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A Night of Wonders

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Acts 16:31

Little did Paul and Silas realize that God had brought them into this prison under close guard and in chains for the very purpose that there they should meet "a man of Macedonia" who would pray them, "Come over and help us."

Still less did this jailer know that these men had been sent to him by the living God to bring a radical change in his life. Nor did he realize that the happenings of this night would have a lasting effect upon his household and his future generations.

The prison keeper was charged to keep these men in double security. He knew that they "exceedingly troubled the city and taught unlawful customs" for Romans to

observe. He had heard or heard about the cry, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation," but it had made no great impression on him at the time.

He had placed them behind locked doors, in the innermost prison, where they lay in an uncomfortable position with their legs in shackles and their raw, bloody backs pressed against the hard, cold, musty prison wall.

Under those circumstances sleep was out of the question. Paul and Silas were deeply aware that they were bearing the reproaches of their Lord and Master, who had suffered far more for their sakes than they now bore, so that from their hearts they could still pray and sing praises to God. Their songs were surely unfamiliar sounds in the ears of the other prisoners.

About midnight the jailer was suddenly awakened out of his sleep by the powerful hand of the Almighty, who alone is God. He experienced a rumbling, a trembling and shaking of the earth. No, this was no ordinary earthquake, as frightening as that can be. It was of a unique character, for it was centered in and shook the entire prison. Amazingly, and that immediately shocked the jailer, this most unusual, localized disturbance in the earth caused the prison doors to burst open and the stocks and chains that held the prisoners to fall away, so that they were free and, if they wished, they had plenty of opportunity to get up and walk out.

The prison keeper's first reaction was quite natural. He feared his prisoners had escaped, even those who were placed in double security. Nothing could stop them. A power greater than that of any

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man had been displayed. And the prison keeper will be held responsible. The authorities would surely kill him for failing in his duty of keeping in custody all the prisoners, but especially the two prominent men concerning whom he had received special orders to keep them secure.

But then a different fear suddenly gripped him, a fear which was far worse than the fear of death. He was confronted by the God whom Paul preached. His whole life passed in review before him and he realized that he was imprisoned in sin, bound in the shackles of guilt, condemned to the everlasting death of hell.

A second wonder had taken place, even greater and more marvelous than the first. Scripture speaks of this as "being born again," not of flesh and blood, but by the Spirit of Christ in our hearts. You may have experienced this amazing change in your own life. More likely, it took place even before you were born. In any case, we become new creatures in Christ, born from above, born with the life of our risen Lord in our hearts. We have become members of the family of God, sons and daughters in God's house, heirs of eternal life.

This radical change in our lives is so amazing that our fathers speak of it as "a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable, not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead" (Canons III/IV, 12).

The jailer experienced another wonder: God's amazing work of conversion, whereby both the heart and the mind of the jailer underwent a radical change. He was taken from death into life, from darkness into the light, changed from a servant of Satan to a servant of the living God, turned from sin unto a godly walk. Now deeply aware of the guilt of his sin that condemned him before the tribunal of the only true God, he cries

out, as it were, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

That is what drove him out to Paul and Silas, to fall down at their feet and to plead: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved."

Broken, humbled to the dust
By Thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear Thy voice;
From my sins O hide Thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.

Psalter #140

The answer of Paul and Silas is as amazing and significant now as it was then: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"

What? No self-mutilation, no sacrifice of a son or a daughter, no costly oblation, as was the practice among the heathen? No promise of remuneration or a life of service? No, none of that! Simply: Believe. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, what is required of the jailer is the humanly impossible. How strange such an answer would have sounded in pagan ears, not taught of God: Believe on a man who preached and taught among His own people, Israel. A man who was rejected by them, even committed to the bitter, shameful, accursed death of the cross! A man who is said to have done the unheard of, the humanly impossible: to have atoned for the sin of others, risen from the dead, and gone into glory to bestow His work of grace upon us from heaven!

The prison keeper was a man who had undergone the wonder of regeneration and had become a new creature in Christ. Old things were passed away, all had been made new. The bond of faith was laid between Christ and him through which all the blessings of salvation are bestowed upon him.

He is now enabled to embrace God as the only true and living God. He knows that this one and only God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He is the God of all grace who breaks the shackles of sin and opens the prison door of death. In Him alone is all our salvation. He is the covenant God, who teaches us to say in awe and reverence: My God! My heavenly Father! My Refuge and my Strength." "He (God) produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also" (Canons III/IV, 14).

No, the jailer's faith was not fully developed. It was still in its initial stage, like a beautiful rose bud that is ready to burst into bloom, or like a shimmering speck of diamond that exposes an unexplored diamond mine.

All concern about the magistrate now fades from his mind. He has but one desire, which he gratefully fulfills. He takes Paul and Silas out of their prison cell and into his home. There he carefully and with deep concern washes their wounds and freely pours balm upon them. He believes. His trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ whom Paul and Silas preach. He trusts in Him with body and soul, for time and eternity. He is ready to surrender himself completely to the true and living God, and he experiences a peace he had never before known. He experiences a peace that is beyond human comprehension.

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

This is not the end of the wonders of that night. Holy baptism was administered to a formerly pagan family by the servants of God.

When Paul said, "And thou shalt be saved," he had added the assurance: "and thy house." How could he say that about a pagan family? Was he not a bit hasty? Should he not have waited until true faith was evident also in the wife, in the children, or in the servants? But this assurance of Paul

is based upon the Word of God, for the promise (I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee ... to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee) is to the believer "and to his children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

A new covenant line has sprung into life. New branches appear on the vine of which Christ is the root. A new line of generations has been added to the family

of God here on earth. Here are newly revealed members of the body of Christ, new members of the one, holy, universal church of God. Here are prospective members of the church at Philippi.

The jailer has confessed before Paul and Silas that he believes that although he and his household were conceived and born in sin, yet they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His church ought to be baptized. He acknowledges the truth of Paul's preach-

ing and instruction and promises to see his household instructed and brought up in that doctrine.

God gathers into His church in sovereign mercy most unexpected and unworthy persons — like the jailer, like you and me! O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown!



Editorial

The Kingdom of God (2)

"Who . . . hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Colossians 1:13

The basic idea of the kingdom is the rule of God—the living, actual, liberating, saving, blessed rule of God in Jesus Christ. We may think of it this way. The whole world lies enslaved to the reign of Satan. Into this world breaks the reign of God, freeing many from the misery, terror, sin, death, and hell of the dark lord, translating them into the knowledge, righteousness, peace, and life of His reign. This is what Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of His ministry: The rule of God is at hand! This is the explanation, why the gospel is called the gospel of the kingdom: the content is the rule of God in Christ.

It is a mistake to understand the kingdom exclusively, or even mainly, in terms of a realm, or in terms of citizens. The kingdom of God is certainly a realm, a territory, just as the United States is a certain land-mass with clearly de-

fined boundaries. Jesus spoke in John 3:5 of *entering* the kingdom. The church has the *keys* of the kingdom, giving entrance into the realm to some and barring others from it. This realm is the church, including the godly lives of her members in every sphere of earthly life.

The kingdom of God has citizens, just as every earthly nation has citizens. These are the elect out of all earthly nations and races. In the day of the final judgment, the Son of Man on His throne will say to the sheep on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). These persons show themselves citizens by obeying God the king: They believe the gospel, and submit to the laws of the kingdom.

The citizens of the kingdom include the children—the *infant* children—of elect believers. It is a grievous error on the part of Reformed ministers and churches to minimize the seriousness of the Baptist heresy. Indeed, this error will prove fatal to the Reformed

faith in these churches. Reformed ministers are guilty of this error. They cooperate freely with Baptists in public religious activities. They refuse sharply to condemn the Baptist exclusion from the covenant and church of God of many for whom Christ died and to whom the Spirit of Christ is promised (see Heid. Cat., Q. 74). In flat contradiction of their own creed, which declares that the Reformed faith detests the error of the Baptists, they write openly that the issue of infant baptism is not of fundamental importance (see Bel. Conf., Art. 34).

The inclusion of the children of believers in the kingdom of God, by infant baptism, is an essential truth of the kingdom. It is a truth that must be vigorously defended and promoted wherever the Reformed faith makes its distinctive witness. It is a truth that is fundamental to the oneness of the kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments. It is a truth that is fundamental to the rejection of the miserable corruption of the kingdom by dispensationalism.

Concerning infant children (and this is what they were according to the Greek word that is used in the passage), Jesus said, “*of such is the kingdom of God*” (Luke 18:17). As regards its citizens, the kingdom of God is made up of such infant children. Mark 10:14 tells us that Jesus was indignant with His disciples for attempting to exclude the infant children from Jesus’ kingdom. What earthly king would not be irate at the attempt by some underling to strip a substantial number of his people of their citizenship and banish them from his realm?

In addition to being a realm and having citizens, the kingdom of God provides benefits. The kingdom can be identified with these benefits, just as one might have said in the early days of World War II, that England was liberty in the midst of the tyranny of a Europe overrun by Nazi Germany. Paul identifies the kingdom of God with its wonderful blessings in Romans 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

Important as realm, citizens, and benefits are as aspects of the kingdom, they are not the main thing. The main thing is the rule of God. First and central in the kingdom of God is the *king*. The kingdom of God is simply God the king and His kingship.

We modern Westerners have a hard time grasping this, familiar as we are with democracy and unfamiliar as we are with real monarchs. An Englishman during the reign of King Henry VIII would have had no problem understanding. Recent history, however, has shown us something of the primacy and centrality of the “leader” in his kingdom. The mighty kingdom of Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s was the creation of Adolf Hitler—the extension of his powerful will. Hitler dominated that kingdom. It existed for him. That was certainly true of the great em-

pires of Old Testament times. Babylon was simply Nebuchadnezzar enlarged. This will be the case also with the coming kingdom of Antichrist.

What is true of earthly kingdoms—the centrality of the ruler—is originally and supremely true of the kingdom of God in Christ. It is the kingdom *of God* because God establishes, maintains, and perfects the kingdom. *He* conceived and planned it in His decree. *He* founded it in the cross of the incarnate Son. *He* builds it by the preaching of the gospel in all the world in the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. *He* brings every one who is a citizen according to eternal election into the kingdom by the sovereign wonder of regeneration: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Having regenerated, *He* sanctifies every citizen to live the life of the kingdom and preserves him to the glory of the perfection of the kingdom. *He* will perfect the kingdom in the Day of Christ, raising the dead and renewing the entire creation of heaven and earth.

God, God *only*, is the creator, the origin, of the kingdom. The kingdom comes from Him, not from man. The kingdom, therefore, depends upon God—upon God *only*.

In part, this is the meaning of the description of the kingdom as the “kingdom *of heaven*.” When Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not *of* this world ... my kingdom [is] not *from hence*,” He was saying something about the origin of His kingdom. His kingdom—the kingdom of God—is not from this world; it does not have its origin in this world. Implied, positively, is that Jesus’ kingdom originates in heaven; it comes from God.

The kingdom is the kingdom *of God* also because it is for God, has its ultimate goal in His glory, and is about Him. The kingdom of God is God-centered. How Christ and

the apostles proclaim this! We think at once of the conclusion of the model prayer in Matthew 6: “For thine is the kingdom.” The Heidelberg Catechism explains: “... and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but Thy holy name may be glorified forever” (Q. 128). Describing the perfection of the kingdom, when Christ shall have put all enemies under His feet, the apostle declares that then God will be all in all (I Cor. 15:28).

The kingdom is for the sake of God in these respects. First, the message, or gospel, of the kingdom is all about God, is a God-centered message. This is the content of the gospel in Scripture. This was the content of the gospel preached by the Reformation. This is still the content of the gospel proclaimed by the true church. How much is this true in the preaching and teaching of evangelical and even Reformed churches today?

Second, in the kingdom God’s will governs the life and behavior of the citizens. God’s law governs our personal lives: regarding church membership; regarding dating and marriage; regarding life in the family; regarding business and labor; regarding civil government; regarding eating and drinking.

God’s law also governs the life of the instituted church: regarding worship; regarding doctrine; regarding discipline; regarding offices; regarding denominational connections.

Third, in the kingdom our will, pleasures, friendships, families, and very lives are so subject to the king, that we are called to sacrifice them to God’s glory when this may be necessary. The kingdom is the kingdom *of God*. The king does not exist for the citizens, but we citizens exist for the king. When professing Christians, facing some personal suffering or loss, whine, “Christ would never require such hardship and pain of me,” they show that they do not know the kingdom as the kingdom *of God*.

What all this truth about the

kingdom of God comes down to is the grand testimony of the Reformed faith, that salvation is by sovereign grace alone to the glory of God only. The message of the kingdom of God is nothing other than the gospel of sovereign grace. God saves His elect by regenerating grace, apart from any worth of theirs, any faith or decision of theirs, any acceptance of an offer that distinguishes them from others whom He is supposed to love also. God preserves His elect, regenerated people. God so rules His own by the sanctifying Spirit that they yield to His lordship, obeying His law in every sphere of life and gladly suffering the loss of all for His sake. God builds His church.

That God is God in Jesus Christ is not some queer, parochial, and even sectarian message of a small Reformed denomination in North America, but the very gospel that Jesus came preaching and that He

Himself still preaches by a faithful church and her ministry.

By this criterion must every proposed "kingdom of God" be tested. Is God central in the kingdom? Is He all in all?

Where now is this kingdom of God, this rule of God in Jesus Christ?

It is in heaven, according to Philippians 3:20, where Christ the king is, at God's right hand.

It is also in the world. It is wherever Christ the king is. Since Christ Jesus is present in the preaching of the gospel and in the administration of the sacraments, wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered, there is the kingdom of God—the blessed, saving, God-glorifying rule of God. We ought to press into it, as Jesus taught in Luke 16:16. We do this by believing in Him, the king.

By the gospel and the sacra-

ments the rule of God, which liberates sinners, is established in the heart and life of every one who has been born again by the Spirit.

The institutional form of the kingdom is the church. The relation of the kingdom and the church will be the subject of following editorials.

Are we in the kingdom? Has God translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son?

He has, if we see it, if we live its life, if we find in ourselves some zeal for glorifying God the king.

What a privilege! Let us be thankful.

What a blessing! It is salvation.

What a calling! Our life must be our seeking the kingdom first.

What a hope! We will reign with Christ forever in the new world.

... to be continued. 

— DJE

Letters

■ The Goal of Foreign Missions

Please grant me the opportunity to respond to the letter of Mr. Paul Goh, entitled "Indigenous Churches," which was included in the October 1, 2000 edition of the *Standard Bearer*. In his letter, the brother criticized the mission work of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), particularly our foreign mission work. This requires a constructive response.

In the first place, the PRCA are committed to establishing churches on our mission fields which are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. By perusing the Foreign Mission Committee reports in the Acts of Synod and the special *Standard Bearer* articles by the FMC of the past five or six years, one will conclude that this

is the stated goal of the PRCA in her foreign mission work. This does not mean we claim to be the experts at fulfilling that goal. We feel inadequate at times, and we realize that we are prone to make mistakes when dealing with the difficult issues common to foreign mission work in developing countries. Nevertheless, we agree wholeheartedly with our brother and appreciate his timely reminder that the goal of our foreign mission work must be autonomous, indigenous, local churches.

In the second place, our goal is to establish churches which maintain ecclesiastical ties with the PRCA. This is in accordance with the command of Christ that we must seek the unity of the body of Christ even ecclesiastically. The PRCA maintain such ecclesiastical ties with the ERC in Singapore and Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland

as sister churches, who are by the Lord's blessing alone the fruit of our mission work. Simply to set up churches and to neglect any enduring and mutually profitable ecclesiastical ties is not scriptural, nor spiritually healthy, especially for the fledgling churches. For that reason, we do not agree with the principle behind the brother's opinion that our current missionaries abroad and minister-on-loan in the ERCS "should work themselves out of the job" as soon as possible. Similarly, we do not share in the brother's implicit disapproval of the financial assistance which the PRCA gives to our brethren in Singapore and Northern Ireland. Such assistance must always be given wisely, especially so in developing countries, but it has profitably assisted our brethren abroad in their work in their locales and even in the training of their minis-

ters in our Protestant Reformed Seminary.

In the third place, it is the goal of the PRCA in her foreign mission work to establish churches which are confessionally Reformed. We must seek to establish churches which confess with the church of Jesus Christ of all ages that catholic, undoubted, Christian, Reformed faith. This is necessary for the local churches on the foreign field in order to stand firmly in the battles against the enemies of the Reformed faith, and it is necessary for establishing sister-church relationships with us. Hence, our goal is to establish congregations which are Reformed in confession, life, preaching, and also public worship.

We take to heart our brother's implied caution against the temp-


tation to establish "carbon-copies" of the PRCA in every respect on foreign mission fields. Nevertheless, we unashamedly desire to establish churches which are soundly Reformed. It must be understood that this goal is *not* the same as the undesirable goal of making a "carbon-copy" of the PRCA in every respect on a foreign field. Therefore, when we witness a mission group begin to grow in the Reformed distinctives and traditions under the blessing of the Lord through the exhausting labors of our missionaries, we must rejoice and give the Lord humble thanks. This is inevitably the catalyst to good enthusiasm.

Lastly, we appreciate the reminder of our brother that "the heart language of the people is in their own local dialect." He speaks from experience. Like our brother,

our contacts in the Philippines and our Ghanaian missionary in Accra, Rev. R. Moore, have reiterated that need to preach and teach in the local languages. Often overlooked, but no less important, is also the need for faithful translations of the Bible in the local dialects. The motivation, the reason, and the urgency for Bibles and for preaching in "the heart language of the people" lie squarely in the basic Reformed principle of mission work: Christ by His Word and Spirit gathers His eternally chosen church out of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

May the Lord of the harvest grant us His grace to be faithful to that doctrine of the Reformed faith.

(Rev.) Richard J. Smit,

Secretary of the FMC of the PRCA
Doon, Iowa 

Guest Article

Rev. Ron Hanko

John Knox's Covenant Views (2)

Introduction

In the previous article we looked at what Knox wrote about the covenant in relation to baptism. We saw that in those writings his doctrine of predestination dominated, so that his view of the covenant, though not fully developed, was there soundly biblical, the emphasis being on the eternal and unbreakable character of that covenant and its establishment with the elect only.

In this article we hope to show that in his other writings, particularly his political writings, he went

in another, less biblical direction and expressed views of the covenant that were in conflict with those expressed in his writings on baptism. We believe that this was true because he, in his political writings, was influenced less by his doctrine of predestination than by the peculiar circumstances in which he and the Scottish church of his day found themselves.

The Covenant in Knox's Political Thought

There can be no doubt that Knox's views of the covenant played an important part in his thought on political and social matters. It would be safe to say, we believe, that his doctrine of the covenant, incompletely developed

though it may have been, was the dominating element in his views on the calling of the Christian in the world, of the magistrate, and of the citizen in relation to the civil magistrate.

In applying the doctrine of the covenant to these aspects of everyday life, Knox began well. He pointed out that those who are in covenant with God must live in obedience to Him, and that those covenant obligations must take priority over everything else. He defined such covenant obligations especially in relation to idolatry, teaching that the believer's league or covenant with God obliged him to forsake and oppose idolatry in every form. He says, for example:

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As it is most profitable for body and soul to avoid idolatry, so is it necessary, that unless so we do, we refuse to be in league with God, we show ourselves to have no faith, and we deny to be witnesses unto God, and to his truth; and so must he, of his Justice, expressed in his word, deny us to be pertain to him or his kingdom (*A Godly Letter of Warning or Admonition to the Faithful in London, Newcastle, and Berwick*, vol. III, p. 190).¹

With this, few would argue.

Due, however, to the political and social circumstances under which Knox ministered, he not only thought of idolatry almost exclusively in terms of false worship, especially Roman Catholic worship, but he carried his views of the Christian's covenant calling in what were, in our view, unacceptable directions. These unacceptable applications of the doctrine of the covenant to everyday life were several.

For one thing, being in covenant with God meant for Knox that every Christian, whether magistrate or citizen, had the obligation to denounce, oppose, suppress, and separate from those who were involved in "idolatry," even family members:

In these words (Deut. 13:10-11, 17) most evidently is expressed unto us, why God wills that we avoid all fellowship with idolatry, and with the maintainers of the same; in which are three things appertaining to our purpose chiefly to be noted. First, that the Holy Ghost pronounces and gives warning unto us, that maintainers of idolatry, and provokers to the same, intend to draw us from God; and therefore he wills that we neither obey them, be they Kings or be they Queens, neither yet that we conceal their impiety, were they son, daughter, or wife, if we will have the league to stand betwixt God and us. And here is the confirming of my first cause, why it is necessary that we avoid idolatry, because that otherwise we de-

clare ourselves little to regard the league and covenant of God; for that league requires that we declare ourselves enemies to all sorts of idolatry (*A Godly Letter to the Faithful in London, etc.*, vol. III, pp. 192, 193).

Nor was this an abstract matter for Knox. As Richard Greaves reminds us, he followed this through in his own family life:

Knox was quite aware that his prospective father-in-law, Richard Bowes, captain of Norham Castle, would conform to Catholicism. The admonition to his fiancée and future mother-in-law was thus harsh: they must accuse Richard Bowes of idolatry because of their covenant obligations.²

These covenant obligations, however, devolved not only on ordinary Christians but also on magistrates and rulers. They especially were obliged by God Himself to put down idolatry, by which Knox meant, as always, false worship and especially the false worship of Rome:

Of which histories (of Josiah and other OT kings, RH) it is evident, that the reformation of religion in all points, together with the punishment of false teachers, does appertain to the power of the civil magistrate. For what God required of them, his justice must require of others having the like charge and authority; what he did approve in them, he cannot but approve in all others who, with like zeal and sincerity, do enterprise to purge the Lord's temple and sanctuary. What God required of them, it is before declared: to wit, that most diligently they should observe his law, statutes, and ceremonies. And how acceptable were their acts to God, he does himself witness (2 Chron. 32) (*The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland*, vol. IV, p. 490).

Knox defended this conclusion on the basis of faulty and contra-

dictory teaching concerning the covenant. As difficult as that may be to harmonize with his teaching elsewhere, that the covenant is established only with the elect, he taught in his political writings, that nations and magistrates are also in covenant with God:

First, it is to be observed, that God's Justice, being infinite and immutable, requires like obedience in matters of religion of all them that be within his league, in all ages, that He requireth of any one nation, or of any particular man in any age before us. For all that are in his league are one body, as Moses doth witness, reckoning men, women, children, servants, princes, priests, rulers, officers, and strangers within the Covenant of the Lord: Then plain it is, that of one body there must be one law; so that whatever God requireth of one, in that behalf, he requireth the same of all. For his Justice is immutable, and what he damnableth in any one, the same he can neither absolve nor excuse in others; for He is righteous without partiality. Then let us search, understand, and consider, what God required of that people, that sometime was in league with him, and what he commanded to be punished amongst them (*A Godly Letter to the Faithful in London, etc.*, vol. III, p. 191).

And again:

If any think that this my affirmation, touching the punishment of idolaters, is contrary to the practice of the Apostles, who, finding the Gentiles in idolatry, did call them to repentance, requiring no such punishment: let the same man understand, that the

1. All references to Knox's writings are taken from the six-volume David Laing edition of Knox's works (Edinburgh, James Thin, 1895), but the spellings have been modernized.

2. Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press: 1980), p. 117.

Gentiles, before the preaching of Christ, lived, as the Apostle speaketh, without God in the world, drowned in idolatry, according to the blindness and ignorance in which then they were holden, as a profane nation, whom God had never openly avowed to be his people, had never received in his household, neither given unto them laws to be kept in religion nor polity; and therefore did not his Holy Ghost, calling them to repentance, require of them any corporal punishment, according to the rigour of the law, unto the which they were never subjects, as they that were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. But if any think, that after the Gentiles were called from their vain conversation, and by embracing Christ Jesus were received into the number of Abraham's children, and so made one people with the Jews, believing: if any think, I say, that then they were not bound to the same obedience which God required of his people Israel, what time he confirmed his league and covenant with them, the same man appeareth to make Christ inferior to Moses, and contrary to the law of his heavenly Father. For if the contempt or transgression of Moses' law was worthy of death, what should we judge the contempt of Christ's ordinance to be? — I mean after they be once received. And if Christ be not come to dissolve, but to fulfill the law of his heavenly Father, shall the liberty of his Gospel be an occasion that the especial glory of his Father be trodden under foot, and regarded of no man? God forbid! (*The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy*, vol. IV, pp. 504, 505).

In that covenant relation with God, according to Knox, it was the duty of the civil magistrate to suppress all idolatry and false worship. Thus, too, it was the covenant, in Knox's theology, which ultimately required the establishment of the true religion by the civil magistrate. And, what is even more significant, it was the failure of the civil magistrate to fulfil those

covenant obligations that released the citizen from his obligations to obey and submit to that magistrate.

From the personal obligation to oppose idolatry, Knox concluded that those who are in covenant with God could give no allegiance to a magistrate or ruler who was outside that covenant or who had broken it. Though he had not at first held such views, eventually he came to believe that citizens not only owed no allegiance to, but had the right, even the obligation, to overthrow those rulers who were not in covenant with God and who were supporting and promoting idolatry.

In fact, Knox saw the relationship between citizen and magistrate as itself a covenant, based on the covenant between God and His people. From this it followed almost inevitably that if the magistrate broke his covenant with God, he broke it also with the people, so that they were no longer bound to obey and support him and might rebel and overthrow such a magistrate:

The inviolable preservation of God's religion (which is the Second point) requireth two principal things: the one, That power nor liberty be permitted to any, of what estate, degree, or authority that ever they be, either to live without the yoke of discipline by God's word commanded; either yet to alter, to change, to disannul, or dissolve the least one jot in religion, which from God's mouth thou hast received. But let his holy and blessed ordinances, by Christ Jesus to his church commanded, be within your limits and bounds so sure and established; that if Prince, King, or Emperor would enterprise to change or disannul the same, that he be of thee reputed enemy to God; and therefore unworthy to reign above his people: yea, that the same man or men, that go about to destroy God's true religion once established, and to erect idolatry, which God detesteth, be adjudged to death, according to God's com-

mandment; the negligence of which part hath made you all (those only excepted whom before I have expressed) murderers of your brethren, deniers of Christ Jesus, and manifest traitors to God's Sovereign Majesty (*A Brief Exhortation to England, for the Speedy Embracing of the Gospel Heretofore by the Tyranny of Mary Suppressed and Banished*, vol. V, pp. 516, 517).

Here, too, he diverged from the views of the covenant expressed in his writings on baptism. Not only did he suggest in his political writings that God's covenant embraced others besides the elect, but he specifically taught that this covenant was breakable and often broken by those magistrates who maintained and promoted idolatrous worship and doctrines, thus contradicting his own teaching in other places that the covenant was permanent and unbreakable.

More importantly, it is in his political writings that Knox tended to view the covenant in terms of a contract, to define the covenant in terms of a formal "league" or compact, and to speak of obedience as a condition to the covenant. Though his use of the word "league" as a synonym for "covenant" may not in other connections have had the idea of a formal compact, it certainly does have that sense when he writes about the duties of magistrates and citizens.


Conclusions

There is, then, a tension in Knox's views of the covenant, a tension which remained unresolved, and perhaps has never been resolved in Scottish theology. This tension seems to us to result from the fact that in his writings on baptism Knox allowed his doctrinal principles, especially the doctrine of predestination, to control his thought. In his political writings, however, the controlling factor was instead the particular political circumstances in which he found himself and his Scotland.

Historical evidence supports this. His more extreme views appeared in connection with the accession of Mary Tudor to the throne (his *Admonition and Warning* was written not long after, and it was there especially that these views began to emerge). So, too, it is clear that his views on the right of citizens to overthrown idolatrous rulers was directed particularly at Roman Catholic Mary and her attempts to restore Romanism in Scotland.

That is only to say, of course, that circumstances rather than principles were the major force in determining the direction of his thought in these areas. Perhaps if Knox's main opponents had been the Anabaptists, with their opposition to the civil magistracy, as was the case on the Continent, he would not have gone in this direction, which in practice at least was not very different from the position of the more radical Anabaptists.

In all of this there is, it seems, a warning for us, for when Knox

allowed circumstances to dominate his thought and determine the direction of his thought, his views of the covenant diverged most widely from Scripture itself. Theology must not be done on the street corner as a reaction to events, but in obedience to the Word of God. Practice must be determined by principles, not by circumstances, for in the latter case, principles will always be manipulated and shaped to fit the direction one has already determined to follow. 

Address at Annual RFPA Meeting

Rev. James Laning

Studying to Answer, Rather Than Studying Destruction

I was asked to speak tonight on our calling to read good, theological works. My theme I take from two passages in the book of Proverbs:

The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things (Prov. 15:28).

Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief (Prov. 24:1, 2).

Those are the two realities. One either studies to answer, or he studies destruction. The believer is to be a diligent student, studying to be able to give a good an-

swer. Out of a strong desire to know the truth and to be able to explain that truth to others, he must dig into the treasures that our God has set before his eyes upon the pages of Holy Scripture.

One thing that hinders us from moving forward in our knowledge of these truths is that so many of us do very little spiritual reading. Even many of those who say they enjoy doing this kind of reading must admit that it is not that often that they are actually found doing it. It is so easy to fill up our days with so many activities, that there is little or no time left to read. Or, if on an occasion we do have an hour or so at the end of the day to read, we are often so tired that we are unable really to comprehend what we are reading.

The subject of reading is related to the writing done by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). As a general rule, the

good readers are the ones who make the best writers. More specifically, it is those who study a subject before they write about it, who produce the kind of writing that is truly profitable to read. When we sit down to write about this or that, it is good for us to ask ourselves whether or not we have sufficiently prepared for what we are about to write. When we finish what we are writing, it is often good for us to ask ourselves whether we have learned anything in preparing and writing what we wrote. The more we as writers do our homework, the more this is going to be evident in the theological depth of the material which we write.

The more God's people read, the more they will desire better writing with more depth. The more we spend time reading good spiritual material, the more we will be crying out to the RFPA for more

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of the good, sound, theological works they have been publishing.

Studying to Answer

Proverbs 15: 28 speaks of our "studying to answer." To study is literally to mutter words to oneself. The student of the Word meditates upon that Word, going over it in his mind. Not only while reading, but at various times throughout the day, he thinks about the things he has read or the things he has heard in the preaching, and he looks for opportunities to discuss these matters. He mutters his thoughts inwardly as he strives to grow closer to his God.

That we are called to study *to answer* means that we must think about a subject before answering. Throughout our life God tests us by bringing to us many problems. To solve these problems we must seek our answer from God. We are truly seeking our answer from God when we are not only praying to God about our problem, but also arising from our knees to seek the answer in God's Word, or in works that faithfully expound God's Word, such as our creeds and other sound theological works.

It is the *heart* of the righteous that does this studying (Prov. 15:28). It is not merely an intellectual pursuit. There are some who spend much time reading theological works, but actually spend little or no time *studying* what they are reading. No matter how much a person reads, and no matter how sound the books and articles may be that he is reading, if he puts down what he is reading and continues to live in a sin, then he is not really *studying* the truth. True studying is done in the heart of the righteous, that is, in the heart of the one who is living and abiding in Christ by faith.

II Thessalonians 2:10 speaks of those who in a sense *had* the truth, but did not *love* the truth. One who truly studies to answer is one who loves the truth. He shows this by desiring to read and to grow in his

knowledge of that truth. A person who enjoys a delicious meal often shows this by asking for more. Spiritually the same thing is true. The more we love the truth, the more we will be requesting good, solid, exegetical works from the RFPA.

Studying Destruction

The wicked do not study to answer. Rather, they study destruction (Prov. 24:2). To study destruction is to meditate upon violence, to delight in destructive thoughts, and often to express this with the mouth. These destructive thoughts refer not only to that which is *physically* destructive, but also to that which is *spiritually* destructive. Those who entertain these thoughts promote teachings that go against Scripture and are destructive both to themselves and to those who hear them speak.

The reprobate ungodly, however, are not the only ones who study destruction. We are always thinking about something, and we are often thinking about things that are not edifying, but rather are destructive. When we are thinking about getting even with a brother or sister in Christ, for example, we are studying destruction, rather than studying to answer. When we are thinking and gossiping about the sins of others, then we are not engaged in profitable studying, but rather are studying that which is destructive both to ourselves and to the congregation of Jesus Christ.

Another common way in which we can be guilty of studying destruction is by spending much time reading about all the wickedness that is going on in this world. Certainly it is good for us to keep abreast of the events that are taking place around us, whether by reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, or whatever. But it is easy for us to fall into the trap of wasting much time reading about all the acts of ungodliness going on around us. Let us say a person has an hour to read something dur-

ing the day. If he routinely spends all of this time reading the newspaper, delighting to dig into much of the trash that is set forth on its pages, and spends no time at all doing profitable, spiritual reading, how can he say that he is studying to answer, rather than studying destruction?

How good it is for us frequently to think on Philippians 4:8, which reads:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Teaching Our Children to Do Theological Reading

If we as a people are going to grow to be better readers, we must teach our children how important this kind of reading is. Perhaps we do not often think of it, but family devotions is a good time for us to teach our children the importance of theological reading. There are a number of ways in which we can do this. One of them is by not only reading a passage, but also taking the time to explain it slowly. This is showing our children that there is much more taught on the pages of Holy Writ than at first meets the eye. When fathers study a passage before reading it in family devotions, they will be much better prepared to show their families the glorious truths that are taught in what they have just read. The more the father and mother show a joy in digging into these truths during times of family devotions, the more their children will desire to do the same.

The more time one spends reading *good quality* material, the better he is able to discuss spiritual matters, whether within the family, among the members of the congregation, or with those outside

our churches. We not only need to be reading, but we need to be reading books and articles with substance and depth. When our young people are found reading, it is not often that they are found reading one of the theological works published by the RFPA, or some other sound, theological work. Perhaps this is partly because many of the adults around them are not often found reading such works. When we decide to read, it is so easy for us to pick up some superficial work that will take very little effort to read, and which will therefore bring very little profit. We need to make the most of our reading time, by reading that which is going to lead us to grow in our understanding of God's truth.


Another important way in which we teach our children the importance of the truths we confess is by *rereading* some of the most profitable works in which these truths are clearly set forth, works such as those which have already been published by the RFPA. Think, for example, of the effect it

would have on a man's children if they knew that he was reading Hoeksema's *The Triple Knowledge* for the third time. If one reads a work like this when he is in his twenties, he will often find that he will glean a lot more from it when he picks it up again, say, in his forties or fifties. It is so easy, and yet so foolish, to let works like this just sit on our shelves, rather than reading them again and again, until we are confident that we have mastered the material found within them. When our children see us doing this, and hear us talking about these things during our times together, they will be much more inclined to dig into these works themselves, in order that they also might grow to enjoy the glorious treasures our heavenly Father has given to us.



Indeed it is true that one can study to answer without even reading. A person, say, who does not even have the ability to read can nevertheless study to answer. He studies as he meditates upon the

truths he has heard, striving to get a better grasp upon them as he mutters these truths to himself, and as he discusses these truths with others. But those of us who have the ability to read should make use of this ability, and do so by reading works that help to prepare us for the difficult days ahead.

When Noah was building the ark, he was heeding the warning of God and doing what was necessary to prepare his family for the days ahead. This is given to us in Hebrews 11:7 as an example of God-given faith. Faith heeds the warnings of God, and takes refuge in Jesus Christ, who is the Truth. God warns us that there are very difficult days ahead. The calling comes centrally to us as fathers to do what is necessary to ensure that our families are prepared for these days. By heeding God's warning, we will be prepared for that which is coming. As prepared soldiers in His kingdom, we will glorify our God, and show our thankfulness for the rich heritage of the Reformed faith that has been given to us in Christ Jesus. 

Annual RFPA Secretary's Report

Mr. Henry Kamps

Dear RFPA Members and Friends,
Having recently completed another year of publishing, we once more thankfully acknowledge the keeping and provision of our faithful God and Savior.

The RFPA is bustling with activity and work. The many-faceted aspects of the work are carried out by board members, editors, writers, translators, volunteers, copy designers, committee members, and managers, all aiming with one purpose to witness to the heritage that is ours in the Reformed faith.

Mr. Kamps is the retiring secretary for the RFPA board.

Our *Standard Bearer* now goes to 48 states, all except North Dakota and Utah, and to 27 foreign countries. Subscriptions increased the past year by 135, so that currently 2,813 copies of each issue are mailed. Our long-standing gift subscription at half-price program proves to be worthwhile in gaining new subscribers to our magazine. This program has handled and filled 2000 gift subscriptions over the last ten years. It appears that we enjoy an approximate 20 percent return in gaining long-term subscribers with this program. We take this opportunity to remind our friends and supporters about this special gift subscription offer and request that you make use of it in

your own life and witness to others.

As promised last year, all 75 *Standard Bearer* volumes were made available on a three-CD set. This proved to be an ambitious — and expensive — project. The Dutch language complicated the scanning process, as did the brittle paper of the earlier volumes. We ended up paying in excess of \$16,000 to get the job done. When finished, the three-CD set was priced at \$125.00, with a special introductory offer of \$75.00. To our delight we found the interest in these CDs had been underestimated. We received some 250 orders, so that we ended slightly on the profit side. As near as we can tell, the CDs are serving

well, especially the search feature for locating articles on specific topics or issues spanning the 75 SB volumes.

We have given the *Standard Bearer* a new look. There's the new cover design with its background logo, and inside there is the use of color, shadows, and gradient bars and boxes. There's some change also in type style. All together, we are favorably impressed with the SB's new look.

Regular gifts to the *Standard Bearer* remained constant and very substantial at \$46,500 again this past year. Our gifts have exactly doubled from a decade ago, as has our overall income now, at over \$115,000 annually. This is very encouraging to us. We heartily thank our subscribers and friends for the generous gifts and support again this past year.

Book publishing and planning is going full tilt. This past year two new books were published and there are several more planned for the coming year. Work progresses on many and various other book projects.

For Thy Truth's Sake, published in May for the commemoration of the PRC's 75th anniversary celebration, has sold 1,429 copies to date; and *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, published last September, has sold 1,186 copies.

Several books are currently sold out and will be republished this year. *Behold He Cometh* will soon be available again in hard cover. Enhancements to this volume include a table of contents, scripture index, and an extensive subject index. *Whosoever Will*, originally published in 1945, remains a classic and will now be reprinted for the sixth time. *Voice of Our Fathers* is also sold out. It will get a new cover design and be reprinted. A new revised RFPA edition of *Reformed Education* by Professor Engelsma will soon be off the press. This work, out of print for 20 years, was originally published in 1977 by the Federation of

PRC Schools and later in 1981 by the Federation of Young People's Societies. The revising of *Reformed Dogmatics*, begun two years ago, has proved to be a significantly larger task than first thought. It is, however, progressing well, and we foresee possibly having this book available again in late 2001.

We anticipate publishing two new books again this coming year. The first volume (*From Creation to the Flood*) of our planned nine or ten-volume set entitled *Unfolding Covenant History*, promised last year, is expected in time for Christmas. Also, *God's Grace is Particular*, written by Dr. Abraham Kuyper and translated by Mr. Marvin Kamps, is currently in the process of copy editing and design. We look forward to the publication of this title this coming summer. Relatively few of the hundreds of works by the extraordinary Dr. Kuyper are available to the English reader. We think it a unique privilege that the RFPA is able to make available for the church of Christ today this exciting defense of particular grace.

There is more good news in the area of translation. *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and His Church*, by Professor Engelsma, has recently been translated into the Korean language by Rev. Sung Ho Lee, who holds a Th.M. degree from Calvin Seminary and is minister in the Presbyterian Church of Korea. Najeunultari (Na-gin-wool-tar-e) of Seoul, Korea will soon publish this translation. Najeunultari is a multi-faceted publishing house, mission office, wedding and life ministry, and music academy. Representatives of Najeunultari are very enthusiastic about this distinctive message on marriage and the publication of this book in Korean.

Overall, book sales are up 62% over last year. This corresponds to a healthy 9,133 volumes sold. Support for book publishing by our friends and readers is very encouraging. Our call last year at this time for financial gifts did not go

unheeded. Gifts to book publishing tripled over the previous year. Because of solid book sales and the support received by gifts we have exceeded our financial goal. We ended with \$65,000 on the plus side, which will be used for publishing additional works this coming year. A year ago it appeared we would have to borrow monies to meet our publishing objectives. Today this appears to be no longer necessary. We sincerely thank our supporters for making this possible.

We are enhancing our ability to promote the RFPA organization and its publications by more effectively utilizing Internet technology. Recognizing that the Internet is especially suited as a tool to achieve our purpose, we invested in a professional, complete overhaul and design of our web site. The first phase of this is scheduled to be launched this week, with Phase II planned for December. Features include *New Site Design*, for a new look and feel. A database-driven *Catalog* will have well laid out book pages, and will support other product types such as magazines, pamphlets, CDs, and tapes. *Shopping Cart* will allow customers to add books to a shopping cart and purchase the books on-line using a credit card. *Membership management* will allow customers to enter a username and password to access their account, and sign up for book club membership. Database-driven *E-mail mailing* enables us to announce new publications and send e-mail newsletters to customers. *Web Site statistics and usage report* feature will give us the ability to determine how many visitors visit the site and where they are from.

Our Book Club Membership program, through which new books are launched, continues to grow. One hundred twenty new members were added this past year, so that the Book Club now numbers 870.


We express our sincere appre-

ciation to Professor Engelsma as our *Standard Bearer* editor. We thank him for an outstanding job and for the sound leadership and distinctively Reformed direction he gives to our *Standard Bearer*. We are thankful that he continues willing to serve in this role as *Standard Bearer* Editor-in-Chief. We take this opportunity to encourage our regular department editors and contributors as well. We heartily thank them for their sacrifice and hard work in writing and contributing to our magazine again this past year.

We say thank you both to Don Doezema and Evelyn Langerak as

our *Standard Bearer* and Book Publications managers. Thanks for your regular and diligent labor in behalf of our organization and publications. We thank our regular staff members Judi Doezema and Natalie Jefferson for the fine, conscientious work they do in performing a multitude of tasks both on behalf of *Standard Bearer* and book publishing. Thanks to our volunteer assistants, Mrs. John Veldman and Dave and Karen Dykstra, for their assistance in mailing each issue of the *Standard Bearer*, and also Suet Yin, wife of Singaporean seminarian Paul Goh,

who helps in book publishing, packaging, scanning, and typing. In addition, there are many others who give volunteer assistance as needed and when called upon by our staff. The value and usefulness of your help is inestimable. We need more volunteer help. Please contact us if you would like to give us a hand or if you have skills in areas you think we can use.

As we look forward to the coming year we pray for the grace to persevere with zeal in the work, and also that God will continue to bless the RFPA so that His truth may triumph and prosper to the glory of His name. 

Contribution

Rev. Barry Gritters

Defending Sovereign Reprobation from Hyper-Calvinism (1) *

Introduction

Reacting against one evil always opens up the believer to the danger of falling headlong into another. One who sees and hates the abuse of government power against the common citizen must be warned against the equally virulent evil of

the militia mentality. Responding to Roman Catholicism must not incline one to Anabaptism. There are always errors, not just on one side, but on both sides of the truth. "Let us sin that grace may abound" is the classic example of this kind of overreaction. Likewise, Reformed believers who see the evil of the Arminian denial of reprobation must not fall into the equally malignant evil of hyper-Calvinism. To warn against that danger is the purpose of this paper.

But warning against hyper-Calvinism in this day of rampant Arminianism should remind us to be aware of something C.S. Lewis described in his brilliant satire, *The Screwtape Letters*. In his book, Lewis has a senior demon, Screwtape, instructing his nephew,

Wormwood, in the myriad ways of undermining and destroying the faith and life of professing Christians. In his twenty-fifth letter to Wormwood, Uncle Screwtape, mentor, tells his nephew of one way they can proceed:

We direct the fashionable outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is least in danger and fix its approval on the virtue nearest to that vice which we are trying to make endemic. The game is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood, and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gunwale under. Thus, we make it fashionable to expose the dangers of enthusiasm (excitement and emotionalism, BG) at the very moment

* A paper given originally for the officebearers' conference of Classis West of the PRC on March 2, 1999 in Redlands, CA. Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Hudsonville PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

when they are all really becoming worldly and lukewarm; a century later when we are really making them all ... drunk with emotion, the fashionable outcry is directed against the dangers of the mere "understanding."¹

For Reformed believers, one danger is the denial of reprobation and with it the denial of sovereign, gracious election. This is the great danger today. Falling into that evil, as so many are, will lead to the destruction of the truth among us. It will leave us without a gospel. Another danger, not as common in the Reformed church world, but a danger nevertheless, is to exaggerate, and thus to distort, the doctrine of reprobation.

So some will be inclined to cry out, "That's not the great danger among us! The great need among us is to warn against Arminian denial of reprobation! We may not lose the truth of reprobation!" Indeed. I hear that cry. We understand the danger well in the PRC. But that does not mean that we do not recognize another danger. Failure to see it and warn against it will also spell the loss of the great biblical truth of predestination among us and thus cut out from our churches the very heart of the gospel. So serious is the danger of hyper-Calvinism. Notice, I did not say "so common," but "so serious." For the sake of even one saint who may be inclined to this error, we must be warned. But my judgment is that this is a necessary warning for all the saints in the PRC.

While, then, we keep in mind the danger of Arminianism, I examine in this paper the danger of hyper-Calvinism in connection with the doctrine of reprobation.

Definitions

Election is God's eternal, sovereign, and gracious good-pleasure to save to eternal glory some men through the means of faith in Christ. *Reprobation* is the eternal, sovereign, and righteous good-

pleasure to condemn others to eternal damnation on account of their sin, as manifestations of His justice, and to serve the purpose of the realization of His elect church.² The official Reformed definitions of the two are in the Canons: "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault...a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ..." (I:6). *Reprobation* means that "not all, but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal decree; whom God...hath decreed to leave in the common misery...and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion" (I:15).

We may define reprobation only in light of election, because it serves election. To define reprobation apart from election would be akin to defining "night" apart from "day." Reprobation is election's necessary "antithetical counterpart," or "side-shadow," as Hoeksema put it in his pamphlet "The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel."³ The inseparable *connection* between the two proceeds from the reality that God's decree is one decree. The Reformed fathers indicated such when they referred to predestination as "that decree (singular, BG) of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God" (Canons of Dordt, I:6). That God's reprobation serves election comes out in the introductory statement of the central article in the Canons on reprobation: "What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election..." (I:15).

Calvinism is the name we give to that body of biblical truth rescued by God in the sixteenth century by men He raised up for that purpose. Foremost among them was John Calvin. By *Calvinism* we

mean that system of belief that maintains the absolute authority of Scripture alone for faith and life, and those doctrines of grace which maintain the absolute sovereignty of God. These include the five main points established by the Synod of Dordt in 1618 and 1619 over against Arminianism. We refer to them, for ease of memory, by the acronym TULIP.⁴ First among these doctrines is eternal, sovereign predestination, including election and reprobation. Calvinism and the Reformed faith have at their heart the doctrine of predestination.

Hyper-Calvinism is defined in different ways by men in Reformed circles. All by itself, the word means "a teaching that goes above and beyond Calvinism." *Hyper* is the prefix that means, *above, over, beyond, excessive*, as a hyperactive child is excessively active. *Hyper-Calvinism* is an exaggeration of Calvinism, a taking of the doctrines of grace above and beyond the place given them by Calvin and the Reformed fathers.

Peter Toon defines hyper-Calvinism as "an exaggerated, rationalist form of the Reformed faith."⁵ Professor David Engelsma, in his *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the*

1. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1977) pages 117,118.

2. See Herman Hoeksema's definitions in his *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* catechism book, Lesson 7, and his *Reformed Dogmatics*, page 161. My definitions are combinations and slight modifications of his.

3. Page 13. Translated by Rev. C. Hanko and reprinted by Southwest PRC, 1993. See also Hoeksema's explanation of the relation between election and reprobation in his "modified-supra" position: *Reformed Dogmatics*, page 161, #4.

4. The Canons of Dordt, which give us these five points, began with the doctrine of eternal election. Their order is U-L-T-I-P.

5. "Hyper-Calvinism," in the *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Louisville, KY: W/JKP, 1992, page 190.

Gospel,⁶ defines hyper-Calvinism as "the denial that God in the preaching of the gospel calls everyone who hears the preaching to repent and believe. It is the denial that the church should call everyone in the preaching. It is the denial that the unregenerated have a duty to repent and believe. It manifests itself in the practice of the preacher's addressing the call of the gospel, 'repent and believe on Christ crucified,' only to those in his audience who show signs of regeneration and, thereby, of election...." At the end of his book, Engelsma broadens out on that definition, calling hyper-Calvinism "the lie on the right that must be guarded against as scrupulously as the lie of self-salvation on the left."⁷

No faithful Reformed believer or church desires to exaggerate the truth, to go above and beyond the Reformed faith. To exaggerate the truth is to distort the truth, to falsify the gospel, to do damage to the testimony of Scripture. To do so would be sin. To be guilty of hyper-Calvinism, therefore, would be to become guilty of great evil.

What is not hyper-Calvinism

In a paper that defends the doctrine of reprobation against hyper-Calvinism, carefulness requires us to define and explain reprobation with accuracy, lest we mistakenly identify Calvinism itself as hyper-Calvinism. Just because Arminianism is such a threat, we must be careful that in our defense of reprobation against hyper-Calvinism we do not compromise the truth of reprobation. Let us draw the lines carefully. Let us be balanced.

First, maintaining the truth of *reprobation itself* is not hyper-Calvinism. Because the Reformed faith (Calvinism) is defined by the Reformed creeds, confessional reference is especially significant. On the basis of a multitude of Scripture passages, the Canons of Dordt teach reprobation. I have shown that in the definition of reprobation

given above. To deny reprobation is not to defend Calvinism against an exaggerated form of it, but is to deny the heart of Calvinism itself. For a denial of reprobation is (not will be, but is) a denial of election.

Second, *preaching* reprobation to the congregation of Jesus Christ is not hyper-Calvinism. A boyhood neighbor and friend once told me that he had to admit that reprobation was taught in the Bible, but that his (dispensationalist) pastor had told him that it was certainly not something that should be preached in the church. It is not only dispensationalist pastors who believe this. By their silence on the matter, many Reformed pastors must conclude that to preach reprobation is improper, unhealthy. Whether dispensational or Reformed, every pastor is bound by God to preach His whole counsel, which includes the doctrine of reprobation. Every

Reformed pastor is worthy of deposition if he does not, since in the *Formula of Subscription* he has promised to the consistory and congregation that he will "diligently...teach and faithfully...defend" this doctrine. How can any man promise to "refute and contradict" errors that militate against reprobation, and "keep the church free from such errors" if he does not preach the truth of reprobation? Besides, the Canons themselves require preaching reprobation: "...the doctrine of divine election (which decree itself passes by many, BG)...is still to be published in due time and place in the church of God, for which it was peculiarly designed...."

Third, teaching and preaching *unconditional* reprobation is not hyper-Calvinism. When God reprobates, He does not do so because

of the unbelief or unworthiness of those whom He rejects. Why does God reprobate this man or that man? For so it seemed good to Him. God's eternal good pleasure. The potter has power over the clay. Whether looked at from a Reformed supra-lapsarian or from a Reformed infra-lapsarian viewpoint, reprobation is unconditional. Even though infra-lapsarians hold that the objects of reprobation are, in God's counsel and mind, sinners, they are not rejected because they are sinners, or all sinners would be rejected. That the Reformed doctrine teaches unconditional reprobation is plain from the Canons themselves. It is also plain from the vehement objections at the Synod of Dordt. What objections would there be to a doctrine that holds that God rejected some because He foresaw that they would reject Him? What violent objections would be raised to that? The Canons and Reformed believers who hold to unconditional

reprobation stand in good company with the apostle Paul who, because he also taught unconditional double predestination, heard the very same objections (Rom. 9:14ff.). When Paul (and Dordt) face the unbeliever's challenge to the doctrine of reprobation, they appeal to God's *sovereignty*, not God's justice or righteousness. This reinforces the truth that reprobation is not conditional.

Fourth, maintaining the doctrine of *supra-lapsarianism* is not hyper-Calvinism. The debate between infra-lapsarianism and supra-lapsarianism concerns the order of the elements in God's decree, specifically the relation between the decree of predestination

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6. Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1994, page 15.

7. Page 195.

and that of the fall. "Infra" (*under, or after*) maintains that the *decree* of predestination comes after the *decree* of the fall. "Supra" (*above, or before*) maintains that the *decree* of predestination precedes the *decree* of the fall.⁸ I want to deal with this more below, but it must be said now that a proper understanding of supra-lapsarianism is not hyper-Calvinism. If supra-lapsarianism were such an exaggerated form of Calvinism that perverts the faith, the supra-lapsarians at Dordt would have been condemned and explicitly rejected in the Canons. Instead, both at Dordt and in subsequent years, supra-lapsarians have been received as fellow Reformed believers.

Fifth, *denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel on the basis (in part) of the truth of reprobation* is not hyper-Calvinism. This may be the most common occasion for the charge of hyper-Calvinism. We claim that God eternally hates some men and therefore neither desires their salvation nor instructs preachers to express such a desire on His part. Perhaps the most powerful part of the Canons of Dordt with respect to the will and purpose of God in the salvation of men is found in II:8: "For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious purpose of God the Father, that the...efficacy of the ... death of His Son should extend to all the *elect*, for bestowing upon *them alone* the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring *them* infallibly to salvation." Is that not clear enough that God does not desire, will, intend the salvation of the reprobate? Determined that no one misunderstand, the fathers continue: "...that is, it was the *will* of God, that Christ...should effectually redeem...all those, *and those only*, who were from eternity cho-

sen to salvation... that He should confer upon *them* faith... should purge *them* from all sin... and... should at last bring *them*...to... glory" (emphasis mine, BG). If anything expresses more clearly the Reformed understanding of the will of God (which must be preached promiscuously!), I don't know of it. Into what knots a Reformed preacher must tie himself who tries to preach a well-meant offer of the gospel at the same time he preaches the truth of Canons II:8!⁹

Sixth, *teaching that God deals in time and history with men, withholding faith from them, even hardening them in their sins, according to His reprobation of them*, is not hyper-Calvinism. According to this truth, God's reprobation of men is the cause of their unbelief. Here we must tread with greatest care. For the Reformed faith, in the significant "Conclusion" of the Canons, explicitly rejects something that sounds very much like what I have just asserted. Is God's reprobation in fact the cause of man's unbelief?


In the "Conclusion," the fathers are rejecting and expressing a loathing of certain wrong inferences that were being drawn from their teaching. One of those inferences that the Reformed fathers "detest with their whole soul" was "that in the very same manner (Latin: *eodem modo*) in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety." At first glance, it may sound as though the Fathers here deny that reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety.

In fact, what the Canons are saying is this: "Election is the fountain and cause of faith! Reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety! But they are *not* so in

the same manner! We deny that reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety *in the same manner in which* election is the fountain and cause of faith." Right at this point we must guard carefully against a form of hyper-Calvinism.

According to the Reformed truth of election, God infuses faith into His people who are dead in sin. Election is the "fountain of every saving good; from which (election, BG) proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation" (Canons I:9). God does *not*, however, infuse unbelief into the reprobate who are good men, or even neutral. According to His decree of reprobation, God *withholds* the gifts of faith and piety from the reprobate who are by their own fault evil and depraved. But in that sense, God's decree of reprobation *is* the cause of their unbelief, as Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees in John 10:26: "Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep."

In the end, how God sovereignly hardens some and withholds faith from them without being the Author of sin is incomprehensible. But He does. "And truly the Son of man goeth as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" According to Scripture, the credit for faith goes to God (Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 1:29; etc.), but the blame for unbelief is man's. No Reformed believer may take away responsibility and the guilt of unbelief from the unbeliever, or attribute guilt to God. The judgment day will justify God with regard to all those criticisms.

... to be continued. 

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8. The debate between "supras" and "infras" is almost always confused by the failure to see that the matter is in the order of the decrees. True infralapsarianism does not teach that God decreed to save after the fall took place. Rather, the *decree* of predestination comes after the *decree* of the fall.
9. For the rest, I refer the reader to Engelsma's *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*.

Regeneration (1)

As we begin our consideration of the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation, we look first at the wonder of regeneration, otherwise known as spiritual rebirth, being born again.

The very concept of *being born again* sets before us an urgent necessity. You must be born again! Those were the words of Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3. That necessity is set before us in Scripture by use of a contrast between natural life and spiritual life.

Every man is born into what is generally called *life*. That birth, natural birth, is profoundly mysterious and wonderful. But the life into which we are born by natural conception and birth is a life that has severe limitations, is very brief, does not last for any man, and ends in death.

In contrast to that stands the new life. It is a life that not every man receives. But it is a life into which every elect child of God is born. And that birth is even more mysterious and more wonderful than the natural conception and birth. For this birth is one which gives us life everlasting, life which will flourish forever.

These two lives, the natural and the spiritual, are not in every respect opposite. For a time the same person may possess both. When a man is born again by the Spirit, he is not by that rebirth

stripped of the life which belongs to the flesh. He becomes a stranger in the earth. He lives in the flesh, yet, as one who has also a life from above, reaching in hope for that which is to come. Though he possesses both for a time, the first or natural life will soon depart, just as the grass withers and the flower fades; but the new or spiritual life will endure forever. From that very contrast we see the urgency of regeneration. To that truth and its workings I call your attention in this and a following article.

While the light of Scripture reveals this glorious truth in both Old and New Testaments, there is one passage where the wonder of regeneration is carefully unfolded before us. We read in I Peter 1:23-25: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Regeneration is a wonder work of God the Holy Spirit. To be born again is to be brought under the very power of God Himself. And that power of God is a life-giving power.

Necessary Because of Death

Let it not be forgotten, apart from this new birth, every man (and I use that term generically, including not only women but also children) — every man is dead in

trespasses and sins. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." And that which is flesh is that which is corruptible and indeed corruption itself.

That is a hard truth, no question about it. But that is the clear teaching of Scripture. When we speak of the truth of regeneration, we must begin with the truth that man is totally depraved, spiritually dead, unable to do any good and flat on his back in his rotting death.

If you can't bow before Scripture in its teaching of that truth, you will never understand the truth of regeneration. Many cannot, or will not. They may even admit that sin is very bad, an abominable thing; but they insist that there is surely some remnant of good in man. That neighbor, who is so good in outward appearance, even though he's not a church-goer, who is always helping the other neighbors, who doesn't curse and is no drunkard — surely that amiable man cannot be dead in trespasses and sins! Those robbers and murderers who are behind the bars of the prison, *they* may be dead in their sins; but really, that can't apply to our nice neighbors, to their lovely girls and honorable sons and pleasant children! They are not prone to hate God and their neighbors, but show some signs rather of love.

I understand why the truth of Scripture is not easy to receive. After all, we also are sinners. And by nature we surely don't want to paint sin as something so serious.

But when we stand before the

perfectly holy and righteous God and examine His authoritative and inspired Scriptures, we have no choice but to bow before Him and to humble ourselves. He tells us who have been born again, Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

The judgment of the Almighty Judge is clearly revealed in Romans 3:10ff. and in many, many other places throughout the Bible: "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10-12).

That is the point even in the context of I Peter 1:23-25. We are exhorted in verse 22: "See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." Verse 23 stands connected as a subordinate clause — "*Being born again.*" Except you are born again, you cannot possibly love these Christian strangers.

When a man dies, he no longer loves. You may yet love that man or woman whose body lies in the casket, and that love may cause you to grieve deeply; but there is no reciprocating love in that corpse. And a corpse is what fallen man is.

For that reason Jesus said in John 3:3, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We confess with Scripture that every work of saving grace must be preceded by a new birth, by a giving of life to the sinner, by an opening of the blind eyes and the deaf ears.

That giving of life is the regeneration, the being born again, to which our text refers. We read in Proverbs 20:12: "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them."

A Divine Wonder Work

Regeneration is the work of

God alone, wrought in its beginning even without our knowledge. To liken it again to something from natural life, consider this, that before there can be conception and birth, the egg has to come down the fallopian tube of the woman who will become a mother. That woman has nothing consciously to do with that egg. The very fact that an egg comes down the fallopian tube must be viewed as the work of God alone. The woman has no knowledge of when that egg is formed or sent. God alone works that wonder. The same is true with regeneration.

The apostle Peter speaks of that rebirth coming, not out of corruptible seed, but out of incorruptible. The human seed is corruptible. The seed that is inseminated at the time of physical conception is a seed subject to corruption. We are conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5). In distinction from that, the seed of the second birth is incorruptible, from heaven. It is the heavenly life of Christ implanted in the hearts of His people.

How does God work that wonder of His grace?

The answer to that question is developed by the inspired apostle Peter. According to I Peter 1:23-25 regeneration can be viewed from three perspectives. In the first place, regeneration is the implanting of the incorruptible seed in the heart of God's elect. Secondly, regeneration is the quickening of that seed by the power of the living and abiding Word of God. And finally, the text speaks of that aspect of regeneration which is the seed of the new birth coming to consciousness. That is worked by means of the preaching as the means of grace.

We consider now the first aspect, namely, the implanting of the incorruptible seed.

The planting of the incorruptible seed into the heart of an elect child of God takes place without any knowledge of the person. God works that sovereignly and alone, through the Holy Spirit. It is an

irresistible work of God's grace, an act of God's almighty power. This wonder of regeneration is beautifully described in our Canons of Dordt, Heads III and IV, Article 12, where we read:

And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated (named, SRK) a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that after God has performed His part it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted; but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable (or inexpressible, SRK); not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.

So the authors at that Synod of Dordrecht described the work of regeneration set before us in I Peter, chapter 1.

Out of that incorruptible seed, mysteriously planted by the work of the Spirit, grows the whole life of regeneration. In that seed our whole life was already present, all the blessings of which we presently partake consciously.

Just as the child is already present in the seed of conception (as is clearly revealed to faith in Psalm 139), so the whole new man is present in that seed of regeneration. All the gifts of salvation were

given us in that moment when God planted the incorruptible seed in our corruptible hearts.


That incorruptible seed is similar to the acorn, in which is the whole oak tree and out of which that whole oak tree develops and grows.

Notice the practical importance of that seed being described for us as incorruptible. That seed, once planted in your heart, can never die. It is a seed immortal, that shall endure in Christ for eternity. Though we may fall into serious sins, and even lose consciousness of the love and presence of God for a time, yet God in mercy does not desert us, nor allow us to

plunge ourselves into damnation. So we read in the Fifth Head of the Canons of Dordt, Article 7:

For, in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by his Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforth more diligently work

out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

The seed of regeneration is incorruptible. That it is planted by the Holy Spirit even without our consciousness, and even apart from any preaching, is evident also from John 5:24. There Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is (literally, has been) passed from death unto life." Without that implanted seed of regeneration, man has no spiritual understanding whatsoever of spiritual things. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ School Vouchers

The question of school vouchers (the government giving to parents a "voucher" which can be used for tuition payments in private and Christian schools) is very much in the news in Michigan. Some prominent men in the state, including some very wealthy ones, have been pushing for this. Other states and municipalities have also been considering this—or have already enacted measures to provide for such vouchers.

The whole idea of "vouchers" is very appealing. After all, why should not those who pay taxes for the education of children have the opportunity to make use of some of this money for the education of their own children? Why should people have to pay taxes for the education of the children of the state—and then pay additional money for tuition if their desire is to have their children instructed in

Christian schools? Would this not provide a measure of relief for parents who are hard pressed to raise thousands of dollars for the instruction of their children in harmony with their baptismal vows?

The arguments both pro and con for vouchers are often wrong arguments. The "pro" argument might run: we are entitled to this tax money for the education of our children, also in our own choice of a school, since we pay taxes. And the "con" argument often insists that this will be in effect governmental support of religion. There must be separation of state and church (and religious schools).

But the more basic question is this: does government funding of institutions with tax dollars not also require, even demand, government control over such institutions?

Timothy Lamer, in *World* magazine of June 17, 2000, insists that this is the case. Vouchers, appealing though these may be, must include government control and regulation. If such regulation appears minor at the beginning, one can be assured that over a period

of time the regulation will become ever greater.

The writer points out two well documented incidents where "conservatives" cried loudly against the pornographic art presented in two different "art" museums in two large cities. The critics insisted that these museums ought not to be allowed to show this sort of "art." Timothy Lamer pointed out:

Taken together, the two actions may represent a renewed GOP commitment to a common-sense proposition—namely that the government has a duty to oversee tax-funded institutions. If museums want to act independently, then they should be independently funded. They cannot, in effect, say to taxpayers, "Hand over the cash, then sit down, be quiet, and don't dare—through your elected representatives—try to influence how we spend your money."

At the height of the furor over Mr. Giuliani and the Brooklyn museum, *National Review's* Kate O'Beirne spoke for many on the right when she made that very point in a debate on ABC's Nightline: "Look, there's an easy

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remedy here. If you don't want to be accountable for the use of tax dollars, then don't take tax dollars." She argued that since the museum's officials accept tax funding, "I don't think they have any right to object when taxpayers, through their elected representatives, object to what they're doing and don't want their tax dollars spent in such a way."

There's just one problem: Many of the same conservatives who applaud Mr. Gilmore and Mr. Giuliani also back government funding for religious schools (through vouchers) and religious charities (through "charitable choice"). Those activities have more popular support than tax-funded pornography can muster, but they could not escape some regulation—for according to our own principles the government isn't overreaching when it regulates tax-funded organizations; it's merely doing its duty.

Most people don't realize it, but throughout American history many evangelicals have opposed government funding for churches and religious groups. They pointed out that God gives civil states coercive power for specific purposes (Romans 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-14), which do not include raising money for churches and religious groups. Baptists and Southern Presbyterians were especially adamant about sticking to the Bible on such matters.

One of their chief concerns was that the church would lose its moral claim to independence if it became funded by the state. The great 19th-century theologian Robert L. Dabney, for instance, said that if "the State pays the salaries of the preachers, her duty to the taxpayer will not only justify, but demand, its supervision of the functions paid for.... Then, how shall the endowed church maintain its spiritual independence, or its allegiance to King Christ?" Dabney, in other words, wanted the church to remain independent, but he knew that it could not morally do so if it accepted tax money.

...we can't have situational principles: If tax-funded institutions that we don't like must answer to the state, then tax-funded institu-

tions that we like must do so as well. Justice demands no less.

It is surprising that those who would destroy private and Christian schools do not support the idea of providing vouchers for these schools. One would think they realize that this would involve also increasing governmental control—ultimately destroying these schools, or at least destroying the reason for their existence. Let us be fully aware of these dangers and continue sacrificially to support our schools without the unwanted government support and control.

■ World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders

In reading the news, one is impressed by the fact that the signs of the end of the age are increasingly seen. When the world religions seek to join hands to establish peace, and when this is done under the auspices of the United Nations, one is reminded of the beasts of Revelation 13. From their web site, the following information tells of the intent of world religious leaders:

On August 28 through August 31, 2000 in the first gathering of its kind, the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders (opening at the United Nations) will unite several hundred preeminent leaders from the world's great religious and faith traditions to pledge a commitment for the achievement of world peace.

The World Peace Summit is being convened to coordinate religious and spiritual leadership as an interfaith ally to the United Nations in its quest for peace, global understanding and international cooperation.

The Summit's outcome – a signed Declaration for World Peace and the establishment of an ongoing International Advisory Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders – will serve as a resource for the United Nations in its con-

flict prevention and resolution efforts.

During the last decade, more than 100 armed conflicts have erupted in over 70 different locations around the world. Since the end of World War II, 27 million people have lost their lives due to war. Although religious leaders individually have spoken out against and tried to halt these hostilities, until now there has been no concerted effort to join the world's leading religious figures in a united initiative for world peace, working in conjunction with the United Nations.

Globalization and new communications technologies have done much to join the economies of countries around the world and to create a growing sense of interconnectedness among people. But these advances have not alleviated the problems that plague humankind. The brutality of war and the despair of poverty are as much a reality today as at any time in the past. Human suffering continues at an intolerable level.

To counter these ills, a strong collaboration is needed between the United Nations and the religious and spiritual community.

For this purpose, and to mark the potential of the new millennium, the world's preeminent religious and spiritual leaders will be gathering at the United Nations from August 28, 2000 for an historic World Peace Summit. Addressing the world's population through a telecast from the United Nations General Assembly Hall, these revered leaders will demonstrate their united commitment and determination to work together to eliminate the causes that perpetrate violence and lead to war.

In times of conflict, the world's great religious leaders will together exert moral authority in the zones of conflict to seek nonviolent resolutions.

Bawa Jain,
Secretary General,
World Peace Summit

The article continues by pointing out what this gathering intends to accomplish: peace among nations.


During recent conflicts in a number of regions, efforts have been made to engage the assistance of religious leaders. But to be more effective, many of the leaders acknowledge the need for a more supportive relationship with the United Nations.

Religious leaders gathering at the United Nations from August 28 will discuss a number of concrete steps to declare their commitment to work more closely as a community of spiritual leaders and with the diplomatic commu-

nity of the United Nations to prevent the outbreak of war.

They will work together to discern shared commitments to peace expressed in a Declaration for World Peace. The assembled religious and spiritual leaders will explore how to establish an International Advisory Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders to offer support to the United Nations and the United Nations Secretary-General in peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts. This Council will add a unique spiritual dimension to the United Nations difficult task of mediating conflicts

between nations and among peoples from different religious and ethnic groups.

Read again Revelation 13. Imagine how the peoples of the world will admire such a council of nations and religions which can establish and maintain peace on the earth! It sounds, however, much like Scripture's description of the Antichrist and his kingdom. Let us remember that the time is short; the night is far spent—the day is truly at hand. 

Book Reviews



Sermons on Melchizedek & Abraham, by John Calvin. Willow Street, PA: Old Paths Publications, 2000. XXIX + 284 pp. \$37.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by the editor.]

With this reprint in modern English of Calvin's sermons on Melchizedek and Abraham, Old Paths adds to its growing library of published sermons, long out-of-print, by the Reformer.

The book consists of sermons by Calvin on passages in Genesis 14, 15, 21, and 22. Calvin preached the sermons in French during the years 1559-1561 as part of his series on Genesis. The particular sermons collected in this book were published in English in 1592. They were never again reprinted and, therefore, have been virtually unavailable for the past 400 years.

Although the title refers to the three sermons on the meeting of Melchizedek and Abraham, the book actually includes much more. There are four sermons on the important passage concerning Abraham's justification in Genesis 15. There are also three sermons on Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, the first of which begins with comment on the last verses of Genesis 21.

In his foreword, Richard A. Muller notes that these excerpts

from Calvin's Genesis series were originally chosen for publication in English

because of their theological and religious interest, namely, the doctrines of faith, justification, godly obedience, and predestination. Indeed, these sermons, given that they were written after virtually all of the commentaries that deal with these particular themes and also after the completion of the final edition of the Institutes, represent Calvin's final published thoughts on these major doctrinal issues of the Reformation (pp. XIV, XV).

As it did with its previous books of Calvin's sermons, Old Paths modernizes the spelling and explains—in brackets—the unfamiliar words. Still, there is the occasional strange word and phrase left unexplained, e.g., "advichilate" (p. 57), "nifles" (p. 147), and "retcheth him up to divers pins" (p. 221). At least one word was misunderstood by the editor. "Weather," undoubtedly, is an old variant of "wether" (p. 247).

Calvin's language in preaching was vivid. Describing Abraham as he assembled his little band to pursue the four kings that had captured Lot, Calvin spoke of a "silly old man" deciding to lead an army.

In another context, Calvin acknowledged that the "jolly rabble of Monks, Friars, and their like ... have a certain glorious glittering show of righteousness."

The plain, vigorous exposition of the Word of God set forth and defended the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith to the saints. Outstanding is the explanation of justification by faith in connection with Genesis 15:6. In justification, the guilty sinner is *accounted* righteous; he is not *made* righteous. The role of faith is not that it is the "substance" or "matter" of the sinner's righteousness; only Christ's obedience for him is the substance of his righteousness. But faith is the instrument, or means, to receive Christ's righteousness to one's own account.

Of great significance in these sermons also is Calvin's emphasis that confidence of one's own salvation is an integral element of true faith. Assurance for Calvin is of the essence of faith. "Belief" is not only that we assent to the Word as true. It is also that we do not "doubt but that he [God] will be our Father and Savior, and so thereupon may be bold to call upon him, and hold ourselves for his children, and fly unto him for succor and aid." Whatever lacks this assurance is nothing but a "fan-

tastical opinion ... conceived in [the] brain" (pp. 98, 99). For Calvin, "faith ... importeth a certainty" (p. 145). In this doctrine of faith, Reformed Christianity differs radically from Rome, which denies assurance and settles for "probability" of salvation. This, says Calvin, is "utterly to overthrow the whole foundation of Christianity" (p. 146).


The notion that there is a kind of genuine faith that lacks assurance and that this miserable and God-dishonoring state of spiritual affairs may very well predominate

in a true church is utterly foreign to Calvin, as it is to the gospel.

This is the reading—devotional, instructive, edifying—for Reformed Christians.

Muller's recommendation is well put:

The reissuing of the sermons on the history of Melchizedek and Abraham, particularly when taken together with the sermons on election and reprobation, provides entry into the mind of Calvin at a significant juncture and on a series of highly important topics for

Reformed or "Calvinistic" Protestants. This is, as already noted, the preaching of the mature Calvin. It is also his preaching on a set of topics—faith, justification, obedience, Christ, and predestination—that belongs to the very heart of the Reformed faith. These sermons also offer a preeminent example of Calvin's manner of addressing the Old Testament both as history and as the living Word of God to the church in all ages. May Calvin's fundamental intention to edify the people of God in a lively and penetrating discourse continue to have fruit in our times (p. XXV). 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

Rev. B. Gritters and Rev. K. Koole returned home on Tuesday night, October 24, from their two weeks in Northern Ireland for church visitation with Covenant PRC and oversight of our churches' missionary and his family.

Nancy Hanko is recovering well from her surgery. The emissaries have also recommended that Rev. Hanko would be helped by a few more weeks off the pulpit—to which he and the consistory there have consented. Arrangements are now being made to have Rev. J. Slopsema, pastor of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, preach for the church there on November 5 and 12. Please continue to include Rev. R. Hanko and his family and the congregation in Northern Ireland in your prayers.

Rev. R. Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, writes in his most recent bulletin that he had the opportunity to speak at the Kinbu Secondary School recently. Once again he enjoyed this opportunity to bring the Word of God to the young people there. There were

probably about 350 present for this speech and fellowship about the Word of God. This is the second time Rev. Moore has spoken at this school and he is indeed thankful for the opportunity.

The first weekend in November, our Protestant Reformed Mission in Pittsburgh, PA held their Third Annual Reformation Celebration under the theme "Reformed, but Always Reforming." This year's celebration was held at Trinity Christian School, with Rev. C. Haak, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL and radio minister for the Reformed Witness Hour, speaking. Rev. Haak was scheduled to give the Reformation Lecture on Friday evening, entitled, "What Is It To Be Reformed," followed by his preaching twice the following Sunday in the morning on "How Do We Continue To Be Reformed?" and again that evening on the theme, "Why Must We Be Reformed and Always Reforming?"

Congregation Activities

The council of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL recently informed their congregation that their building mortgage has been paid in full. Looking back to my notes on Peace, I discovered that Peace dedicated

their new church building on November 17, 1995, and they held their first service there on October 29 that same year. A quick look at this year's "Yearbook" also shows that they organized in 1988, on November 11 I believe, with 24 families. There were 30 families when they moved into their new sanctuary in 1995, and now, some five years later, they have grown to 42 families. Through this all we are reminded of the words of Psalm 127:1: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."

If you missed the presentation of the Anecdotal History of the PRC at this summer's 75th anniversary, or if you simply wished to hear it again, you were invited to the First PRC in Holland, MI on October 31 to be part of a special presentation of that history given by Mr. Herm Ophoff and Miss Agatha Lubbers. Having heard it back in June, I do not hesitate to add here that it was truly an interesting and inspiring talk.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI invited members of the West Michigan churches and beyond to a public Reformation Day Lecture

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

on October 27. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on "Suffering for the Faith."

The Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA sponsored a Reformation Day Meeting for October 31. Prof. R. Decker was the featured speaker, speaking on "The Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Word." The Reformation debate included not only the question of the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, but also His presence in the preaching of the gospel.

The Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL sponsored a lecture on October 27 with Rev. R. Van Overloop speaking on the subject "Church Unity in Light of Many Denominations."

Rev. G. VanBaren, emeritus minister of the PRC, was the

speaker at a lecture sponsored by the Reformed Witness Committee, the evangelism arm of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs, along with the Edgerton, MN PRC. This lecture was held in the B.J. Haan Auditorium on the Dordt College Campus in Sioux Center, Iowa on October 27. Rev. VanBaren spoke on the subject, "Hell: Temporal or Eternal?"

The South Holland, IL PRC sponsored a lecture on November 3 with Prof. H. Hanko speaking on "Luther's Heidelberg Thesis: A Theology of the Cross."

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Doon, IA PRC invited their congregation, as well as other of

the nearby churches, to join them in a Reformation Day Singspiration on October 29. There was a collection for the 2001 Young People's Convention, which will be hosted by First Holland PRC.

Minister Activities

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, MI announced the following trio, from which they were to call a minister-on-loan to Singapore: Rev. W. Bruinsma, Rev. C. Haak, and Rev. D. Kleyn.

Food For Thought

"Peace is such a precious jewel that I would give anything for it but truth."

— Matthew Henry

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses their sincere Christian sympathy to Mrs. Jean Bloemhof in the recent loss of her husband,

DAVE BLOEMHOF.

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

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Marlys Mantel, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

First Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, MN has changed their second service time for the winter months from 2:00 to 6:00 PM. The second service will now be held at 6:00 PM all year.

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2001, at the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 11, 2000.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!!

The Association for Protestant Reformed Secondary Education in Lansing, IL is seeking an administrator/teacher and teachers for our high school's inaugural year beginning with grades nine and ten in August, 2001. Interested individuals please contact:

Education Committee chairman
Bill DeJong
(708) 946-6126
[bill@dejongequipment.com]
or Board chairman
Don Terpstra
(219) 838-3600
[dwterp@juno.com].

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father we are privileged to celebrate, on December 6, 2000, the 50th wedding anniversary of our dear parents and grandparents,

UILKE and JOANNE TOLSMAS.

We are grateful to our God and Father for the years He has given them together and pray that the Lord may continue to bless them in His grace. We are very thankful for the godly covenant instruction, example, and love they have given to us over the years. "The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand" (Psalm 121:5).

- ❖ Art and Helen Tolsma
Tracy, Philip, Ryan, Jason, Benjamin,
Travis, Loralie, Luke
- ❖ Fred and Netty Tolsma
Russell, Rachel, Trevor
- ❖ Richard and Sharon Tolsma
Kimberly, Jennifer, Michelle, Stephanie
- ❖ Brian and Carolyn Tolsma
Derek, Cindy, Curtis, Justin, Julie
- ❖ Irwin and Yvonne Tolsma
Melissa, Stephen, Christine, Kathleen,
Elisabeth, Mark, Sarah, Caleb
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada