Christian living. If interested, you may contact Hudsonville at info@hudsonvilleprc.org.

School Activities

The building permits for the PR Christian School/Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL have been obtained and work has started. A groundbreaking photo-shoot involving both school boards and the Project and Development Committee took place Saturday, September 30, at the Calumet Ave. property. If you are interested, various pictures of the joint building project are now available for viewing on the Heritage Christian High School website at www.heritagechs.org.

The Senior class of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI hosted a Fall Family Festival on October 7 at their school. The festival included a chicken and pig roast, along with an expanded Farm and Craft Market. The market featured fall decorations, baked goods, crafts, and fruits and vegetables. Activities such as face-painting and a hay-ride were also planned—for the younger supporters of Covenant Christian.

The first PTA meeting of Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI for the new school year was held October 12. Rev. G. VanBaren spoke on "The Internet: Bane and Boon."

This year's PR Teachers Convention, hosted by the faculty of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI, was held October 19-20. All retired, prospective, and active teachers were invited to attend. This year's theme was "Discipleship: Called to Serve the Master," with the text from Mark 8:34.

Young People's Activities

On Saturday, September 30, the young people and young adults of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were able to participate in a combined golf outing at the Mines Golf Course in Walker, MI. Those signed up for the event were able to enjoy nine holes of golf with a cart, and supper afterwards.

The Young People's Society of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada sponsored a car wash and BBQ fundraiser on September 30 at Heritage Chrysler in Lacombe.

Minister Activities

We extend our congratulations to Rev. Andrew and Stephanie Lanning, presently serving our churches at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, on the occasion of the birth of their third child, Emily Kate, born September 21. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC wish to express their Christian sympathy to their members Wayne and Becky DeJong, following the death of Becky's mother,

MARY ANNE AARDEMA.

May we find strength and comfort in God's Word, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy" (Psalm 61:2, 3).

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

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathy to James and Karen Andringa and their children in the passing of Karen's mother,

MRS. ANNABELLE ONDERLINDE.

In our loss may we be comforted by God's Word: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

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

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Byron Center PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Ruth Engelsma, for the Lord in His infinite wisdom and love has called her husband,

MR. CHUCK ENGELSMA,

unto his eternal home. We pray that she may receive strength and comfort in the words from Psalm 27:1, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Rev. R. VanOverloop, President
Mike Elzinga, Clerk

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