

THE *June 2006* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

- ◆ *Grieve Not the Holy Spirit* 386
- ◆ *Synod 2006* 388
- ◆ *All Around Us* 390
- ◆ *Modern Heresies: Higher Criticism (2)* 393
- ◆ *Royal Children: Redeeming the Time* 395
- ◆ *Clouds* 398
- ◆ *Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (4)* 399
- ◆ *Let the Nations Be Glad* 402
- ◆ *Worship in His Fear (2)* 405
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 407

Volume 82 ◆ Number 17

Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

We can easily grieve others by our behavior. Our conduct can bring grief to a family member, a fellow saint in the church, a fellow student at school, or some close friend. Everyone has at one time or another grieved someone by his actions or been grieved by someone else.

It is also possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. And we are told not to do so.

This charge is found in a series of exhortations that probably reflect weaknesses found in the church of Ephesus.

Put away lying.

Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

Let him that stole steal no more.

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

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.

And now this — grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.

There is an obvious connection here. One grieves the Holy Spirit of God by continuing in the abuses just mentioned.

Have you ever grieved the Holy Spirit of God?

The Holy Spirit of God is the Spirit that was poured out upon the church at Pentecost. By this Spirit we are sealed unto the day of redemption. As we celebrate the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost it is good to be reminded that we must not grieve Him.



A wonderful redemption!

Redemption is a release granted upon the payment of a price. This price is called the ransom. This was applied to slaves. For the payment of a ransom price, slaves were set free from their bonds.

There is also a spiritual redemption that results in release from the bondage of sin. On ac-

count of the fall, we are all the slaves of sin. Just as one can be a slave to the bottle or to drugs, so we are by nature slaves to sin. Sin controls us. It dominates our lives. It has an ironclad hold on all that we do. This is due to the depravity of the nature that we have inherited from our first father, Adam. Unless we are set free, this slavery will lead to our eternal ruin.

Christ has redeemed us from this horrible bondage. He paid the ransom price. The price was extremely high. He took upon Himself the guilt of our sin. At the cruel cross He endured the infinite wrath of God as proper punishment for our sins. On the basis of this ransom price we are redeemed. We are righteous before God. Our sins are forgiven. And we are set free from sin's power. Sin can no longer reign over us. Through a spiritual rebirth we have become new creatures. We have a new life in which we are free to serve God and enjoy an intimate life of friendship and fellowship with Him.

However, we read here of the day of redemption — the day in

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which we are redeemed. And this is obviously in the future.

Jesus spoke of this day. Concerning the great upheaval in both nature and society that will mark the end of the world, Jesus said to His disciples, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

To understand this we must bear in mind that our redemption in Jesus Christ is not yet complete. Full redemption awaits the coming of the Lord.

There are several things to remember in this connection.

First, the work of grace that has freed us from the control of sin and set us free to serve God in righteousness is not finished. It is only begun. That leaves us with the sinful nature against which we must struggle daily. Redemption will not be complete until the work of grace completely sanctifies us.

Secondly, the curse of God is still on the creation. That explains the many trials and tribulations of life. The cross of Christ is the power also to redeem the physical creation from this curse. Only when the curse is removed from the creation will redemption be complete.

Finally, the wicked are still on the earth. Redemption also implies the destruction of all who wickedly oppose the church and who would use God's creation for sinful purposes. Redemption will be complete only when the wicked are destroyed from the earth.

All these things will take place at the coming of our Lord from heaven. Then we will forever be freed from sin. The curse will be lifted from the creation. In fact, there will be a new creation in which only the righteous dwell. The ungodly shall be cast forever into the lake of fire.

This is the day of redemption! What a glorious day that will be. To that day we must look in hope.



A blessed seal!

To seal something is to stamp it with a signet or special mark. Items were sealed with a signet for various purposes. Sometimes it was used to show ownership. A seal was used also for security. Jars containing documents were sealed with clay and a special mark. Also, a seal could secure a letter's privacy.

God has sealed us. He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit. "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (II Cor. 1:21-22).

To understand how the Holy Spirit can serve as God's seal on us, bear in mind that it is the Spirit that leads us into a holy, sanctified life. He does this as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit was given to Jesus Christ at His exaltation in heaven. Through the Spirit the exalted Christ bestows upon us the blessings of the cross. This results among other things in our sanctification. It is this sanctifying work that frees us from the power and slavery of sin. It is an important part of our redemption.

This Spirit and His sanctifying work are God's seal or mark upon us.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal upon us, first, in that He is the mark that God places on us to identify us as belonging to Him, as being His property. The Holy Spirit, and His sanctifying work, are a very appropriate mark of ownership. God Himself is the holy God, pure and undefiled. Consequently, God marks with the sanctifying Spirit those whom He has purchased with the blood of His own Son and who therefore belong to Him.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal

on us also in that we are kept secure by His sanctifying work. Another purpose of a seal was to safeguard one's property. So also are we kept safe by the Holy Spirit. The powers of darkness seek daily to bring us back into the bondage of sin from which we have been redeemed. But God has given us the Holy Spirit to keep us safe. By the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit we have been freed from the bondage of sin. By the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit we are also preserved in that freedom.

This is true unto the day of redemption. Until the day of redemption the church will find herself living in the midst of an evil world. Until that day God's mark identifying those who are His will be the Holy Spirit. And by that mark God will keep His own safe until their redemption is complete.



An important calling!

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

To grieve someone is to cause him by your behavior to suffer the pain and sorrow of grief. It is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. We do this when we walk in sin rather than in holiness. The Holy Spirit resides in us and works in us to lead us in holiness. When we walk in sin, we grieve the Spirit.

This is not to be understood to mean that the Spirit is unable to control our lives, and that therefore He grieves helplessly when we sin. The working of the Spirit is irresistible. This was demonstrated in the sound of a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost. The Spirit is able to exercise total control over our lives. However, by God's design, the work of the Spirit is only *begun* in us, so that there is still much sin in our lives. And when

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Nor is this grieving to be understood as God changing His mind about us and rejecting us. This would be contrary to the faithfulness and immutability of God.

Yet, the Spirit is filled with sorrow when the redeemed forsake the way of their redemption to live in sin. This “grieving” is called anthropomorphism, a describing of God in human terms. This describes a reality with the Spirit. A parent is grieved by a son who rejects his upbringing and training. So also is

the Holy Spirit grieved when we forsake the way of holiness to which He labors to bring us.

By calling attention to this, God gives us the motive for forsaking sin and walking in holiness. What a terrible thing it is to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It is bad enough that we, through our sin, bring grief to those around us. Are you aware that you are grieving the Holy Spirit of God? Do you want to grieve the very Spirit who is set on you as a seal unto the day of redemption?

The realization that we grieve others by our sinful behavior will often be the incentive to turn away from such behavior. How can we continue to grieve a faithful spouse, a loving parent, or a close friend? How much more is this true for those who realize they are grieving the Holy Spirit of God by their sinful behavior?

Grieve not the Spirit by pursuing a sinful lifestyle.

Instead, give joy to the Spirit by walking in His sanctifying work, showing all the fruits of the Spirit.



Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

Synod 2006

The Protestant Reformed Church's Broadest Assembly

By now, all the delegates of the upcoming Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches have received and begun to study the agenda for the meetings. Each officebearer of every consistory has also received a copy of this year's relatively slim agenda. Because the agenda is not private, also the membership of the PRC and any interested observers may know what issues the churches will be deliberating at this gathering.

Synod is the PRC's broadest (denomination-wide) assembly. Classis meetings are not as broad; they are *regional* assemblies, with two delegates from each consistory in the classis. For synod, each classis delegates ten men (five elders and five ministers) to represent the classis at synod. So the synod is the broadest representation of the churches. Because synod asks the seminary professors to attend the meetings as non-vot-

ing advisors, the tables are usually circled by twenty-four or twenty-five men.

This year's synod will be held at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, on June 13, 8:30A.M.

The agenda is slim — fewer than 100 pages this year.

There are no controversies set before synod for adjudication. No signs of division or proposals for departure. This agenda may be significant for its proportions. Fifty-three of the ninety-two pages treat the mission labors of the denomination. The other thirty-nine pages include everything else.

But the pages in the agenda do not reflect accurately what will occupy a great deal of synod's time. Again, the first few days will be devoted to an examination of seminary students — this year, Mr. Andrew Lanning and Mr. Clayton Spronk. May the Lord strengthen these men to sustain the exams. Visitors are welcome to observe.

Call a delegate or the church to find out the times.

The major items in the agenda include:

Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC)

The CC reports on contacts with our sister churches in Singapore, the Evangelical Reformed Churches. The Lord took suddenly from their midst one of their pastors, Rev. Cheah Fook Meng. The CC sent a delegation to express the PRC's condolences and to offer assistance if any was needed. But the relationship between the PRC and the ERCS is strained on account of differences on the doctrine of divorce and remarriage. The ERCS Classis (*their* broadest gathering) planned to meet again at the end of April to make final decisions regarding the doctrine and, thus, the future of the denomination. The CC asks for synod's permission to send another

delegation to Singapore if the ERCS's decisions would make a visit necessary.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPC) cancelled on account of "present circumstances" a planned conference that would have included Protestant Reformed representatives. The EPC desires to reschedule as soon as possible. Good to report is the decision of the EPC to send one of their members, Dr. David Torlach, to study for the ministry in the PRC's seminary. Dr. Torlach and his wife have five children. Their needs will be overseen by the CC and a local congregation. They will be arriving in the States, God willing, this summer.

The Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland seeks to be reorganized as a congregation this summer. Hudsonville, MI, PRC's council (calling church for the mission work in Northern Ireland) requests that sister-church relations be established between the newly organized church and our denomination, as existed in the past. Normally the process to establish such a relationship takes two years. The CC is asking synod to shorten the process to one year, so that the new congregation will not be independent, without a "court of appeal," for so long. Also good to report are the plans of a member of the fellowship, Mr. Martyn McGeown, to enroll in the PRC seminary. The CC asks authorization to assist in the support of the brother during his studies.

The active CC reports on contacts with three other groups, contacts too new to publicize names.

Classis East and Classis West

In addition to delegating representatives to synod, each of the classes submits request for financial assistance for the needy churches in its region. Each classis requests subsidy for three churches, totaling nearly \$190,000US for 2007 (approximately \$2 per denominational family per week).

At Synod 2004's request, Classis East gives its annual report on the viability of Covenant (Wyckoff, NJ) PRC. Classis recommends that synod declare that Covenant is a viable congregation and worthy of continued subsidy. Classis grounds its recommendation on the availability of men to serve in office, and the desirability of a witness on the US's East coast.

Domestic Mission Committee (DMC)

The DMC reports on its work in four areas: Northern Ireland, Western USA, Eastern USA, and "other contacts."

Because of increased membership and attendance, the fellowship in **Northern Ireland** is requesting organization this summer. The fellowship has nine families and seven individuals, and men qualified for office. Both Hudsonville PRC (calling church) and the DMC are recommending approval of this request. After organization, if missionary Rev. Angus Stewart receives and accepts a call to the new church, his membership would be transferred there from Hudsonville. The DMC also asks synod's permission to consult with Hudsonville and the church in Northern Ireland about further mission work in the United Kingdom.

The PRC's eastern home missionary is stationed in **Pittsburgh**. When Missionary Mahtani accepted a call elsewhere after eight years in Pittsburgh, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma accepted the call to labor there. Southwest (Grandville, MI) PRC, the calling church for eastern home missions, reports that the fellowship remains at six families (including the missionary's) and one individual. A proposal for organization is not being made. Missionary Bruinsma is also active with a group in Fayetteville and other contacts in the east.

The Western Home Missionary, Rev. Thomas Miersma, is stationed in **Spokane, WA**. The group of believers there is five families (in-

cluding the missionary's) and seven individuals. Although the reports of the calling church (Loveland, CO) and the missionary are positive, the group is not yet ready to request organization.

The DMC has contacts in other locations in the US and Canada, and in other parts of the Western Hemisphere.

Because synod supports some of the broadcasts of the **Reformed Witness Hour** (approximately \$30,000/yr), the DMC also reports on radio. Significant is the report of about 10,000 downloads of radio sermons per *month*.

The DMC proposes a small but significant change in its constitution. Presently, the calling church for a mission field proposes nominations for calling a missionary, which nominations are approved by the DMC. From this list, the calling church forms a trio and calls a missionary. The DMC proposes that the DMC present the list of nominees. Grounds are that this would harmonize the DMC's constitution and the Foreign Mission Committee's, and that the present setup has been a source of tension between the two supervising bodies.

Foreign Mission Committee (FMC)

Last year's synod approved discontinuing the mission work in **Ghana, Africa**. The FMC reports that this has been done in a timely and orderly way, and recommends that synod thank all those who participated in the work.

Regarding the **Philippines**, Missionary Spriensma, the calling church (Doon, IA), and the FMC all heartily recommend approval of the request of the Berean Church of God Reformed to be organized in the fall of 2006. The main object of the work of the missionary, this group has grown to number thirteen families, with six others in less regular attendance. The BCGR also makes request for a relationship with the churches

of Doon, Hull, and Edgerton, "for advice and accountability (on discipline, protests, examination of pastors, or other serious problems)." Missionary Spriensma reports on the BCGR's desire for the "continued work of a missionary both in their congregational life and in their evangelism efforts." Synod 2005 instructed the council of Doon and the FMC to continue working toward the goal of calling a second missionary for the Philippines. The FMC advises against the calling of a second missionary at this time.

The PRC's proposed mission budget (foreign and domestic) of approximately \$406,000 for 2007 amounts to a little over \$4 per week per family.

Emeritus Committee (EC)

The EC supervises the support of the retired pastors/professors and their wives or widows. This year they make request of approximately \$250,000 for ten ministers and spouses (ten households; eighteen individuals). This works out to be a little over \$2.50 per family per week. Because the laborer is worthy of his hire even after he is unable to work, the churches thankfully provide this support for these servants of the church—many

of whom are still very active in their service.

Theological School Committee (TSC)

One of the "centers" of denominational work is the seminary, where all the future ministers, missionaries, and professors are trained. The TSC oversees this work for synod. This year they report on the activities of the five full-time faculty. Prof. R. Decker and Prof. D. Engelsma are both in the process of retiring, since both are between ages 65 and 70. Prof. R. Cammenga and Prof. B. Gritters are busily preparing to take up the full load as soon as possible. Prof. R. Dykstra already teaches a full load of classes. As noted above, the TSC recommends for examination the two senior students and proposes an examination schedule for synod. Four students will continue their studies in the coming year — fourth-year student Mr. Nathan Langerak; third-year student Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh; and second-year students Mr. Nathan Dykstra and Mr. Cory Griess. Three new students are being recommended for admission: Daniel Holstege, a son of Southeast, Grand Rapids, PRC; and the two above-mentioned foreign students from Australia and Northern Ireland.

The TSC presents a proposed budget of \$479,000 for 2007, down significantly from 2006. When the transitions to the two new professors are complete next year, the budget should be yet lower. Each family contributes approximately \$5 per week for the training of gospel ministers.

The agenda includes the denomination's work through her Board of Trustees (which oversees the churches' treasurer and bookkeeper); the Catechism Book Committees (which print, distribute, and recommend regarding publishing new books); the Stated Clerk (whose work includes publishing synod's agenda and Acts); and the Synodical Deputies in both classes (who attend the meetings of the *other* classis and this year are recommending approval of Classis West's actions in approving the examination of two candidates for the ministry — now Rev. Dennis Lee and Rev. John Marcus).

The Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, IL, offers to host Synod 2007.

May God bless the labors of an undeserving people who find their worth in Jesus Christ alone.

Please remember the synodical delegates and deliberations before Jehovah's throne of grace. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ **OCRC Responds Officially to Federal Vision**

In the April 12, 2006 issue of *Christian Renewal* (p. 8), we read the following:

A special synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches was held on March 2 in Cambridge, Ontario. The meeting was called

to address concerns raised in response to what has come to be known as the 'Federal Vision.'

The Federal Vision ties together the teaching of a conditional covenant and the teaching of justification by faith. The work and obedience of faith becomes the condition to justification, so that a man's work of faith is seen to be the condition he fulfills to become righteous before God.

This meeting of the synod of the OCRC was called in response to overtures coming to synod beginning in 2004. One congregation

had given its tacit approval to the "Federal Vision," and several others reacted to this by bringing the matter to synod.

In the end, this special meeting of synod adopted the following,

We deny and reject any teaching or doctrine being taught under the name 'Federal Vision' which contradicts the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort or Holy Scripture.

This is further explained by synod in its rejection of the Fed-

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eral Vision teaching in three specific areas. The three are justification, imputation of Christ's obedience, and the sacraments. Synod summarized each of these errors and then gave its grounds for rejecting each teaching.

With regard to justification, synod rejected the following:

1. The works which are excluded from justification are restricted to those 'works of meritorious self-righteousness that only serve to mask gross sin and disobedience.' Other works are included. Man is justified forensically not only by faith, but he is also justified forensically by all those 'works done in faith, according to the law of God and for the glory of God.' In justification, faith is equated with works done by faith.

The grounds given for rejecting this teaching were:

- a) The teaching strikes at the heart of the gospel and is a rejection of a central tenet of Reformational truth because it undermines justification by faith alone.
- b) This teaching is being taught under the Federal Vision banner.
- c) This teaching is clearly contrary to our confessions.

With regard to the imputation of Christ's active obedience, synod rejected the following:

2. There is no such notion of anyone 'meriting' or earning anything in Scripture. Therefore Christ's perfect moral obedience to the law did not 'earn' or 'merit' anything for God's people. Therefore there is no imputation of Christ's active obedience. Only Christ's passive obedience — namely, what He did in going to the cross and suffering the penalty of our guilt and sin — is imputed to us, rendering us forgiven and guilt-free.

The grounds for rejecting this teaching were:

- a) It is clearly contrary to our confessions, the historical Reformed faith, and Scripture which speak of the imputation of Christ's active obedience and of His 'merits' on our behalf.

- b) It is being taught under the banner of the Federal Vision.

With regard to the doctrine of the sacraments, synod rejected the following:

3. Reformed Theology has undermined the importance, place and efficacy of the sacraments. The sacraments are equal in importance with the Word. Neither are the sacraments to be considered 'means of grace.' They are 'saving grace.' A covenant member who is a recipient of such 'saving grace' and who is a believer (possessing true faith and its fruit) may completely apostatize and be a reprobate.

The synod's grounds for rejecting this position on the sacraments were:

- a) Our Reformed confessions distinguish the sign from the reality that is signified thereby. They also see the sacraments' role not in the 'working' of faith but in the assurance and strengthening of faith.

- b) A form of sacramentalism is being taught by some under the Federal Vision banner.

- c) This sacramentalism fails to uphold the importance of the exercise of faith and repentance as essential factors in personally appropriating and receiving forever the reality that is pictured by the sacraments. It is often united to the doctrine of paedocommunion and is hesitant to recognize the Scriptural distinction between 'saving' faith and other 'faith.'

- d) The result is a teaching which affirms that even a believer who has exercised true faith and borne the fruits of sanctification may completely apostatize. This results in a covenantal understanding that undermines the covenantal comfort of Lord's Day 1, Q&A 1 and 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism and is in opposition to the

doctrine of the 'perseverance of the saints.'

It is heartening to see that some denominations are recognizing these errors and dealing with them as they surface in their circles. It is notable that this denomination (the OCRC) is small. Till now, the larger conservative Reformed denominations (URC, OPC, PCA, CanRC), which are also known to house sympathizers with the Federal Vision, have not spoken so clearly against these errors.

The three areas of error identified by the OCRC are important. It is easy to see, when you string the three together, that the Federal Vision is heading, essentially, back to some of the fundamental errors of the Roman Catholic Church, errors that were opposed by the Reformers.

Let me demonstrate that.

If the errors of the Federal Vision are correctly summarized by the OCRC in the three points above (and I believe they are), then in the first error having to do with justification the Federal Vision is teaching that the sinner's justification (his standing before God as innocent) is dependent on his good works. Those good works are defined as 1) the good work of faith, and 2) any other good works that are free of self-righteous pride. When the sinner asks the question, "How do I become righteous before God?" the Federal Vision answers, "You must do two things: 1) believe and 2) live a life of good works to the Lord."

This teaching is nothing different than that against which Luther struggled. It is a teaching clearly condemned by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Days 23-24. Yes, we must believe; yes, we must live in good works that are free of self-righteous pride — but we are not "acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of (our) faith," and that is so because "that righteousness which can be approved before the tribunal of God must be absolutely

perfect” and “our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.”

In response to the sinner’s question, “How do I become righteous before God?” the Reformed creeds do not say, “You must do ...” but rather, “You must let go of all doing and depend on Christ alone.”

In the second error rejected by the OCRC there are some similarities to the Roman Catholic sacerdotal “works-righteousness” system. Rome teaches that the death of Christ pays for a man’s original sins but not his actual sins. This payment removes part of a sinner’s guilt, but the sinner, says Rome, must add to Christ’s work in order to become fully righteous and acceptable before God. The sinner must earn acceptance with God by his own good works, the good works of other saints, indulgences, etc.

Now, as to the Federal vision, it seems that the distinction between the active and passive obedience of Christ and the teaching that only the passive obedience is imputed to the sinner leads in the direction of Rome’s teaching. If Christ’s active obedience is not imputed to the sinner, then what is it that makes a sinner righteous before God in his day-to-day living? Is it his own good works? His own active obedience? And does faith in Christ’s payment for sin remove then only the guilt of original sin and not the guilt of our actual transgressions?

Again, the Heidelberg Catechism is clear on this. It is not only Christ’s death on the cross (His passive obedience — really a misnomer, since He was very active in submitting to this) that becomes the ground for our righteousness before God, but it is His whole life of active obedience. The catechism speaks of His holiness as part of the ground for our justification. “God, without any merit

of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ” (LD 23, Q&A 60). That holiness is the suffering of His entire life. The sinner’s only

ground for the knowledge of his righteousness before God is what Christ has done in His living and dying. When he prays “Forgive my debts” at the end of a day, it is Christ’s obedience

that he must look to, not his own.

In the third error rejected by the OCRC, the tendency toward Rome is even more apparent. As the OCRC point out, the Reformed teaching on the Sacraments is that they are a lesser means of grace than the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel works and confirms faith, whereas the sacraments are sent to confirm a faith that already exists. Without the Word, faith is not worked.

Some proponents of the Federal Vision are also proponents of paedocommunion, which advocates the admittance of all baptized children to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. These teach a kind of “sacramental grace” to all participants. The argument is that the children have all received the grace of God in baptism, so all ought also to receive the Lord’s Supper. As the OCRC decision points out, there can also then be a falling out of grace.

These ideas are, again, very similar to the Roman Catholic teaching on the sacraments, *ex opere operato* — through the sacrament itself there is an operation of grace.

All of this shows us that the Federal Vision is a teaching that is very dangerous. Though there are differences on some issues among the proponents of the Federal Vision, its basic emphasis is on the works of man as the basis for justification. This emphasis undermines the important and basic Calvinistic teachings of “total deprav-

ity,” “unconditional election,” “irresistible grace,” and the “perseverance of the saints.”

Behind the Federal Vision stands the “conditional covenant” teaching of Klaas Schilder. The weakness of the OCRC synodical decisions is a failure to deal with the teaching of a conditional covenant, and to identify a connection between the Federal Vision’s teachings on justification and Schilder’s conditional covenant.

Steve Schlissel, a proponent of the Federal Vision, was asked by *Christian Renewal* to respond to the decisions of the OCRC. After pointing to what he sees as some flaws and misrepresentations in the decisions of the OCRC, Schlissel says,

To be brief, I would say that my views concerning covenant, justification, and obedience, are substantively identical with those of Klaas Schilder. If Schilder’s views are found distasteful, one ought not be surprised if mine provoke some response.

Now, to be fair to Schilder, we cannot say that the two (Federal Vision and Schilder) are identical. But, as Schlissel himself points out, there is a connection. And the connection is that the Federal Vision has now consistently worked out the conditional covenant view in their teaching on justification.

The result is conditional justification.

And, sadly, many in Reformed circles are not seeing this connection.

■ Division in the URC over Paedocommunion

Closely connected to the above story is the outworking of the Federal Vision view on the sacraments in a United Reformed congregation.

Rev. John Barach is an advocate and supporter of the Federal Vision. For the past several years he has been pastor of Grand Prairie URC in Alberta, Canada. Re-

“You must let go of all doing and depend on Christ alone.”

cently he accepted a call to a congregation outside of the URC in Oregon. But it seems that he leaves trouble in his wake as he departs.

The March 8, 2006 issue of *Christian Renewal* informs us that:

the three remaining officebearers of the small 21-family congrega-

tion have announced their resignation from office and their intention to form a new church outside of the federation.

The wedge issue is 'paedocommuion', the inclusion of all members, those confessing and baptized, at the Lord's Supper table. The officebearers, minister included, support the belief from

Scripture that communion is for all covenant members of the congregation. The federation's Classis Western Canada has taken the position, backed by Synod Calgary in 2004, that the Scriptures and the federation's confessions restrict participation in communion "to professing members only." 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Modern Heresies: Higher Criticism (2)

Introduction

Proceeding from a fundamental premise that the Bible is, at least in part, a human document, higher criticism has come up with many strange ways in which to explain Scripture. I am sometimes amazed at the fertility of human imagination, which can invent so many theories to deny that Scripture is the Word of God. It makes one wonder, when one discovers the literally hundreds of books that have been written on this subject, all professing to be learned treatises, all written by self-proclaimed scholars, but all having one thing in common: Scripture is not verbally inspired.

Questions have been raised over the last two or three centuries over the authorship of various writings from antiquity — even over the question whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays ascribed to him. But no other

writing of ancient times has ever been subjected to the scathing criticism to which the Scriptures have been subjected. No other body of writings has ever been challenged the way Scripture has. No other manuscripts from the past have been so ruthlessly torn to shreds and have occupied so much of the time of unbelieving critics to learn of their origin as has the Bible.

One quite naturally asks the question: Why all this frenzy to disprove the Bible as the Word of God, if it is only a human book anyway? Why write hundreds and perhaps thousands of unreadable tomes about a book that no one ought to believe in any case? The only answer that can be given to that question is this: Every critic knows that the Bible is the Word of God, but hates that truth. And so he bends his efforts to discredit it, and to persuade others to do the same. The Bible condemns him for his sin, and he will not repent. The way to escape from the condemnation pronounced by the Bible is to attempt to destroy the Bible. And so men try again and again.

A striking example of this is found in what is called an "eschatological" method of Bible interpretation. This method is used

to justify women in the special offices of the church and homosexuality in its members. The theory goes like this.

It is obvious that the Bible condemns women in the special offices of the church and it is undeniable that the Bible condemns homosexuality, but these were the opinions of Christians from long ago, and perhaps opinions that had some validity in past centuries. But the Bible must be interpreted in the light of history moving towards the end, where the ideal will exist. That ideal will be the equality of all, including male and female, and the acceptance of all sinners by a merciful God who loves all. And so, as history moves irrevocably towards that end, we must move beyond Scripture's prohibitions and do all in our power to achieve now what Scripture says will someday be reality. In this way we confess our faith in a brighter and happier future.

Scripture's Inspiration

The church of all ages has confessed that Scripture is the Word of God and the standard of truth and holiness. Yet the bitter attacks against Scripture have forced the church to define more precisely

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what it means that Scripture is the Word of God. To do this involves defining more precisely what is meant by inspiration.

This the church has done. It is not my intention to define this doctrine in all its details in this article, but the main tenets of Scripture's teaching ought to be emphasized.

Even though Reformed theology has made use of the term "human element" or "human factor" in its doctrine of inspiration, the time has clearly come to abandon the term and the idea. It has led to confusion and corruption of the doctrine. There ought not be any regrets about abandoning the term and the idea, for it is impossible to find anywhere in Scripture so much as a reference to such an element. The Scriptures from beginning to end, not only the classical proof texts, teach that the divine element is the only one that must be considered. Nor ought the believer to be perturbed by the charge often made that such a view of Scripture is "Docetic." Docetism was an ancient heresy that denied the human nature of Christ. To deny the human element in Scripture is said to be docetic, the underlying premise being, of course, that what is true of the union of the two natures of Christ in one person is also true of a human and a divine side of Scripture united in one book.

Scripture is given to the church by God, word for word. Scripture is verbally inspired, fully inspired, totally that which the Holy Spirit wanted written. Hence, Scripture is both infallible and inerrant. Attempts to find a difference between these two terms, to justify the presence of errors in the Bible and still speak of an infallible Scriptures, have failed and ought to fail because they are word games meant to introduce error into Scripture.

Scripture is verbally inspired, fully inspired, totally that which the Holy Spirit wanted written.

Scripture is authoritative. It tells us what must be believed as truth and how we must live. To disobey the Scriptures in any respect is to disobey God. To disobey God is to incur God's wrath and just judgment. The doctrine of Scripture is not a doctrine the pros and cons of which can be argued in some intellectually enjoyable debate but which makes no great difference in the end. The doctrine of Scripture is literally a life and death matter — eternal life or eternal death.

Does all this mean that we believe what in my high school days was called the "typewriter theory" of inspiration? Was the Bible written mechanically without any trace of the character of the men who wrote it? Were they acting only as secretaries? Did God play on the keyboard of their minds in much the way a rapid typist plays on the keyboard of a typewriter — or computer? Or did the Bible perhaps fall complete from heaven as a gift of the angels?

Inspiration means nothing of the kind. The Bible, inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, gives us the infallibly inspired record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ in the salvation of the church. This is the great miracle of the ages of which the other miracles recorded in Scripture were pictures. The inspiration of Scripture is organically connected to the miracle of salvation. This connection is there because the Scriptures, while having a great deal to say about the reprobate and even, as subordinate to the gospel, saying something to the reprobate (viz., that they must repent), is written for the church, the company of believers. It is, so it has been said, Christ's love letter to His bride for her to carry with her while He is still absent from her. The Scriptures are also connected inseparably to the

miracle of salvation, because salvation is, in fact, accomplished through the Scriptures. The gospel is preached from the Scriptures. The people of God derive their strength, their comfort, their hope, their blessedness in searching the Scriptures. It is a mighty fountain of blessing from Christ Himself. The Bible belongs to the miracle of salvation.

The inspiration of the Bible is, therefore, itself a miracle. It is a miracle planned in God's eternal counsel from eternity. God eternally determined to reveal Himself in Christ. He determined to give the church an infallible record of that revelation as it took place in history and will reach its grand finale when Christ comes again. He determined how the Bible would be written — that is, that He would use men to write it who lived in different times, had different personalities, were brought up under different circumstances, and would be used as God's secretaries in such a way that all their personal attributes would be reflected in what they wrote. Yet, their role would be of minor importance. In some instances we do not even know the identity of the men who were used by God to write parts of the Bible.

When every man God eternally determined had, through God's sovereign control of his life, written by divine inspiration the part eternally assigned to him, the product was one book with one theme. It was perfect, complete, and exactly suited to the purpose for which God had intended it. It was the church's Bible. Because the Bible was prepared as a part of God's means to save His people through Christ, the Bible is indispensable for salvation. To take it away as the Word of God in any sense is to jeopardize man's salvation. Hence, to believe it is to be saved; to reject it is to be damned.

The church has treasured the Scriptures. The Reformers insisted that no work of reformation would be possible without restoring the

Bible to God's people, and that there was no hope of delivering the saints from the chains of popery without freeing the Bible from the shackles of Roman Catholic theology. The church produced men who understood the importance of the Scriptures and were willing to die a martyr's death to give Scripture to God's people in a language they could read. The roll call of

martyrs who lived in constant peril of their lives because they insisted that Scripture alone was what they would believe is long and illustrious. In heaven alone is known the number of times God's people have turned to God's Word in all the sorrows and sufferings and have found peace. Scripture is the cooling fountain of an oasis in the desert of this life, from which

God's people have drunk deeply and longingly to quench their parched souls.

The words of Theodore Beza to the Duke of Guise, though referring to Christ's church, can be applied to the senseless and wicked attacks on Scripture by the higher critics: "Sire, I would have you know that it is an anvil which has worn out many an hammer." 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children: Redeeming the Time

I don't have time right now." "I'll do that when I have more time." "I finally have some free time." "I wish I could just have some time for myself!" How frequently such expressions cross our lips or thoughts and those of our children. Stewardship of time is a challenging subject for us to deal with. God's Word clearly sets forth the principles, but applying these principles is something that we must each do in the place in which God has set us, in the freedom that we have in Christ.

We saw last time that we and our children, as royal stewards of the king, owe all that we have — possessions, time, and talents — to our heavenly Father-King. We saw that all that He gives us, He gives us for the purpose of seeking Him, in the way of advancing His cause and kingdom in the world, of glorifying His great name, and expressing our gratitude to Him as redeemed children. We looked briefly at teaching our children

stewardship of possessions. The principles of time stewardship are really the same as the principles of possessions stewardship.

First, we recognize that time is a creature of God, appointed and apportioned by Him. He gives us time to manage and cultivate, just as He gives us material possessions and talents. Thus, approaching our use of time with prayer and thankful gratitude to God, we strive to use time as a means to seek after and serve Him. With this as our chief goal, we will desire to use our time diligently, heeding the warnings of His Word against sloth. Finally, we will look forward to His faithful promise to His children-stewards, "...in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

It is, of course, understandable that we say such things as "I don't have time right now," because God does give time to us as His stewards. Yet how easily we begin to think of time as something to which we have a right in ourselves or as a mere succession of moments. Time is, in a sense, something more powerful than we. We stand amazed, especially in our later years, at how quickly time bears us away. It so often seems

to be a source of frustration to us as demands on our time multiply, especially in the busy years when our families are growing up. It is easy to feel at times that it is something completely beyond our control. Yet God tells us in His Word to redeem the time and He gives us instruction concerning what we are to do with our time — speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, labor as servants of Christ, being obedient to our masters. How is this possible?

Although it is nearly impossible for us to think of existence apart from time as a succession of moments, we recognize that in the beginning the eternal God made time, giving the sun and moon to mark the days and years and seasons. He put Adam in perfection in a time-bound creation, and Adam, standing at the head of the creation, was able to offer up time to God, just as all the other creatures, as praise to Him. He did this by walking and talking with God in the garden, by dressing and keeping the garden of Eden, by living in a bond of perfect love with his neighbor, Eve. When man fell,

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making common cause with the devil, he became a usurper in the creation, also in his use of time. Under judgment, man's use of and relationship to time falls under the curse of vanity. God condemns man now to eat of the fruit of the ground in sorrow, "all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3:17). Under the sun, what we can see in this fallen world, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 2:17b). We eat our bread in the sweat of our face, only to do it over and over again.

Only in Christ do we escape the cycle of vanity. Coming as Lord of time, the One who says, "I am," yet subjecting Himself to the vanity of this earthly creation, He said every moment, "I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). Finally offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone for our sin, He bore away the curse of vanity. Although for this present time we await the perfection of that deliverance, in principle there is no more curse for us. Time is not a trap that holds us captive, but a creature over which Christ now rules at God's right hand. Hence, the time is redeemed, and we may walk in the privilege of our salvation as those who now "...redeem the time."

Just as with our stewardship of material things, we strive to avoid error in both directions. God calls us to diligence in our work, not to making work an end itself. He calls us to stewardship of our time, not to squeeze every last ounce of our time as an end in itself.

Unlike the world, we need not fear the ravages of time and his cohorts, disease and death. Those who live only for this earthly life must have everything right now, for they never know when time and death will overtake them. They race along, often living for the pleasure or activity that is just out of reach instead of enjoying the gift of the moment. Fussing and fuming when they must wait in traffic

or stand in line for something, they fret about lost time, wasted time, too little time. The dispensations of God's providence that place barriers in their way frustrate and anger them. How readily we fall into these sins ourselves. We can learn from the books on and methods of time management and efficiency that abound in our day, but always our goal is redeeming the time in the service of the King: finding more time to meditate upon God's Word, more time to be with and care for God's people, more time to instruct our children as we go in and out.

Just as He gives material possessions, God gives time, not equally, but as He sees fit, in His wisdom, for our welfare. He sets one as mother of a busy household,

or as father struggling to provide for the needs of his family. For these, time is an exceedingly precious commodity. To another, a young child,

or perhaps a single person or an elderly person, God gives much time, often what seems like an over-abundance. Yet, for each the provision is exactly what is needed, and the calling is to redeem that time given, just as the servant was called to use the one pound in the service of his master. Knowing this, we can rest content in the time God gives us, not fussing and fuming with the children of this world, but trusting that with nothing outside the will of our Father, we may use the portion of time He gives, whether it be great or small, as those who will render account.

Just as we set aside a portion of the material gifts God has given us to the service of His cause and kingdom, so we set aside time. God gives us the gift of the sabbath, whereby we enter His rest as the root principle of our lives. What a blessed privilege we have to lay aside our earthly labors to engage in a whole blessed day of spiritual activity, hearing and

studying God's Word, enjoying fellowship with His people, performing works of mercy and kindness. The more readily we live that sabbath life on the Lord's Day, the more readily will our time in the remainder of the week be engaged in God's service. While we must often teach our children in a somewhat negative form concerning this privilege, let us, from their earliest years, hold before them the delight we have in the Lord's rest. Let the words of the psalm govern our approach to the Lord's Day: "My heart was glad to hear the welcome sound."

Then each day we redeem the time by calling upon our Father-King in prayer and reading His Word, for how else will we be able to serve as His faithful stewards? We will also give precedence in ordering our days to gathering with fellow-believers to study the Word, preparing for that study, and instructing our children for catechism class.

Service to God by serving His people in need will be a priority for us. Our children may learn this as we and they help the elderly or infirm with lawn work or shoveling snow, by helping to prepare a meal, or caring for children of families in need. This is particularly the calling of the older women in the church (Tit. 2:4, 5). They do this by example, by word, but also by working with and helping the younger women.

We do not always see this as much as we should. In describing the qualifications for those widows who would be "taken into the number," the Holy Spirit by the apostle Paul says, "Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work" (I Tim. 5:10). Some older women have physical infirmities that hinder them when they desire to do this, but work outside the home some-

*Only in Christ
do we escape
the cycle of vanity.*

times prevents them, or with the children grown and husband retired, large amounts of time devoted to travel or recreation prevents them. Perhaps as older women, we may even think our help is not needed or wanted. But God's Word says it is. Our children and grandchildren will see, more readily than hear, what our priorities are.

Service to others means caring for the needs of our own families, but as the Word of God in Hebrews 13:1, 2 admonishes us, brotherly love comprehends more than our earthly families: "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." This may be as simple as inviting our fellow-believers for a simple meal or a cup of coffee, recognizing one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord, getting outside our small circle of family and friends to show the love of Christ to those who must live without the blessings of family life (including extended family life), to those who come as visitors to our church, to those who are new to our church or fellowship. This is redeeming the time in service to our King.

While workaholicism is certainly a danger against which we must guard, laziness and time-wasting is probably the sin more present with us and our children. There are not many warnings in the Proverbs against working too hard, but warnings against sloth appear again and again. Sloth is also the spirit of the world. Even when they work hard, it is with "eye service, as men-pleasers" (Col. 3:22), doing their work with an eye to promotion, financial prosperity, or perhaps self-congratulation. With this motivation, the children of this world will work only as far as necessary to achieve these ends. As children and stewards of the King, we labor "...in singleness of heart,

fearing God." We strive "...to do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:22-23).

If we labor as to our beloved King, whether in the workplace, in the home, or in the school, we will strive to do the best work we can, as rendered to Him. How readily we say, "That's good enough," when we know it isn't. How soon our children learn the attitude, "What's the least I can do to fulfill the assignment, to pass, or to get a certain grade?" As stewards of the King, we will hold the motivation to diligence in our daily labors, whether in the workplace, the home, or the school, continually before ourselves and our children. We do this not only in direct instruction, but especially in how we speak of and perform our own daily tasks.

We see our sinful tendency toward laziness in how we and our children often abuse our God-given time. Although life seems to get busier year by year, many of our activities are not, in fact, very active. Entertainment and recreation occupy us far more than we realize. By entertainment, I would understand a virtual non-activity, something in which someone or something else simply diverts or amuses me. By recreation, I mean an activity in which I am actively engaged, which

serves to restore or refresh me. We cannot, physically or mentally, work continuously. We need sleep; God "giveth his beloved sleep"

(Ps. 127:2). Yet we are warned in Proverbs 20:13, "Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty...." So also we view recreation. We need, in these days of mechanization and automation, physical restoration by means of exercise and sports. But, "love not sports."

We need mental restoration, by means of activities that give us a change from our regular labor. There are many profitable recreational activities through which we

may learn new skills, exercise our minds, enjoy and learn more about the wonders of God's creation, have fellowship with our families and friends. But, "love not nature, hobbies, reading, games, and music, as ends in themselves."

Admittedly, there is often a rather fine line between entertainment and recreation, but as the King's stewards redeeming the time, we should examine whether we really need much entertainment, in the sense mentioned above, at all.

It takes effort on the part of parents to teach their children these principles and how to apply them. Ironically, good Christian recreation takes work for us as parents. It's often easier (and less messy) to allow our children to watch a video or play a computer game than to sit down and teach them to build with blocks, to help them with practicing a musical instrument, to study the creation with them, or to take the time to help them develop a sports or exercise skill. Certainly there are valuable resources in the area of videotapes and DVDs that we may use, but let us remember that nothing in our Christian life is an area of indifference. It's tempting to take the attitude that as long as our children get their work done, it doesn't matter what they do with their free time, as long as it's not something overtly wrong. We desire to teach our children to redeem the time also in their rest and recreation.

In all that we do and teach as stewards of God's time, we need, both as admonition and as promise and incentive, the words of the apostle in Galatians 6:7-9, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." 

Our children and grandchildren will see, more readily than hear, what our priorities are.

Clouds

After the ascension, angels told the watching disciples, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go” (Acts 1:11). He was taken up bodily, and in like manner He shall one day return. He was also received by a cloud, and so likewise the Son of man will return — He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30, 26:64).

It was significant that Jesus was received into heaven by a cloud. Clouds are transcendent. Their purpose is to cover and separate. God made clouds a garment for the seas and covering for heaven (Job 38:9; Ps. 147:8). With clouds God covers the light (Job 36:32). As with a thick cloud, He blots out our transgressions (Is. 44:22). God may even cover us with a cloud for a time in His anger, or cover Himself with a cloud that our prayers pass not through (Lam. 2:1; 3:44).

When Jesus ascended into the clouds, He proved that He is the glorious, majestic God. His home is the dark waters and thick clouds of the sky (Ps. 18:11). Clouds are the dust of His feet and are round about Him (Nah. 1:3; Ps. 97:2). His strength is in the clouds (Ps. 68:34). He makes the clouds His chariot and from them He smites His enemies (Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1). Even His covenant faithfulness, mercy, and truth reach high unto the clouds (Ps. 36:5; 57:10; 108:4), clouds in which He sets a rainbow as a token of that unbreakable covenant (Gen. 9:13-16).

Yet, He is very near — God immanent. In a cloud, this majestic, gloriously transcendent Jesus once dwelt closely with His church. They were a people under the cloud (I Cor. 10:1). In a cloud He appeared in His glory (Ex. 16:10), led them from the bondage of sin and death through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21), protected them from threatening hosts (Ex. 14:19ff.), baptized them (I Cor. 10:2), lived and worshiped with them (Ex. 40:34; Lev. 16:13; I Kings 8:10), and talked with them (Ex. 19:9; 33:9; Num. 11:25). So now, though living bodily in heavenly clouds, He is near us by His Word and Spirit (I John 4:13). But soon face to face.

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Now in heaven, Jesus sovereignly controls the clouds to accomplish His purpose. He established the clouds above (Prov. 8:28). They are so many bottles in His heavenly pantry that He numbers, gives purpose, and sends where He desires (Job 37:15-16; 38:37). He commands them from above as doors of heaven (Ps. 78:23). By His knowledge they drop down their dew (Prov. 3:20) and distil water upon man abundantly (Job 36:28). When He speaks they may give no rain at all (Is. 5:6), as happened for three and a half years in Israel. Yet at the fervent prayer of a righteous man, one little cloud announced a fresh deluge of rain (I Kings 18:44-5; James 5:17-18).

Though some say rain is an example of a common grace God gives to the ungodly, the clouds teach otherwise. There is a difference created between clouds themselves. While the saints are a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), the wicked are clouds without water, carried by tempest to the mist of darkness forever (II Pet. 2:17; Jude 1:12). The supposed goodness of the wicked quickly vanishes as a morning cloud, and as a cloud he himself shall perish (Job. 7:9; 20:6; Hos. 6:4; 13:3). Then there is the fact that from one cloud may come both blessing and curse. When the Lord marched from Edom, His clouds rained destruction upon the enemy but gave victory to Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:4). And within a single cloud God once stood between the church and the wicked, protecting the beloved people and giving them light, while glowering upon the other, the despised people, whom He soon would drown (Ex. 14:19ff.).

Jesus is as a bright morning without clouds (II Sam. 23:4), yet clouds are a sign of His return (Matt. 24:30). He sits now upon a white cloud, is clothed with them, and crowned with the rainbow that He set in the clouds — but He has a sharp sickle in His hand (Rev. 10:1; 14:14). The day of the sickle will be a day of gloomy clouds and thick darkness for the heathen (Ezek. 30:3; Joel 2:2). But it will be a day of rejoicing for His covenant people, who will be caught up together in the clouds to meet Him in the air (I Thess. 4:17). See Him sitting on the right hand of power, and coming on those clouds with power and great glory. Behold! He cometh with clouds (Rev. 1:7). 

The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (4) The Example of Calvin's Geneva: An Evaluation

The proper work of the deacons includes the care not only of the poor, but also of those members of the church who are sick, widowed, orphaned, disabled, or in other ways physically afflicted. In past articles we have argued this point both from scriptural principles and from the example of other Reformed diaconates throughout the history of the church. Particularly we noted that the deacons in Geneva, during and after the time of Calvin, cared for people with varied needs, both in the General Hospital and by the various Funds that had been established for this purpose.

Such examples from church history are worth noting. The church of today would be foolish to ignore the historical precedents of our spiritual forefathers.

Yet such examples require evaluation on our part. Did our forefathers act rightly? This question we attempt to answer now, with regard to the example of the deacons in Calvin's Geneva.



Because the work of the deacons in Geneva was in harmony with Calvin's understanding and teaching regarding the diaconate, we ought to have his teaching

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Previous article in this series: April 15, 2006, p. 320.

clearly before us. I quote in full that section from his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that pertains to the deacons.

The care of the poor was entrusted to the deacons. However, two kinds are mentioned in the letter to the Romans: "He that gives, let him do it with simplicity; ... he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8). Since it is certain that Paul is speaking of the public office of the church, there must have been two distinct grades. Unless my judgment deceive me, in the first clause he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick. Of this sort were the widows whom Paul mentions to Timothy (I Tim. 5:9-10). Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor. If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves. But even though the term *diakonia*? [the Greek word translated "deacon" or "servant," DJK] itself has a wider application, Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office are described by Luke in The Acts (Acts 6:3). For when the Greeks started a rumor that their widows were being ne-

glected in the relief of the poor, the apostles, making the excuse that they were unable to fulfill both functions (preaching the Word and serving at table), asked the multitude to choose seven upright men to whom they might entrust this task (Acts 6:1ff.). Here, then, is the kind of deacons the apostolic church had, and which we, after their example, should have.¹

Calvin's understanding of the place of deacons in the church, including his ideas regarding their election, qualifications, and proper work, was sound and biblical. In his *Institutes* Calvin refers to Acts 6 when speaking of the origin, institution, and office of the deacons, and to Romans 12:8 when speaking of their work. In his commentary on I Timothy 3:8ff., Calvin taught the need for deacons to be qualified. Calvin's instruction regarding the work of deacons is another area in which he contributed significantly toward the reformation of the church.

It is especially Calvin's idea that the church should have two kinds of deacons that interests us now.

As the quote from his *Institutes* indicates, Calvin based his view on

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 edition, edited by John McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), volume 2, pp. 1061-1062. This is section 4.3.9 in his *Institutes*.

his exegesis of two Scripture passages, Romans 12:8 and I Timothy 5:9-10. Commenting on the former passage, Calvin notes that the “givers” were not “those who gave of their own property, but the deacons, who presided in dispensing the public charities of the church,” while those who show mercy are “the widows, and other ministers, who were appointed to take care of the sick, according to the custom of the ancient Church: for there were two different offices, — to provide necessities for the poor, and to attend to their condition.”²

Calvin understood I Timothy 5:9-10 to teach that widows may be supported at the public expense only when they reached the age of 60, but that receiving such support obligated the widows to consecrate themselves to the ministry of the church:

They were received on the condition that the Church should relieve their poverty, and that, on their part, they should be employed in ministering to the poor, as far as the state of their health allowed. Thus there was a mutual obligation between them and the Church.³



Before evaluating this aspect of Calvin’s teaching, we do well to examine what exactly Calvin meant by “two kinds of deacons.”

Calvin did not merely mean to say that the deacons’ task is twofold, involving both the care of the poor by giving alms, and the care of the sick, widows, and others in need, by providing health care, meals, and other material necessities. That he did not merely mean this is evident from the fact that he speaks not just of two tasks of the diaconate, but of two kinds of deacons, both of which were to devote themselves to their particular task.

Calvin is unambiguous when he writes that by the first kind of deacon he refers to those who collect and distribute the alms in car-

ing for the poor. Note again the above-quoted statement from his *Institutes*: “one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor.” Also the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* makes this point clearly: “There were always two kinds of deacons in the early Church. The one kind was deputed to receive, dispense, and keep the goods for the poor, not only daily alms, but also possessions, revenues, and pensions....”⁴

Calvin is also clear regarding the work of the second kind of deacons. Again, from his *Institutes*: “the other, in caring for the poor themselves.” By this Calvin means bodily, hands-on care of the poor and sick. And again, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* are clear: “... the other kind to care for and remember the sick and administer the allowance for the poor, a custom which we still retain at present.”

But regarding exactly who these second kind of deacons were, Calvin is ambiguous. The quote from his *Institutes* indicates that they were women — the widows of I Timothy 5:9-10. But in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* the strong impression is left that these were the procureurs and hospitaller of the General Hospital. Remember from previous articles that these men were, to use modern terminology, the board of directors and the chief operating officer of the hospital. This “strong impression” is left because, immediately after describing the second kind of deacons, and in the same paragraph as that description, the *Ordinances* speak of these positions. These positions were always filled by men, who were elected according to the rule of God in I Timothy 3. Nothing is said about women in this connection.

In pointing out this apparent contradiction between the *Ordinances* and the *Institutes*, we must bear in mind that the *Institutes* express the ideas and words of Calvin himself, while the *Ordinances* are the decisions of the Consistory of

Geneva, not the words of Calvin personally.

This leads some to surmise that Calvin personally desired women to hold the office of deacon in the church, but that society’s view of women and the mentality of the Reformed church at that time would not allow it. William Innes notes that, in Geneva, the involvement of the women “amounted to assisting the hospitaller, either as his wife or as one of the ‘cresses’ or servants. Of course, women were never officially incorporated into the diaconate of the Genevan Church because of social strictures regarding the position of women generally at the time.”⁵ Elsie McKee also indicates that Calvin’s desire for women deacons was not implemented in Geneva:

Calvin’s sermons on I Timothy 5:3ff., preached to the Genevan people in 1555, indicates his real regret that their church had no widow deacons. He was, however, chiefly concerned that the poor be cared for, that the functions of the second kind of deacon be carried out, and the hospitaller of the city system and the deacons of the refugee organizations fulfilled these duties adequately. Diaconal functions were more important than the precise personnel who carried out this service to the needy.⁶

In other words, Calvin wanted women to be deacons, specifically the second kind of deacons, but the church of Geneva was not willing to make them such, and did not feel the need for such. Calvin contented himself with this, because at least the poor and sick were being cared for.

However, the assumption that Calvin personally desired women to hold the special office of deacon in the church is erroneous. The quote from his *Institutes* helps us here. Yes, he speaks of two “grades” of the public office of deacon, or servant, in the church. But he then points out that the word

diakonia (which is translated by the words “minister” or “servant” as well as “deacon” in the King James Version) is used in a broader and narrower sense. Any who, in caring for the body of Christ, care for the earthly and material needs of others, are deacons in a general sense. They are serving in the capacity of believers. But specifically, the word refers to one special office in the church, described in Acts 6. Those who fill this office must be men — a fair reading of his *Institutes* allows no other conclusion. (Nowhere to my knowledge can Calvin be justly quoted as suggesting that women may function in any of the special offices — that of pastor, elder, or deacon, using the term “deacon” in its narrower sense as in Acts 6 and I Timothy 3). In the words of Brian Schwertley:

For Calvin, the authoritative aspects of being a deacon (i.e., taking care of the financial affairs of the church, and the counseling-judicial aspect) are reserved for the men deacons alone. The women deacons function somewhat like nurses. The food, water, clothing, and medicine, etc., set aside by the deacons are delivered and administered by the deaconesses. This does not mean that deacons were not involved in similar activities. It only means that deaconesses were limited to separate non-authoritative activities.⁷

In sum, I understand Calvin’s point to be, even though he did not express it so clearly, that deacons in the church of Christ (using “deacons” in the narrower sense to refer to men ordained into the special office) have two main tasks — the financial care of the poor and the hands-on care of the poor and needy. This hands-on care of the poor and needy these deacons can do personally, or may oversee this work as it is done by women deaconesses — using the term in a broader sense.



If this understanding is correct, we can readily agree with Calvin’s ideas.

That the word *diakonia* can be used in a broader sense (referring to a servant) or narrower (referring to the special office of deacons in the church) is self-evident. The word is used in Matthew 20:26, John 2:5, Romans 13:4, Romans 16:1, and other passages in the broader sense.

That I Timothy 5:9-10 speaks of a special role that women play in the church cannot be disputed. And that this role cannot be that of deacon, holding the special office, has also been pointed out.

Whether Romans 12:8 can truly serve as exegetical support for Calvin’s view is debatable. Without question, Romans 12:6-8 speaks of different gifts given to the members of the church. But the apostle emphasizes that he is speaking of the one body of Christ with all its members (v. 5). We ought not, therefore, interpret verses 6-8 as referring exclusively to the special offices in the church. Indeed, what these verses teach can be *applied* to the special offices, but not referred *exclusively* to them.⁸ And when we do apply this teaching to the special offices, we ought not to suppose that each gift presupposes a different office, or subset of an office, in the church. All deacons must both give with simplicity and shew mercy with cheerfulness.

We are, however, not dependent on Romans 12:8 for our contention that the work of the deacons involves not only the care of the poor but also the care of those in the church who have other needs. Other passages and teachings of Scripture, which have been set forth both in this article and in our first article on this subject, make the scriptural case sufficiently.

Did our forefathers, and particularly the deacons in Geneva, act rightly in this regard? Insofar as they manifested loving care and tender mercies to all God’s people

in all their needs, we can say that they did.

We should not make the mistake of supposing that the example of the deacons in Geneva is irrelevant to us. Their example is relevant because we also are the church of Christ, called to show mercy to those in need. Furthermore, it is relevant because we are Reformed churches, which desire to carry on the teaching of the Reformation. Living in a different age and culture, we might find it necessary to implement the principle differently. But implement it we must.

In the next article, the Lord willing, we will examine the various ways in which our deacons can implement this principle. 

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, translated and edited by John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989 reprint), p. 463.

3. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989 reprint), p. 128.

4. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, editor and translator, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 42. All subsequent quotes from the *Ordinances* are found on pp. 42-43 of this book.

5. William C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin’s Geneva* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983), p. 110.

6. Elsie Anne McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 77.

7. Brian M. Schwertley, *A Historical and Biblical Examination of Women Deacons* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1998), p. 32.

8. Such is also the view of Robert Haldane and Charles Hodge, expressed in their commentaries on this passage, and of Herman Hoeksema, set forth in his book *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), particularly pp. 583-588.

Let the Nations Be Glad

“O sing unto the LORD a new song; sing unto the LORD all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.”

Psalm 96:1-4

This is the great calling of Christ’s church, to declare, to make known amongst the peoples, the glory of our God and the glory of all His works. That’s the work of missions!

But, as John Piper writes in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad*:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

The Purpose of Missions

Worship is the *goal* in missions! We desire to bring the knowledge of God and His glory to the nations. For He is worthy to be made known. “Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!” (Psalter #261, 259, 258). “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God

and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 1). Our desire is to make known to the nations “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!” The work of missions is not to make man’s life here on earth better. It is to make God known among the nations. We desire to magnify God!

Worship is also the *fuel* and *power* of missions. Zeal for God in worship comes before the work of missions. One cannot commend what he does not cherish. Churches and her missionaries will never call out, “Let the nations be glad!” if they cannot say from the heart, “I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD” (Ps. 104:34). John Piper writes, “When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God’s true worth, the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth.”

Yes, where zeal for God is weak, zeal for missions will also be weak. Churches that are not focused on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to “declare his glory among the nations.” When people are not stunned by the greatness of God, how can they be sent with the ringing message, “For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods”? The psalmist writes:

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:1, 2).

“Honor and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering and come into his courts” (Ps. 96:6-8).

This vision of God, this devotion to God, must come first. Savoring it in our worship precedes our spreading it in missions. This is true for the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and their outreach. This is true for the Berean Church of God Reformed in the Philippines and their outreach. Zealous worship of God is the fuel of missions. We do missions not first of all because we love people, desiring their salvation, but because we love God. He is great and glorious! He is worthy to be made known to the nations.

We declare and make known the glory of God in Christ Jesus in the preaching of the Word. This is what the apostle Paul did in Corinth. We read in I Corinthians 15, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” The message saves because it proclaims the name that saves — the name of Jesus. Peter declared that God visited the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). The proclamation by which God takes a people for His name is a message that hinges on the name of His Son Jesus. “Neither is there salvation in any other, for

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there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Christ calls and commands: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The calling of the church and the calling of missions is to bring that authoritative Word of God to the nations in the preaching of the Word. I emphasize this because today many churches consider to be missions any kind of good deeds done to help other ethnic groups. This might be teaching them how to farm, setting up health clinics, drilling water wells, setting up schools, or fixing up, building, or painting their houses. All of these are noble tasks that individual believers may certainly engage in, but let us be clear that it is not missions. It is not the calling of the church of Jesus Christ. The task of missions is the preaching of the Word. The Word preached is the power of salvation to such as believe. Preaching Christ, and Him crucified, was the mission of the apostle Paul, and it is the mission of all his heirs. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). The purpose of missions is to preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Vision in the Philippines

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Matt. 28:19). Why? According to the text, because "all power is given unto (Christ) in heaven and in earth." Christ wills, commands, and enables His church to reach out to all the peoples of the earth. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice" (John 10:16). And, too, the Lord said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Missions is supremely the work of the risen Lord Jesus. In the preaching of the Word, His people in every nation hear *His* voice.

What did Jesus mean when He commanded the church to go and teach "all nations"? In almost every instance that the phrase "all the nations" is used in the Bible, the reference is not to individuals, nor to geographical and political boundaries, but to ethnic people groups. The Hebrew phrase in the Old Testament, used some 100 times, has the sense of people groups outside of Israel. The Old Testament is filled with promises and expectations that God will someday be worshiped by people from all the nations of the world. In His promise to Abraham, God said, "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). And: "...Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him..." (Gen. 18:18). As we sing in Psalter #49 (versification of Psalm 22:27, 28):

The ends of all the earth shall hear
And turn unto the Lord in fear;
All kindreds of the earth shall own
And worship Him as God alone.
All earth to Him her homage brings,
The Lord of lords, the King of kings.

Especially in the Psalms and in the prophecy of Isaiah there is repeated reference to the nations and to all people. Where the KJV, in such texts, translates "people," the meaning is "peoples." Over and over the Book of Revelation speaks of nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. The Bible pictures not merely a people but peoples that are saved. Why is this important? For an answer to that question we need only to look at God's command to Adam and to Noah. God commanded that they multiply and replenish and fill the earth. There is inherent in the one human race a vast variety of physical and mental characteristics, of powers and talents. One nation differs from another nation, and one tribe is distinct from another. The race reveals itself in a rich diversity. Paul

said to the Athenians, "(God) hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). The diversity of the nations is, thus, not *in spite of*, but *because of* God's will and plan. He made the nations. This diversity is *God's idea*. Out of these diverse peoples God is pleased to choose and call forth His elect people in Christ Jesus. And the diversity of these peoples adds to the richness and beauty of Christ's church.

Beautiful: One rainbow with its various bright colors; one diamond with its various gleaming hues; one edifice made up of stones of various colors and size; one choir blending in various parts; one church made up of various tribes, nations, peoples, and languages. Can you see it: A big tall Engelsma or Slopsema next to a small Filipino? The red, curly hair of a Scotsman next to the dark black and straight hair of an Asian? The burly figure of a farmer or fisherman next to the slight form of a writer or teacher? An African standing next to an Indian or pale-faced Dutchman? We love and appreciate this grand diversity, united together in one faith: faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A diversity it is, I believe, that is not a temporary one, intended only for the life here and now, but rather one that will be preserved in the life to come. In the new heavens and new earth, those ransomed by the blood of Christ will be from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. As Pentecost did not do away with the cultural ethnic diversity of the peoples, neither will the resurrection. How the Book of Revelation celebrates again and again the great multitude "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues (that) stood before the throne, and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). The beauty and the power of praise that will come to the Lord from such diversity are

greater than the beauty and power that would come to Him if the chorus of the redeemed were culturally uniform. God reveals His glory to His redeemed from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. The nations are glad and sing for joy. "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy..." (Ps. 67:3, 4). Our vision in the Philippines, therefore, is not to make the people there clones of the Dutch-American churches in the States. Rather, we look for the beauty of Philippine people to be added to the rainbow of God's church.

What an incentive for the little Protestant Reformed Churches to do mission work among the peoples. It is our *delight* and our *privilege* to bring the precious Word of God, revealing the glory of God to the various peoples of the world, whether that work be in Jamaica or Ghana, in Northern Ireland, Singapore, or the Philippines — or with various ethnic peoples in our own cities and country. Each of our various churches can carry out this work right in their own backyards. And as a denomination we do this work together, going wherever the LORD calls us, domestically or on foreign fields.



The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, having received a request to "come over and help us," called and sent a missionary in 2001 to labor with the peoples in the Philippines, a land with many different ethnic groups. Work began in Manila, Daet, and Bacolod, with the central labor to be with a group in Manila. The goal was to form indigenous churches, that is, churches that would be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. With a view to this, the missionary would conduct worship services and preach to various groups. The missionary would also be involved in giving instruction to men to re-

pare and equip them to be pastors, elders, and deacons.

It is now almost five years since I accepted that call. And it is with thanksgiving to God that I can report that there has been the fruit of faith. One of those groups is coming this year to our synod asking that we assist them in organizing an instituted church, the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines. The men here have received instruction on Reformed church government and are not only able but also desire to serve the Lord in this way. Believing families desire to confess their faith and to have their children baptized. Young men continue to receive instruction to equip them to serve better as pastors. God is faithful. He has indeed blessed and is blessing the work.

The vision for our work in the Philippines has been the building and organizing of strong, indigenous, Reformed churches. Our hope and vision is that these various churches can then work together as a federation of churches, growing spiritually themselves and also reaching out to teach other peoples. This vision is being blessed as pamphlets and other literature are being translated into Tagalog, and songs from the Psalter are being translated and sung in the native languages. Bible studies are taking place in various places in Manila and in the provinces. By God's grace the Reformed faith is taking hold here, to the glory of God. "Let the nations be glad!"

History of the Berean Church of God Reformed

This group of believers has been on a long pilgrimage — through the wilderness of the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church and then through the desert of the heretical teachings of the Worldwide Church of God, a cult led by Herbert Armstrong. Under the new leadership of Joseph Tkach, many of the original teachings of the Worldwide Church of God were thrown out, re-

vised, or made non-mandatory. The cult became loosely Arminian. Many adherents became disillusioned and began to question everything that had before been forced upon them. One particular group of them decided to meet together weekly to examine doctrines taught by churches of various Reformed persuasions. They met every Thursday evening, discussing a broad range of doctrinal topics and issues, examining and searching the Scriptures in a way and fashion that was characteristic of the early New Testament Bereans. Hence the word "Berean" in the name they chose for themselves when they, on December 8, 1998, formed the Quezon City Berean Fellowship. For two years the Fellowship met, building up their library of photocopied Reformed material, and coming to a greater awareness of the Reformed faith. As a result of this the "Bereans," after a series of meetings and dialogues with the Worldwide Church of God leadership, and seeing the irreconcilability of differences between them, tendered their official resignation on October 31, 2000. November 4, 2000 was the opening worship service of the Berean Church of God Reformed as an official, government-registered religious organization.

It was during this time that one of the members of the group found and was reading the web page of the PRCA on the Internet. When he saw that delegations from our churches would be in the Philippines, he requested, and was granted, a meeting with the two PR ministers who were to come in October 1998. Representatives of the group also met with subsequent delegations, in 1999 and then again in 2000. Finally, in February 2001, a PR delegation was able to hold a two-day conference with the Berean Fellowship. In March of 2001 the BCGR sent a letter to the FMC requesting a missionary, a request that was granted by our synod in June. I accepted the call from Doon PRCA to serve as the

missionary and arrived in the Philippines in July of 2002.

The Berean Church has grown from eight to thirteen families (not including the missionary's) in regular attendance, with an additional four families who attend on a less regular basis. They hold two worship services each Sunday, with one worship service centering in the truths taught in the Heidelberg Catechism. Between the two worship services, there is time for a small lunch and for catechism classes for the children. Hymns from the Worldwide Church of God have been replaced with songs from the Psalter. Two offerings are received each Sunday: one for benevolence and the other for the operating expenses. It is heartwarming to see God's children here giving freely out of their meager budgets for the cause of Christ's kingdom.

In November of 2005 the Board of Trustees of the BCGR sent a request for organization as a church to Doon PRC and the FMC, with the matter to be dealt with by our synod this summer! The BCGR

hopes to organize under the name of Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines. The reason for the name change is to identify themselves better in the church world. "Church of God" had indeed been a scriptural designation (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; II Cor. 1:1), but today that name is identified with Universalist theology and cults. The BCGR desire to identify themselves clearly with the historic Reformed faith, and with God's blessings in developing and preserving that faith as it spreads to all the nations of the earth. She desires to be a vibrant Reformed church that loves to worship, and is thus prepared to bring the message of salvation to the peoples of the Philippines. "Let the nations be glad!"

The missionary visits and gives instruction also to young men from the Bastion of Truth Churches and to a pastor from the Inayuaun Reformed Free Church. It is my desire that, through conferences and visits, these churches might someday unite together to form a federation of Re-

formed churches that can labor together in the work and hold each other accountable in their faith and life.

The little children have a song that speaks of God's love for His chosen people, the redeemed out of all the nations:

Jesus loves His little children,
All His children of the world:
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves His little children of
the world!

Do you see those different children in your cities in the States? Arabs, Indians, Mexican, Jew, German, Canadian, Chinese, African, and the list goes on. Do you have a vision of those children in far-off lands? May God give us delight in making known His glory and salvation in Jesus Christ to all the peoples! And they shall be glad and sing for joy.

"Let the people(s) praise thee, O God; let all the people(s) praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps. 67:3, 4). 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Worship in His Fear: (2) The Votum

When the church gathers in worship, the saints come together in order to humble themselves before God, to praise and adore Him, and to enjoy fellowship with Him. This worship service begins with the salutation. God speaks first, greeting His people with the words, "Beloved congregation in the Lord

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Jesus Christ." He assures us at the very start of our worship that we are His beloved people. This gives us confidence in our approach to Him. It also reminds us that no matter what God says to us in the course of the worship service, it is all spoken in love. It is indeed a blessing to be able to begin with these comforting words from God.

The next element of the worship service, which follows immediately after and is closely connected to the salutation, is what we refer to as the votum. This votum consists of

these words (from Psalm 124:8): "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

This is an element of worship that we can easily grow accustomed to, so that at times it becomes a mere formality. We do well, therefore, to take a close look at this important part of our worship service.



A votum is literally a vow or promise. The votum we use in worship is in the form of a confes-

sion. By means of the votum, we confess our dependence upon God. As a believing response to our God's greeting, we confess that all our help comes from Jehovah, who made heaven and earth. Confessing this, we thereby promise to seek all that we need from Him.

We confess that He who helps us is Jehovah. This name expresses that He is unchanging, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is faithful. He is reliable. He is trustworthy. He keeps His word. For He "is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

We confess that Jehovah's help is saving help. Jehovah is the God of our salvation. His purpose is to save His people. He accomplishes that through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ, Jehovah saves us from all our enemies.

We confess that Jehovah's help is constant. In His faithfulness, He helps us every day. He saves us daily from our sins, even though we do not deserve it. He continually forgives. He continually rescues us from the power of sin. He is Jehovah who never changes, "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

We confess that Jehovah's help is sure. It is so because He is the God who made the heavens and the earth. Our Helper is the almighty who, by the Word of His power, formed a great and marvelous universe. He made it all out of nothing. He spoke, and it all came into being. Our Helper, therefore, is powerful to save. There is never any doubt or question concerning our salvation. He who created all things will also surely be both able and willing to save those who are His in Jesus Christ.

As we begin our worship, we confess all this concerning Jehovah. And thus we vow to seek all that we need from Him.



This votum is fitting at the beginning of worship, for it expresses why we worship God. It reminds us of one of the reasons why we worship Him. The main reason, of course, is to praise our God. But as the votum points out, we approach Him in worship also because we need and are dependent upon Him and His saving help.

We need Jehovah's help. We need Him to save us from our spiritual foes. Every day of our earthly lives we are involved in a spiritual battle. The attacks against us are constant and powerful. We are preyed upon by the devil and his hosts. We wrestle against spiritual wickedness in high places. The devil goes about as a roaring lion trying to devour and destroy the saints.

We are very much aware of these attacks, and feel them. We know, too, how vulnerable and weak we are. The temptations that come our way have a mighty appeal to us, for we have yet a weak and sinful flesh. Often we are tempted, and often we fall into sin.

Realizing that we ourselves are helpless against our enemies, we confess that Jehovah is our help. We need Him to save and protect us. We come to church, therefore, to receive His help.

We know from our own experience that this is one of the reasons why we come to God's house on the Lord's Day. We have just been through another week of earthly life in which we faced and experienced many struggles. We were tempted each day by the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eyes as presented to us by an ungodly world. We were not always able to resist the temptations, and so we sinned. We also experienced afflictions from the mighty hand of God that tested our faith and trust in Him. Life was again a spiritual battle. At the end of another week our souls are weary. We are spiritually exhausted.

We come to God's house because we cannot continue in life

without enjoying worship and fellowship with Jehovah. We need that, in order once again to be assured of His love and forgiveness, and in order to be again strengthened for the battles of faith.

It is very appropriate, therefore, that at the beginning of our worship we enter God's presence and immediately confess that we find our help in the name of the LORD who made the heavens and the earth. Jehovah is our helper! He saves us! He forgives us! He gives us strength to go on!



There is another reason for us to begin with these words, and that is because thereby we confess our need of, and promise to seek, God's help with regard to worship itself.

We need God's protection so that we are able to worship Him freely and unhindered. It is perhaps difficult for us to see the need for this kind of protection. We know that some of God's people are in urgent need of it, for they are severely persecuted. They are closely watched and spied upon. They gather in worship at the risk of their very lives. We, however, are able to meet freely for worship. We know the day may come when that is not possible. But for now we have peace and do not fear physical persecution.

But the same enemy who uses persecution to try to stop some of God's people from worshipping Him, also tries hard, through other means, to stop us. That enemy is the devil. He hates the church and the people of God. He despises our gathering together for worship. He hates it that the Word of Christ is preached, and that the saints join their voices to sing God's praises. Thus he puts great effort in trying to prevent us from worshipping our God.

The devil does that in many subtle ways. He makes us lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, so that we choose not to come to church twice on the Lord's Day. He gives us excuses for not com-

ing to church, such as time, or distance, or tiredness, or a little sickness. He causes our love for the things of God to grow cold so that we are not very interested in hearing the preaching of the truths of the gospel. He convinces us that attending worship once on the Lord's Day is sufficient, so that we say: "I was in church this morning. I worshiped God then. I was spiritually fed then. That's enough for another week!"

The devil also tries to keep us from worshiping God properly, that is, in spirit and in truth. Then, although we come to church faithfully, we simply go through the motions of worship. Our worship is not sincere and from the heart. We are easily distracted. Because

we are carnally minded, we allow the things of earthly life to occupy our thoughts while we are in the house of God. To others it may look like we are worshiping God well, but the devil has succeeded in keeping us from true worship.

The child of God is in great need of God's help against all this. Worship is a difficult activity. The opposition we face from the devil and our own flesh is strong. Our only hope of worshiping at all is through the name of the LORD who made the heaven and the earth. Confessing our need, may we sincerely seek Jehovah's help to worship Him.



We make this confession with confidence, for Jehovah "is" our

help. He is not one who, while being *able* to help, may not always *want* to. He is not one who is almighty to save, but does not actually do so. He is both able and willing, for He loves His saints. We can be sure that He will help us.

May the significance of this confession be prominent in our minds as we gather in worship each Sunday. May we humbly and sincerely express thereby our complete dependence upon Jehovah, so that we seek the help of our almighty God. And may we confidently confess that He both can and will help us in all our needs, also in the many needs we have as we are involved in worshiping Him.



News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

Congregation Activities

Catechism classes for our churches have finished their lessons for the season. We can thank our heavenly Father for the privilege of feeding the children and young people of our congregations with the life-giving truths of His Word. In connection with that official work of the church, we ask our readers if they have personally thanked their pastor or elder, or maybe retired pastor or a seminarian, who has taught their children this past season. By God's grace these men guided the feet of our children into godliness as they helped prepare them for their place in our churches and God's kingdom.

Somewhat related to the above comments on catechism, we couldn't help but notice that the May issue of

"Closer Look," the monthly newsletter of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, included a copy of one of their church bulletins from September 13, 1942. That bulletin contained an announcement that their weekly catechism classes would begin that week on Saturday afternoon for all children 6-15 years old. Ages 6-8 at 1:30, ages 9-11 at 2:15, and ages 12-15 at 3:00 P.M. How times have changed!

There was also a reminder to parents in an April bulletin from the First PRC in Holland, MI concerning catechism. Their pastor, Rev. D. Kleyn, had arranged to pick up some of his catechism students after school at Heritage Christian School for a short trip to downtown Hudsonville and the Reformed Book Outlet. There these students, who had successfully memorized and recited Hebrews 11, were given opportunity to choose and purchase books, at the expense of First Church, as a reward for a job well done.

The council of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI informed their congregation recently that they had approved the formation of a church library. Funds for the project came in the form of a donation. Obviously at this point their library committee is still in the early stages of beginning the venture, but they were already looking for

sound Reformed literature to begin filling their bookshelves.

The Building Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited their congregation to a spring cleanup of their church and grounds Saturday, April 29. Work to be done included site preparation for their new church sign, general yard cleanup, like raking and weed-pulling, and the cleaning of lights and ceiling fans inside the church building.

The combined choirs of our two Iowa PRCs, Doon and Hull, presented their choir program on April 23 in the auditorium of the Doon PRC. The collection taken was for the upcoming 2006 Young People's Convention to be held this summer, the Lord willing, at Dordt College.

The Adult Choir of the Loveland, CO PRC presented their annual Spring Program Sunday evening, April 30.

Tuesday evening, April 25, there was a combined Bible study at the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL for members of Adult Bible Societies from Peace as well as our other neighboring PR churches in the Chicago, IL area, including Bethel, Cornerstone, and South Holland. The topic for discussion was "Peter's Denial and Restoration," using passages from Luke 22 and John 21 for the basis of the study.

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

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THE STANDARD BEARER

The members of the Ladies Morning Bible Study at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were invited to meet together May 2 for an informal talk with Rev. and Mrs. J. Kortering concerning the church in Myanmar, India, and the Far East. Rev. Kortering also planned to include information on recent developments in our sister churches in Singapore.

Evangelism Activities

In ongoing evangelism work at the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, we read recently that members of Christianity on Campus manned a booth at Grand Valley State University during exam week in April. The purpose was to administer a most important test on theology. Many students took the "test," and there was plenty of opportunity for conversation and witness.

Hopes are that this may kindle interest in God's Word on campus among people there. Though Christianity on Campus is officially over for the summer, Grace's congregation was encouraged to pray that true Christianity, and Christ Himself, may be known and shown as they walk in this world unto Him by faith and not by sight.

The Evangelism Committee of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL has decided to begin publishing a quarterly Evangelism Newsletter. This newsletter will be for the specific purpose of reaching unbelievers with the good news of the gospel. This will put in the hands of members of Bethel a newsletter that they, in turn, can distribute to those who have no background in the Christian faith. Bethel is considering articles on fundamental truths of Christianity as summarized in the Apostles Creed.

Denomination Activities

With thanks to God for granting our churches a faithful minister of the gospel for nearly forty-one years, thirty-three of those years in our seminary, we can report that Prof. R. Decker will be declared emeritus, that is, he will be retiring from the active labors of the ministry, effective July 1, 2006. If you would like to write to encourage him and his wife, their address is Prof. & Mrs. Robert Decker, 8760 Cedar Lake Dr., Jenison, MI 49428, or decker@prca.org.

The Psalm Choir, made up of members of the West Michigan churches, presented two concerts this spring. The first at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on Sunday, April 23, and the second, one week later, at the Grandville, MI PRC. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mr. and Mrs. Society of Southwest PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow members Gary and Joyce Noorman and their children, Lisa and Chad, in the sudden death of their beloved son and brother,

PAUL NOORMAN,

who was taken home to glory to be with his Savior. Our prayers are with the family during this time of sorrow and loss. May our merciful heavenly Father surround them with His grace. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 131:1, 2).

Dirk Westra, President
Evonne Kreuzer, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to the families of John Hoksbergen, Henry Hoksbergen, Elder Don Hoksbergen, and Deacon Ken Hoksbergen. The Lord has taken

MRS. HENRIETTA HOKSBERGEN

unto the place that He has prepared for her. We find our comfort in the words of Psalm 103:17, 18: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

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

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Our parents and grandparents, **PETER and RUTH (Kuiper) NOBEL**, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on June 8, 2006, D.V.

We thank God for giving us parents whose instruction pointed us to the God of our salvation. "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?...I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD" (Psalm 27: 1, 6).

- * Abigail Nobel
- * John and Naomi Chesebro
Mercy, Ruthie, Peter, Gideon, Andrew
- * Brian and Priscilla Boot
Julia, Timothy, Damaris, Susannah,
Jared, Maria
- * Ken and Eve Atkinson
Miram, Nathan, Job, Lydia, Sarah,
Joanna, Sylvia
- * Travis and Charity Grassmid
Jessica, Esther, Lindsey, Alicia, Joseph
- * Luke Nobel
- * Hope Nobel
- * Samuel Nobel (in glory)
- * Hannah Nobel

Byron Center, Michigan

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for June

Date	Topic	Text
June 4	"So I Prayed and Said..."	Nehemiah 2:1-10
June 11	"Come, Let Us Build"	Nehemiah 2:11-20
June 18	"Eli's Failure As a Father"	I Samuel 3:22-36
June 25	"The People Had a Mind to Work"	Nehemiah 3 & 4:6