

# THE *February 1, 2006* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

## *In This Issue:*

- ◆ *All Thy Children Taught of Jehovah* 194
- ◆ *Another Look at the Declaration of Principles (1)* 196
- ◆ *All Around Us* 198
- ◆ *Address at Annual RFPA Meeting* 200
- ◆ *Secretary's Report 2005* 203
- ◆ *Prophecy of Malachi (4)* 206
- ◆ *Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel* 208
- ◆ *Rejoicing at Thy Word* 210
- ◆ *BRF Family Conference 2006* 213
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 214

Volume 82 ◆ Number 9

# All Thy Children Taught of Jehovah

*"And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children."*

Isaiah 54: 13

**B**elieving parents commit themselves to the instruction of their children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. But all believing parents who are wise know that, except the Lord bless their efforts, they can teach twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and nothing will enter the understanding, let alone the heart, of their children. Therefore, wise parents pray as they instruct their children. The real teacher must be God Himself. He alone is able to communicate to their understandings and to their hearts.



Judah, God's servant, had sinned. They and their kings forgot the law and worship of their God. They followed their own

pleasures and worshiped other gods. God promised to visit the iniquities of His servant on His Servant, the promised Messiah. The servant, Judah, will be sent into terrible captivity in Babylon. As terrible as this would be, it could be worse — far worse. It could be, instead of the chastening hand of their Master, the actual payment for their sins. This latter will be reserved for the Servant of Jehovah. The substitutionary suffering that was to be endured by the Servant of Jehovah is described in the previous chapter of this prophecy.

Because the Servant will have fully borne the complete punishment for all of the sins of the servant, the present chapter begins with words of great encouragement for the distressed servant. God promises that, after generations will have borne the anguish and shame of captivity in a foreign land, there will be deliverance. To assure His people that they have no reason to fear the severing of their relationship with Jehovah, He calls the barren to sing, for they shall have many children (v. 1). The beaten, tiny nation is commanded to "enlarge the

place of thy tent, ... lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes" (v. 2). God is assuring Judah that their bondage in Babylon is not the end. God promises that they will "forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood" (v. 4), for He will restore them to the beautiful relationship where "thy Maker is thine husband" (v. 5). He explains that "for a small moment" and "in a little wrath" He hid Himself from her, but He promises great and eternal mercies (vv. 7, 8). Further, Jehovah promises that He will never forsake His people again and that the covenant of His peace will be theirs forever (vv. 9, 10). Also God promises a restored relationship reflected in outward beauty and glory: "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones" (vv. 11, 12). All this is because they are reckoned to be righteous in the finished work of the suffering Servant (v. 14).



*Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.*

*The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.*

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

#### REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

#### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

#### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra  
4949 Ivanrest  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Mr. Timothy Pipe  
P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI  
49468-0603  
PH: (616) 531-1490  
(616) 538-1778  
FAX: (616) 531-3033  
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

#### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

#### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
c/o B. VanHerk  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

#### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney  
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland  
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

#### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

#### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)  
Website for PRC: [www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

A specific part of these wonderful promises that God gives to His restored and comforted church is that her “children will be taught of the LORD.” What a wonderful promise! What an amazing promise! Jehovah Himself will teach our children!! Parents (as well as pastors and elders) can only present truths. And the mere proclamation of the truth is not sufficient in itself. The internal work of the Spirit of God is needed for the children to understand and believe. All that humans can accomplish with preaching and teaching is to present information. It is God who not only causes the gospel to be externally preached, but also powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit. He pervades the inmost recesses, opening the closed mind, softening the hard heart, and sweetly inclining the stubborn will. The result is that the children can rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God.

They are not only taught by Jehovah, but they are also taught about Jehovah. Those who are so taught know Jehovah Himself. Yes, they know about Him, but the knowledge they gain of Him leads them into the intimacy of knowing Him. And to know Jehovah is eternal life (John 17:3).

Who are taught of Jehovah? “All thy children.”

And who are “all thy children”? Are they every physical child born to believers? Or are they every spiritual child born to believers? Scripture itself gives us the answer. Let Scripture interpret itself.

Scripture interprets this passage when the first verse of this chapter is quoted in Galatians 4:27. The apostle Paul was giving instruction to the Galatians about their justification being by grace alone and not by the works of obedience to the law. He has just compared Sinai (and the law) with Jerusalem that is above (Gal. 4:25, 26). He goes further and says that this Jerusalem that is above “is the mother of us all.” To substantiate this in the

minds of the Galatian believers, Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1: “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.” And then Paul adds, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are *the children of promise*.” The believers in the church of Christ in Galatia, Jews and Gentiles alike, having been justified by grace alone through faith alone, are “the children of the promise.” Therefore the “all thy children” taught of Jehovah are the children of the promise (cf. also Rom. 9:8). They are the true, spiritual seed of the previous generation of true, spiritual seed.

Thus the promise that “all thy children shall be taught of the LORD,” cannot refer to every physical child of believers. Besides, we certainly would not want to conclude that anyone who is taught by God can be unsaved. When God teaches, He truly teaches. He is always effective as a Teacher. We must conclude that “all thy children” are all the true children of the promise, the true Israel of God, whether Jews or Gentiles. And this harmonizes with the description of the glorified church given in the two verses that precede our text. It is to this glorified church, not to individuals, that the word comes, “And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD.”

Even further scriptural evidence that “all thy children” are the children of the promise is given by the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus quotes these very words of our text in John 6:45. He quotes this passage to prove the efficacious nature of God’s work of saving His people. Jesus is speaking of the Father’s irresistible drawing of those who come to Jesus (cf. John 6:39, 44, 65). How does the Father draw them? Jesus answers: the Father teaches them. And do not think that some are lost along the way — that some of those whom God taught end up not being drawn or coming or being saved.

As Jesus Himself said, “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45b).

How does the Father teach them? He teaches through the preaching of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, the Savior from sin. He puts His law into their hearts. He is their God and they are His people (Jer. 31:33). Those taught by the Spirit know God, from the least to the greatest; and the heart of what they know about God, their Father, is that He forgives their iniquity and remembers their sin no more. All those taught of Jehovah, the covenant God, know that He has redeemed them from all their sin. So when the circumstances of their earthly pilgrimage, like the Babylonian captivity, lead them to thinking that they are enduring the wrath of God as the punishment for their sin, then Jehovah, their Husband, teaches them of Himself and His work of so forgiving them that He remembers their sin no more. What a tremendously wonderful lesson to learn from Jehovah.



It is no wonder that these children have peace and that their peace is great! Great peace is the result of the knowledge given when one is taught of Jehovah.


Shalom (peace) is a rich, comprehensive term for being complete or full. Shalom implies prosperity and victory, and a general state of complete well-being. It speaks of true happiness. True happiness results when God enlightens our understanding so that we embrace the salvation revealed in Christ. Without this knowledge we are a great distance from happiness.

Zion’s children are given an abundance of peace. The knowledge of their covenant relation with God is peace. God is not at war with them. Being justified by grace alone without works, they have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). This is because they are the recipients of “the covenant of my

peace ... saith the LORD that hath mercy" (Is. 54:10). So wonderful and "great" is this peace that it passes all understanding and it guards their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

Those taught of Jehovah know that they are justified by His righteousness. Their consciences are sprinkled with His blood. They discover His love shed abroad in

their hearts and they enjoy peace.

As godly parents and grandparents, let us know what it is to be taught of Jehovah. And let us pray that He will teach our children. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

# Another Look at the Declaration of Principles (1)

**I**n 1951, the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches formally adopted a document entitled "A Brief Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches." The document had four parts, which can be briefly summarized as follows: 1) Common grace; 2) Salvation by sovereign, particular grace; 3) The covenant; and 4) Church government. Perhaps 75% of the document consisted of quotations from the Reformed confessions.

The synod also approved a preamble, which sheds a little light on the document. The preamble reads as follows:

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, to be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches on the basis of Scripture and the confessions as these have always been maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches and as these are now further explained in regard to certain principles.

The preamble hints at, but does not tell the whole story.

The document was adopted provisionally at the synod of 1950. In the next two years, it would be debated in homes and consistory rooms, on sidewalks and in church basements, in committee meetings and on the floor of Classis East and of Classis West, and in later syn-

ods. It would give rise to scores of letters, protests, and overtures to ecclesiastical assemblies — both for and against it. A Canadian Reformed Classis addressed a letter to the PRC concerning it, and a Dutch religious periodical, *De Reformatie* (*The Reformation*), editorialized for weeks on the Declaration.

The synod of 1951 spent five days reading the relevant material and debating it before recessing (without a final decision) until September 27. When synod reconvened, the delegates debated for six more days before adopting the document. The delegates were so evenly divided on the question that for a time it seemed possible that no motion would pass. Several motions failed on tie votes.

The synod of 1953 would be inundated with protests against the action of adopting the Declaration of Principles. Obviously, it was not an easy decision, nor one lightly taken.

And it cost. It divided families, colleagues in the ministry, consistories, classes, and churches. Two congregations left almost immediately and transferred to the Canadian Reformed Churches. Division over the *content* of the Declaration of Principles meant for the PRC a horrific schism, resulting in an exodus of sixteen ministers (out of twenty-eight) and well over half of the 6000 members.

What was it about this document that caused this astounding

upheaval and strife in this small denomination? And was it worth the cost?

## A Brief History

The history of this schism must be traced back to the roots of the relatively small denomination known as the Protestant Reformed Churches. Most readers of the *Standard Bearer* know well that these churches were formed in the fires of controversy. Three ministers and their consistories in the Christian Reformed Churches rejected the teaching that God has a common favor or grace toward all men, elect and reprobate. Related to that, these men rejected the teaching that in the preaching God graciously and sincerely offers salvation and expresses a desire to save everyone who hears the gospel. For their refusal to adopt those teachings, they were condemned and deposed in 1925. After their formal protests were rejected in the CRC, several churches, led by Revs. Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff, federated in 1926 as the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

The Reformed confessions (Three Forms of Unity) formed the foundation of these churches, with an emphasis on sovereign, particular grace, the antithesis, and the insistence that the preaching does not express a desire of God to save every individual. On the contrary, it was firmly maintained, the preaching is the power of



God to save His elect people, and by it God accomplishes His purpose to harden the reprobate who come under that preaching.

In the next twenty years or so, the PRC grew and prospered on that foundation. The Protestant Reformed Theological School graduated about twenty-seven ministers in as many years. Missionaries went out proclaiming the Reformed truth, with that rejection of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer. The churches grew to number twenty-four, with some 6000 members, in about twenty-five years.

However, in spite of this growth, all was not well in the churches. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, editor of the *Standard Bearer*, wrote in October 1, 1949, concerning "The *Standard Bearer*, and, for that matter...the Protestant Reformed Church as an institution," that "the future does not look bright to me." In March 1, 1950 he wrote, "It is by no means with an unmixed feeling of joy that *The Standard Bearer* celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the existence of our churches." A split was looming.

A number of factors contributed to this division in the Protestant Reformed Churches. One can find evidence of personal distrust, even animosity, among members and clergy. Among many, there was dissatisfaction with the small size of the denomination and of many individual congregations. But the overriding issue, Herman Hoeksema insisted, was doctrinal. He wrote in March of 1950, "As Protestant Reformed Churches we no longer present a united front as far as the truth is concerned." He went on to say that "a conditional theology is being introduced, the sound of which is surely foreign to our Protestant Reformed truth."

At least in part, the new sound of a conditional theology can be traced to Dr. Klaas Schilder. Dr. Schilder was a renowned and capable preacher in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

(Gereformeerde Kerken Nederlands, GKN). Through his visits to the USA in 1939 and 1947, and through much correspondence, Schilder became a good friend of Herman Hoeksema and was generally beloved in the PRC.

There was a natural attraction of Herman Hoeksema and the PRC to Klaas Schilder, especially after the first visit. Schilder was deposed by the GKN during World War II, in a manner that seemed strikingly similar to the treatment that Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff had received from the CRC in 1924. The deposition of Klaas Schilder and others would lead to the formation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Liberated (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Vrijgemaakt). Add to that the fact that Dr. Schilder condemned the action of the CRC synod of 1924 in adopting common grace and the hierarchical deposition of the officebearers by CRC classes, and one can see why the PRC were drawn to him.

Doctrinally, too, there seemed to be much affinity between the PRC and the newly formed Liberated Churches. Dr. Schilder and the Liberated rejected certain teachings of Dr. Abraham Kuyper — particularly presupposed regeneration, but also at least some aspects of common grace.

However, there was a significant difference between the PRC and the GKNV on the doctrine of the covenant. As discussions would gradually reveal, the Liberated taught a conditional covenant that was virtually identical to the covenant theology of Prof. William Heyns of Calvin Theological School.

This difference in covenant theology is related to the Declaration of Principles in the history that unfolded. In the years after the Second World War, thousands of Dutch immigrated to the American continent, particularly to Canada. Among these immigrants were a significant number of Liberated. Dr. Schilder advised that the im-

migrants not start their own church, but rather seek affiliation with the PRC, if this were possible. So it was that the PRC stood on the threshold of a potential growth spurt of thousands of members.

However, there was a problem. Although both the PRC and the Liberated Churches were established on the same three Reformed confessions, they had been shaped by their respective histories. They expressed some doctrines differently and had different emphases. As a result, both Liberated immigrants and PRC missionaries struggled with the question of precisely what teachings in the PRC the immigrants must accept in order to affiliate with them. The focus of this question was the doctrine of the covenant. Specific requests were received from former members of the Liberated Churches asking what is "bindend" (binding) in the PRC.

Thus it was that the Mission Committee of the PRC came to the synod of 1950 asking synod "to draw up a form that may be used by these families requesting organization into a Prot. Ref. congregation" (Art. 63). This "form" would enable those seeking affiliation with the PRC to indicate that they agreed with what the PRC considered binding.

As a result of this request, the synod of 1950 adopted, provisionally, "The Brief Declaration of Principles,"\* and the following synod confirmed it.



It is the burden of this and subsequent editorials that the Declaration of Principles is worthy of "another look" in the *Standard Bearer*. I say "another look" because the Declaration of Principles was the focus of intense study and debate in the

---

\* The treatment of this history is necessarily brief. More detail is available in three RFPa publications: *A Watered Garden*, by G. Hoeksema; *For Thy Truths' Sake*, by H. Hanko; and *Ready to Give an Answer*, by H. Hoeksema and H. Hanko.

SB in the 1950s. Herman Hoeksema gave a thorough study/exposition of the Declaration after the synod of 1950, in a series of five articles (Mar. 15—Apr. 15, 1951). He returned to a discussion of the Declaration in 1958 in a series of nine articles (Mar. 1—Oct. 15, 1958). In addition, various questions and objections were raised in letters, many of which he answered in the SB. The present editorials will not be as detailed a study of the Declaration as was done by Herman Hoeksema.

The Declaration of Principles warrants renewed attention some 55 years after it was adopted. The Declaration needs some explaining for the sake of those outside the PRC. Some do not know the document exists. For others, it is often misunderstood and maligned. It is alleged, for example, that the Declaration of Principles is a fourth creed in the PRC. It is confidently (and erroneously) affirmed that all officebearers in the PRC must subscribe to the Declaration. The Declaration is denounced as an obstacle to ecumenical relationships for the PRC with other denominations. It is criticized as extra-confessional binding, or as extra-scriptural binding. These are some of the indictments against the Declaration of Principles by Reformed folk, many of whom are closest to the PRC. They do not like the Declaration of Principles.

But do they really understand it? With the goal that those around the PRC may better understand the purpose and content of the Declaration of Principles, it is worthy of another look.

Secondly, the Declaration of Principles ought to be known by members of the PRC. Ironically, in spite of the common perception that the PRC maintain the Declaration as a virtual creed, the members of the denomination, by and large, are not very familiar with it. But we ought to know it — it is a significant document. Herman Hoeksema thought so. He described the Synod of 1951 (which adopted the Declaration of Principles) as “one of the most important synods—if not the most important—that to date was ever held,” because the Protestant Reformed Churches had “finally officially declared what according to their conviction is the truth as expressed in our confessions, especially concerning certain fundamental principles, all concentrating around the promise of God and the preaching of the gospel, and therefore around one aspect of ‘common grace’” (*Standard Bearer*, Nov. 1, 1951).

Members of the PRC ought also to consider the place that the Declaration of Principles has in the PRC today. According to the preamble, it is *to be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospec-*

*tive churches.* The question arises, What is the status of the Declaration of Principles? Is it still to be used in the mission endeavors in the twenty-first century? Does it have broader uses in the denomination? It warrants another look.

Thirdly, the Declaration of Principles is worth examining from a theological point of view, because it touches on the doctrine of the covenant. It is not by any means a complete treatment of this doctrine. It does not contain so much as a definition of the covenant. What it does contain, however, is significant, namely, the confessional basis of the covenant. That is to say, it sets forth those statements in the confessions that fix the boundaries for a Reformed covenant theology. That is extremely significant, and ought to make the Declaration of interest to all Reformed believers, even those who disagree with the covenant theology maintained by the PRC.

But the Declaration is of the utmost significance in the year of our Lord 2006 exactly because the heresy of justification by faith and works has reared its ugly head in Presbyterian and Reformed denominations — *based on a conditional covenant.* As the brief history above indicates, the Declaration of Principles deals with, indeed arose over, the issue of conditions in the covenant.

The Declaration warrants another look. 

## All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

### ■ No Services on Christmas Sunday??

It seems churches today are willing to bend over backwards in an attempt to accommodate their members. The mega-churches typically have multiple services with various worship styles. But who

would have dreamed that several of the largest congregations in the United States would actually cancel their services on Christmas Sunday in an effort to be “lifestyle friendly” and not be a hindrance to family Christmas activities?

Elaine Spencer reports in *The Christian Post* on December 7, 2005:

This year, Christmas may be cold or at least quieter for the thousands who attend several

evangelical megachurches across the country. Some of America’s largest churches are closing their doors on Christmas day, which this year falls on Sunday, to accommodate to the lifestyles of their congregants.

Among those slated to close its doors on Christmas day is Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago’s largest congregation and one of the top five largest in the nation.

“It’s more than being family

*Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.*

friendly. It's being lifestyle-friendly for people who are just very, very busy," said Cally Parkinson, spokesperson for Willow Creek, to the Associated Press. Some lifestyle-friendly adjustments include bunching up the services on Christmas Eve instead.

According to the Associated Press, megachurch officials around the country consulted with each other before deciding to take the day off. On this list include Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, MI, North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, GA, and the Fellowship Church near Dallas, TX.

Supporters of the move say it frees up time for the church staff and church members to focus on commemorating Christmas at home.

"At first glance it does sound contrarian," said the Rev. Gene Appel, senior pastor of Willow Creek, to the Chicago Tribune. "We don't see it as not having church on Christmas. We see it as decentralizing the church on Christmas at home, hundreds of thousands of experiences going on around Christmas trees. The best way to honor the birth of Jesus is for families to have a more personal experience on that day."

However, some scholars criticized the move, saying it's the day of the week, Sunday, that is sacred to the evangelical faithful.

"This speaks to the dilapidated state of evangelical faith today," said David Wells, a professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, to the Tribune. "That we would think that going to church is getting in the way of celebrating Christmas, that the family celebration shouldn't be impeded by having to go to church, it seems to me that our priorities are upside down."

For the most part, the megachurches have survived the decision relatively unscathed. At Southland, for example, only a handful of complaints were called in, and only two inquired about the closures at Willow Creek.

According to James Bratt, a historian at Calvin College, this general acceptance reflects a shift

in how relevant Evangelicals are becoming to the secular culture.

"It's a sign of how totally identified with the culture (evangelicals have) become," Bratt said. "The church has subordinated to cultural icons, and family is one of them.... The logic of that is you should celebrate the holiday in its true sanctuary, which is the home."

For those who wish to celebrate the holiday with the church family, doors to other evangelical churches across the nation will generally remain open.

Yes, there has been some flak since this became generally known through the Associated Press. Allie Martin and Jennie Parker report on Agape Press on December 4, 2005:

Some Christian leaders feel some U.S. churches are bowing to secular culture by not having worship services on Christmas Day this year. Recently, a number of mega-churches across the nation announced that they are canceling their services on Sunday, December 25, saying they expect low turnout or want to allow members to spend time with their families on the holiday....

However, some Christian leaders have criticized these churches' decisions, declaring it is unthinkable to close the doors of God's house on the Lord's Day, and perhaps particularly so when that day is also the Lord's birthday. While some pastors argue that the decision to close is a matter of putting family relationships first, Fuller Theological Seminary's Professor Robert Johnson has voiced strong objections to the idea of redefining Christmas as a family celebration rather than a commemoration of the Savior's birth. And Rev. D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries told the Miami Herald that Christians need to "think carefully" before abandoning worship services that day, "especially when many churches are rightly blaming retailers and business for ignoring Christmas."

California pastor and Bible teacher Dr. John MacArthur agrees. In fact, he believes a con-

sumer mentality may be to blame for what he sees as a disrespectful or even sacrilegious move on the part of these churches that are opting to cancel services on Christmas.

"I think it's ridiculous," MacArthur says. He proceeds to demonstrate the irony, commenting, "You certainly wouldn't want to have a church service interrupt a celebration of Christ's birth, I guess. What kind of thinking is that?"

Many churches intending to close on Christmas Day have planned multiple services in the days leading up to the holiday this year. Still, MacArthur insists, "I can't think of anything more perfect than to have Christmas on a Sunday. That's like, the best plan possible — to come and celebrate the birth of Christ by worshipping Him. To me, that's so obvious...."

Those churches that are choosing to forego gathering for worship on Christmas Sunday are exercising flawed judgment, MacArthur contends. "To me it is indication of the superficiality, the shallowness, and the disinterest in really worshipping Christ — disinterest in truly exalting Him," he says.

Despite widespread criticism, Pastor Jon Weese of Southland Christian Church in Kentucky has defended his church's decision to cancel its December 25 services. In an AP report, he was quoted as saying that the Lord Jesus Himself was also criticized by people who "emphasized religion over relationship."

What I find especially striking is that most of the criticism regarding this cancellation of Christmas Sunday services by some of the prominent mega-churches concerns Christmas and its celebration. There may be discussion and debate concerning the necessity of observing, by public worship services, special days such as Christmas. In the Reformed tradition, this matter is settled by the Church Order of Dordrecht, which is essentially the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Article 67 of our church order



states that “the churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas...”

But what is outrageous in the closing of these church doors is that they are being closed on *Sunday!* This bespeaks an increasingly common attitude toward the Lord’s Day and corporate worship — the attitude that relationships and family activities should take precedence over public worship. Sunday becomes “family day.” Yet very little of the criticism regarding this cancellation of worship services concerns the fact that this is Sunday, the Lord’s Day! That Lord’s Day worship services should be cancelled for family Christmas festivities is an abomination! Worship services are at the very heart of the keeping of the fourth commandment. The Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord’s Day 38, explains our calling well: “that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God....”

### ■ Another Attempt to Ban Spanking

This is not the first time Canada’s spanking laws have been called into question. In 2004, after numerous court challenges, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the spanking law does not violate the rights of children. The Canadian Criminal Code currently states that any schoolteacher, parent, or person standing in place of the parent is justified in using rea-

sonable force by way of correction of a pupil or child. But an anti-spanking law is central to the plans of the social engineers who are creating the New Canada.

Consequently the Canadian Senate found itself debating the issue once again this past summer. Introduced as Senate Bill S-21, the bill seeks to criminalize spanking as a form of discipline. Ted Byfield, columnist in *Western Standard* magazine, comments in the July 11, 2005 issue:

It is part of the lunatic attack on parental rights by people who, in the main, have no children themselves — being so frightfully busy with their nation-building careers — and who are bent on telling those who do have them how they want those children raised....


Meanwhile, would some of these far-seeing nation builders please explain something? Would they try to produce a convincing answer to a simple question that I have never once seen any of them address: why is it that the more we preach and legislate non-violence, the more violent our society becomes?

That is, 50 years ago, when nearly all children were spanked by their parents for misbehaviour and routinely strapped in class for breaking known rules, we had no instances of juvenile mass mayhem; we did not have kids performing drive-by shootings; we did not have police assigned to high schools; we had very few teachers terrorized by their students.

But now, after at least 25 years of the “new education,” wherein all physical discipline is denounced and withdrawn, many schools have become, as the saying goes, “unfit for human habitation,” centers for drug trafficking, where some kids feel it necessary to go armed.

Could it be that the people who made these supposedly enlightened changes were handicapped by a fundamentally flawed perception of human nature? They seemingly believed that human beings are instinctively “nice” — so nice that if they removed the strap from the classroom, and the swat stick from the parent, and filled the police department with sympathetic “youth specialists,” transforming cops into social workers, then every errant childhood tendency would simply disappear. Every youth would automatically become gentle, loving, tolerant, and utterly “non-violent.”

Well, it didn’t happen. They have produced instead, to a distressing degree, the precise opposite. They do not understand what people are really like.

How true! Who today will reckon with the sad reality that children, also our children, have inherited a “vicious nature.” They are conceived and born in sin. Even as regenerated children, they have an old man of sin, just as we do. That means that a “time-out” doesn’t always cut it. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15). 

Address at Annual RFPA Meeting

Rev. Gise VanBaren

## All Around Us\*

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

\* This was the address given at the annual RFPA meeting held on September 22, 2005.

200/Standard Bearer/February 1, 2006

Several months ago Mr. Fred Hanko called and asked me to speak at this meeting on the subject: “All Around Us.” I hesitated. But Mr. Hanko is a persuasive man.

Finally I agreed. Yet I could hardly imagine crowds of eager and anxious people coming to hear a moving speech about “All Around Us.”

By way of introduction, I give



you a bit of information about the rubric and its origin.

The rubric first appeared in the *Standard Bearer* of October 1, 1945 with the name "Periscope." The first writer was Rev. Walter Hofman. After a number of years, a new editor, Rev. James Howerzyl, wrote articles through September 1952. He ceased writing at that point without explanation. I suspect it had something to do with the church controversy during that period of time.

The next article written for "Periscope" was by the editor of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Herman Hoeksema. In the issue of November 15, 1952 he wrote the first article, and continued writing for seven issues.

At that point, the rubric was renamed "All Around Us." The editor explained that "Periscope" is to "look over or to look around"; therefore "All Around Us" would be a suitable "translation."

The first editor in the renamed rubric was Rev. Marinus Schipper, who wrote for seven and a half years. After that, Prof. Hanko took over the rubric and wrote for 15 years. Rev. H. Veldman wrote for one year. From 1976 until the current time the speaker has been writing. There was a period of one or two years during that span of time that Prof. Decker took over the rubric. The last few years Rev. Kenneth Koole, Rev. Rodney Kleyn, and Rev. Michael DeVries were appointed to write some of these articles as well.

The material for these articles comes from various sources. Many newsworthy articles come from *World* magazine. Other articles are taken from the daily newspapers. Articles are frequently sent in by readers for comment. The Internet is another source of interesting material.

I call attention to: "All Around Us." There are three things I would consider with you: 1) a view of the world in which we live; 2) a view of the churches; and, finally, 3) an examination of ourselves.

### **"All Around Us" and the world in which we live**

There have been many articles in "All Around Us" that treat world events. Out of curiosity I read some of the early ones. I found one of interest by Rev. Herman Hoeksema. He was the first one to make comments in the *Standard Bearer* about that debatable subject of smoking. In December 15, 1952 he wrote an article in "Periscope":

Recently several papers and journals published articles that deal with the effect of smoking on the larynx and the lungs. Investigation seems to show that excessive smoking produces cancer of the lungs. This appears to be the case especially with cigarette smokers, probably because the latter usually have the bad habit of inhaling. The following quotation I clipped from "Signs of the Times."

There follows a fairly lengthy quotation. And he concludes this way:

The figures, I must admit, are rather impressive. How valid the conclusion is that is to be drawn from them I cannot judge. The question is, of course, whether other factors, such as, for example, excessive drinking, must not also be taken into consideration. At any rate, personally, I rather stick to my pipe, which I have smoked for 60 years.

Many articles were written about world events. Some dealt with the question of evolution or theistic evolution. Articles were written showing the development of the one-world power that will culminate in the final Battle of Armageddon.

In reading these news events, one soon finds powerful reminders of the fulfillment of the signs of the times of which tonight's chairman read in Matthew 24.

One phrase repeatedly used when possible disasters are dis-

cussed in the media is: "It is not if, but when." It is the attempt of many today to prepare us for inevitable disasters. They are "natural" occurrences that have scientific explanations. These have nothing to do with God's rule.

On the contrary, we see these same things as a fulfillment of Revelation 8. Surely the prophecies of Scripture are clearly being fulfilled.

"It is not if, but when." That phrase was used a year ago when several devastating hurricanes swept Florida, entered into the Gulf, and came very near New Orleans. There were those who said then that inevitably New Orleans would be hit. And if a hurricane hit that city, which is mostly below sea-level, there would be a terrible disaster. The city would be devastated. This year the "when" has taken place. Not only that, but another hurricane is striking somewhere in that area that might be as devastating as Katrina — a hurricane called Rita.

The phrase has been used in connection with terrorist attacks. We have had the devastating one in New York — the 9/11 attack. Several years before, there were those who said, "There will be terrorist attacks, perhaps in some of our largest cities. It is not a question of if, but when."

There is the matter of earthquakes, especially on the west coast. Earthquakes could destroy San Francisco again, as one did in the year 1908. It is not a question of "if, but when."

We have read about the tsunami in Asia and the possibility of future tsunamis. We are reminded of the possibility of very destructive volcanoes. We hear of Avian (or bird) flu. The statement is repeatedly made: "It is not if, but when."

Sounds like the trumpets of the book of Revelation, does it not? The media provides natural explanations. The Bible reminds us that God's prophecies of the end-time are being fulfilled.

The second thing taking place “all around us” is the development in science and medicine. It has become the means of joining the whole world together. Thomas Friedman is an editorialist in the *New York Times*. He has recently written a book entitled, *The World Is Flat*. In it he points out the economic development of the world from Columbus to the present day.

From Columbus to about 1800, he says, was the age of nations.

From 1800 to about 2000 he labels the age of large companies. Wal-Mart is one striking instance.

From 2000 until today (only 5 years!) Friedman calls the “age of the individual.” By that he means that through modern technology one can carry out important work of companies of the United States (or other modern nations) in India or China or Russia or any number of other places. This is true because of the invention of the Internet, the computer, rapid transmission, and search engines. Within a period of the past five years, it is as though (Friedman’s terminology) these inventions were given steroids. The computers now have hard drives of 200 and 300 gigabytes.

Today information is being transmitted by fiber-optic cables. A cable of 48-strands of fiber optics can transmit all the written materials of the whole world in a matter of a few minutes. There are now search engines like Google that can find any subject in a matter of seconds. Even translation programs are available. One cannot help but think of the wound of the beast that was healed according to Rev. 13.

Individuals in India (or Russia or China) can work as engineers, accountants, auditors, radiologists for companies in the U.S. for one-fifth the cost of such specialists who work in the United States. The world indeed is becoming one.

These recent inventions affect us directly in that the world can come easily into our homes via

television, internet, radio, and other inventions. The world can use this to deceive and entice into all kinds of sin.

#### **“All Around Us” with respect to the church world**

“All Around Us” is concerned especially with developments in the church world. It is interested obviously first with the Christian Reformed Church, our “mother church.” There is reason for concern. That concern was expressed already in 1924. Herman Hoeksema protested the adoption of the doctrine of common grace by the Christian Reformed Church. For this he was condemned and deposed. He warned then that this doctrine of “common grace” would only lead to greater worldliness in the church. “All Around Us” has pointed out how this has proven to be true.

Their adoption of a different view of Genesis 1 and creation, their adoption of a changed position on women in church office, the debate about homosexuality, the matter of divorce and remarriage—all these concern us. We see the underlying errors to be their adoption of the doctrine of common grace and a changing view on the infallibility of Scripture.

“All Around Us” considers these developments as warning to us of the consequences of forsaking the “old paths.”

#### **“All Around Us” and self-examination**

Finally, we must consider ourselves as we look “All Around Us.”

In the first place, we are concerned about our “mother church.” We cannot rejoice in the errors that we see there. We do testify to the error and urge proper repentance.

Secondly, “All Around Us” seeks to show the development in error. One error leads almost inevitably to others. We, too, must understand the consequences of the adoption of error.

Thirdly, the purpose of point-

ing out errors in other churches is as a warning to ourselves. We must beware lest we adopt some of the same errors.

There are reasons for concern. The Yearbook in our Acts of Synod lists the total number of families and shows a gain in 2004 of 8 families. The preceding year listed an increase of 46 families. 1999 listed 48 families gained. Last year there were just 8 families gained. Why? There might be a good explanation. Perhaps it is an anomaly. Possibly families were not faithfully and accurately counted by some of the councils. It could be that there were families in the process of transfer — they were not counted by their former congregation and were not added to their new congregation. But it is also likely that the effects of those things happening in the world and in the churches explain some of the problem. Why was there such a small increase of families? Consider how many marriages of Protestant Reformed young people took place in one year. There must have been forty or more marriages. From the point of view only of internal growth, there should have been at least forty families added to the churches. Besides, there are all of the other areas of mission labors in the churches. And there is a gain of only 8 families?

What is the problem? Are we not diligently teaching the Word of God? We might well consider that. Do we properly impress upon our people, especially upon our young people, the importance of the truths of God’s Word as it is maintained in our denomination? Are we faithfully pointing out the consequences of forsaking the doctrines to which we hold?

There is one other important matter. One sees what might be called the “termite-effect.” We rejoice in the fact that our doctrinal stance has remained the same since 1924. But there is a certain “termite effect.” You know how termites work. Termites eat the wood

and leave the paint that covered the wood. One first becomes aware of the damage when he pokes his finger through the paint. The shell is there—but the substance behind it is eaten away.

Has there been “termite damage” within our denomination as well? We oppose the false view of common grace. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, from the beginning, warned of the consequences of the teaching of common grace — that it would introduce worldliness into the church. That has happened. The CRC changed its position on the movies and the dance on the basis of its decision on common grace. The movie and the dance as produced by unbelievers are even called the fruit of the common grace of God.


We still deny that error of com-

mon grace. But there has been “termite damage.” Increasingly there is the acceptance of drama on television and even in the theater within our churches. The dance is considered by some to be appealing and attractive as well. It is “termite damage.” We deny common grace — the façade remains. Yet, even while common grace is denied, worldliness also creeps into our midst.

We emphasize the antithesis — the difference between light and darkness. Yet this antithesis is not always evident in our lives. Paul says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” However, too often we imitate not Paul or Christ, but the unbelieving sports heroes and the movie actors and actresses, in their dress styles or the types of jewelry that they wear. It is “termite dam-

age,” even while we still rightly maintain the antithesis.

We confess the beautiful covenant of grace that God establishes with us and our spiritual seed. But often we fail to live according to the truth of that covenant. There is real danger of “termite damage” in the churches.

So, when we write in “All Around Us,” we are not simply writing about the world “out there.” We are not just criticizing other churches. But we examine things that can be and are affecting us and our calling. We are encouraged to follow the old paths and teach them to our children faithfully and diligently. For if we do not, we too will soon fall into the same errors into which others have fallen. May God grant to us faithfulness in confession and walk. 

Annual Report

Mr. Fred Hanko

## Secretary's Report 2005

**T**he RFPA has had its booth set up at several recent conventions of distributors of Christian books. There are hundreds of distributors who set up their displays of books, pamphlets, and CDs, as well as pictures, gadgets, and trinkets, all designed to promote the work of churches. A man who had observed many of these displays came finally to the little RFPA booth. After examining some of the RFPA materials, he said to those who staffed the booth, “Your material is unique. There is no other like it in all these displays.” Although the truth that we proclaim is as old as the Scriptures and was carefully defined hundreds of years ago in the Reformation, it is becoming increasingly

*Mr. Hanko was secretary of the RFPA at the time this report was presented to the Association last September.*

difficult to find in the publishing world today. The RFPA has the privilege and the responsibility to spread the truth as far as possible, to every part of the earth.

We have made much effort in the past year to carry out that responsibility as well as we are able. As you will see in this report, there is much evidence that God is blessing our efforts, and we are thankful to Him for what has been accomplished.

### The Board and the Staff

The Board makes a continuing effort to make the RFPA work as smoothly and efficiently as possible. For that purpose the standing committees have been given new names that reflect more accurately their specific responsibilities. The duties of each committee have been carefully defined. Each of these committees reports

to the Board at its monthly meeting.

The work of carrying out the decisions of the Board and its committees is done by our excellent office staff.

Tim Pipe has helped us a great deal by managing the promotion of our materials as well as many other activities that keep things running smoothly.

Tim has been able to relieve Evelyn Langerak of some of her former duties, and she is now able to concentrate on sales and inventory as well as doing some of the editing of new books.

Natalie Jefferson continues her work of editing and of writing the semiannual *Update* and preparing it for publication.

Work on editing manuscripts is also done by Mindy Bergman.

Paula Kamps has proved valuable in general office work as well



as the placing of *Standard Bearer* archives on the Internet.

We appreciate the dedicated work of these people as well as the work of the other editors, typesetters, proofreaders, and graphic designers, all of whom are essential to the work.

All of these, however, are dependent upon the most important people of all: the writers. We are especially thankful to God, who has provided us with men who love the truth and are blessed with the talents to write for our publications.

### **The Standard Bearer**

Perhaps our most important publication over the years has been the *Standard Bearer*. The contents of the magazine are determined by the Editorial Committee and produced by the Editorial Staff. Don and Judi Doezema capably perform all the work connected with the gathering, typesetting, and layout of the material for each issue. They take care of countless other details connected with the magazine.

The purchase of new software for addressing and mailing the *Standard Bearer* has made that considerable work much easier and more efficient as well as saving us a good deal of money. There are still several faithful volunteers who come in every two weeks to help prepare the magazines for mailing. Our thanks to Don and Judi and to these willing volunteers.

We promote the *Standard Bearer* through advertising in *World* magazine, on our website, and at the conventions that our representatives attend. The number of paid subscriptions is about 2,500 at this time, but we send out at least 100 more free to various libraries and as a part of our promotions. We are concerned about the fact that there are slightly fewer paid subscribers than there were last year. We are trying several ways of increasing that number. About one-third of Protestant Reformed households do not subscribe to the

*Standard Bearer*. Perhaps you can help by encouraging others to become subscribers.

In the past year all those who had previously purchased the *Standard Bearer* on CD were sent new, updated (through volume 80) CDs without charge. The new CDs are easier to use and work better than the old ones. For those who did not previously own the CDs, they are available at a modest charge from our office. We expect that the demand for these CDs will diminish with the availability of the *Standard Bearer* on the Internet.

**E-mail in large type:** Dear friends of Christ, I received the 3 CDs of the *Standard Bearer*, vols. 1-80. What a fantastic treasure of Reformed exposition! Thank you so very much! I am typing in large type because I have macular degeneration and I can scarcely see the keyboard. I do have a reading machine which I use most of the day. It is a God-send. I am most thankful to our Lord for the manifold ministry of the Protestant Reformed Churches. You have set a wonderful Biblical model for Reformed Churches! God bless the *Standard Bearer*.

**E-mail feedback for online SB:** What a delight to find the *Standard Bearer* archives on the net, with the updated CDs and the ability to search the SB files, my hard copy files for the past 12 years can be eliminated.

### **Inventory of publications**

We have about 50 different titles available at this time, besides workbooks for the Bible study series. The number of publications offered continues to grow by at least three books each year besides minor publications. Our Publications Committee continually searches for additional material to be published, as well as for material that may fill a special need.

An example of a publication that will fill a special niche in our inventory is *Behold the Beauty*, art curriculum written and illustrated by

Connie Meyer, a series of seven levels of art lessons for elementary age children. Another special publication is *Praise His Majesty*, simplified *Psalter* arrangements for beginning pianists by Marilyn DeVries.

One of the most important books published in the past year was *Reformed Dogmatics*, the revision and reprint in two volumes of the original book by Rev. Herman Hoeksema. There was a huge amount of work and considerable expense invested in this work. For that reason the Board was especially gratified by the enthusiastic reception of the book. More than 900 of each volume have already been sold, even though it was not a required purchase for Book Club members.

The books for next year are in various stages of the publication process. A revised reprint of *Calvin's Calvinism*, which will include two valuable historical introductions by Professor R. Dykstra, will be completed in 2006. The *Unfolding Covenant History* series will be extended with the publication of volume 6, *David and Solomon*. *Knowing God and Man*, a book compiled of the first two series of radio sermons by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, will be distributed during the coming year. The *Rightly Dividing Series* will be continued with books compiled from the *Standard Bearer* Reformation articles of the last decade. This is just a sample of the good things planned for the coming year.

**E-mail with regard to Reformed Dogmatics:** I can read and understand just fine, but not German and Latin. Herman Hoeksema and his unashamed love for the solid truth have become even more valuable thru this transliterated edition. I could go on and on about how much I love Hoeksema, and not only him but all your writers! Not only are the contents of the work you produce supreme, but the books themselves are very appealing outside and in. May the Sovereign God grant this work to the student,



teacher, and layman, and when they read it they will turn and bless the one who blessed them with Herman Hoeksema.

### Translations

Further testifying to the unique character of our publications is the fact that we continue to receive requests for permission to translate them into other languages. The RFPA generally gives permission to translate to those who request it, provided that we are sent a copy of the translation so that we may be assured of its accuracy and completeness.

*The Voice of Our Fathers*, by Prof. Homer Hoeksema, and *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, by Prof. Engelsma, are currently being translated into Russian. Prof. Engelsma's book *Better to Marry* has been translated into Dutch and is arousing considerable interest in the Netherlands. We have also granted a request to translate *Reformed Dogmatics* into German. We are thankful for these opportunities to spread the truth of the word of God throughout the earth.

**E-mail request to translate:** I'm a member of a small Reformed congregation in Giessen, Germany. Its name is Bekennende Evangelisch Reformierte Gemeinde (Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church). In our church various members have a lively interest in the publications of the RFPA. The church situation in our country is very dreadful, and in all spheres of theology and church life we experience a growing lack of knowledge in the Biblical truth. However, besides the few churches which still faithfully proclaim the gospel, some organizations and individuals try to serve the kingdom's sake by writing pamphlets and books and by translating existing works of good reputation. For example Herman Bavinck's *Dogmatiek* is currently being translated from Dutch into German. This project is mainly sponsored by friends in the Netherlands.

Now a sister from our church,

who is a professional translator from English and French, has offered to translate the *Reformed Dogmatics* by Herman Hoeksema into German. She has already made a proof translation of some pages.... We are very hopeful that such a work, even though it would take a lot of time, would be fruitful and of good use in the kingdom of God in Germany and Central Europe.

### The Book Club

The Book Club is without doubt our most important means of marketing our books. They are the base by which we can estimate how many of a particular book we can expect to sell. The books sold to Book Club members provide the monies to pay for further publications. This makes the entire financial structure of the organization more stable and makes planning for future publications more reliable.

We have tried hard during the past year to increase the number of Book Club members. We have encouraged our agents to find new members in their own churches and we have made special offers to first-time members. The results of these efforts have been encouraging: We now have about 1,100 Book Club members.

### CBA convention

Tim Pipe, Evelyn Langerak, and their spouses traveled to Denver this past summer and set up and attended the RFPA booth at the Christian Booksellers Association convention. This is the second year that we have been represented at the CBA convention. By our attendance at this convention we hope not only to sell books directly to distributors but also to establish relations with distributors that will encourage them to carry our books on their stock and to make the name of the RFPA familiar as a source of sound Reformed literature.

Through contacts made at the last convention the RFPA has sold more than 500 books, and several important contacts were made with

distributors in foreign countries as well as our own country. The recent catalog of the Christian Book Distributors featured the *Reformed Dogmatics* of Rev. Hoeksema in the "Pastor's Resources" section.

### RFPA on the Internet

The Internet is becoming more and more important in the lives of people, both as a source of information and as a place to buy the things they want or need. The RFPA is trying to supply both of these interests.

Our website promotes the sale of subscriptions to the *SB* by offering special rates.

Foreign subscribers complained that it takes a very long time to get their copies by mail. In response the RFPA offers the current issue of the *SB* online to them at no cost. This is an experimental program to make this benefit available to foreign subscribers and to test whether they will continue getting their copies by mail when they are also available on the Internet.

By putting the previous editions of *Standard Bearer* online, we are making all of its tremendous resources available to anyone who has an Internet connection. Our goal is to make available to anyone all of the *Standard Bearers* that were published from the beginning until now. Paula Kamps has the responsibility of putting the past *SBs* on the web. She has been working from the present backward. So far she has placed all the *SBs* published after 1987. All of these magazines are fully searchable on the website. This is an enormous opportunity to spread the truth to every part of the earth.

For several years the RFPA has been selling books through our [rfpa.org](http://rfpa.org) website. Every year our sales through this site have been increasing. We also sell some of our books through the [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) website. Altogether, sales on the Internet will soon exceed those sold in all other ways.

### RFPA Building

For several years we have reported a need to move to different quarters. The seminary has been most kind to allow us to use the downstairs of their building, but now they are planning other uses for the area and there is no more room. Like the camel that puts his nose under the tent and continues to encroach until he occupies the entire tent, so the RFPA began their use of the seminary downstairs, using only a fraction of the available space. However, every time we add another publication to our inventory we need more space. Now we take up most of the downstairs area, and we see no end to our

need for more space. As we add more people to the staff, we also need more space for them to do their work.


Now at last, after years of study of our needs and an extensive search for available buildings or property, we can at last see an RFPA building being built. The building that is now being built in the Jenison Village Square is planned to serve our needs for thirty or more years. If future expansion becomes necessary, we have room on the lot to more than double the size of the building.

We are extremely grateful for the support of the association in

approving the building location and plan, and in doing volunteer work to reduce the cost as much as possible.

We're thankful for the many generous contributions that have been made already for the building cost. We hope that contributions keep on coming, so that any mortgage we may need for the completion will be as low as possible.

### Conclusion

We are thankful to God for the unique place he has given us in the cause of His kingdom: that of the publication of the truth throughout the world. May He continue to bless our efforts. 

*Search the Scriptures*

*Rev. Ronald Hanko*

## *The Prophecy of Malachi* *Covenant Faithfulness and* *Unfaithfulness (4)*

### **The First Disputation:** **Chapter 1:2-5** **(continued)**

*5. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.*

**W**hy does the prophet speak in this first disputation of the wrath of God and its eternal source (chap. 1:2-4)? The answer lies here in verse 5. God's eternal hatred in reprobation and its results are not an end in themselves. Reprobation is always subordinate and serves another purpose. Here that pur-

pose is described in terms of Israel's seeing God's judgments on Edom, understanding that those judgments are a result of His eternal wrath, learning that His love is also eternal and unchangeable, and thus praising Him.

That is the only possible reaction to these judgments and their eternal source, other than disbelief and scorn. Seeing God's fury poured out on the heathen, realizing that the outpouring of His wrath is not a hasty reaction against the wickedness of the heathen but the working out of an eternal and unchangeable decree, we tremble before God, and cease to speak carelessly and foolishly of Him.

Especially we do not speak as Israel did in the days of Malachi, as though His love is a temporary and changeable thing like ours.

Seeing these judgments we do not say, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" but trust that like His wrath and hatred, His love also is unchangeable and abiding, even when circumstances seem to indicate otherwise.

The Lord, however, begins to speak of the fact that it would no longer be in Israel, but among the heathen nations, the Gentiles, that He would be feared and honored. "From the border of Israel" does not mean "within the borders of Israel," but "from the border of Israel outward." In Israel, with only a few exceptions, His name would continue to be dishonored and His love for His people questioned. This becomes clear especially in Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every

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

*Previous article in this series: December 1, 2005, p. 111*

place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts." It is the result of that Word of God that we Gentiles now know of His eternal love for us.

### **The Second Disputation:**

#### **Chapter 1:6-2:9**

1:6. *A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?*

1:7. *Ye offer polluted bread upon my altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.*

1:8. *And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.*

1:9. *And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means; will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.*

In this longest section of the book of Malachi God addresses the priests, not only because they were the spiritual leaders of the people and were responsible for much of the apostasy of the nation, but also because they ought to have been the ones who rebuked the people for their apostasy and tried to turn them from it.

The sins of the priests were three. They had polluted His offerings, they had despised their own position in the church and kingdom of God, and they had been partial in judging the people. These sins are described in chapter 1:6-10, 12-14 and in chapter 2:5-8.

Each mention of priestly sin is followed by a statement of the judgment of God upon the priests for their wickedness. For the sin of despising and misusing their office, God would take away their

priestly office and give it to the Gentiles (1:11). For the sin of polluting His offerings, the offerings from which they themselves lived and received their sustenance, God would curse the produce of flock and field, and thus take away from them everything they had (2:2-4). For the sin of partiality in judgment, the sin of despising His law, of which they were the caretakers, God would make them contemptible and despised in the sight of the people (2:9).

We must understand that those who are the spiritual leaders of God's people always bear a greater responsibility for apostasy and wickedness in the church than do the members. They have this greater responsibility because of their position and calling. They are responsible not only when they actually encourage apostasy in the church by their own conduct and example, as these priests did, but also when they fail to rebuke the wickedness of the people.

That is not to say, however, that the people themselves are without fault. Not only do they often follow the example of godless leaders blindly and ignorantly, but they are sometimes themselves a cause of the wickedness of their leaders in that they refuse good counsel, insist that their leaders tell them only what they want to hear (Is. 30:10), and stubbornly go their own way.

What usually happens is this: the people themselves become worldly and carnal, as they were in the days of Nehemiah and Haggai, and when they refuse to hear rebuke and to turn from their wicked ways, their leaders, instead of continuing to rebuke them and to resist them in their wickedness, begin to cater to it. Eventually, the leaders become leaders in wickedness and lead the people deeper and deeper into it. That seems to be what happened in Israel. It certainly is what happens in the church today.

Before pointing out the actual

sins of the priests, God says that by their wickedness they had failed to honor Him. The honor and fear they expected and received from their own children and servants, they refused to give to Him. To emphasize the point He speaks of Himself as their father and master, which indeed He was, and not just a father and a master, but the Father and the Master. Yet they despised His name and never rendered Him His due.

That He is the Father of His people is not a truth mentioned often in the Old Testament. The fact that His Fatherhood was seldom revealed in the Old Testament is explained in Galatians 4:1-7, where Israel, though God's child, is compared to an immature child, who, under tutors and governors, was treated little different than a servant. Nevertheless, the Fatherhood of God was known by the people of God (Ex. 4:22, 23), and the priests, who were the teachers of the law, ought to have known it, and knowing it have honored and obeyed God as a Father. Certainly they knew that He was their Master or Lord, and they should have feared Him at least for that. But they did not. Indeed, they did not even recognize their own sin, but when confronted with their sin insisted that they had not refused to honor Him. That was the import of their question, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" It was not an innocent question, but an expression of their doubt and distrust of God. It meant: "We have not done so — there is nothing that can possibly be mentioned against us as proof of such a lack of honor."

It is here, for the first time, that God uses the name LORD of hosts. He does that in connection with what follows concerning the priestly offerings and office. That name refers to the fact that God is the sovereign owner and ruler of all things and that they are used by Him to fulfill His own purpose and good pleasure — all things are a mighty host, an army, which



marches in His service, willingly or even unwillingly. Here God is saying that as the LORD of hosts the offerings and offices of the priests belonged to Him, not to the priests themselves, and that they were not to be used as the priests saw fit, for their enrichment and profit, but for His honor. In the next verse He even speaks of the altar as His own. The priests by their conduct had acted as though it were not so — as though the offerings did belong to them. They behaved, in other words, in exactly the same way as many ministers, elders, and leaders of the church behave today — that the worship and service of God and the offerings brought to God in worship belong to them to do with as they please.

God charges these priests first with offering polluted bread on His altar. There is some question about whether the word “bread” refers to all the offerings or whether it refers just to the so-called “meat-offerings,” which were primarily offerings of meal, flour, or loaves, or whether it refers to the shewbread, which was renewed each day on the table that stood on the north side of the holy place. Though the word seems to refer to

all the offerings, the point is that the priests in all the offerings despised the service of God.


We must understand that the priests received their own sustenance and support from these offerings. The shewbread, when taken from the table, was given to the priests for food. The meat offerings were also theirs, as was a part of every offering except the whole burnt offering. It is this matter that Malachi is addressing, since the priests were not satisfied with the offerings they received. They saw their work not as a calling in relation to God, but as a poor-paying job. The contempt of which verse 7 speaks, therefore, is the contempt the priests felt for their own work as priests.

This contempt led to a corrupting of the sacrifices. The point of verse 7 is that the priests allowed the people to bring every kind of unacceptable offering to God, including blind, lame, and sick animals, though that was forbidden in the law (Ex. 22:31; Lev. 7:24; 17:15; 22:8; Ezek. 4:14; 44:31). What was imperfect was unclean and could not even be eaten by the people. Yet the priests allowed the people

to bring such offerings, and themselves ate of them, in order to have more than they would otherwise have had.

Such wickedness was not only the fault of the priests, but also of the people, in that they did not give willingly to the Lord and grudged every good thing that was offered to God. Nevertheless, their grudging covetousness and poor giving did not excuse the wickedness of the priests.

This same contempt is often found in those who have the calling to preach the gospel. It usually becomes evident, not in an open contempt for the service of God but, as with these priests, in a dissatisfaction with the wages they receive for their work and in the lack of honor they show towards God.


Dissatisfied, such men give as little honor to God as they possibly can, changing the worship of God into a sideshow and putting themselves at center stage. And like these priests, they seek to enrich themselves, by allowing the people to bring every kind of unacceptable offering, no longer insisting that God must be worshiped as He has commanded. 

*Marking the Bulwarks of Zion*

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

# Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel (1)

## Introduction

 utside of fundamentalist Christianity, the social gospel has come to dominate the thinking of the church.

Characteristic of the social gospel is the idea that the work of the

church can best be described as a concentrated effort to make this world in which we now live a better place, so that the kingdom of God can be realized here on earth. If the church fails to work towards the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor, the oppression of the downtrodden, the eradication of mayhem and murder, of greed and hatred between men, of war and its accompanying destruction, indeed,

of all the social ills that afflict man, the church has become a non-entity, an irrelevance, a useless institution not worthy of notice by those “called to a nobler task.” We must, we are told, love all men. This is our calling. And, without doubt, this means that the place where the action is cannot be found within the walls of the church sanctuary, but out on the streets, in the marketplace, and down there in skid row.

*Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*



Behind the social gospel is a whole set of beliefs, a sort of false theology, a terrible misinterpretation of Scripture. The social gospel speaks of the brotherhood of all men, a universal love of God, a suffering Jesus who gave us an outstanding example of suffering for one's beliefs, and a gradual transformation of this world into the kingdom of heaven.

Liberalism promotes the social gospel. But other theological positions share in the errors of a social gospel doctrine. Postmillennialism and Reconstructionism, while speaking of the universal adoption of the Reformed faith, nevertheless share with social gospelers the dream of the kingdom of Christ here in the world. Those who follow the logic of Dr. Abraham Kuyper's view of common grace and the philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven have bought into the social gospel and likewise find the calling of believers to be defined as working towards the kingdom of Christ here in the world.

The subject that we treat is an important one.

Walter Rauschenbusch is considered by many the father of the social gospel. And, if that name is not apt, he is surely considered to be an outstanding leader in this movement that has come to dominate so much thinking in our day.

### **The Early Life of Rauschenbusch**

Walter did not have much of a home life when he was a child. He was born on October 4, 1861 in Rochester, New York. But his parents were not natives of this country. His father, Augustus, took his family to America from Westphalia, Germany. The Rauschenbusch family had produced five generations of ministers in the Lutheran Church, but had also come under the influences of German Pietism.

Augustus had had a singularly good education. He had studied under Augustus Neander, the noted church historian. Neander had, in turn, studied under

Schleiermacher, had been heavily influenced by his theology, and had passed on Schleiermacher's influence to his students. Augustus Rauschenbusch was also a contemporary of Philip Schaff, another noted church historian with whose views Augustus was acquainted.

When he took his family to America, he did so as a missionary for the Lutheran Church. His zeal and dedication to Lutheranism could not have been very strong, for he was in America only a short time when he became a Baptist. Augustus was only shortly in the pastoral ministry, however, for soon he was summoned to become a professor in Rochester Theological Seminary.

Walter's parents did not get along very well, and Walter's mother took her family back to Germany in 1865, two months after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The father followed them after a few years, but spent very little time at home, more interested in his research on the Anabaptist movement than in caring for his family and giving them the spiritual training they needed. In 1869, Walter's father took the family back to America, where they lived the rest of their life.

Walter was, not unexpectedly, a rebellious son who was frequently in trouble with his teachers. The tension in the home increased his tendency to rebel. Yet, he completed his high school studies in 1879 and graduated the second in his class. After his graduation, his father took him back to Germany, where he studied for four years before returning to Rochester, where he completed his university studies, entered the seminary for ministerial studies, and graduated from the seminary in 1886. He was ordained into the ministry in that same year.

### **Influences on Rauschenbusch's Thinking**

A man's thinking and life are formed by his education and early life. So it was with Walter Rau-

schenbusch. Many different influences were instrumental in making him the father of the social gospel.

Walter's university training was conservative. In this country it was even Calvinistic to some degree. But during his seminary training, his reading and studies led him in different paths. The seminary itself was probably not directly responsible for this shift in thinking, for his rather free-thinking style caused deep concern in the seminary. In his reading he came across the writings of Horace Bushnell, an outstanding liberal thinker of the nineteenth century who had his roots in New England Puritan thought, but who was in a measure responsible for the destruction of orthodoxy throughout the New England States.

It was from Horace Bushnell that Rauschenbusch acquired his view of the atonement. Bushnell, and Rauschenbusch following him, denied the substitutionary nature of the atonement — that is, that Christ died on the cross in the place of those whom the Father had given Him, so that He bore the sins and guilt of His people and satisfied God's justice by paying the price due to them. Such a denial strikes at the heart of the atonement and is, in fact, what Hebrews 6 calls a crucifying afresh of the Son of God and a putting of Him to open shame. Yet it is the necessary starting point for a social gospel.

In 1886 Rauschenbusch became minister of the gospel in the German Baptist Church in New York City. New York was the intellectual capital of the world at that time, and Liberalism was beginning to make its mark, though mostly among the intelligentsia. Rauschenbusch took hold of their thinking and immersed himself in it.

Liberal thinking at this time was suspicious of capitalism, and charged the economic theory on which America was founded with creating all the social, economic, and cultural problems that afflicted the country. Added to this was the

heavy immigration that brought tens of thousands of the world's poor to America's shores, and the industrial revolution during which greedy industrialists became rich at the expense of the poor who worked long hours for little pay and who had to put their little children in factories in order to have enough bread to eat. More and more, Liberalism saw the gospel in terms of helping the poor.

At the time of his ordination into the ministry, Rauschenbusch was already worrying his parents by his liberal views, for their thinking had not gone that far — although they were not what we would call orthodox. The pastorate that Rauschenbusch assumed was in a tenement part of New York City adjacent to what was called "Hell's Kitchen." It was the slum of the city, the high-crime area, the core of poverty, oppression, and entrepreneurial tyranny. He saw his work chiefly as helping these poor.

It did not help Walter's drift towards Liberalism that his mother, finally unable to endure the constant warfare that went on at home, left her husband permanently and came to live with Walter, her unmarried son.

#### **Rauschenbusch's Early History as a Social Reformer**

Having committed his ministry

to solving the problems of poverty in New York City, Rauschenbusch developed his social gospel.


He formed a fellowship with two other nearby pastors with similar views, so that they could work together in social welfare programs among the poor. During this period, he was influenced by the social emphasis of John Wesley, Dwight L. Moody, and J. Hudson Taylor, who succeeded in combining what was thought to be a conservative theological position with social work, and with an emphasis especially on helping the poor. So committed was he to this work that he turned down a request that he take up professorial duties in the same seminary in which his father had taught. This was 1888.

By the late '80s Walter suffered an extremely traumatic experience. He lost almost all of his hearing. Because of the severity of this handicap, he resigned from his pulpit, although his congregation refused to accept his resignation and insisted he continue his calling in "Hell's Kitchen." Walter became a friend of John D. Rockefeller, a Baptist who was instrumental in establishing the University of Chicago, and persuaded Rockefeller to donate \$8000.00 towards the construction of a new church building in Walter's parish. During this same period he cooperated with Ira Sankey in preparing a new hymn

book by translating the old hymns into German, the only language that many of his parishioners knew.

In 1891 Walter traveled to Germany, in which country he spent nine months drinking at the fountain of German higher critical thought. Upon his return, he married, which marriage produced five children. He seemed to have the same wanderlust that his father had, for he went to Europe without his family, content to live alone and leave his family responsibilities behind. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that all his children forsook the Baptist religion, turned their backs on their father's evangelical piety, and broke entirely with the church.

In 1897, partly because a growing family required an increase in his income, Walter accepted a position as a professor of German in the Theological Seminary in Rochester, where his father had taught and where he had pursued his theological studies. He was to remain in Rochester the rest of his life.

By 1912 both Walter and his wife were suffering from exhaustion and were, for a time, unable to do much work. Walter died in 1918, at the end of World War I, disillusioned by the war and the smashing blow it gave to Walter's hope for a better world. He died of colon cancer. 

*In His Fear*

*Rev. Richard Smit*

## *"Rejoicing at Thy Word"*

**N**ot only must the believing child of God possess a spiritually healthy reverence and fear towards God and

His Word as Psalm 119:161 shows; but, according to the next verse in Psalm 119, he ought also to approach the Word of God with delight. This healthy joy is summarized by the psalmist's confession in Psalm 119:161: "I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."

This beautiful attitude towards God's Word is quite the opposite of the terrible attitude of King Jehoiakim king of Judah towards the Word, as recorded in Jeremiah 36. Jeremiah was commanded by Jehovah to write down all the words that Jehovah spoke to Jeremiah concerning Israel, Judah,

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

and all the nations, from the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry up until the day Jeremiah was commanded to write down the Word of God. This Jeremiah did through his scribe, Baruch. After the Word of God was infallibly written down by Baruch, Jeremiah delivered the scroll, containing the Word of God through Jeremiah, unto the King in his winter house. While sitting before the fire on the hearth in his winter house, the king listened to his servant, Jehudi, read the Word of God through Jeremiah. What was the king's attitude towards the infallibly inspired and written Word of God?

And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. (Jeremiah 36:23)

The king burned the scroll of the Word of God (Jer. 36:29, 32). Moreover, the king further demonstrated his disgust and rejection of the Word of Jehovah when he commanded his servants to capture and imprison Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. However, Jehovah had hid them from the wicked king so that Jeremiah and Baruch could write down infallibly by divine inspiration a new copy of the Word of God, which we possess now in the book of Jeremiah (Jer. 36:32).

The wicked king of Judah showed utter contempt, hatred, and disgust toward the Word of Jehovah. He particularly objected to the prophecies of the judgments of God against his sin and the sins of Judah. He rejected the revelation of God's righteousness and holiness and the just reward of God's wrath upon the sinner. He rejected the holy Word of God.

We must understand that he rejected the Word of God. The Scriptures are not the word of men, but they are the Word of God. "Word" in the original Hebrew means the

word that is *spoken*. God spoke His Word in the beginning when He made the heavens and the earth. God continued to speak His Word, especially of the gospel, in Genesis 3:15. He continued to speak His Word unto the patriarchs and prophets. That Word is essentially His only begotten Son, the Christ. He is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us and in whom we see the glory of the Father. That revelation of the Word of God is given to us in the infallibly inspired Scriptures. Thus, when we hold in our hands our Bibles, we have there the complete, sufficient, all-authoritative, and unified Word of God. Through that Word, God speaks to us and tells us of His great and infinite glory in Jesus Christ.

That Word the world hates and becomes angry against it. When shown from the Word that immorality is sin, or that homosexuality is sin according to Romans 1:18-32, the world vents its rage against the faithful church who stands in awe of Jehovah's Word. When shown that evolution is a lie and that the truth is that God is the Creator, the world dismisses the faithful saints as fools.

Even in the church world, the pure Word of God is met with coldness. The Word of Christ as our particular, complete, and sovereign Savior is shunned. The Word of double predestination and God's absolute sovereignty, as historically confessed by the Reformed church, is rejected for new, false definitions of those teachings. The Word of justification by faith alone is despised and exchanged for essentially the old, deceitful heresies concerning our justification.

But let us beware of our own hearts and the attitudes of our own sinful natures to the Word of God. Do we rejoice at the Word of God when it points out our sins and those areas where we fall miserably short? Do we rejoice when the Word of God cuts down our idols and images of God and Christ? Do we rejoice when the

Word of God demands of us more sacrifice, more self-denial, more cross-bearing, more submission, more obedience, more commitment, more suffering, more persecution, more of our all? By faith, we should.

However, we often dismiss the Word of God as something that does not apply to us. It is easy to be happy with God's Word when the Word says what we like to hear; but, when it demolishes our Baals, our golden calves, or our evil altars, then we become irritated and angry at the sacred speech of God, His Word. And, like King Jehoiakim, we are quick to show our pride against the Word by attacking the messenger of that Word, which messenger may be a pastor, a spouse, a parent, a teacher, an elder, a church member, or a friend.

More often, however, our response to the Word of God is apathy. The Word to us is often unattractive and not very important. We lack the spiritual excitement and deep appreciation for the Word of God that we should have. Often we approach the Scriptures with very little zeal or attention, in contrast to our rapt attention to a newscast, a hockey game, or the daily newspaper.

Such are the responses of our unbelief, which cannot see and hear the Word. In fact, in our unbelief, we do not want to see and hear the Word because it condemns our sin, our pride, and the idols and images we by nature like to worship.



We need the wonder-working power of the grace and Spirit of God to work in us what the psalmist experienced. At the spiritual sights and sounds of the infallible Word of God, the psalmist rejoiced. God gives His people new hearts and prepares them by His Spirit. With that new, spiritual life in our hearts, we rejoice at the sights and sounds of the Word of God.

That joy is not itself earthly joy.



When the psalmist rejoiced at God's Word, he was being persecuted. He had been rejected by former friends, family, nobles, and princes. His joy was not earthly. His earthly circumstance was misery and sadness. Do not we experience similar troubles in this life? Our joy in the Word of God is often experienced in times of sadness and trial. Hence, our joy is spiritual, heavenly: the spiritual, transcendent joy of living in and out of the Word of God. In that way, there is joy at the voice of Jehovah in our troubles and delight in our covenant Friend-Sovereign. As a bride delights in the voice of her husband, so we rejoice in the voice of our Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, in His Word.

Does the Word of God make you rejoice? When you study the Bible or read the Bible at the table, do you rejoice in that Word of God to you? Do you rejoice in the good news of God's Word in your life? Do you rejoice with a suffering fellow-saint in the Word of God that comforts them in their affliction?



The psalmist did.

In fact, he rejoiced "as one that findeth great spoil."

The psalmist was like a man who finds unexpected and great spoil. "Spoil" refers to the treasures that an army captures from its defeated enemy. It is treasure for which the army has fought; and when they possess the spoil of their enemies, they enjoy it with a sense of triumph. The psalmist compares himself to one who had rejoiced in a great spoil; however, this is spoil for which he had not fought, but which he had simply found. He compares himself to a man who enjoys all the spoils of victory, triumph, and gladness for a war that he had not even fought.

That illustration pictures the intensity and quality of his attitude towards the Word of God in his life. His response to the Word of God was not a cold shrug of the

shoulder, nor a hard heart and a stiff neck. His response was a rejoicing of the highest degree. He rejoiced greatly in the midst of his persecution and troubles at the humbling and comforting treasures of the Word of Jehovah.

That is our joy, too, by the grace of God. Our joy before the Word is great because the Word is an inexhaustible mine of treasures. For example, we may have read the same passage of Scripture fifty times, but in the fifty-first time we find the great treasure of a new perspective on the truth or a new depth of understanding of the passage that we had not enjoyed before. Our hearts rejoice that we have struck it rich!

That ought to be our attitude always before God's Word in the Old Testament's law, prophets, and psalms as well as the Word of the New Testament. For example, we must approach the Psalms with eager anticipation of finding new jewels of understanding. After we have worked hard and prayerfully in the studying of the Word, the Lord does reward us with the spoil for which we have not fought or labored, but which is freely given to us for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord is often pleased to work in us this good attitude of rejoicing at His Word through affliction. Is it not often true that when times are going well and life is easy, we develop a kind of spiritual earwax and spiritual cataracts? We do not hear the Word of God with eagerness and anticipation, nor do we see the Word of God so sharply. Our spiritual senses become dull. Then God sovereignly sends us affliction to clean out the earwax and remove the cataracts. In the hard struggles or sudden calamities, we approach the Word with eager anticipation. We wait and listen to what God will say. We expect longingly for Him to lay before us the great jewels and gold of the Word of Christ. When Jehovah speaks, we rejoice like a poor

man who has found a gold mine in his backyard.

Understand, that joy does not come without work. Regularly we must study the Word of God in that spiritual joy and eager anticipation for more knowledge and understanding. Daily we must read our Bibles, wearing the pages out. Daily we must be busy with the Scriptures, like a farmer who plows his fields. We must plow through the Scriptures, expecting that the Lord by His Spirit will lead us into new hidden treasure chests below the surface.

In that way, then, the Scriptures will more and more become our chief delight.



They will become our chief joy, first of all, because in His Word Jehovah is speaking to *us*! That in itself is a reason to be joyful. The holy, invisible, triune God comes to us puny creatures and speaks His glorious Word. Then, when He speaks, we are not consumed, but we are saved and preserved. That God speaks to us with His Word of grace is in itself an amazing wonder at which to rejoice greatly.

That speech of our covenant God is a precious gem to God's people, which they eagerly anticipate, especially in tribulation. That was true of God's people in the Old Testament. When God spoke His Word of promise, His saints rejoiced. However, when God did not speak for a lengthy period of time, the saints were troubled and dismayed by the silence. But when He spoke His Word to them again, the people of God rejoiced in assurance and peace. That is similar to a flock of sheep in a storm. When the sheep are troubled by the storm, the sheep can be quickly calmed, even in the storm, by the shepherd simply speaking to them. His voice assures them that he is with them and will continue to care for them.

Is not that true of us? When we pass through troubles, we re-



joyce to hear the voice of our Great Shepherd in His Word. We rejoice in the knowledge that even in the storm Jehovah is with us, nigh unto us, and even within us by His sovereign grace and Spirit. We rejoice spiritually as though we have struck it rich!

And, really, we by faith have struck it rich, because that Word is the Word of our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our salvation by His atoning death on the cross of Calvary and His triumphant resurrection. He has fought for us and obtained the spoils of victory over all the enemies of the kingdom of darkness. He has redeemed us from our death and to-


tal poverty. He speaks to us in the gospel the riches of His complete and glorious salvation.

When we hear that Word of God, we rejoice! By faith, we have struck it rich in Christ! We possess in Christ the pure gold of His everlasting righteousness, the solid diamonds of the love of God, and the glorious rubies of His unfailing mercies. In Christ alone, we have that great, undeserved, unmerited, graciously and sovereignly bestowed treasure.

Finally, we rejoice at and in the Word because it gives us great hope. That is never true of the word of man. What man says will not abide forever. What man says

is powerless and hopeless. But the Word of God gives us blessed assurance and hope because the Word is the power of God unto our salvation. The Word is our hope for our full deliverance from our sin and the troubles of this life and our hope for our full glorification in the eternal joy of our Lord.

Do *you* rejoice at Jehovah's Word as one that finds great spoil? Only in faith we do.

May God grant us that faith so that, in our personal devotions, in our family devotions, in our Bible studies, and in our worship services in God's house, the Word of God may evermore remain our chief delight. 

*Special Article*

*Rev. Angus Stewart*

## BRF Family Conference 2006

**T**he British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) is holding its eighth biennial Family Conference at Cloverley Hall, Whitchurch, Shropshire, England, Saturday 5 to Saturday 12 August 2006. The conference theme is "The Five Points of Calvinism." Professors Herman Hanko and David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Churches are the speakers. Reformed believers from the US and Canada and all over the world are heartily invited to join us for what promises to be a week of rich Christian fellowship with ample time for sightseeing and relaxation. One attendee at the last BRF Conference remarked that it was "the most edifying conference that [he had] ever had the privilege to attend."

---

*Rev. Stewart is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, currently serving in the British Isles.*

After an introductory lecture on "The History of Calvinism" by Prof. Hanko, the five speeches will follow the order of the five heads of doctrine in the Canons of Dordt (not the order of T-U-L-I-P): "Sovereign Predestination," "Particular Redemption," "Total Depravity," "Irresistible Grace," and "The Perseverance of the Saints." Dr. Aza Goudriaan from Holland will deliver a special address on the history of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619). We will also hold two Lord's Day services.

Two day-trips are scheduled. One is to Snowdonia National Park and Mount Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales. A Narrow Gauge Railway is available for the less energetic, affording spectacular views of mountains, lakes, and even a castle. The scenic Roman town of Chester, with its Tudor houses and quaint streets, is the destination of our second trip.

Our venue, Cloverley Hall, is a Victorian Country Home de-

signed in 1868 and later remodelled. It has been used as a Christian Conference Centre since 1968. The 9-acre grounds includes areas for volleyball, soccer/football, and tennis, as well as sites for barbecues, caravans, and campers. Indoor recreational facilities include table tennis, pool, and snooker. The BRF Conference will have Cloverley Hall to itself for the whole week. Accommodation can be provided for up to 130 guests in rooms varying in size from single, to twin, family, or 6-bedded rooms; some are ensuite. These include three ground-floor bedrooms with wheelchair access and toilet facilities for the less mobile. The main meeting room can hold up to 140 people. (See [www.cloverleyhall.com](http://www.cloverleyhall.com) for more details.)

The nearest airports to Cloverley Hall are Liverpool (less than an hour away) and Manchester and Birmingham (in that order). The M6 motorway and Crewe, with its excellent railway services, are

within 20 miles of Cloverley. Whitchurch railway station is 5 minutes away.

The prices at the 2006 BRF Conference are (despite inflation) down £50 or more on the 2004 BRF Conference (at the moment \$1 is worth about £0.57). Children aged 4 and under are free, and those between 5 and 12 receive reductions. The standard adult charge for accommodation and full board is £210 (age 5-6: £50; age 7-10: £100; age 11-12: £150). A single room costs £250 for an adult (5-6: £60; 7-10: £120; 11-12: £180). Ensuite is £290 for an adult (5-6: £70; 7-10: £140; 11-12: £210). Contact Mrs. Mary Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, Ballymena, Northern Ireland, BT42 3NR ([anmstewart@lineone.net](mailto:anmstewart@lineone.net) or 01144 28 25 891851). Interested persons in North America should get in touch with Bill and Ardith Oomkes, 6299 Wing Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512, USA ([oomkes@iserv.net](mailto:oomkes@iserv.net) or [616] 698-6697).


#### CPRF Reorganization

Members of the PRC will be glad to hear that the Covenant

Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, intends to bring to the PRC Synod of June 2006 a proposal to reorganize as a church. Should all be approved, we hope to become a church institute on the evening of Wednesday 2 August 2005, D.V.

Those who are planning on coming to the BRF Conference may well want to include a visit to Northern Ireland for this happy occasion as part of their trip. The CPRF has booked a coach to travel from Ballymena to Dublin, cross-

ing by ferry to Holyhead in NW Wales, before driving to Cloverley Hall for the BRF Conference (5-12 August 2006). There are 50 places on the coach to be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. We estimate the coach trip will cost about £80, with a reduction for children.

We hope that many will be able to join us for the CPRF reorganisation and/or BRF Conference. But if not, please continue to pray for the witness of Jesus Christ in the British Isles 



## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

#### School Activities

This past December the students and teachers of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI were given an opportunity to contribute towards a cause that will, the Lord willing, assist fellow saints in need. This year's Christmas collection was to assist the Herrick Presbyterian Covenant School in Tasmania.

The students of the South Holland, IL Protestant Reformed

School presented their annual Christmas program on December 21 at the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. The students developed the theme, "His Star: Light for the Gentiles."

#### Congregation Activities

If there is one characteristic that all our congregations share in the month of December, it has to be the Christmas program. One would be hard pressed to find any of our churches that did not have some type of celebration for the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The program could have been given by the Sunday School, or the

choir, or some combination of the two. What type of program really does not matter; what does matter is that young and old alike in our churches were given a wonderful opportunity to offer their praise and thanks to our heavenly Father for the unspeakable gift of His Son.

At a congregational meeting held in December, the members of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI approved a proposal for a new church sign on their property.

The last "News" reminded us that the internships for Seminar-ians A. Lanning and C. Spronk were over at the end of December. The congregation of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, the church

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

where Seminarian Lanning served his internship, marked the occasion with a special reception for the Lannings on Sunday, January 1, as an expression of their appreciation for their time with them.

Sunday evening, December 25, the Voices of Victory Quartet led a singspiration at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. The evening included lots of audience singing, as well as several special numbers by the quartet. What a wonderful way to join together in joyful praises as we thanked our Father for the gift of His Son!

### Evangelism Activities

Radio station WFUR, serving the area around Grand Rapids, MI, contacted our Georgetown PRC with a request for a church service recording to be aired in the 3 P.M. to 4 P.M. time slot on Sunday afternoons. Georgetown saw this as a very worthwhile outreach to their community, and their Evangelism Society understandably wanted to move forward with the project. But standing in their way was the cost of a little more than \$9,000.00/year. Thankfully this all came together in less than a week and a half. God has made it possible and provided the funds. A broadcast committee has been appointed, but as of this writing no start time has been announced. Stay tuned for more information.

### Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Wingham, Ontario, Canada PRC presented a Christmas program at the Braemar Retirement Center in Wingham, the evening of December 27.

The Young People's Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC sponsored a Christmas Singspiration on December 18 for their congregation as well as the members of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs. Everyone was invited to join the host society for an evening of singing praises.

The Young People of the South Holland, IL PRC invited the young

people from our other area churches to join them December 17 for ice-skating at Millennium Park in Chicago.

### Mission Activities

Since our last "News," the members of the PR Fellowship in Fayetteville, NC have received two visits from our Domestic Mission Committee. First on December 1-4 Mr. Gary Kaptein, an elder at Faith PRC, along with his wife, Judy, visited. Then on December 15-18 Rev. W. Bruinsma and wife, Mary, visited. Both men led Bible Study when they were there, and Rev. Bruinsma also preached at both services on December 18.

We could also mention that a picnic basket for Christmas cards, letters, etc. for the saints in Fayetteville was collected by members of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI to be sent to them late in December.

### Minister Activities

Rev. M. Dick declined the call to serve as the next pastor of Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ.

Congratulations to Rev. Martin and Tricia VanderWal, serving in the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, on the adoption of a son, Cameron James, born November 2 and placed with the VanderWal family through Bethany Christian Services on December 8.

On Sunday, January 1, Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, was in the Loveland, CO PRC on classical appointment. That morning he had the opportunity to install newly elected officebearers, and that evening he led the installation service for Loveland's eighth pastor, Rev. Rodney Miersma. Rev. Kuiper preached from John 21:15-19 under the theme, "Peter Restored to His Office." A welcome dinner for Rev. and Mrs. Miersma followed the evening's worship service.

## Announcements

### OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES  
Loveland PRC, Loveland, CO - Tuesday, February 28, 2006

### The Minister and His Money

*A bishop then must be blameless ... not greedy of filthy lucre ... not covetous.*

I Timothy 3:2-3

**8:45** *Opening Devotions*

**9:00** *Presentation by Clergy Financial Services of Loveland, CO*

A Basic Introduction to the Unique Features of Clergy Tax Law

- employment status of ministers
- ministers' exemption from social security
- ministers' housing allowance
- ministers' ministry expense allowance
- ministers' medical allowance
- 403(b) plan for ministers' retirement

**12:00** *Lunch*

**1:00** *Keynote Speech:*

*The Minister's Sanctified, Exemplary Use of His Money and Possessions*

Rev. Richard Smit, Pastor of the Immanuel PRC, Lacombe, Alberta

**2:45** *Speech/Discussion:*

*Preaching and Counseling Regarding the Use of Money and Possessions*

Rev. Rodney Miersma, Pastor of the Loveland PRC, Loveland, CO

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

Lunch will be provided, and a free-will offering will be taken to defray expenses.



## THE STANDARD BEARER

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Evangelism Society of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to the family of

#### KENNETH RIETEMA.

Mr. Rietema served us well for more than 20 years as reader for our *Standard Bearer* on cassette tape for the blind. Our prayer for the bereaved family is that they may find their comfort in Isaiah 40:31: "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Evangelism Society  
Southwest PRC

### NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able to listen to a reading of the *SB*. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is James Noorman of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC  
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC extends its Christian Sympathy to the Klein Families in the death of their beloved mother, grandmother, great grandmother,

#### MRS. HENRIETTA KLEIN.

As a faithful member of our society, Henrietta will be missed for her words of faithful edification, but we must remember Christ's prayer for us in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." May the family find comfort in God's word: "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Rev. D. Overway, President  
Geraldine Blankespoor, Secretary

### NOTICE!

The next regular meeting of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado, on Wednesday, March 1, 2006 at 8:30 A.M. An officebearers' conference is planned for Tuesday, February 28, the Lord willing, on the subject of "The Minister and His Money."

Rev. Richard J. Smit,  
Stated Clerk of Classis West

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Joyce Rietema and family in the death of her husband,

#### KEN RIETEMA.

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

Rev. W. Langerak, President  
Tim Pipe, Clerk

### NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: (616) 453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 27, 2006, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoiced with our parents and grandparents, WILLIAM and THERESSA HOFMAN, as they celebrated their 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary on January 19, 2006. We are thankful to God for the many years He has given to them. We are grateful for the godly example they showed to us by walking united as one with Christ. Our prayer is that God will bless them and continue to be with them in the years to come. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- \* Bill and Joan Hofman  
Katelyn, Jeffrey, Jill, Michelle
- \* Tom and Darla Hofman  
Jacob, Emily
- \* Doug and Melissa Looyenga  
Stephanie, Justin, Nicholas

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC extends its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Vivian Hunter, along with her children and grandchildren, in the death of her husband,

#### MR. CHESTER HUNTER SR.

May the bereaved family find comfort in the promise of God's word and be upheld by His grace. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee, be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

Rev. D. Overway, President  
Geraldine Blankespoor, Secretary

## Reformed Witness Hour

### Topics for February

Date	Topic	Text
February 5	"His Banner of Love Is Over Us"	Song 2:4
February 12	"Delight Yourself in the Lord"	Psalm 37:4
February 19	"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ"	Romans 13:13, 14
February 26	"The Life Grace Teaches Us to Live"	Titus 2:11-13