

Creation's Song of Joy

11 *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.*

12 *They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side.*

13 *The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.*

Psalm 65:11-13

Have you heard the pastures and valleys shouting for joy? Have you heard them also singing?

What do they shout, what do they sing, but of the goodness of God!

The ever-blessed God has visited the pastures of the wilderness. The great God has come near to the little hills. He has walked over the pastures, and He has gone down into the valleys. Throughout His creation He has gone forth. Wherever His paths have led, He has left behind something. Fatness,

great abundance. That rich abundance of good things is the very evidence of His presence. The year is crowned with His goodness. Of that goodness the pastures and valleys shout and sing!

Trace those paths! See the places where Jehovah has walked!

Understand the manner of their shouting and singing. This Scripture tells us that they shout and sing by means of their abundance. The hills are covered with flocks. Those flocks find the grass growing upon the hillsides rich and verdant. Grazing on that grass they grow fat and numerous. They lack for nothing. Herds and flocks cover the hills.

The little hills feel that clothing upon them. Clothed with white, brown, and black, they have joy and gladness. "The little hills rejoice on every side." Joy bursts forth out of their depths in shouting and singing. They are clad in glorious garments, garments which speak of God's goodness to them.

The same is to be said of the crop sown into the ground. The ground was plowed and tilled. The seed was sown. Upon that seed the rain fell and the sun shone, in

the right amounts and at the right time. The hills are covered with the green of the stalk. Over the course of the summer they grew tall and strong. They have brought forth an abundance of grain. Now turned brown and dry by the autumn season, they are ripe for harvest.

The valleys are thus covered with corn. They, like the little hills, have a rich and luxurious carpet laid upon their lap. They are abundantly covered. This covering gives them also their own joy. Out of that joy they shout, and they also sing. They sing of God's goodness to them, for they know that God has beautifully adorned them.

Do you hear them shouting and singing, these little hills, these pastures and these valleys?

The fatness is ready to be received by men. They harvest the abundance. Men gather it into their barns. By the further labor of men, it is prepared for the home. The abundance is brought into the oven, and cooked on the stove. Now the hungry have food upon their tables. They eat the fatness of the harvest, and they are filled.

But do they hear the shouting

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

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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: benwig@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)

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and singing? Do they all hear the glad anthem of the creation?

Many do not. They are altogether ignorant and foolish. In their foolish ignorance they sing the songs of man: man's glory and man's possibility. They sing the song of evolution, that all things happen by chance. They compose their own songs. They shout their own praises. By their own compositions they try to drown out the voices of these little hills, the pastures, and the valleys. You see, this very shouting and singing of the creation condemns them. The creation's very joy is abhorrent to them.

But the music of these little hills, pastures, and valleys is to the ears of the children of God most blessed. They hear the shouting and singing of the creation, and they know of whom it shouts and sings: Jehovah and His glory. The paths of the Lord drop their fatness—that is the song! The children of God hear it. That song causes their hearts to rejoice. They shout for joy. They also sing!

Perhaps the farmer, the God-fearing farmer, hears that shouting and singing better than any. He knows his labor. He knows the seed that he sows into the earth. That labor and seed he has received from the hand of His God. He knows the source of the rain and sunshine that has fallen upon the earth during the season of growth. As he has tilled the land and sown the seed, he has lifted his labor before the Lord, seeking His blessing upon it. Thus, when he brings in the fruits, he knows it has come from the hand of God. When he looks upon his fields, he hears the proper shouting. When he considers his herds and flocks he hears the proper song: The Lord has been here! His paths have dropped fatness!

You and I must also hear that glad chorus! Before Thanksgiving Day, take a drive into the country. Go to the little hills, the pastures, and the valleys. Look at the crops

growing in the field. See the farmers laboring to gather in the plentiful harvest. Count the cattle or sheep grazing in the rich pastures. Harken to the song! Listen to the shouts of joy!

On Thanksgiving Day, enjoy that bounty of the earth. Eat and drink to the full, rejoicing in the abundance that God has given to you. But with every bite of the savory meat of the turkey, and with every juicy spoonful of cranberries, do not taste that abundance only with your mouth. Hear with your ears the ringing chorus. Hear the little hills. Attend closely to the pastures and the valleys. Enjoy the music. And, as you hear, bless the name of the Lord.


Indeed, the paths of the Lord drop fatness. The hills are covered over. They shout for joy, they also sing.

Our calling is to join this chorus. If the earth is given to such gladness, and if the earth itself shouts and sings, how much more is that our glad calling. For this abundance is not for the hills and valleys. It is for us. It is for us, whom the Lord has given minds to think upon His goodness to us. It is for us, whom the Lord has given hearts to be made glad and joyful with this abundance. It is for us, whom the Lord has given voices and tongues to shout and sing His praises. We are covered and we are filled, so that we might bless the name of the Lord, whose paths have dropped such fatness to us.

May that joy ever live in our hearts! May it ever find expression upon our lips!

We have even more cause for joy. Our ears have been opened to hear. By nature they were stopped up against this shouting and singing of the creation by nature. But God has given us ears to hear His Word, even the truth of these words of Holy Scripture. Only then do we hear the shouting and singing of His creation in praise to His name. God has opened our

blind eyes to see the covering of the pastures and valleys, that such covering is His fatness, the footprints of His paths. He has softened our hearts, to kindle therein a desire and love of that knowledge. By His grace we rejoice in Him. By even further grace, that joy comes to expression upon our tongues.

We shout for joy! We also sing!
Thanks be to our God! 

PEACE

The first ray of sunlight
Is just peeking through —
No breeze is yet stirring,
The day is so new;
The birds are beginning
Their daily refrain;
The dew cloaks the grasses;
I stroll down the lane.

I muse on the wonder
Of all God has made;
The sounds, scents, and
movement
This moment displayed.
Each creature, each action
Is part of the whole;
A balanced creation —
It's in God's control.

The cares of my life
Seem to vanish away.
If God clothes the grass
May I worry today?
God promised that all things
Shall work for my good.
I have comfort and peace;
He has told me I would.

Of myself I'm defiled;
I cover my face;
Yet I'm His own dear child
By the work of His grace.
So I pause now to thank
My Creator and Friend,
My Father, my Savior,
The Beginning and End.

Thelma Westra
Faith PRC

The Standard Bearer: Past (concl.)

The origins of the *Standard Bearer* shaped the character of the magazine. It was born out of the controversy in the Christian Reformed Church over common grace. The original writers intended their new publication to be doctrinal and polemical, setting forth the truth and exposing the lie. To this purpose the *SB* has remained true for eighty years.

Through the years, a host of articles critical of the CRC have been published in the *SB*. Sometimes the writers picked apart a *Banner* article, or perhaps a writing in the Dutch CRC publication *De Wachter*. The *SB* reported on decisions of the CRC synods, demonstrating departure from the Reformed faith or walk.

Why so much attention to and criticism of the CRC? Was it the goal of the *SB* simply to prove that the PRC was right, and the CRC wrong?

Was it to justify the existence of the PRC that all this ink was spilled criticizing the mother church?

Was the purpose intentionally to stir up unrest in the CRC in order to enlarge the membership rolls of the PRC at the expense of the CRC?

Or was it, perhaps, malice that motivated H.H. and G.M.O. and the others, a matter of spite, and desire for revenge?

All these evil motives have been ascribed to the *SB* writers over the years.

Reading the old issues has led

me to the conviction that the answer is: None of the above.

To be sure, this is not to claim sinlessness for the critics of the CRC who wrote in the *SB*. Herman Hoeksema did not either. Twenty-five years after he had been expelled from the CRC, he wrote of how difficult it is “when one is maltreated and finally cast out by the Church, to keep the spirit of Him Who was meek and lowly of heart” (Vol. 25, p. 53). More than once H.H. publicly acknowledged that the *SB* was hardly a perfect magazine.

One indication of H.H.’s attitude towards the CRC was that he did not use the *SB* to exacerbate the division between the two denominations. On the contrary, in the late 1930s he wrote a lengthy paper on the topic of the possible reunion of the CRC and the PRC and printed it in the *SB* in both English and Dutch.

There is evidence, especially in articles of H.H., that the criticism of the CRC arose out of a genuine love for God, His church, and His truth. This was love for the mother church, first of all. Surely it is evident in H.H.’s impassioned “Open Letter to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church” in June of 1932.

H.H. begins with an assurance to the CRC Synod of his “sincere interest in the well-being of the Christian Reformed Church, that is, in their true and spiritual well-being, their growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The letter, he writes, is in obedience to the Lord’s admonition found in Hosea 4:2 that “His faithful children...plead with their mother, the Church in the world. Emphatically this...admonition is enjoined upon the hearts and

minds of the faithful children, as is evident from the urgent repetition: ‘Plead with your mother, plead!’”

H.H. maintains that the pleading voice of the PRC has gone forth in lectures, sermons, pamphlets, and books, and, “last but not least, in our...*Standard Bearer*.” Once again, he acknowledges that this activity of pleading has not been without fault.

Think not, reverend and worthy brethren, that our efforts and labors were inspired by personal malice and envy. Neither must you imagine that we were motivated by the desire to build ourselves into a Church organization of tolerably good size and large numbers. Surely, I gladly confess that all our work is imperfect and defiled with sin, that carnal motives and desires often corrupt our best works. I feel that often, in the heat of strife and controversy words are spoken that had better been left unspoken, paragraphs are written that had better remained in the pen. No doubt, the same imperfection will be found to characterize our labors, the plea we had with mother. Yet, by these faults and imperfections you may not judge our work.

Then he explains his motives for repeatedly addressing the CRC.

On the contrary, the deepest motive of our strife and labors has always been a sincere desire to lead mother in the way of God’s precepts. Love to her prompted us to plead with her, not to rest, till she might put away her whoredoms out of her sight and her adulteries from between her breasts. This I may confess before God and you all.

Love for the church of God, not only manifest in the CRC, but in the PRC, compelled the mainstays of the *SB* to point out the errors of the CRC. That is to say, it was necessary that the *SB* make crystal clear the differences between these two denominations.

H.H. makes this point in his editorial of December 1, 1932, in which he responds to a *Banner* article by a Rev. J. Vander Mey. Vander Mey argued that the CRC must develop the doctrine of common grace. H.H. concurs, in light of the decision of 1924, which both adopted common grace and instructed the churches to make a serious study of the doctrine. With regard to such a development, he writes:

And such a course would, perhaps, have a good effect, yield positive fruit for the Churches.

In the first place, a proper emphasis on the theory of common grace would, I hope, open the eyes of many for its danger and diabolical deception. Now they are asleep to the danger that is, nevertheless, very real. And they are carefully kept in their state of spiritual slumber.

In the second place, the lines would be more clearly drawn than they are now between the Christian Reformed and the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Not that I like the separation as such.

But I do like healthful conditions.

And I do not like the present situation at all. The Christian Reformed brethren almost create the appearance of unity in doctrine with the Protestant Reformed Churches. Occasionally one may even hear that there is really no difference between the two Churches, the remark being made by leaders of the Christian Reformed Churches.

And such a situation is not healthful because it is not true....

Let the Christian Reformed brethren, with all that in them is, develop the theory of common grace.

Let the Protestant Reformed Churches develop themselves on the basis of the truth that God's grace is always particular.

For the good of the church, and for the right knowledge of truth, H.H. would continue his polemical editorials.

Under the next editor, Homer C. Hoeksema, the same purpose prevailed. However, by that time (the 1960s), the *SB* was less focused on the CRC. The *SB* would describe the bitter fruits of common grace in the CRC, and her steady departure from sovereign grace in favor of common grace — the approval of movies and the dance, denial of limited atonement, tolerance of evolution, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, to give a few illustrations.

The mother would not hear the pleading.

Being Spent for Christ

The history of the *SB* is a history of writers willing to spend themselves for the cause of God and His truth. The amount of work performed by the first writers is staggering! The stalwarts in the initial monthly issues of thirty-two pages were Danhof, Hoeksema, and Ophoff, with limited contributions from a few others. Shortly thereafter the Danhofs stopped writing, and the load — a crushing load! — fell chiefly on H.H. and G.M.O. By God's grace, they persevered.

Although the ranks of ministers swelled considerably in the next fifteen years, H.H. and G.M.O. carried the *SB* through the 1930s and into the 1940s. A random sampling of issues in the 1930s reveals that these two men regularly wrote sixteen to twenty pages of each issue, with H.H. taking the larger load. As late as April of 1939 they combined for twenty-two of the twenty-four pages!

Let us put this into perspective. Ask almost any high schooler about a five-page paper for history, and the

response will probably be, "That's a lot of work!" Many a college student feels the burden of a ten-page research paper. Seminary students know the hard work required to finish a paper of thirty pages.

On average in the 1930s, Ophoff wrote a seminary length paper (plus) every month. H.H. wrote that every two weeks. That is astounding! From 1924 to 1958 (for G.M.O.) and 1964 (for H.H.) these faithful stewards of the mysteries of God filled the *SB*, hardly even taking an issue off. Filled it, they did, with solid, Reformed stuff, not fluff.

They accomplished this while teaching nearly all the courses in the seminary, serving as pastors and preachers, giving public lectures and speaking on the radio, serving in the meetings of consistory, classis, and synod, and on special committees besides. In the case of H.H., he was also preparing books for publication.

It must be understood that the crushing burden was not merely the amount of writing. By far the greater weight was the responsibility to stand for the truth issue after issue, page after page. How easy it would have been to allow the younger men to do the writing in the 1940s, and not lead the charge against the rising errors. Who could have blamed these ministers, so burdened with other responsibilities, if they had caved in to pressure and allowed others to transform the *SB* into a glossy church/news rag? Or, consider the temptation to compromise, when but a (seemingly) slight compromise on the doctrine of the covenant could have obtained acclaim from a leading Dutch theologian (Dr. K. Schilder) and probably forged a union of the tiny PRC and the much larger GKN Liberated. How devilishly tempting!

Concern for the defense and development of Reformed doctrine is evident from G.M.O.'s rebuke of a minister (in 1949) who found room in Reformed theology for condi-

tions. Wrote Ophoff, "Did it not once occur to you that...you might with one thoughtless stroke of your pen be breaking down and destroying what others by hard work in the way of unwearied study of the Scriptures have built up?"

And when the very men whom they had taught rose up and rejected the truths of sovereign, particular grace and election as applied to the covenant, one wonders whether these giants in the faith ever had the weary thought to leave the field, to give up the battle.

That did not happen. When in the early 1950s the truth was threatened by the pernicious error of the conditional covenant, the *SB* led the fight against it, first in the

bold polemics of G.M.O., and then in the clear and antithetical development of the doctrine by H.H. Others joined them in the defense of the truth, to be sure; but God used these two men in particular.


There is no earthly reward that could have motivated these men to expend such energy and labors. Nor is there a human power that could bear such burdens alone. By the grace of God they did it for the cause of Christ, for the sake of His church, and out of zeal for His truth. No plausible explanation is possible, but that they were willing to be spent for the sake of Christ. And spent, they were. They toiled until they could labor no longer, until strokes removed

the pens from their worn and trembling hands. About a year after their respective strokes, they died.

That is part of the legacy of the *Standard Bearer* — hard work, marked by diligence to get the magazine printed month after month, and by faithfulness to the Reformed faith. The same characterized the labors of the subsequent editors, H.C. Hoeksema and D.J. Engelsma.

A rather frequent ending of H.H.'s articles, a paraphrase of Jesus' words in John 9:4, was this: "Let us labor while it is day, ere the night cometh in which no man can work."

They *did* labor.

So, now, must we. 

Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (10)

The Second Prophecy (cont.)

6. *For thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;*

7. *And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*

The shaking to which this passage refers takes place in "once, a little while," which Hebrews 12:26, 27 interprets

to mean "yet once more." The first shaking was at Mount Sinai, when God's voice shook the earth only. This shaking would take place once more and in a little while in the overthrow and destruction of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great, but the yet once more refers especially to the shaking that takes place in the New Testament in connection with the coming of Christ, and throughout the New Testament when there will be a shaking of all things in earth and heaven, temporal and spiritual.

Hebrews 12:27, however, clearly indicates that this shaking takes place at the end of the world, for when it happens, Hebrews says, the things that are made shall be removed and only those things that

cannot be shaken shall remain. However, it is clear from Haggai that this shaking also takes place in connection with the incarnation of Christ, for the coming of the Desire of all nations is first fulfilled then. It was that shaking especially that the Jews looked for in Haggai's days.

How can that be? We should understand that the coming of Christ in Scripture is always viewed as one event, which includes His incarnation, His coming through the Spirit (John. 14:16-18), and His coming at the end of the world. They are one in principle because through the coming of Christ God accomplishes His one purpose in the salvation of His church and the judgment of the

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

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world. It was from this perspective that the Old Testament prophets did not even see that there are different events that are part of the coming of Christ. Joel, when he spoke of blood and fire and smoke and darkness (Joel 2:30, 31), did not realize that he was prophesying both of the coming of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-21) and of the end of the world (Rev. 6:12-14).

One must, in reading the prophets, think of the whole New Testament as one day on God's time clock, the one day in which He finishes his work and cuts it short in righteousness (Rom. 9:28). It may be difficult for us to grasp that (after more than 2000 years of New Testament history have passed), but we must remember that the passage of time means nothing to God. One day with Him is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day (II Pet. 3:8).

There is, then, a progressive fulfillment of this prophecy, as there is of most prophecy. That is not often seen, but should be evident, since to say that prophecy has only a single fulfillment at one point in history is really to say that the prophecy is of no significance for the people of God living at other times. A progressive fulfillment of prophecy means that prophecy is always relevant and always applies to the times in which we live. We live in the middle of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Haggai concerning this shaking.

The "yet once more," therefore, is the whole New Testament and is fulfilled again and again in the events of the New Testament, until finally the word of God in Hebrews 12:27 is fulfilled and the things that are made are shaken to pieces and removed. It is fulfilled in the shaking of Herod's heart at the time of Christ's birth, in the shaking of the nations that brought the wise men

to Bethlehem, in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, and whenever hearts and minds are shaken by the truth concerning Christ. It is fulfilled in the shaking of the earth at the crucifixion, in the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, in every earthquake that shakes this present world, and in the great earthquake at the end of the ages (Is. 24:19, 20; Rev. 6:12).

This shaking, as Hebrews 12 teaches us, is a shaking of all things that destroys everything but that which cannot be shaken (v. 27). It shakes this present creation and all the works of man to pieces, in order that only God's work may remain. It does that in the judgments and destruction that come upon and destroy the ungodly and their world and that leave only God's work of grace in the hearts of His people unshaken. But even in them, that which is made is removed, and only God's work remains, when they are translated by means of this shaking into the everlasting kingdom of Christ (Heb. 12:28).

We must not set our hearts on those things that can be and shall be shaken and removed, nor labor for them. We must seek those things that cannot be shaken, the things of the everlasting and enduring kingdom of Christ, the king-

dom that cannot be moved, the kingdom that is centrally the church and that is found always in the institute of the church. Even that shall be shaken, however, and much

that does not really belong to that kingdom of Christ shall fall away and be destroyed, both those who are hypocrites, as well as the sins of God's people, and those things that belong now to the life of the church in the world but shall not be necessary in the life to come.

Of this shaking, every earthquake is a sign. Each is a beginning tremor of that great earth-

quake that shall shake not only the dry land but the sea, not only the earth but the heavens. Even the nations are and shall be shaken by this earthquake. And all but God's work through Jesus Christ shall be shaken to pieces and destroyed. What a thing it is to experience an earthquake, when we understand this prophecy of Haggai! An earthquake is a frightening experience in any case, when the ground beneath our feet becomes unstable and unsafe. How much more frightening when it is seen as the beginning of that greatest of all quakes.

This shaking, then, takes place as a revelation of God's righteous judgments on the world in which we live and on those who live in it. The things that are made are removed. Through that judgment comes salvation, however (Is. 1:27; I Pet. 4:17, 18), for those things that cannot be shaken remain, the glorified church in the new heavens and earth (Heb. 12:28).

Though Hebrews interprets Haggai's words to mean "yet once more," the "yet a little while" of Haggai is also true. Always, beginning with the coming of Christ in Bethlehem, it is but a little while and this shaking is felt again. From Bethlehem to the cross is but a little while. From the cross to Pentecost, from Pentecost to the gathering of the Gentiles, from the ingathering of the Gentiles to the coming of Christ — each is but a little while. Even the whole period from the first to the second coming of Christ is but a "little while," one day, the day of the Lord, in biblical terms.

This shaking accompanies and is caused by the coming of the Desire of all nations. We take this, like Handel's *Messiah*, as a reference to the coming of Christ, first in His humiliation and then in His glory as the judge of the living and the dead. The grammar, however, is quite difficult. It has caused much controversy and led to very different interpretations of the passage. The RSV translates, "The

A progressive fulfillment of prophecy means that prophecy is always relevant and always applies to the times in which we live.

treasures of all nations shall come in"; the NKJV, "They (the nations) shall come to the Desire of all nations"; and the NIV, "The desired of all nations shall come" — a few samples of the many differences in translation that are the result of the grammatical difficulties.

The difficulties are two. The word translated in the KJV as "desire" is feminine and plural, so that literally the phrase would read: "The desires of all nations shall come." This is the reason why some versions and commentators do not find in it a reference to Christ but to the precious things, the gifts, that the Gentiles bring when they come into the kingdom of Christ (cf. Is. 60:6). The other difficulty is that the verb "shall come" is singular and masculine and does not seem to fit with the word desire. That second difficulty is not solved, however, by making the noun subject refer to the Gentiles and their gifts instead of to Christ.

Without going into a detailed explanation of the grammar, we believe that the word "desire" does refer to Christ, and the prophecy is similar, therefore, to II Samuel 23:5. That the word is plural can only be, then, because it refers not only to Christ but to all the riches of His glory and grace. The masculine singular verb, we believe, confirms the fact that the passage is a reference to Him alone. It is difficult to see how the passage could refer to anything or anyone else, since the glory of the temple, which is the main subject here, is not in its members but in Him.

That He is called the Desire of all nations is a reference to the fact that in His saving grace and power He is lovely to the people of God. They say of Him: "He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:16). They say this, of course, only by grace, for without grace He is not seen as lovely, but is despised and rejected. He is called the Desire of the nations especially, however, because He is

the fulfillment of everything the temple represented, the covenant and fellowship with God as members of His family under one roof.

He is literally the "Desires" of the nations, because all pleasant and desirable riches are found in Him. One of the early church fathers, Ignatius, says of Him:

Hungerest thou and desirest food? Long for Jesus! He is the bread and refreshment of Angels! He is manna, containing in Him all sweetness and pleasurable delight. Thirstest thou? Long for Jesus! He is the well of living water, refreshing, so that thou shouldst thirst no more. Art thou sick? Go to Jesus. He is the Saviour, the physician, nay, salvation itself. Art thou dying? Sigh for Jesus! He is the resurrection and the life. Art thou perplexed? Come to Jesus! He is the Angel of the great counsel. Art thou ignorant and erring? Ask Jesus! He is the way, the truth and the life. Art thou a sinner? Call on Jesus! For He shall save His people from their sins. To this end He came into the world: This is all His fruit, to take away sin. Art thou tempted by pride, gluttony, lust, sloth? Call on Jesus! He is humility, soberness, chastity, love, fervor: He bare our infirmities, and carried, yea still beareth and carrieth, our griefs. Seekest thou beauty? He is fairer than the children of men. Seekest thou wealth? In Him are all treasures, yea in Him the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth. Art thou ambitious of honors? Glory and riches are in His house. He is the King of glory. Seekest thou a friend? He hath the greatest love for thee, Who for the love of thee came down from heaven, toiled, endured the Sweat of Blood, the Cross and Death; He prayed for thee by name in the garden, and poured forth teats of Blood! Seekest thou wisdom? He is the Eternal and Uncreated Wisdom of the Father! Wishest thou for consolation and joy? He is the sweetness of souls, the joy and jubilee of Angels. Wishest thou for righteousness and holiness? He is the Holy of holies; He is everlasting Righteousness, justifying and sanc-


tifying all who believe and hope in Him. Wishest thou for a blissful life? He is life eternal, the bliss of the saints. Long then for Him, love Him, sigh for Him! In Him thou wilt find all good; out of Him, all evil, all misery.¹

Because the temple in the Old Testament was the place of God's covenant it was sometimes referred to as the desire of God's people. Thus Ezekiel 24:21:

Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth.

And Psalm 84 says the same, though in different terms:

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.... For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness (vv. 1, 2, 10).

Of that temple and house of God Christ is the reality to which the pictures pointed, the true temple of which the Old Testament temple was but a shadow. That He is that true temple is clear from John 2:21. There the Word of God adds to Jesus' words concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the temple this explanation: "But he spake of the temple of his body." He is that true temple because in Him God dwells with His people and is their God. As Paul says in Colossians 2:9, 10: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him...." 

1. Quoted from E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets: A Commentary Explanatory and Practical*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1977), vol. II, pp. 312, 313.

The Gathering of the Church

Having considered the nature of the church and its essential character, we begin to give more attention now to the formation of that church as we see her and live within her. We consider her institutional and earthly form. And we begin, therefore, with the gathering of the church.

The church of Jesus Christ, chosen by God from eternity (Eph. 1:4), is gathered by the Son of God into an institutional form in the midst of the world. As the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes the teaching of Scripture concerning the doctrine of the church, we are told that “the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word” that church chosen to everlasting life. That means also that He gathers the individual members of that one glorious church.

The gathering of the church is precious in God’s sight. For that church is the beautiful bride of His own dear Son, the one whom He calls “my love, my fair one,” as the Song of Solomon makes clear. It is Christ’s gathering of the church by His Spirit and Word that sets her apart and distinguishes her as His own. For that reason this truth is also precious to us who are His.

A Distinguishing Work

The church is gathered out of the world. It is not without reason

that the biblical terms for church speak of an assembly *called out*. The church consists of those *called out*. *Called out* speaks of a separation. It speaks of a significant separation, a spiritual separation.

The church is separated from, gathered out of, the fallen human race. That makes this gathering of the church an amazing wonder, a wonder in which God reveals Himself as rich in mercy, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The human race from which God gathers His church, is, after all, dead in trespasses and sins, the object of God’s just and holy wrath.

In gathering His church, therefore, God must quicken the dead!

In gathering His church, God shows the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7). In gathering His church, He looks upon those who stand in enmity against Him, whose very lives are marked by profanity against Him, and He calls out those who by the wonder work of His particular grace are made in Christ Jesus a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth His praise (I Pet. 2:9).

This gathering, which brings to expression the spiritual separation between believers and unbelievers, has its source and reason in the sovereign and eternal good pleasure of God. The gathering of the church is the out-working of God’s sovereign decree of election (which, by the very nature of God’s absolute sovereignty, also implies reprobation). And it is this spiritual separation wrought by God’s

sovereign gathering of His church that comes to expression in the church’s holiness.

A Historical Work

The gathering of the church takes place throughout history.

Contrary to the teachings of dispensationalism, the Bible makes no separation between Israel and the church. While the significance of this is a matter to be drawn out in connection with our coming treatment of infant baptism several months from now, God willing, we must at least call attention to it here.

Israel is the church, as gathered in the Old Testament.

That is made clear by Stephen in his inspired exposition of Old Testament history just prior to his martyrdom, as recorded in Acts chapter 7. In recounting the history of Moses, who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea upon dry ground, and who served as the type of the coming Mediator, Stephen said (Acts 7:37-38): “This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the *church* in the wilderness....” Israel, God’s Old Testament people, is referred to by the Holy Spirit as the *church* (*ekklesia*). This means that the church is gathered both from believing Jews and believing Gentiles to form the one body of Christ. As the apostle wrote in Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that cir-

circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

This truth is established in our Reformed confessions, both in the Heidelberg Catechism, which speaks of the Son of God gathering His church “from the beginning to the end of the world,” but also in the Belgic Confession, Article 27, where we are told, “This church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be.”

In addition, the historical gathering of the church takes place, not exclusively, but most emphatically in the line of the generations of believers. This again is a matter that will be developed and emphasized in connection with the treatment of infant baptism. But it is important also to note in connection with the truth of God’s gathering of the church. For this emphasizes not only the gracious purpose of God with His people, but also the importance of the church’s (and parents’) calling to teach the church’s children. Pastors must feed not only the sheep, but also the lambs!

A Divine Work

That being said, let it be understood that the emphasis of the Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 54 is correct when it speaks of the gathering of the church as a divine work. The gathering of the church is not the work of ministers, nor of parents, but of God in Christ and by His Holy Spirit.

When we understand, as was mentioned earlier, that the gathering of the church is a wonder of grace and the out-working of God’s sovereign decree of election, it stands to be emphasized that this work is exclusively His work. It is nothing less than absurd to think

that the church must come into existence by the will and work of men. Is the creation itself the product of man’s cooperation with God? No more can we speak of the church being created by man’s cooperation with God.

Here the Reformed faith differs from that of the Roman Catholic Church and all forms of evangelical Arminianism that teach that the church comes into existence by the free will and choice of those who would join her. While a person certainly has a choice in joining the *institution* of the church, and stands responsible before God for belonging to a church that is faithful (a matter that we will be considering later, God willing), the church that God gathers is not a mere religious movement constituted by followers of some prophet, such as Mohammed. Nor is it the product of persuasive preachers. It is the wonder work of grace that God alone accomplishes through Jesus Christ and by His Spirit and Word.

Christ is the One who said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). That is a comfort for us too. For then we can also believe Him when

He immediately follows that statement with the promise, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Accomplished by God’s Appointed Means

While we emphasize that the gathering of the church is exclusively a divine work, we do not deny that God also uses means to accomplish His sovereign purpose.

The church is gathered out of and spiritually separated from the whole human race by the divine calling.

This wonder work of God in salvation we have treated earlier, and will not repeat our development of this concept. But there is

in Scripture an emphasis upon this truth that God gathers His church by sovereignly calling His people out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In Isaiah 43, there is a beautiful connection made between the calling and God’s gathering His people by that wonder work of His grace. We read in verse 1 of that chapter, “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” Further explanation is given by the Lord in verses 5 through 7: “Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

The preaching of a particular minister may be ever so plain, persuasive, and powerful, but it can never bring one soul out of darkness, nor add one member to the body of Christ.

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In I Corinthians 1:9, the inspired apostle writes, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our

Lord.” And to the church at Thessalonica, he writes in II Thessalonians 2:13-14, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That calling, and therefore that gathering of the church, though accomplished through the preaching of the gospel, is exclusively God’s work. The preaching of a particular minister may be ever so plain, persuasive, and powerful, but it can never bring one soul out of

darkness, nor add one member to the body of Christ. But when God speaks through that preaching, He powerfully accomplishes that which no man can accomplish. He brings life out of death!

Because God is pleased to use the means of gospel preaching, and because He gathers His church by “the foolishness of preaching” (I Cor. 1), He gives the church the calling of the great commission


(Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-48).

Because He gathers His church by this means, He commissions and calls men to preach the gospel.

Because He calls His own by the preaching of the gospel, He sends forth His people as witnesses to the power of His embrace, and uses them in drawing others also under the preaching that gathers.

Because He gathers even the little lambs by the power of His

gospel, He gives His church the calling also to teach the covenant children — also by faithful catechism instruction, which is but another form of gospel preaching.

But in all our labors we are dependent upon Him. And for that reason we also labor in hope, and rejoice in seeing God perform that wonder work of His grace in the gathering of His church, to the glory of His own name. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Jan Miersma

Royal Children

What joy we experience as God’s people when we welcome a new child into our home! Whether it be the first or the ninth, when the long time of waiting is over and the baby arrives safely, our hearts, filled with gratitude to God, rejoice. Very soon, as the calling to care for and to train the child confronts us, we are struck by our absolute dependence on our faithful covenant God. When a new season of instruction of covenant children in home, church, and school begins, there is a renewal of that anticipation and rejoicing, a renewal of our commitment to faithfulness in the nurture and instruction of covenant children, and a renewal of our sense of dependence on our sovereign God. To us as new parents, as parents of many children, and as pastors and teachers, these children are precious and unique.

But whose children are they? In a sense, they are our children,

but only in a limited sense. God places in our homes His own children, children who belong to the heavenly King. We are but stewards, to whom the great and heavenly King entrusts the care and training of His own children, children who have a royal calling and for whom a royal inheritance is prepared.

God shows to us in the Scriptures the heart of our life as His people, which is living in covenant relationship with Him, by means of various earthly relationships, relationships that God created with a view to manifesting His covenant to us. Although they reveal different aspects of God’s covenant to us, friendship and communion of life stand on the foreground of these relationships, which include the father-child relationship, the lord-servant relationship, the king-subject or citizen relationship, and, as church, the bridegroom-bride relationship. This friendship and communion of life are set in the framework of a relationship of sovereign salvation and protection and humble gratitude; sovereign authority and joyful submission; and faithful care and childlike depen-

dence. Uniting a number of these ideas, we may also say that, since our Father is the great King, we, with our children, as His children, are not only citizens and servants in His heavenly kingdom, but children and heirs of the King. This inheritance of royal sonship will be fully realized when we reign with Christ over all things in a new heavens and new earth.

The King wants us to know the origin of these royal children entrusted to our care. Although not born of royal seed according to their earthly, fleshly birth, born, in fact, hating the King, yet they are rescued from their birthplace in the filthy slums of sin. The great Captain of our salvation Jesus Christ enters into that place of misery to release them from the very camp of the King’s enemies. An analogy to the adoption of a wretched and miserable orphan has frequently been drawn and helps us to understand what God does in our lives and the lives of our children. Yet the analogy to an earthly parent is limited. Although a man may adopt a desolate orphan and give that orphan everything he possesses as his heir, he can never

Mrs. Miersma is the wife of Rev. Thomas Miersma, missionary in Spokane, WA.

make that orphan a child of his own flesh. When God adopts and regenerates us, however, by the wonder of our union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He makes us “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4) — royal children indeed.

Still, to our sorrow, we must be aware that as long as we and our children live in the flesh, our miserable origin will have its effects. Satan and the world of sin, the enemy without, and our own sinful natures, the enemy within, beckon the former orphans back to those prison-camp slums. Sadly too, there are children of the enemy, whose identity is hidden from us, mixed in with the body of royal children, a sort of fifth column of enemy sympathizers and supporters seeking to undermine the royal children. Nevertheless, God calls our children His children; He has given them a new, heavenly birth; Christ calls them His lambs. As royal children, then, we will view them, as royal children we will train them, and as royal children we will hope for them. We see them in the light of what God calls them to be, now and future priest-kings, children of a heavenly King.

Will this lead to pride? Surely not, for it is only when we view ourselves and our children in the light both of their miserable origin and of the new birth out of which God calls them to live, that we begin to see how far we fall short of His glory.

What a privilege and responsibility then is ours — to bring forth and train the children of our heavenly King, to be the means by His appointment to nurture and instruct those who will one day reign with Christ, the King of kings, but who even now, as child-citizens, have the calling to fight the battle of faith in a world under enemy occupation, consecrating all to the service of their Father-King. If this consciousness does not live in our hearts and minds, we will quickly lose the focus that alone can strengthen and

equip us for this awesome calling. We will fall into a habit of living merely reactively, with a crisis-oriented mindset. “What are they into now?” or “How am I going to get all this work done?” or “How can I provide for this financial need or emergency?” These thoughts often arise, and must arise, but that cannot be the whole of our lives. Then we become, like Martha, “cumbered about with much serving.” Then we need to hear our Savior’s instruction, “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42). Time must be allotted for daily meditation and prayer, preferably more time, but at least some time. Without this, our labors lose their meaning, their focus.

When this consciousness lives in us, we will not, like many in the world about us, see our children as our possessions, as something we acquire by our own efforts or decision, as we would a house or a car. Nor will we desire children for our own pleasure, though they do afford us tremendous joy and pleasure. “Surely, we would never do that,” you say. Yet, if the attitude of the world rubs off on us, as it so easily does in this age of media bombardment, we might be tempted to say, “Now we are ready for children,” or “We can’t afford another child,” or “I was hoping for a boy (or girl),” or “We decided to have another baby.” Rather, in humility we say, “The fruit of the womb is His reward.” Royal children are privileges then, not possessions.

What is to be the goal in training the children of our heavenly King? Certainly, we have earthly goals for educational achievement or practical accomplishments for our children — all the way from weaning and toilet training to

driver training. These are all necessary and have their proper place, which is in subordination to *the* goal, and that goal is nothing less than that Christ be formed in these children. As God’s great King, the great Captain of our salvation Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), and in Galatians 4:19 the apostle Paul writes, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you....” If the apostle spoke this concerning the believers with whom he labored in the churches of Galatia, we may also take this as our goal, and labor with the same intensity in training the King’s children.

The analogy to childbirth is striking. We do not create or shape our children in the womb. That is the almighty, creative work of God. Nor do we form or fashion spiritual life in our children. Again, this is the almighty, creative work of God. Yet, when the time of birth comes, the mother, with the father upholding and strengthening her, must labor with all her might to bring forth the child. It is an all-consuming, completely goal-oriented event. Never for a moment can that goal be forgotten. Just as the earthly pilgrimage of our children begins with such labor, so do we labor continually in an all-consuming travail in the spiritual birth of our children, longing that Christ be formed in them.

Let us not then view this spiritual ideal that God sets before us as a burdensome task, but rather as a glorious privilege of our salvation. Truly it is a humbling thought that the King of kings would entrust the training of His own beloved children to the care and wisdom of such miserable wretches as we are. Do we deserve this? How could we? To be given

Truly it is a humbling thought that the King of kings would entrust the training of His own beloved children to the care and wisdom of such miserable wretches as we are.


such a place of responsibility in the heavenly kingdom surpasses anything we have a right to expect. Idealistic? Yes. Impossible of perfect attainment in this life? Yes. Yet we strive toward the ideal, knowing that it is God Himself who sets that ideal before us and that “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thess. 5:24).

Still more marvelous, it is through this very means that God reveals to us and our children the secrets of His covenant. First, by giving us this responsibility and privilege, He causes our own relationship with Him to grow. He opens our eyes to sins and weaknesses we had never imagined in ourselves and sends us fleeing to the cross as the only foundation of our life with Him. He works in us a consciousness of our complete

dependence on Him and His wisdom. Secondly, by setting us in family life (as a rule, at least for some portion of our lives), God gives us to experience in a creaturely way the picture of the divine communion of love and life within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that very life into which He takes us in our new birth from above. Day by day, as we live the life of God’s covenant in our homes, He shows us, too, through the eyeglasses of His Word, what it is that He loves us with a father’s love, how as a father pitieth his children, He pities us (Ps. 103:13), how “as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you” (Is. 66:13), how He chastens us, rebukes us, and receives us (Heb. 12:5ff.).

How sad that among Christians

there are those who would willfully cut themselves off from this blessed privilege by refusing to have children, refusing this God-appointed way of knowing God’s covenant of love and friendship. There are those in God’s church who will never have the privilege and joy directly of bringing forth and rearing the royal seed, by God’s own appointment and in His wisdom, but He will bless them in the way of their longings and desires for a place in His covenant, promising them, “in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Is. 56:5).

I will endeavor, the Lord willing, to return to more particular aspects of our calling to train the royal children in future articles. 

Islam (1)

A Little History: Jihad Without End (concl.)

“And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.”

I Chronicles 12: 32

What about the present? Has Islam changed? Does jihad refer to a

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

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spiritual struggle rather than a physical one? Is Islam now a peaceful religion as many claim? Robert Spencer, director of *Jihad Watch* and author of *Onward Muslim Soldiers*, believes otherwise. He writes:

...the widespread Western assumption about Islam—that because it is a religion, it contains core teachings of love, peace and brotherhood that people of good will can emphasize against those who would twist the religion to contrary purposes—begins to ring hollow. Self-proclaimed moderate Muslims in the United States have insisted that they be regarded at

all times as unflinchingly patriotic and filled with civic zeal whatever unpleasant evidence to the contrary that individual cases may provide.¹

The Unpleasant Evidence

Evidence for present worldwide Islamic jihad of the militant sort is legion. Note just a few examples:

Nigeria — Forty-eight people have been hacked to death in Yelwa, Nigeria, by armed Mus-

1. Robert Spencer, “Calling the Islamic Reform Bluff,” *Human Events* 21 June, 2004:24.

lims, many during a church meeting, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

A recent upsurge in violence in southern Plateau State in Nigeria has claimed at least 100 lives and is the worst single incident so far, at least 48 people were murdered, many during an early morning prayer service on 24 Feb., CSW reported.

Armed Muslims invaded the service, ordered the congregation to lie face down and proceeded “to machete and axe them to death in their house of worship” according to the Christian Association of Nigeria. The victims included women and children.²

Istanbul — A Pakistani Christian teenager kidnapped for more than two weeks in November has been forced into hiding to avoid recapture by Muslim extremists. Leaders of a fanatic Islamic school have vowed to send Zeeshan Gill, who just turned 16, to fight in Kashmir as a newly-converted Muslim jihadi (holy warrior). Abducted 7 Nov. on his way home from school, the boy was taken to the Jamia al Qasim al Aloom Islamic school. Kept there under guard, Gill was forced to recite the Islamic creed, an act that makes one a Muslim under the tenets of Islam. The boy was beaten by his captors, who declared that they would kill him if he tried to run away or convert back to Christianity. Four days before they planned to send him to Kashmir, the boy returned home to tell his mother what had happened. Mrs. Gill fled the city with Zeeshan, who remains in hiding at press time.³

Zanzibar — Churchgoers on the Muslim dominated island of Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania are aware of a growing threat by Muslim extremists suspected of carrying out recent attacks against church facilities. “There are some people who think they can do away with the Christians, and most of them are coming from outside (the country),” said Father Arbogast Mushi of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Zanzibar. Tensions increased on 5

Mar. when the Islamist group UAMSHO (Revival and Propagation Organization) held an illegal rally despite a government ban imposed after previous demonstrations in which UAMSHO distributed jihad-training videos and literature. The group urged killing secular politicians who refuse to impose sharia, or Islamic law. Five days later, arsonists set fire to a Roman Catholic church in the Jumbi district.⁴

Pakistan — Pakistani police reluctantly detained a Muslim cleric after a Christian university student savagely tortured inside an Islamic madrassah (seminary) died of his injuries. Maulvi Ghulam Rasool was put under detention at a Toba Tek Singh police station on 2 May, about 10 hours after 19 year-old Javed Anjum died in a Faisalabad hospital. Rasool has been identified as a prayer leader and watchman at the Jamia Hassan Bin Murtaza Madrassah, where Anjum was tortured for five days last month. In testimony videotaped by his family as he lay on his deathbed, the third-year student in commerce at Quetta’s Government College said he was seized by people from the madrassah when he stopped there to get a drink of water. They pressured the young man to convert to Islam. When Anjum resisted, his captors broke his right arm and fingers, pulled out some fingernails and severely beat him. The injuries caused Anjum’s death from kidney failure, despite repeated dialysis treatments.⁵

Ambon — This Indonesian city was a key base of operations for the now-disbanded Lasker Jihad, which killed as many as 10,000 Christians during three years of bloody sectarian strife. Lasker Jihad’s leader, Jaffar Umar Thalib, issued numerous belligerent statements that made it abundantly clear that he regarded his struggle as a religious war.⁶

Sudan — With material help from France, the Muslim regime in Khartoum continues to wage a

bloody jihad against Christians in the southern part of the country.... So far it has claimed the lives of two million Sudanese Christians and displaced five million more. Countless Christians have been kidnapped and enslaved, and even forcibly recruited by the government to fight this jihad.... In spring 2003, radical Muslims burned a Christian pastor and his family to death while carrying out an unprovoked massacre of fifty-nine villagers.⁷

United States — ...according to Democratic senator Robert Graham of Florida, former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah (the Party of Allah), which receives as much as \$100 million each year from the Islamic Republic of Iran, “has a significant presence of its trained operatives inside the United States waiting for the call to action.... They are a violent terrorist group. And they have demonstrated throughout their now twenty-five-year history a hatred of the United States and a willingness to kill our people.... There are a number of lessons we should learn from September 11. One of those lessons is that these terrorist groups tend to do what they say they’re going to do. If they define the United States as being Satanic—and that therefore they want to kill us—they will find ways to carry out that objective.”⁸

Great Britain — In Britain last week ... a group of mujahedin got involved in sports, but they weren’t playing the game. Ten suspected Islamic terrorists were arrested just before they had planned to blow themselves up amid a crowd of nearly 70,000 people at a soccer game between two popular teams, Manchester United and Liverpool.⁹

Jordan — ... a jihadist attack on the U.S. Embassy and other targets in Amman, Jordan was foiled. The plot involved the unleashing of poison chemicals that would have killed upwards of 80,000 people. According to the *New York Post*, “The authorities said a

group of 10 suspects planned to pack the truck bombs with deadly cocktails of 71 lethal chemicals—including blistering agents, nerve gas and choking agents—and then simultaneously crash them into their targets.”¹⁰

The Overwhelming Evidence

The evidence is overwhelming! Although throughout Islamic history jihad has meant many things, including both a spiritual and martial element, the downplaying of the latter by Islamic sympathizers is unconvincing in light of the abundance of current militant jihad practice around the world. In addition, Islam’s history, tradition, and holy writings lend clear support for the violent jihad of present-day radical Islam and make it highly unlikely that they will change their terrorist ways anytime soon.

We have already seen in previous articles that the history of Islam is red with the blood of its acts of violence. This history goes all the way back to the violent jihad of Islam’s founder, Muhammad. All of which would certainly be disconcerting for the believer were it not for the fact that he understands that this is, in part at least, that which is spoken of in the opening of the second seal of Revelation 6:4: “And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.”

Not only is radical Islam’s militant jihad grounded in history, it also has firm justification both in the *Quran* and *Hadith* (the collection of sayings and acts of Muhammed). A few quotes from those documents will make that clear:

—From Sura 9:1-6: ...fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleager them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war).

—Sura 9:29-31: Fight those who believe not in God nor the last day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and his Apostle (Muhammed), nor acknowledge the religion of truth (Islam) ... until they pay *jizya* (poll tax on non-Islamics) with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

—*Hadith* 4:44: A man came to Muhammed and said, “Instruct me as to such a deed as equals Jihad.” He replied, “I do not find such a deed.”

—*Hadith* 4:50: Muhammed said, “A single endeavor (of fighting) in Allah’s cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in it.”


—*Hadith* 4:72: Muhammed said, “Nobody who enters Paradise likes to go back to the world even if he got everything on the earth, except a Mujahid (one who fights in jihad) who wishes to return to the world so that he may be martyred ten times because of the dignity he receives (from Allah).”

—*Hadith* 4:73: Muhammed said, “Know that Paradise is under the shade of swords.”

These and many other quotes from the *Quran* and *Hadith* make clear that radical Islam’s violent jihad is no doubt consistent with their holy writings. They practice what they preach! In light of this it is very difficult for more moderate Muslims to condemn the actions of their radical brothers; to do so would put them at odds with their own holy writings.

Furthermore, they preach what they practice: the ideas of militant Islam are taught in the schools. A case in point is the high school textbook, *Islamic Culture*, produced by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Education. This book teaches young Muslims, “Islam is Allah’s religion for *all* (emphasis mine, c.k.) human beings. It should be proclaimed and invite (people) to join it wisely and through appropriate preaching and friendly discussions. However, such methods may encounter resistance and the preachers may be prevented from accom-

plishing their duty ... then, *Jihad* and the use of physical force against the enemies become inevitable....” Also taught is Islam’s belief that the world is divided into two portions: the Dar al Islam, the world of Islam, and the Dar al Harb, the world of war. According to this view of the world, peace is possible only within the world of Islam, and the non-Islamic world is a battlefield where Muslims are required to war against the unbelievers.

In this light the modern-day children of Issachar must recognize that the conflict between Islam and the West is not merely a result of U.S. support of Israel, past conflict, and Western economic policies that affect Muslim countries. It is much more than that. It is a war of ideas, worldviews if you will. Their cry of “Death to the West” is no idle threat, but rather an expression of their worldview that Islam and the West cannot coexist! No doubt the world will stand in awe of the beast that will bring these two antithetical worldviews into a semblance of peace under his rule (Rev. 13 & 17). 

2. Elizabeth Kendal, “Spreading Flame,” *Christian Observer* April, 2004:30.

3. Kendal: 30.

4. Compass Direct, “Spreading Flame,” *Christian Observer* May, 2004:30.

5. Compass Direct, “Spreading Flame,” *Christian Observer* July, 2004:30.

6. Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003) 43.

7. Spencer 46-47.

8. Spencer 48-49.

9. Robert Spencer, “Of Crusaders and Jihadis,” *Human Events* 3 May, 2004:24.

10. Spencer 24.

Cocceius and Historical Theology (1)

Introduction

It would be a mistake to call Johannes Cocceius a heretic and to include him in a series of portraits of those who introduced heresy into the church. Cocceius was wrong in some aspects of his theology, but he was also very right in other ideas, particularly in his doctrine of the covenant. His wrong ideas sparked a bitter controversy in the church, which lasted beyond his own lifetime. And his wrong ideas introduced into the thinking of the church a way of studying and teaching theology that has had extremely detrimental consequences in the church even today. That is why his ideas are worth our study.

I will forego a biographical sketch of his life, except for some brief facts, because I included a lengthy description of his life in my book *Portraits of Faithful Saints*. In that book is a brief summary of Cocceius' ideas and a biographical sketch of the life and the importance of his chief opponent, Gijsbert Voetius.¹ The reader is urged to read these two chapters prior to reading this discussion of Cocceius.

A Brief Sketch of His Life

Cocceius was born in Emden, Germany in 1609, and was, therefore, a contemporary of the Synod of Dordt, although he was too young to attend. He was an outstanding scholar and was especially trained in the original lan-

guages of Scripture. His scholarship was widely recognized: he taught in his hometown of Bremen and in some of the most prestigious universities in the Netherlands: Leiden and Franeker. Although the University of Franeker has become a rest home for the aged, one can still see Cocceius' name carved in the stone about the main entrance.

The period during which he lived was one of the most flourishing periods of Reformed theology in the Netherlands and the entire continent of Europe, and he was one of many towering defenders of the Reformed faith, most of whom were present at the great Synod of Dordrecht. It was the age of the development of the truths of Calvinism and the systematization of these truths in dogmatical works.

Yet, Cocceius was always "odd man out." Of German extraction, he never quite felt at home among the Dutch. In an age of somewhat loose living (partly because the Reformed Church was a National Church and included all the citizens of the country on its rolls), he was noted for his piety. In a time of systematic theology he introduced a new way of dealing with dogmatics, a way with which we are now occupied.

Cocceius' Concerns

Cocceius was primarily an Old Testament scholar, although his abilities in languages qualified him to teach New Testament as well. In the course of his studies he became convinced that the church was responsible for serious errors when theologians wrote and taught theology as a systematic body of doctrine. He was of the opinion that the wealth of biblical truth,

along with its rich teachings and its emphasis on piety, were obscured in theological treatises such as systematic theologies or Reformed dogmatics. He developed what has become known as biblical theology.

It seems as if Cocceius' major concern was his fear that systematic theology omitted Christian piety. The works on dogmatics that had been written were so committed to a systematizing and analysis of all the truths of Scripture that the godliness, the Christian life, the subjective experience of the faith, the piety that ought to be a part of the life of every child of God, were ignored. One was left with cold, abstract, complicated, and involved theology that appealed to the intellect and not to the heart. It left a person with a head full of knowledge, but did nothing for his own inner life of faith and his walk as a child of God in the world. Cocceius was interested in piety.

Cocceius had other concerns, all related to the dangers of systematic theology. He was concerned with the fact that the study of Scripture had become, in large measure, a matter of "proof-texting." Theologians developed individual doctrines of Scripture, such as justification by faith alone, eternal and sovereign predestination, the perseverance of the saints, and sought to prove these doctrines from Scripture by citing texts found throughout Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible was used for proof texts, little else.

The major task of the theologian was to discover proof texts, build his doctrines on them, and proceed in a very rational and coldly intellectual way to analyze,

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

dissect, and parse every doctrine so that it could be laid bare in all its implications.

Another serious danger arose from this approach, according to Cocceius. Texts from Scripture were misused when they served as proofs for given doctrines. They were frequently torn out of context; their place in Scripture went unrecognized; and exegesis did not take into account the historical circumstances under which the given text was written. To use an example (my own), in proof of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, not only was Paul's powerful description of our bodily resurrection used as proof for the doctrine, but Job's words in Job 19 were also quoted as proof: "I know that my Redeemer liveth...." But no significance was given to the fact that Job lived around 2000 years before Paul, was a contemporary of Abraham, and could not have understood the truth of the resurrection as well as one who lived after the outpouring of the Spirit. Job's words simply became one more "proof" for a doctrine; but the meaning, the limited understanding, the power, the force of them in Job's life were lost.

Before we move on, it is well that we grant Cocceius the point that a systematic approach to Scripture in the interests of Reformed dogmatics can indeed result in these errors. The method of the interpretation of Scripture that has been adopted by the church since the third and fourth centuries is called the grammatical-historical method. The use of that method implies that each passage of Scripture must be interpreted *in its own historical context*, and the question must be asked: What did this passage mean to the saints at the time it was given by God? Cocceius pointed to a real danger.

Cocceius' Method

In the place of systematic theology, Cocceius proposed another method of developing doctrine, the

method of biblical theology — although he did not give it that name. His method was the study of Scripture from the beginning to the end, book by book, taking each book individually and separately, developing the theology in each book or each part of a book, and then moving on to the next section of Scripture.

He was convinced that this way of doing theology was far to be preferred. It dealt honestly with each text and explained it in its own historical setting. It was faithful to the character of revelation; God, so Cocceius was fond of pointing out, did not reveal Himself in giving to the church a Reformed dogmatics, but God made Himself known in and through history by means of a continual flow of revelation, which gradually developed through time until it was all fulfilled in Christ. God added to, further explained, enriched by new revelations, the one great truth of salvation in Christ. Cocceius' historical approach did justice to that obvious fact of Scripture.

At the same time, because the emphasis fell on God's revelation in and through history, proper emphasis could also be placed on godliness and piety as the truths of Scripture were interwoven with the lives of saints and sinners and God's dealings with them.

It was this approach, for all its value, that made Cocceius a *covenant* theologian. Cocceius saw, in his study of the gradual development of God's promise throughout the old dispensation, that the covenant stood out in bold relief and was, in fact, the unifying truth in the whole of God's revelation.² Although Cocceius retained some ideas of the covenant which were not biblical, though current ideas at that time, he also saw the covenant of grace as more than a two-sided agreement between God and man: he understood that the covenant was also a bond of friendship between God and His people.³

Cocceius' Mistakes

But the approach to the doctrine of Scripture that Cocceius took led him to serious mistakes.

Cocceius is considered the father of dispensationalism. Certainly, he did not develop dispensationalism in the way and to the extent that it is developed today in dispensational premillennialism. But Cocceius, by his approach to Scripture, tended to separate the Old Testament from the New. This separation between the two testaments is fatal for correct Bible teaching.

One can understand how it goes. If a given passage in Scripture must be interpreted in its immediate, but also in its broader, context, the Old Testament passages must be interpreted as such, and any correct interpretation must take into account that Christ had not yet come, that the Spirit had not yet been poured out, and that the church lived in the "dark ages" of types and shadows. From such a view emerges the idea that two different dispensations result in two different ways in which God deals with His people. That kind of separation between the Old and the New is the cornerstone on which all Baptist thinking is built.

Cocceius applied this distinction between the two dispensations in another way: the moral law of God in general, and Sabbath observance in particular. With consistency Cocceius said that the fourth commandment was fulfilled in the work of Christ. Therefore, it no longer applied to the new dispensation. In our age, no single day ought to be set aside as the Christian Sabbath; it is not necessary to make Sunday a day in

1. Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFP, 1999) chapters 45, 46.

2. Cocceius' approach was something like the new series on the Old Testament that is being published by the RFP, *Unfolding Covenant History*.

3. *Portrait of Faithful Saints*, 338.

which the church observes the fourth commandment and meets in divine worship services. It may be, said Cocceius, wise and expedient, but not a requirement of the law.

There is an irony here. Cocceius lived in an age of some looseness in Sabbath observance, and he himself, in spite of his views, kept the Sabbath holy. His theology did not affect his life in this respect. Nevertheless, his views had their effect, and the fruit of his views is seen today, even among “conservative” evangelicals, who desecrate the Sabbath on much the same grounds that Cocceius developed.

The Error of Biblical Theology

Biblical theology is much in vogue today and is frequently the theological method employed in seminaries. In some more extreme cases, systematic theology is scorned and even accused of doing great harm to the truth.

There are plenty of books written about the view that, while Calvin developed a theology that was more biblical and interwoven with genuine piety, Theodore Beza⁴ spoiled all that and began a trend of developing theology systematically. His practice was followed by such outstanding Reformed theologians as the men at the Synod of Dordt, Francis Turretin, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Herman Hoeksema. These are fre-

quently scornfully and mockingly called Scholastics. The name is employed to designate these men as being of the same ilk as the Roman Catholic Scholastics in Medieval times who prided themselves in picking apart the truth, discussing such abstract questions as, “How many angels can dance on the point of a pin,” and rationally analyzing and dissecting truths in a coldly intellectual way.

Is biblical theology the desirable thing it is said to be?


We cannot argue with the important method of Bible interpretation that requires that every text of the Bible be explained in its own historical context. This principle of interpretation is indeed rooted in the truth that Scripture is the infallibly inspired record to God’s revelation, in and through history, of Himself as the God who sovereignly saves His church in Jesus Christ His own Son. Never may that truth be violated.

I well recall how I frequently was comforted in my early ministry after I preached on some Old Testament saint. After such a service, one saint would admonish me not to ascribe too much knowledge of the truth to those who lived in the dispensation of shadows: “Rev., they didn’t have the Spirit yet, you know.” But soon another would approach me with a look of some concern on his face to tell me: “Rev., you do not give sufficient

credit to those saints in the Old Testament. They believed a whole lot more than you realize.” As long as both talked to me about it, I concluded I had things about right.

Nor may we dispute the fact that Scripture is vitally interested in godliness and genuine piety. Who could ever deny that? And it is also true that true piety arises out of doctrine. The two are inseparable. True doctrine deals with piety, and piety pleasing to God is confession in word and life of sound doctrine.

But theology is one thing and preaching is another. The church needs both. The preaching, even the systematic preaching, of doctrine has to be woven through with the golden threads of godliness — or it is simply not preaching. And, although a solid textbook on Reformed dogmatics will not ordinarily incorporate into itself biblical ethics, there is no reason why it ought not do this; and in the teaching of “Systematics” a faithful professor can and must point the way to preaching godliness from doctrine. But a Dogmatics is not a book on Ethics, any more than a book on Ethics is a Dogmatics. Both are needed; and the blending of both into a whole is the business of the whole church.

... to be concluded. 

4. Calvin’s co-worker and successor in the Academy of Geneva.

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Adorning Sound Doctrine

Doctrine and life are closely related to each other. They are not, as some claim, opposites. They are inseparable.

Because of this close relation-

ship, doctrine affects life. What one believes determines how he lives. If he errs in doctrine, he will also err in life. If he believes the lie, his life will not be in conformity with God’s commands.

This can also happen in the church. If a congregation departs from the truth and false doctrine

is believed and preached, the result will be departure in the life of the congregation. The worship, the sacraments, and discipline of the church will soon be corrupted. Every man will do what is right in his own eyes.

We can also turn this around. Not only does doctrine affect life,

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

but life affects doctrine. Whenever one persists in a life that is contrary to the Word of God, he will inevitably alter and deny the truths of God's Word. For the sake of an ungodly and worldly life, he will corrupt and forsake the truth, for that truth condemns his wicked life.

Again, this can also take place in the church. If a church has within it those who continue to live in sin, and if the church is of a mind to allow that to continue (by failing to exercise Christian discipline), this will inevitably affect the truth that is confessed. The truth that forms the basis of godly living will not be preached, for to do so might cause offense and might turn members away.



The fact that doctrine and life are inseparable is pointed out by the apostle Paul in Titus 2:1. In this verse, Paul is telling Titus what he, as a minister of the gospel, must preach. Paul's instruction is this: "But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine."

To preach the things that "become" sound doctrine means a minister is to preach things that "befit" or that "match" sound doctrine. He is to teach the people of God concerning lives that are "in harmony with" the doctrines and truths of Scripture.

It is clear, therefore, that sound doctrine is the basis of godly living. A godly and sanctified life flows out of the truth. For example, the doctrine of the total depravity of man has, by God's grace, the result (among other things) of a life of humility in which the child of God knows and confesses and repents daily of his sinfulness and sin. And an effect of the truth of the covenant is, by the grace of God, that parents give godly instruction to their children, both within their homes and through establishing and using Christian schools. A godly life that is consistent with the truth is therefore a

life that *adorns* the sound doctrines of God's Word.

The fact that godly living follows from sound doctrine clearly implies that what must come first in the preaching is sound doctrine. That stands to reason, for how can one teach the things that befit sound doctrine if he does not first of all teach sound doctrine itself? Practice that is not grounded in the truth will lead people astray. Therefore, sound doctrine must be preached.

Sound doctrine is, literally, doctrine that is wholesome and healthy. What makes a sermon so is that it is, from beginning to end, the true Word of God. The minister of the Word may not be "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). He may not teach weak or watered-down doctrines. He may not stand before the congregation in order to set forth the ideas and opinions and philosophies of men. Rather, the preaching must contain the solid truths of God's Word. Everything that is spoken must be firmly grounded in the Scriptures. It is a matter of being able to say, "Thus saith the Lord!"

The importance of sound doctrine needs to be underscored. Doctrinal preaching is not popular today. Many dislike and criticize it. They say it is too difficult to follow and grasp. They claim the doctrines are too deep to understand. And they argue: "What good does it do me? What usefulness does it have for my life?" Instead, they want "practical" preaching. And what they mean by that is the application of God's Word to their lives apart from the doctrinal basis for that application. They simply want "How to..." sermons.

A minister can be tempted to cater to this wish of the people. He is tempted to do so in order to keep the people happy — to try to please the pew. He is also tempted to do so because he sees many weaknesses and sins in the lives of God's people and thinks the solution to

this is "practical" preaching. And he is tempted because it is hard work and takes great effort to make sermons that are doctrinal — sermons in which the truths of God's Word are clearly explained and then also properly applied to the lives of God's people.

Yet a minister of the gospel must not give in to these temptations. The Word of God states clearly that he is to preach sound doctrine. That is God's command. That is what preaching must be. And that is what God's people need to hear in order to be led to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Sound doctrine is the sure basis of godly living.



But sound doctrine is not only necessary because it is the basis for proper living — it is also necessary and significant because it is the motive for such living. That is, sound doctrine not only teaches God's people how to live properly, but also serves as the incentive for them to do so.

The child of God is called to live a life of gratitude. He is to be thankful for God's grace to him in Jesus Christ. In gratitude, he is to live a life of obedience to God, a life in which he loves God with all his heart and mind and strength, and his neighbor as himself.

However, God does not simply command us to do this, but in His mercy He also gives us motivation to do so. Sound doctrine is that motivation.

This is because of what sound doctrine is. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the gospel. At the heart of all faithful preaching of doctrine is the truth of God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ. Sound doctrine is the truth that God loves and saves unworthy sinners. Sound doctrine is the truth that God is absolutely sovereign in this work of salvation — He does it all.

The believer who knows that God has graciously saved him, an

unworthy and wretched sinner, and has saved him completely, cannot be anything but thankful to God. The sound doctrines of the gospel motivate and compel him to be obedient. His heart and life are characterized by grateful obedience to God. The sound truths of God's sovereign grace cause him to adorn the doctrines with a godly life.

If someone does not know or believe sound doctrine, he will not live a thankful and obedient life. Really, he cannot, for he does not know the great grace of God. He cannot be thankful, for he does not know what to be thankful for. He does not have a reason or motive for obedience. He will conclude that he can live as he pleases. And if he does happen to strive to obey God, the fact that he holds to false doctrine means his life

is not properly motivated. He will most likely be living this way in order to try to earn God's favor. Such a life, though outwardly good, will not be one of true gratitude and obedience to God.



Sound doctrine is necessary, therefore, as both the basis of and motivation for godly living. It serves, by the work of the Spirit, to lead the saved child of God in a life that adorns that sound doctrine.

The Scriptures give specific commands concerning that life. We read of those specifics in the remaining verses of Titus 2. In that passage, each believer in the church is addressed. No one is ignored or overlooked. In unam-

biguous language the Word of God makes it very clear what is expected of each of us — of aged men, of aged women, of young women, of young men, and of servants. Be sure to read Titus 2:2-6! It states very clearly what befits sound doctrine.

When we disobey this Word of God and fail to do what we are commanded in Titus 2, our lives will be a contradiction of what we say we believe and confess.

However, when by the grace of God we are faithful to these admonitions, our lives will be in harmony with the truths of God's Word. Then, and only then, are our lives pleasing to God. Then, and only then, are we adorning sound doctrine by the way we live.



Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Evangelism in the Established Church (2) The Role of Every Believer in Evangelism

In the previous article of this series (see September 1, 2004, p. 472), we set forth that the work of evangelism in the local church must involve every member of the congregation. No matter what project is undertaken, be it door-to-door evangelism, radio ministry, sponsoring local lectures, or whatever, it requires the active involvement of every member to accomplish its stated goal. In this article we want to develop a bit more why this is not only necessary, but also proper, and why it is to be expected by those

who are working hard in this evangelism.

I address this question to every reader: Are you actively involved in outreach yourself and not just passing this work off to your pastor, the Evangelism Committee in your local church, or even to other members? The burden of this article is to show from the Bible that God has saved you to evangelize and that the leaders of the church want you to be busy in evangelism and expect it of you. This is God's way.

John Sittema, in an article in the *Outlook* of October 2003, raised the question why it is that in the past both Presbyterian and Reformed churches were zealous in

outreach and missions, but now seem to have lost the passion for the lost. He writes, "Local evangelism is almost nonexistent. Sadly a correlative attitude seems to be acceptable and popular among Calvinists these days: people get saved in Baptist or other fundamentalistic churches and then they learn good theology and become Calvinists. If it weren't so arrogant it might be funny. Fact is that not many 'get saved' through evangelism effort of Calvinistic churches in today's Christian world. And that's a shame."

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we fall under this criticism as well. We can say so easily that the church is being

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

gathered from all nations under heaven and when that is complete, and we are very close to that completion, Christ will return. Do we realize what little effort is being put forth from Reformed churches, including ourselves, to do this work? Just consider India as an example and discover how little effort is put forth among those billion plus people. It is so small, it is mind-boggling. The same is true for Africa, including Ghana. I ask you, are we really doing all we can as churches in our mission work? We are doing something in mission work, and we in no way want to belittle that, it is cause for thanksgiving to God. Could we do more? If you really believe we could do more, then I also ask, why are we not doing it?

Mission zeal has something to do with it. I ask myself, what does it take to generate more zeal for missionary work and evangelism among our members? This ought to be the burden of every member of our churches. It is not honest simply to say, "We have zeal." It is not enough to say, "To generate zeal is the concern of consistories in the local church." Yes, they have their responsibility to promote missions. I am convinced that the real issue is spiritual and lies in the heart of every one of us. Every member must accept it as his calling to evangelize, and when we get this straight, we will discover under God's blessing that our churches will become truly more mission minded. I share the burden which G. Van Dooren expressed for his churches in the book *Get Out and Get Rid of Dilemmas*,

Better a local congregation with no evangelistic organization whatsoever but fully alive "in the Lord," than a place with much noise of committees and sub-committees and all the works, but no life of the Spirit and no love for the neighbor.

God emphasizes that every saved person must speak of the won-

derful works of God to *everyone!* A converted soul has within him a burning desire to praise and extol the name of the God who saved him. This is obviously true for new converts in the mission field, but it ought to be just as true for one saved within God's covenant. The Bible says in I Peter 2:4-10,

Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.... Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye *should shew forth the praises* of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The word "to shew forth" is "to declare, to make known" the praises, virtues, and wonders of God. This is not limited to ministers, elders, and deacons; it is the task of every stone in the living house of God. The purpose of our salvation is to declare to everyone who crosses our pathway, our neighbor, that God is sovereign, He is great and greatly to be praised.

This is so rudimentary that I need not belabor the point. The shepherds led the way, for after having beheld by faith the wonder of the incarnation, they rejoiced in their salvation, and declared the message of the gospel to all. "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17, 18). This is the irrepressible joy of heart that motivates every Christian to share the gospel with his neighbor. He cannot but speak to his precious covenant child at home. No less can he be silent before the coarse sinner with whom he works on the job.

The motive is obvious; it is love, pure love. Jesus illustrated this with His reference to the forgiven debtors in Luke 7:40-50. Why did the forgiven debtor find

it easy to forgive his debtors? Jesus put it this way: when one is forgiven a great debt, he finds it easy to forgive someone who owes him a little. In the narrative, Jesus mentioned how Simon criticized Jesus' evangelistic work with the local prostitute because he did not know his own forgiveness of sins. If we truly know the horror of our sins and the depth of God's love to wash them away in the blood of Jesus, relief and joy motivate us to want others to enjoy this. The mark of a true Christian convert is his eagerness to see others saved even as he is saved.

It is the task of the ministry of the gospel and the teaching ministry of the local church to promote this activity in every member. I agree with Van Dooren when he writes in *Get Out*,

Assuming that consistories have to "appoint" committees, let them never instruct those committees, "to promote evangelism among the membership." That should never be the task of a committee which is only to give a helping hand to "God's own people," the "promotion" has to be done by the officebearers themselves, who have to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and are not allowed to "delegate" this Christ-given mandate to others (cf. Eph. 4:11ff.).

Every pastor has the commission from Christ so to conduct himself in his ministry and by example that he motivates every member to evangelize. In this way the congregation understands this to be their duty and that they ought to exercise it faithfully to the glory of God. Such instruction is part of the gospel, written in the Holy Bible. If we preach the whole counsel of God, it will include instruction in this labor.

The reference Van Dooren makes is to Ephesians 4:11-14. There Paul instructs the Ephesian church leaders concerning their work. "And he gave some apostles,

and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” I have mentioned before, that we have a misplaced comma here. It ought to read that the work of pastors and teachers is for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry. The ministry (service to others) is that done by the saints. The pastors and elders have the commission to equip the members so that they mature (perfecting) and are thus qualified to be active in service, ministry, which in turn edifies the body of Christ. This ministry includes attending to the needs of fellow members, assisting in training children of the covenant, helping the poor in the midst of the congregation, visiting the lonely, and doing the work of evangelism by sharing the gospel with others and thereby bringing others into the fellowship of the congregation.

In summary we say, when God works salvation in the heart of His child, love excels. God’s love to us is so precious that we respond to Him in love. This love is the effect of the law written on the tables of our hearts. That law has two parts. It is, first of all, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. With God’s love in our hearts we worship, honor, and obey Him in love. The law also has a second part, to love our neighbor as ourselves. To fellow believers, this love is demonstrated in the communion of the saints. To neighbors who still are lost in sin, our love to them is expressed in our desire and effort to lead them to salvation.

The effectiveness of the gospel is *seen* in the life and practice of the members. The marks of the true church become the marks of true Christians as spelled out in Belgic Confession Article 29. In the earlier part of the article the well-known marks of the true church are mentioned: pure doctrine of the gospel is preached, the sacraments are administered properly, and church dis-

cipline is exercised in punishing sin. Then immediately follows the marks of the true Christian:

With respect to those who are members of the church, they may be known by the marks of Christians, namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof.

This is expected of every Christian because God anoints every true believer by His Holy Spirit to serve Him in the church or kingdom of heaven. Every true believer is equipped to be an officebearer in the covenant, a prophet, priest, and king in the service of God.

The Heidelberg Catechism describes this work in Lord’s Day 12:

Why art thou called a Christian?
A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures.

As an anointed prophet, every Christian has the calling and ability to “confess His name.” This has many aspects to it. We think of public confession of faith; confessing His name in the instruction of covenant children; and no less importantly, confessing His name to the neighbor, whether Christian or non-Christian. We cannot separate the prophetic office (speech) from the priestly and kingly office (action). Thus the Bible uses the word “conversation,” which includes both speech and action. Later the Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord’s Day 32, mentions that by our godly conversation, we may be able “to gain others to Christ.”

Witnessing, or the work of evangelism by the members of the church, consists of more than inviting others to come to church. Hearing the preaching of the gospel is the goal of all evangelism. This is necessary because of the key role that Christ has assigned to the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:11-15). We may speak of the witnessing of the members as the sharing of the gospel or evangelism because it is in the service of the gospel that they work. Their burden is the salvation of the lost, and this includes bringing them under the preaching of the gospel. To accomplish this, members must realize that for a non-Christian to come under the preaching of the gospel requires our explaining to them what it means to be a Christian, telling them why the gospel is so precious to us, familiarizing them with the Bible, and such things. This is part of our prophetic office, which God may be pleased to use to prepare the heart of one to come under the preaching of the Word.

The benefits of this for the congregation are beyond measure.

True, wrongly motivated and careless methods contribute to the church’s fear of such activity. There are many “objections” that have been and are being raised against this activity. We will begin to address some of them in our next article, the Lord willing.


But we would be remiss in our responsibility to address this subject if we did not end on a positive and beautiful note.

Active witnessing on the part of the individual believer contributes in a marvelous way to his own spiritual maturity. Yes, it includes getting sharpened in apologetics, in what to say to those who argue against the gospel and how to give a Christian response to those who deride and mock the gospel. It is much more than that, it relates to the growth of his personal faith. When we witness to others, we have to “walk the talk.” Careless living and evangelism are incompatible.

We have to know the truth if we are to teach others. We learn quickly that we have to be patient with the spiritual growth of others. We must not be careless in judging and condemning if our goal is to gain for Christ. In summary, we learn that God saves whom He wills, in the way He wills, and in the time of His own choosing. Nothing quickens the heart more than to be an instrument in the hands of God to lead a lost soul to the Savior. We cannot help but praise God when we see His work of salvation before our very own eyes. At the same time, we learn that we cannot save a soul, it is all of God and all of grace, thus prayer

takes on more meaning when we know that the eternal destiny of the souls of those with whom we speak are in God's hands. That is humbling, and that is a good virtue for every Christian.

The church is blessed by such activity. When members of the congregation are involved in personal evangelism, they take an interest in all the mission work of our churches. We appreciate the difficulties involved and are patient and prayerful because we experience it in our own efforts. We want to learn more of what God is doing in the various fields of labor so that we can pray fervently for the Holy Spirit's presence. Even

though we live in serious times, the last days, we are not overcome in gloom or defeat by the apostasy within the churches or by the opposition from the world about us. Rather, we remain positive because we are doing the work of our Lord as He has commissioned us to do until He returns. We do not know the day and the hour of His return, so we work fervently and with great hope. His promise is to be with us until the end. The evidence of this is given to us when we recognize His blessings within the congregation and in our evangelistic efforts. This draws us together and makes us joyful and thankful in Him. 

Report of Classis East

September 8, 2004
First PRC, Holland, MI

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 8, 2004. All the churches were represented by two delegates. Rev. J. Laning was the chairman for the session.

Classis was busy with two issues: 1) the report of the study committee appointed by the May Classis to bring advice concerning the overture to Synod 2005 on newer, vernacular Bible translations; and 2) the appeal from a

brother concerning statements made in a sermon by his pastor.


With regard to the overture to synod requesting that synod appoint a study committee regarding newer, vernacular translations, Classis decided to refer this matter back to its committee for reformulation of its grounds.

With regard to the appeal of the brother's charge against his pastor, Classis rejected his appeal and upheld the position of his consistory defending the statements made by their pastor.

Classis granted classical ap-

pointments to Faith and Hudsonville. Classis West requested help in supplying the pulpits of Bethel, Doon, and Edmonton. Classis decided to grant this request and scheduled as many appointments as possible to aid Classis West and these churches.

Expenses for this classis amounted to \$1,808.93. The next meeting of classis will be on Wednesday, January 12, 2005 at the Southeast PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

In a follow-up to the Mouw/Engelsma debate over common grace, the Evangelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC sponsored a lecture given by Prof. D. Engelsma at Grace Community Church in Hudsonville, MI on Fri-

day evening, October 8. Prof. Engelsma spoke on "The Reformed World View on Behalf of a Godly Culture." Grandville not only promised to make one consider what their world view was, but they also promised to answer the question, "Does the Reformed gospel of sovereign grace have a world view, and was Dr. Richard Mouw's charge that the Protestant Reformed people are not active enough in society true?"

Members of the Loveland, CO PRC were encouraged to invite family and friends to a lecture Friday night, October 15, in their church auditorium. Rev. G. Eriks, pastor at Loveland, spoke on the timely subject "Christian Living in an Age of Tolerance." In this speech Rev. Eriks demonstrated how the worldly concept of tolerance is antichristian and a tool of Satan to attack the church.

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Sister Church Activities

Rev. A. denHartog, our denomination's minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, left Friday, October 8, for a month of work in Myanmar. He planned on being there alone for most of the month, and was busy in teaching a seminar. About 40 men, ministers and elders from the Reformed Churches in Myanmar, planned to be in attendance, the Lord willing. At the morning sessions Rev. denHartog was to give instruction in Essentials of Reformed Doctrine, using a Chin translation of our very own catechism book. At the afternoon sessions he planned on working with the men to help them make Reformed and expository sermons. This was by the request of the men themselves. Rev. denHartog hoped to be in Myanmar until at least November 1. After the seminar, he planned to travel with Pastor Daniel, a graduate of the ARTS program in Singapore, to his hometown of Mandalay, which is the second largest city in Myanmar and has a population of over three million.

Congregation Activities

Sunday morning, October 10, Rev. C. Haak was installed as the second pastor in the ten-year history of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Rev. R. Van Overloop, Georgetown's former pastor, led the installation service, preaching from I Kings 22:14 under the theme, "What Jesus Says to Me, That Will I Speak." Also participating in the service was Rev. B. Woudenberg, leading the congregational prayer, and Prof. R. Decker, reading the installation form.

That evening Rev. Haak

preached his first sermon as Georgetown's pastor, using II Corinthians 12:14, 15a as his Scripture basis under the theme, "I Seek Not Yours, but You." Immediately following the evening worship service there was a brief welcome held for Rev. Haak, his wife, Mary, and daughter Melanie.

Members of the Lynden, WA PRC were encouraged to join together on Monday, October 18, for a painting/cleaning day at their church. If you wanted to clean, you were encouraged to bring buckets and rags. If you felt more comfortable painting, you were urged to bring your favorite paint trays, rollers, and brushes. Paint and cleaning solution was provided.

An evening of thanksgiving was planned for Sunday evening, October 10, at the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL for the commemoration of their pastor's (Rev. S. Houck's) 25 years of service as a minister in our denomination.

The council of the South Holland, IL PRC informed their congregation that the purchase of their new church property was finalized on September 24. The property purchased was 19.5 acres.

The ladies of the Edgerton, MN PRC hosted this fall's Combined Ladies' Society meeting with the ladies from the Doon and Hull, IA PRC's on October 12. Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor at Edgerton, spoke on the topic, "The Christian Citizen."

Fathers and sons of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to participate in a father/son outing on the ice of the Georgetown Ice Arena, October 15.

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA,

was invited to speak for the Indian Christian Fellowship on October 9, and for the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary on October 13.

The council of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for Pittsburgh, sent two elders, Mr. Dan Schipper and Mr. Henry Kamps, and two deacons, Mr. Todd Groenendyk and Mr. Les Kamps, to visit the field October 15-18. They planned to meet with the missionary and his family, as well as with the Steering Committee. They also were available for pastoral and diaconal visits as necessary. They worshiped with the Fellowship on Sunday, before returning home early the next week.

We could also pass along to our readers that Pittsburgh now has a new web site and e-mail address. Their web address is prcpittsburgh.org and their new e-mail address is prcpittsburgh@yahoo.com.

Minister Activities

Rev. A. Brummel declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada.

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of the Doon, IA PRC.

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland express Christian sympathy to member Henry Lubbers in the passing of his wife,

MRS. GLADYS LUBBERS.

May we say the words found in II Corinthians 1:3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

Rich Moore, Pres.
Francine Leep, Sec'y.