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Strong in the Lord

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Ephesians 6:10

As children we sang with youthful enthusiasm, "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before." Little did we realize the implication and seriousness of what we sang. Only as we grew older did we learn that each one of us who is born in the line of God's covenant is a recruit in the regiment of Christ Jesus, called to fight the battle of faith all our life long.

We are not volunteers for Jesus, as if we choose Him. But He chose us and privileges us to be a part of that mighty army that fights the battle of the living God, going forth conquering and to conquer unto the day of our ultimate triumph in Christ Jesus in glory.

All those who are born of believing parents bear the ensign of the army of Jesus Christ. All who

are baptized wear the outward mark that distinguishes us from the world. All are under the external calling of the preaching of the Word, whereby we are called to be faithful soldiers who fight God's cause in an evil world. Therefore it is a most grievous sin to be a draft dodger or to go AWOL, to ignore or reject this calling. Those who do so, carry that mark of distinction even unto eternal damnation in hell.

But this call of the gospel is efficacious for us who are born again. We are made willing soldiers of the cross, prepared to serve in the army of our God. We bear the insignia on our foreheads and the seal in our hearts that we are of the party of the living God, standing opposed to all the powers of darkness, prepared to fight the battle of faith even unto victory!

We find ourselves surrounded by enemies everywhere. In fact, we experience that this enemy is even within our hearts, as well as in the world round about us. We are called to fight the battle of faith every day, every minute of our lives, led by the Captain of our salvation, the Lord of glory, who directs us from the highest heavens

through His Word and by His Spirit in our hearts.

We are warned that we have the most hostile, the most cunning, and even the most treacherous enemy that one can ever imagine. He is not seen. He prefers to work in secret, and you may even ignore the fact that he exists. He desires that he be denied or, if not denied, worshiped. He is the leader of a huge band of followers, including both his host of demons and the members of this present evil world. Ours is not a battle with an enemy off in the distance, or one that can be fought with earthly weapons. Ours is a hand-to-hand combat fought with spiritual weapons only. Scripture states: "For we wrestle (notice that, 'wrestle') not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

The devil may personally attack us as he did Eve in paradise, as he did Judas the betrayer, and as he did Jesus. But more likely he sends his demons to assault us. Maybe he even appoints one particular demon to spy on us, to discover our weaknesses, to choose the proper

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moment and the means or person to attack us, maybe even one of our own family or our closest friend. He sometimes comes as a roaring lion, filling us with terror, driving God's sheep helter-skelter. At other times he comes slinking in quietly and unnoticed like a fox to devour us. He may even come as a wolf in sheep's clothing, or as an angel of light, treacherously threatening us with his cunning deception. The keyword is: Be strong!

Our enemy is in our home, in our school, or in our place of labor, in the church and all around in this present evil world. For the sinner and the world hate us. This enemy works among those who live in squalor as well as among those who are rich; he also works among the high and mighty, among those who are in authority in our land. He is everywhere. We are called to be alert, to be on our guard, to be strong against the foe, lest he make us his victims and lead us into shameful sin that breeds sin unto death, even the death in hell. For one sin leads to another that is worse than the previous one, until soul and body are destroyed. Nothing, absolutely nothing, no firm resolve, no psychologist, nor any other means can deliver us from the bondage of sin and death. No one but God in Christ Jesus!

Therefore we are called to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." This reminds us of Moses' repeated admonition to Joshua, who was called to lead the armies of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan: "Be strong and of good courage, be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

To be strong in the Lord we must, first of all, be sure that we are *in the Lord*. That means that we were chosen in Christ from all eternity. We are one with Him as members of His body. It also means that when He died on the cross, we died in Him, and that

when He arose, we arose in Him. As Paul states in Ephesians 2:4-6, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ, ... and hath raised us up together (with Him)." We are willing soldiers in God's regiment by our rebirth in Christ.

Our earliest training began in the home, was carried on in the Christian school by devoted teachers, and in the church by God-fearing pastors. Always we were encouraged, and still are, to be strong, not in our own strength, but *in the Lord* and in the power of His might.

Literally we read in the original: "be strengthened in the Lord." That means that we do not fight in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. Our trust is not in the arm of flesh, but in the living God who sustains us and continually makes us strong in the faith by the Spirit of Christ in our hearts.

To be strengthened in the Lord also means that we constantly live in the conviction that we are righteous in Christ Jesus. We have a just cause, the cause of the living God, whose we are and whom we serve. We are well aware that sin still wars in our members, that our greatest battle is against the enemy within us. That, too, must be overcome with the strength of the power of the Lord.

This also means that we must be strengthened in the Lord in the sense that we surrender ourselves to His cause so completely that we are ready to give our all, our very lives. We live, not unto ourselves, but unto the Lord; and we die unto the Lord, for we are the Lord's. Therefore, even in the heat of battle, we are confident that we are always victors in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The text also points out to us that we must be strengthened in the power of the Lord. That power is the almighty, sovereign, invincible power of the living God Him-

self. Sustained by that power, we also are invincible. No enemy can resist that power. "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ... In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:32, 37).

To be strengthened in the Lord and in the power of His might means that we must strengthen ourselves in the Lord and in the power of His might! We must do that, not once for all, but constantly, every day, every moment of our lives! To do that, God's Word tells us, we must put on the whole armor of God! It is the armor God shapes and prepares in His arsenal for each of us, but, still more, by which means He gives us the victory over all our foes!

What is implied in putting on that armor? The instructions are given to us by the apostle.

In general it may be said: we must realize the importance of the Scriptures and make use of them. We must read them as God's message to us, study it as our Book of Instruction. We must listen carefully to the preaching of the Word, and our lives must be brought in harmony with it.

We are told how extremely important this Word is in equipping us for battle. It is an essential part of our armor. For it is, first of all, the girdle of truth that we must buckle about our loins. It is, secondly, the holy gospel that we must put on as the shoes of preparedness, in order that we may stand firm, immovable in the strife. It is, thirdly, the one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, whereby we fight off every enemy that attacks us, no matter how strong or numerous.

This is the weapon that Joseph used when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife: "Can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" David used it when he faced Goliath, saying: "I come to

thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." Jesus used it twice against Satan with the emphatic words: "It is written," and then: "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Therefore we must gird ourselves with the girdle of truth, pull on the boots of preparedness, and take up the sword of the Spirit.

Moreover, we must place firmly on our chests "the breastplate of righteousness." It is the positive assurance that we belong to the Captain of our salvation, our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, that we are righteous in Him, and therefore are called to fight His righteous cause in this present evil world. That breastplate is a strong protection for that vital organ within us, our heart! As Paul says: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Besides that, and we are told that this is extremely important, we


must firmly grasp in our left hand "the shield of faith, whereby we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." The enemy surrounds us wherever we turn. He showers his darts upon us — mind you, fiery darts, with the deliberate intent to kill us, not in the physical, but, still worse, in the spiritual sense. He wants to bring us along with him into hell. But the shield of faith is the bond that unites us to Christ and gives us confidence in Him. It is our sure protection. As Jonathan said to his armor-bearer as they approached the Philistine army, "There is no restraint by God to save by many or by few." And moments later: "Come up after me: for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel."

Finally, as the last of the defensive weapons, we need the "helmet of salvation." It bears the insignia, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord." We must be sure to put that on to protect our heads. It is

the hope, the assurance, and the expectation of our eternal salvation. It is the confidence that even now, though we must die for God's cause, we are more than conquerors in Him who loved us even unto death!

Put on the whole armor of God. Be strong! Be of good courage! Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed. Strengthen yourself in the power of His might.

We sing with the sweet singer of Israel:

Thou art, O God, our boast, the
glory of our power;
Thy sovereign grace is e'er our
fortress and our tower.
We lift our heads aloft, for God,
our shield, is o'er us;
Through Him, through Him
alone, whose presence goes
before us,
We'll wear the victor's crown, no
more by foes assaulted,
We'll triumph through our
King, by Israel's God exalted.
(Psalter #422, stanza 6) 

Editorial

Total, Absolute, or Partial Depravity?

In the controversy between the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) over common grace, a strange doctrinal distinction has surfaced. The distinction originates from the side of the CRC and is used by Christian Reformed theologians. It is the distinction between "total and absolute depravity."

The distinction concerns the teaching of the second and third points of the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924. This is the teaching that there is a gracious work of the Holy Spirit in

unregenerated men and women restraining sin in them and enabling them to perform good works in the sphere of everyday, earthly life. When the PRC object to this teaching as a denial of the biblical and confessionally Reformed doctrine of total depravity, the CRC accuses the PRC of holding a doctrine of absolute depravity. With its teaching of the good of the unregenerated by common grace, the CRC claims to maintain the doctrine of total depravity.

The odd result of this strange distinction is that the PRC, which deny any good in the unregener-

ate, are made out to oppose the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, while the CRC, which affirm good in the unregenerate, come off as confessing the Reformed doctrine of total depravity.

This strange distinction comes up in the reconsideration of the third point by Christian Reformed theologian John Bolt in the November 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*. Bolt only refers to the distinction. He does not use it himself. He writes: "It is an open question whether Hoeksema here conflates the distinction between total depravity and absolute de-

pravity" ("Common Grace, Theonomy, and Civic Good: The Temptations of Calvinist Politics [Reflections on the Third Point of the CRC Kalamazoo Synod, 1924"], p. 216). This editorial does not take issue with Professor Bolt. It takes occasion from his reference to the distinction between total and absolute depravity to address this Christian Reformed distinction.

It is high time that this strange distinction be exposed for the ploy that it is. It must be buried in the sea of utter theological forgetfulness. No progress in the discussion of the third point of common grace can be expected as long as this distinction plays in the minds and writings of the theologians.

The PRC deny, absolutely, the charge that they hold "absolute depravity." They do not now hold, and never have held, a doctrine of "absolute depravity."

The PRC repudiate the distinction itself. It is not biblical. It does not appear in the Reformed confessions. It is not part of the Reformed tradition. Heppe does not use it in his summary of the Reformed tradition. Turretin does not mention "absolute depravity" in his treatment of the extent of fallen man's depravity. Even Louis Berkhof does not use the phrase "absolute depravity" in his treatment of man's depravity in his *Systematic Theology*, although Bolt is correct in noting that Berkhof suggests the distinction.

As Dr. Bolt points out, Herman Hoeksema does offer an explanation of the phrase "absolute depravity" in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (see pp. 252, 253). But his explanation does not allow the distinction "total and absolute depravity" any place in the consideration of the extent of the sinfulness of the unregenerated. Hoeksema's recognition of the legitimacy of the phrase "absolute depravity" is grudging. The impression is left that the repeated use of the phrase by his Christian Reformed foes caused him to cast about for some

orthodox explanation or other of it. He should have renounced the phrase as such.

Where did the distinction "total and absolute depravity" originate?

I suspect that it was invented by Christian Reformed theologians for the express purpose of deflecting the deadly serious accusation by the PRC, that the Christian Reformed doctrine of common grace denies the doctrine of total depravity. At the same time, by tagging the PRC with a novel, radical doctrine of "absolute depravity," the theologians of the CRC could carry out their largely successful program of painting the PRC as "hyper."

As Bad as He Can Be?

To Hoeksema's charge that the second and third points of common grace in particular are Pelagian in that they ascribe good to the unregenerated, Louis Berkhof responded with a counterattack on the theology of Hoeksema concerning the natural man. The counter-attack was implied in Berkhof's description of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity: "The doctrine of total depravity, according to the Reformed confession, does not maintain that man is as bad as he can possibly be" (*De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd*, p. 54, emphasis added; my translation of the Dutch). The words "absolute depravity" are not used, but the idea is there. Down the years, the defenders of common grace have charged against the PRC that they teach that every unregenerated sinner is "as bad as he possibly can be." The PRC, it is alleged, confess "absolute depravity."

This description of the doctrine of the PRC regarding the extent of the depravity of the unregenerated immediately puts the Protestant Reformed doctrine in a bad light, if it does not automatically expose it as erroneous. Who can doubt that some unregenerated sinners are far worse than others? Who

does not see both in Scripture and in experience that unregenerated people develop in wickedness?

The description of the doctrine of the PRC as teaching that men are "as bad as they can possibly be"—"absolute depravity"! — is ambiguous. The description could refer to the *extent* of depravity, in which case it is orthodox Reformed doctrine. But it can also refer to the *development, intensity, and expression* of depravity, in which case a church that confesses that every unregenerated man is as bad as he can possibly be is witless. Because the description is ambiguous, to employ it against the PRC is theologically irresponsible and, finally, ethically wrong.

The PRC confess total depravity. Of an "absolute depravity," we know nothing.

Confessing total depravity, we deny that there is any ethical good that remains in fallen, unregenerated humans, or that they can do any good works by a grace of the Spirit working in them.

To the ambiguous charge from the defenders of common grace that this implies that every unregenerated human is as bad as he can possibly be, we respond: "Every unregenerated person is *as totally depraved* as he can be." He is utterly without any good, or ability for good. He is completely corrupt. He is completely under sin's dominion. He is *dead* in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1ff.). The decent pagan is as totally depraved as was Judas Iscariot when he betrayed our Lord. Adolf Hitler at three years old was as totally depraved as he would be in his 40s and 50s when he unleashed his horrors upon the world.

Degrees and Development of Depravity

This biblical, creedal doctrine—total depravity, not "absolute depravity" (which we do not know)—allows for degrees of evil among those who are totally depraved. The totally depraved Capernaite,

who rejects Jesus Christ, is worse than the totally depraved Sodomite engaging in his sexual perversion in the days of Abraham (Matt. 11:23, 24). The explanation is not that the Sodomite is partially good, whereas the Capernaite is wholly bad. But the badness of the Capernaite is worse than the badness of the Sodomite. All sin is wicked. Some sin is more wicked than other sin, depending, among other things, on the degree of knowledge that one has and on the nature of the sin itself.

Today, the baptized young man from a covenant home and a Reformed church who abandons the faith is far more wicked than the drug-using, homosexual young black in the Chicago ghetto. Both are totally depraved.

The biblical, confessional doctrine of total depravity allows for real development of sin in the totally depraved person. I choose Adolf Hitler once more, not because I think that he was virtually the only totally depraved person who ever lived, nor because I think that he was the most evil man who ever lived (although he must come close), but because even the foes of total depravity will grant that there was little common grace good in that monster.

Adolf Hitler as a small boy of three or four, loving his mother, running playfully in the yard, and petting small animals, was as totally depraved as he would be when he plunged Western civilization into darkness in the 1930s and 1940s. When he finally put the gun to his head in the Berlin bunker in 1945, he was not more totally depraved than he was when he was conceived and born. How would that be possible? Everyone is conceived and born in sin, that is, depraved totally from conception (Psalm 51:5). At three as at fifty-six, he was completely sinful. Every part of his being was completely wicked.

But Adolf Hitler developed his corrupt nature. He fanned his ha-

tred of God and his neighbor, especially his Jewish neighbor, to a white-hot flame. And then he struggled his way to power in Germany and in the world, so that he could express and spread his hatred to a nation and the world.

Hitler's development in sin was not a backsliding from good to bad, not even from partial good to complete badness. It was an advance from bad to worse. It was a vigorous, thorough working out of depravity to its extremest possibilities. It was the intensifying of depravity, not the spreading of the extent of depravity in him.

The figure that illustrates the development of sin in a totally depraved person—a figure that is solidly biblically based—is not that of a sick man who gradually dies. But it is the figure of a dead man who increasingly decays, rots, and stinks more and more.

There is a similar development of sin in particular societies and nations.

There is a similar development of sin in the ungodly world throughout history. The wicked world of the ungodly does not move from a partial love of God to a complete hatred of God. Nor is the history of the world this, that the world degenerates from good to bad as common grace gradually fails. But the world steadily fills up the cup of its iniquity. The world explores, develops, and perfects with tender, loving care the possibilities of sin, the possibilities of life apart from and in rebellion against God.

Partial Depravity

The alternative to the doctrine of total depravity as the PRC confess it (with other churches) is a doctrine of *partial* depravity.

This is the doctrine of the CRC in its theory of common grace, especially the second and third points. The unregenerate man is partially good by virtue of a gracious operation of the Spirit within him restraining sin. Since he is

only partially depraved, he does many works that are good—good in the judgment of God, whose grace produces these works.

Many Reformed and Presbyterian churches freely acknowledge that they are one with the CRC in its doctrine of depravity. They too maintain a doctrine of partial depravity.

So far has this theory of partial depravity developed in the CRC that Christian Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema has rejected the phrase itself, "total depravity," as the description of the condition of the unregenerated man. His reason is exactly that by virtue of common grace the unregenerated man is partially good and capable of doing good. Hoekema proposes instead the phrase "pervasive depravity." This, he defines as depravity that "extends to every aspect of human nature: to one's reason and will as well as to one's appetites and impulses" (see his *Created in God's Image*, Eerdmans, 1986, pp. 149-154).

Man is merely partially depraved! Part of his will, part of his mind, and part of his affections are depraved.

Part of his will, part of his mind, and part of his affections are not depraved!

Partial depravity!

The issue between the PRC and the CRC over depravity has absolutely nothing to do with any teaching by the PRC of an "absolute depravity." The PRC have never taught such a thing, do not recognize such a thing, and do not know what such a thing is.

The issue is very simply this: Is the unregenerated man *completely* depraved in all aspects of his being, or is he only *partly* depraved in all aspects of his being?

Total depravity or partial depravity?

Say it like it is.

— DJE 

■ Divine Hardening

This letter serves several purposes. One of my purposes is to express appreciation for the editorial, "How Does Christ Speak in the Preaching of the Gospel?" in the January 15, 2001 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The other purposes are to remark and to seek a better understanding for myself and other readers of the truth of the hardening of the reprobate by the preaching as mentioned in the above editorial, also the hardening of the reprobate who are not in the church in any sense.

In light of my following comments, questions, and the risk of being misunderstood, I find it necessary to state first that our triune, covenant God may never be charged with sin or be made the author of sin. Our God is perfectly holy (Rev. 15:4). It is also necessary to state that I and all of God's elect are no less guilty of judgment in this life and in the life to come than the reprobate (II Tim. 1:9 "... who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"). Sovereign, particular grace!

Concerning those who remain unregenerated, does not God continue to harden and blind them with greater blindness and use sin to bring them greater judgment as part of their punishment as Romans 1 teaches? In Exodus 9:12 we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart; and in Numbers 22:20ff. we read that Balaam was told by God to go with the servants of Balak, and when Balaam went, God's anger was kindled against him. Can this be a proof-text that God uses sin to punish and confuse the reprobate?

Having established that Christ

is the one speaking in the preaching of the Word, softening the hearts of the elect and hardening the hearts of the reprobate, don't we have to conclude that Christ by the Holy Spirit is indeed the one doing the hardening? Is this indeed the teaching of John 12:40 and Romans 9:18?

Paul Starrett
Zeeland, Michigan

RESPONSE:

Romans 1:18ff. teaches divine hardening of sinners through the revelation of God in creation. John 12:37ff., Romans 9:18, and II Corinthians 2:16 teach Christ's hardening of reprobate sinners through the gospel.

— Ed.

■ Infallible Preaching?

Thanks for your clear explanation of the Protestant Reformed Churches' view of preaching in the recent *Standard Bearer* (January 15, 2001). I found the parallel drawn between this view of preaching and the Calvinistic interpretation of the Communion particularly helpful. However, a few questions remain about which I would appreciate further clarification.

My primary concern with the position that Christ speaks directly in the preaching of the gospel is that it implies that the preaching of a minister is infallible, and therefore beyond question or scrutiny. If such a situation exists, how can we exercise our Reformation right of private judgment over what is preached (Acts 17:11)? This position seems further to imply that the minister is mediating the word of God to His people, just as Roman Catholic priests believe themselves to be standing between Christ and the laity. But does not the Word of God exist directly for both ministers and congregation in the Scriptures themselves, about which

the minister merely provides his fallible interpretation when he preaches, which has ecclesiastical authority insofar as it remains within the bounds of creedal orthodoxy?

Allen Baird
Ballymena, Northern Ireland

RESPONSE:

"Ecclesiastical authority" for the preaching is something, but it is not enough. Ecclesiastical authority does not work faith, forgive sins, or open and shut the kingdom of heaven, Rome to the contrary notwithstanding.

We must hear Jesus Christ and be taught by Him (Eph. 4:20, 21).

And this is what the believer wants. As the Greeks desired of Philip in John 12:21, he desires of the minister on the Lord's Day, "Sir, we would see—and hear—Jesus." He is not satisfied with hearing a learned, or not so learned, man share his fine, or not so fine, insights into Scripture.

The biblical and Reformed doctrine that Christ speaks His living Word by means of the faithful preaching of the gospel of Scripture does not imply either that the minister is infallible or that the preaching is exempt from testing.

No minister, though he be John Calvin, is infallible, whether in the pulpit or out of it.

Every believer has not only the right but also the duty to test the sermon, whether it is faithful to Scripture, the sole infallible standard of all preaching and teaching. Indeed, the Holy Spirit commends the Bereans for testing the inspired preaching of the apostle himself: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The explanation of Christ's

speaking through fallible preaching, which preaching may and must be tested by the believer, lies in the error of your adverb. Christ does not speak "directly" in the preaching. He speaks *indirectly*. There is a twofold indirection. He speaks by means of a man who is weak, sinful, and capable of erring. And He speaks by means of Holy Scripture, which this fallible man authoritatively proclaims in the office of the ministry.

We may describe the twofold indirection this way. Christ speaks by means of a fallible preacher faithfully proclaiming the (true) gospel set forth in the infallible Scripture.


When the weak, sinful, fallible minister does faithfully proclaim the one, true gospel, drawn from Scripture and in harmony with it, Christ speaks through the preaching of the man exercising the office of the ministry in the church. Christ speaks through this preaching, even though the minister has a weak voice, makes grammatical errors (once in a while), mixes up his facts (occasionally), and even gets a certain point of exegesis wrong (which is not the same as heresy).

That Christ is willing to use such an unlikely instrument to sound His own blessed voice is another testimony to His amazing grace and condescension. There

are no depths to which He will not stoop to save us.

That Christ is able to use such a foolish means is another testimony to His almighty power, that is, His Spirit. There is nothing that He cannot do to save us.

And when the believer has compared the sermon with Scripture and has been assured (by the Spirit working through the preaching and in connection with the Scripture being preached) that the sermon is the gospel of Scripture, he ought to receive it with all readiness of mind, not as the words of men but as the Word of God, which, in truth, it is (I Thess. 2:13).

— Ed. 

Guest Article

Rev. Ron Cammenga

The Scotch Confession of 1560 (2)

In a previous article (see the October 15, 2000 issue), we treated the history of the Scotch Confession of Faith. That article appeared in the special Reformation issue, October 15, 2000. It may be helpful to reread that article for the background to the present one. In this article, we want to look more closely at the contents of the Scotch Confession.

Overview of Contents

The Scotch Confession contains all of the important truths common to the creeds that were written in the Reformation era. It affirms all of the doctrines relating to the Trinity and the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ as they were de-

fended by the early ecumenical councils and embodied in the early creeds, most notably the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. In addition, the Scotch Confession holds forth the doctrines of Scripture, sovereign grace, and the church and sacraments made prominent by the Reformation.

To gain an overall view of the Scotch Confession, it will be helpful to list the headings of the twenty-five chapters of the creed.

- Chapter I: God
- Chapter II: The Creation of Man
- Chapter III: Original Sin
- Chapter IV: The Revelation of the Promise
- Chapter V: The Continuance, Increase, and Preservation of the Kirk
- Chapter VI: The Incarnation of Christ Jesus
- Chapter VII: Why the Media-

tor Had to Be True God and True Man

Chapter VIII: Election

Chapter IX: Christ's Death, Passion, and Burial

Chapter X: The Resurrection

Chapter XI: The Ascension

Chapter XII: Faith in the Holy Ghost

Chapter XIII: The Cause of Good Works

Chapter XIV: The Works Which Are Counted Good Before God

Chapter XV: The Perfection of the Law and the Imperfection of Man

Chapter XVI: The Kirk

Chapter XVII: The Immortality of Souls

Chapter XVIII: The Notes by Which the True Kirk Shall Be Determined From the False, and Who Shall Be Judge of Doctrine

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Chapter XIX: The Authority of the Scriptures
 Chapter XX: General Councils, Their Power, Authority, and the Cause of Their Summoning
 Chapter XXI: The Sacraments
 Chapter XXII: The Right Administration of the Sacraments
 Chapter XXIII: To Whom Sacraments Appertain
 Chapter XXIV: The Civil Magistrate
 Chapter XXV: The Gifts Freely Given to the Kirk

This overview makes plain that the Scotch Confession was designed to set forth the convictions of its framers and signatories regarding all of the fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture. Its focus, therefore, is not narrow but as broad as all of Scripture.

The Character of the Scotch Confession

Before highlighting some of the main teachings of the Scotch Confession, we ought also to take note of the main characteristics of the confession.

First, the Scotch Confession is explicitly biblical. Scripture is regarded as the authority for everything contained in the creed. The presumption of the creed is that Scripture is the written Word of God, infallible and authoritative. Its appeal is always to Holy Scripture. The creed is built on the foundation of Holy Scripture. Scripture's authority is not derived from anyone or anything outside of Scripture, but rests in the truth that Scripture is the Word of God.

Such (true) Kirks, we the inhabitants of the realm of Scotland confessing Christ Jesus, do claim to have in our cities, towns, and reformed districts because of the doctrine taught in our Kirks, contained in the written Word of God, that is, the Old and New Testaments, in those books which were originally reckoned canonical. We

affirm that in these all things necessary to be believed for the salvation of man are sufficiently expressed. (Chapter XVIII)

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk, which always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same. (Chapter XIX)

Besides being explicitly biblical, the Scotch Confession is also warmly personal. What is affirmed is not cold, abstract dogma. But the creed sets forth the living faith of the church, as that faith is believed and confessed by the individual members of the church. Most of the articles begin with "*We* confess...." or "*We* confess and acknowledge...." or "*We* hold...." Faith is not considered to be mere assent with the head, but conviction of the heart. The truth of Scripture is presented as the truth which is *embraced* by the believer, which is the strength and support of his life, and which is the faith for which he is willing to die. The history of the Reformation in Scotland prior to the adoption of the Scotch Confession provides scores of examples of Reformed Christians who did just that.

Third, the Scotch Confession is pointedly polemical. The confession exposes false doctrine and repudiates the teaching of the false church and the sects of the day. The creed does not content itself to be only positive, but takes seriously the biblical calling to try the spirits. This is done in a fair way, the way in which polemics must always be done. The positions of those with whom the creed takes issue are accurately represented, to

the credit of its framers. But it *is* done. On the one hand, Rome and its many perversions are warned against and rejected. And on the other hand, the wrong views and practices of the Anabaptists are also renounced.

And fourth, the Scotch Confession is decidedly instructional. The purpose of the creed was not only to serve as a statement of belief to the world outside of Scotland. But its purpose was also to provide a means of instruction for the members, and especially the youth, of the Scottish churches. The new-found freedom to exist openly, which the churches of the Reformation in Scotland enjoyed, must be taken advantage of. The great truths of the creed must be preached and taught to the people.

The Doctrines of Sovereign Grace

Prominent place is given in the Scotch Confession to the doctrines of sovereign grace. In this respect the confession shows itself to be thoroughly Reformed.

The confession sets forth the Reformation teaching of the total depravity of man, and therefore man's complete inability to contribute to his own salvation. The following two citations will serve to illustrate this point.

By this transgression, generally known as original sin, the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin. (Chapter III)

For by nature we are so dead, blind, and perverse, that neither can we feel when we are pricked, see the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will. (Chapter XII)

The total depravity of man necessitates the sovereignty of God

in salvation. In line with the other great creeds of the Reformation, the Scotch Confession affirms that the sovereign decree of God is the cause of salvation. The creed breathes sovereign election. Over and over again the members of the church are referred to as God's "chosen." (Cf. Chapters III, VIII, XIII, XVI, XVII, XXI, and XXV.) In Chapter VIII the truth of election is set forth.

That same eternal God and Father, who by grace alone chose us in his Son Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls.... Therefore we are not afraid to call God our Father, not so much because he has created us, which we have in common with the reprobate, as because he has given unto us his only Son to be our brother, and given us grace to acknowledge and embrace him as our only Mediator.

Already in connection with the work of Christ, it had been stated in Chapter VII:

We acknowledge and confess that this wonderful union between the Godhead and the humanity in Christ Jesus did arise from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all of our salvation springs and depends.

In line with God's eternal decree, the death of Jesus Christ was a limited atonement. This is affirmed in Chapter IX of the Scotch Confession that deals directly with the passion and death of the Savior. The main line of argument here, as is the case in other of the Reformation creeds, is the clear teaching of Scripture that Christ's death was real atonement. His death was the real satisfaction for the sins of all for whom He died. The fruit of Christ's death is that all for which He died are "...absolved before the judgment seat of our God." The conclusion of this

chapter is: "From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin; if any affirm so, we do not hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's death and the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us."

The grace of God worked out in Christ's atonement is applied irresistibly by the Holy Spirit to elect sinners. The Scotch Confession affirms irresistible grace.

Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; whom we confess to be God, equal with the Father and with his Son, who sanctifies us, and brings us into all truth by his own working, without whom we should remain forever enemies to God and ignorant of his Son, Christ Jesus. (Chapter XII)

It is the Spirit's work in us that produces whatever good comes from us.

The cause of good works, we confess, is not our free will, but the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in. (Chapter XII)


At the same time, the Spirit's presence in us *does* and *must* produce good works.

For we most boldly affirm that it is blasphemy to say that Christ abides in the hearts of those in

whom is no spirit of sanctification. Therefore we do not hesitate to affirm that murderers, oppressors, cruel persecutors, adulterers, filthy persons, idolaters, drunkards, thieves, and all workers of iniquity, have neither true faith nor anything of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus so long as they obstinately continue in wickedness. For as soon as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, whom God's chosen children receive by true faith, takes possession of the heart of any man, so soon does he regenerate and renew him, so that he begins to hate what before he loved, and to love what he hated before. (Chapter XII)

Those whom God has chosen, for whom Christ has died, and who are indwelt and gathered by the Holy Spirit are also preserved in salvation. "We most surely believe that God preserved, instructed, multiplied, honored, adorned, and called from death to life his Kirk in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh" (Chapter V). The assurance of the preservation of the church as a whole and of every individual believer rests squarely on the sovereignty of God, the cornerstone of the Reformed faith.

The Scotch Confession ends with a fitting and beautiful prayer.

Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be confounded; let them flee from thy presence that hate thy godly Name. Give thy servants strength to speak thy Word with boldness, and let all nations cleave to the true knowledge of thee. Amen. 

Imputed Righteousness

Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness;
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood.
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace –
Thy blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord my God.

Standard Bearer,
1929

■ You Knew it Was Bad, But...

That the modern media is permeated with sex is known to any who pay any attention to this. Movies, television, videos, and now especially the Internet present this corruption in an uninterrupted stream. One is especially impressed with the seriousness of all of this when writers in the secular press speak out against the shocking prevalency of it. In an article in the *Grand Rapids Press*, February 7, 2001, Valerie Kuklenski, writing originally in the *Los Angeles Daily News*, presents some of the shocking figures.

A survey released Tuesday found that three out of four prime-time programs have sexual content and one in 10 shows overall depicts or "strongly implies" intercourse. Sitcoms showed the greatest growth in innuendo since the last survey, two seasons ago....

...Even with the outcry from some political leaders it's unlikely the industry will make any changes....

Researchers at the University of California, Santa Barbara, watched all but newscasts, sports and children's shows.

The foundation defined sexual content as "both talk about sex and depictions of sexual behavior," excluding scenes in which the emphasis on sex was "minor or inconsequential."

Movies, at 89 percent, were most likely to have sexual content, followed by 84 percent of sitcoms and 80 percent of soap operas. Reality shows were the least likely at only 27 percent, but that was before "Temptation Island"....

Add to this the corruption presented by so many of the songs which are popular with the youth

of the land. And there is the terrible filth available on the Internet. We live in a world of almost unmentionable filth. Nor ought we to think that this affects only the "world." Our young people can be tempted to check out this filth. It can be seen in our living rooms. It can be viewed in public institutions. Some young people doubtlessly look at this sort of thing. But fathers and mothers have been known to do this too. The devil, it seems, has available vast numbers of "tools" today to seduce the members of the church.

Under the guise of "freedom of speech" the government allows this sort of corruption to flourish. There appears to be no stopping of this anymore. The moral decay also of our society becomes increasingly evident as a result of all of this.

Meanwhile, the Christian must be aware how easily he can become addicted to this sort of rot. Often, like the drunkard who began with a few drinks, it begins with a few "glances." One just wants to "check it out." But what begins with mere curiosity soon becomes full-blown addiction. Young people and even young children are being affected—*our* young people. Families are being destroyed through this corruption—*our* families.

How necessary is the stern warning of Scripture to "touch not the unclean thing" (II Cor. 6:17). Striking, is it not, that we are not to *touch* the unclean thing. The *touch* seems to be such a little thing. Yet the danger is there: the touch soon leads to more. Often the Christian is tempted to come as close as he can to the edge of the precipice. He ought rather to move as far from that as possible.

How far have we also slipped in this regard?

■ Intelligent Design—Again

Some months ago I quoted an article concerning opposition to the very idea of "intelligent design" in creation. A reader from New York kindly sent additional materials on the subject. These are quotes taken from *The American Spectator*, November 2000. The article was titled: "Lynching Bill Dembski." Bill Dembski is a mathematician who taught at Baylor University (a Baptist institution in Waco, Texas). He headed a research center at the university which studied the possibility of intelligent design of creation. But that created a furor of controversy. In a vote (26 to 2) of the faculty senate at Baylor University, a recommendation was adopted that Dembski's research center be dismantled. Some of Dembski's fellow-professors even wrote Congress about the dangers of Dembski's project. The article states:

So you're wondering: What kind of new and evil science is William Dembski practicing? Is he cloning half-humans without souls to create cheap labor? Several Baylor students interviewed for this article couldn't pinpoint the exact deed, but knew it was immoral because they heard that it had something to do with an evil use of the human genome project.

What does Bill Dembski think of all this? A mild-mannered mathematician more at home with probability theory than politics, he shakes his head in disbelief. "I've found that when people get to know me one-on-one, they think what I'm doing is legitimate, or, at least worth pursuing. But when they start listening to the siren call of the Internet, things get out of control."

What Dembski has actually done hardly seems nefarious. As a scientist with twin Ph.D's in

mathematics and philosophy, Dembski has set about developing mathematical methods for detecting intelligent design, should it be discernible, in nature. That's all. What's more, he has submitted his work to the scientific scrutiny of his peers. So why are all these professors so hysterical?

Since the 1980's, critics have charged that the intelligent design concept is really just "a disguised form of creationism." According to Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education: "They're really saying God does it, but they're not as honest as the Biblical creationists. The intelligence is really spelled in three letters: G-O-D."

The article continues by explaining the difficulties which Dembski faced in Baylor University. Other faculty members opposed his work. Others throughout the country from different universities expressed their shock and disappointment at Dembski's teachings. The article continues by explaining some of Dembski's work:

What is intelligent design? ID depends upon a concept known as specified complexity.

Say you're out raking leaves in the backyard. If you were to find little piles of leaves, equally spaced apart in a long line, the arrangement would be an example of specificity; but it could be explained by what fell out of a rolling barrel. Each time the barrel made a revolution, another clump fell out, each spaced apart by about the same distance. The pattern is specified, but not complex.

When you come across thousands of piles of leaves in no particular pattern, that's complex, and it may take billions of overturned barrels to produce another pattern just like it. But it's not specified. No intelligent design is required to explain it.

But let's say you come across a thousand leaves arranged as letters spelling meaningful words, sentences, paragraphs, even a whole story—that's specified complexity. Specified complexity cre-

ates information and meaning, and that requires intelligent design.

Many scientific disciplines already use such logic to distinguish between phenomena produced by an intelligence from those that are not. The cryptologist, when breaking a code, looks for patterns that create meaning and are not due to chance. SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) does the same in its search for signals of intelligence from space (think Jodie Foster in *Contact*). Even Quincy's forensic science was all about trying to determine whether a death was due to an accident, natural causes, or the design of an intelligence.

William Dembski puts it this way: "Specified complexity powerfully extends the usual mathematical theory of information, known as Shannon information. Shannon's theory dealt only with complexity, which can be due to random processes as well as to intelligent design. The addition of specification to complexity, however, is like a vise that grabs only things due to intelligence. Indeed, all the empirical evidence confirms that the only known cause of specified complexity is intelligence."

Thus when Dembski observes this specified complexity in DNA messages and protein coding, he infers intelligent design. These patterns give real information in the form of meaningful instructions, precisely analogous to language with words, sentences, punctuation marks, and grammatical rules.

The old "scientific creationism" based itself upon two tenets: a supernatural agent created all things, and the Bible gives us an accurate account of what happened. In contrast, according to Dembski, intelligent design is built upon three very different tenets:

1. Specified complexity is well defined and empirically detectable.
2. Undirected natural causes are incapable of explaining specified complexity.
3. Intelligent causation best explains specified complexity.

What was the outcome of the furor? Dembski has a four-year contract remaining at Baylor University. He was fired from his position of director of the study center. There is no room, so it appears, for anyone who proposes anything which seems to contradict the idea of evolution. But that's hardly scientific.

Once again we ought to be reminded that "intelligent design" which does not recognize the infallible testimony of Holy Scripture itself lacks the essential element of "faith." It is by faith that one understands that the worlds were framed by the Word of God. "Intelligent design" confirms the testimony of Romans 1 that creation itself gives evidence of God's power and Godhead. Those who see that are also without excuse in the day of judgment. How much worse will it be for those who see these very things—but deny their reality?

■ "Survival of the Fakest"

The same *American Spectator*, December 2000/January 2001, presents some of the "faked" evidence for evolution. "Evidence" which has been proven inaccurate or completely wrong continues to appear in science textbooks as proof of evolution. The author, Jonathan Wells, points to one:

It was only when I was finishing my Ph.D. in cell and development biology, however, that I noticed what at first I took to be a strange anomaly. The textbook I was using prominently featured drawings of vertebrate embryos—fish, chickens, humans, etc.—where similarities were presented as evidence for descent from a common ancestor. Indeed, the drawings did appear very similar. But I'd been studying embryos for some time, looking at them under a microscope. And I knew that the drawings were just plain wrong.

I re-checked all my other textbooks. They all had similar drawings, and they were all obviously

wrong. Not only did they distort the embryos they pictured; they omitted earlier stages in which the embryos look very different from one another.

Like most other science students, like most scientists themselves, I let it pass. It didn't immediately affect my work, and I assumed that while the texts had somehow gotten this particular issue wrong, it was the exception to the rule. In 1997, however, my interest in the embryo drawings was revived when British embryologist Michael Richardson and his colleagues published the result of their study comparing the textbook drawings with actual embryos. As Richardson himself was quoted in the prestigious journal *Science*: "It looks like it's turning out to be one of the most famous


fakes in biology."

Worse, this was no recent fraud. Nor was its discovery recent. The embryo drawings that appear in most every high school and college textbook are either reproductions of, or based on, a famous series of drawings by the 19th century German biologist and fervent Darwinian, Ernst Haeckel, and they have been known to scholars of Darwin and evolutionary theory to be forgeries for *over a hundred years*. But none of them, apparently, have seen fit to correct this almost ubiquitous misinformation.

Still thinking this an exceptional circumstance, I became curious to see if I could find other mistakes in the standard biology texts dealing with evolution. My search re-

vealed a startling fact however: Far from being exceptions, such blatant misrepresentations are more often the rule....

The article continues by pointing out several other instances of deception in connection with the "proofs" for evolution. All of this indicates that "science" is not all it claims to be. Not only are there many who would seek to silence all that contradicts evolution, but false "proof" is used to convince the uninformed of the "truth" of evolution.

The Christian has the testimony of Scripture. There is found the testimony both of who created, but also how He created. By faith we believe that. 

Feature Articles

God Dwelling with His People in Covenant Fellowship (1)

A Summary of the Covenant Theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches *

Prof. Russell Dykstra

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* In September of 2000, a conference on the doctrine of the covenant was held between the Committee for Contact with Other Churches, a committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches. At this conference, both committees submitted papers on the covenant. What follows is the paper given by the committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The covenant is undoubtedly one of the most significant doctrines revealed in the Scriptures. In the judgment of most Reformed theologians, the covenant is the very heart of Reformed doctrine and life. In the doctrine of the covenant all theology "comes together." The various doctrines of a church come into focus in her doctrine of the covenant, thus revealing either intrinsic conflict and contradiction in its theology, or, harmonious, organic unity. Clearly it is good that this doctrine receives due attention and discussion among us.

For the Protestant Reformed Churches, the doctrine of the covenant is essential to her existence as a denomination. Already in 1950, Rev. Herman Hoeksema set forth what he believed to be the distinctive contribution of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed faith, as well as their distinctive stand in the Reformed church-world. He wrote:

But I ask, what is the heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches? Is there any part of the truth which they have emphasized and further developed in distinc-

tion from other Reformed Churches?

...If you ask me what is the most peculiar treasure of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I answer without any hesitation: their peculiar view of the covenant.

And what is their particular conception?

It stands closely connected with their denial of common grace, and with their emphasis on the doctrine of election and reprobation.

Moreover, it emphasizes and carries out the organic idea.

Briefly stated it teaches that God realizes His eternal covenant of friendship, in Christ, the Firstborn of every creature, and the First-begotten of the dead, organically, and antithetically along the lines of election and reprobation, and in connection with the organic development of all things.

That is, in a nutshell, the peculiar Protestant Reformed heritage.*

Subsequent events in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches would only confirm that conviction, and if possible, make the covenant to be even more distinct and more beloved by the members of the PRC.

Numerous differences exist among Reformed churches concerning the doctrine of the covenant. However, we are convinced that the essential element of the covenant that distinguishes the covenant theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches from virtually all others in the Presbyterian and Reformed church world today is the insistence that the covenant is sovereign, unconditional, and particular. In fact, we are convinced that only an unconditional covenant is fully consistent with the Reformed faith, particularly the doctrines of sovereign grace.

A Bit of History

The Protestant Reformed Churches did not arrive at this peculiar stance without struggle, or in a vacuum. We are well aware that, historically, the prevailing

theology of the covenant has often included some notion of conditions. Bullinger, Calvin, and Olevianus all used the term "conditions" in their discussions of the covenant. At least part of the reason for this has been that the term covenant itself seemed to demand it. A covenant can mean "an agreement" in Scripture, as it often did in the covenants made between men. And the Latin term for covenant, *foedus*, a compact or league, seems to imply the same.

Hence, many theologians viewed the covenant between God and man as a contract, where God promised certain blessings and demanded that man fulfill certain obligations, sometimes called conditions. When they discussed the ability of man to keep the covenant, Reformed theologians insisted that Christ fulfilled the conditions for us.

The Arminian controversy in the Netherlands, however, exposed the grave dangers inherent in the term "condition," and by the time of Bavinck and Kuyper, the term was not used by these leading Dutch theologians to describe the covenant. In fact they rejected the notion that the promises of God are conditional.

However, two twentieth century theologians in the Reformed camp introduced conditions into the covenant – Prof. Heyns in the Christian Reformed Church, and Dr. Klaas Schilder, of the GKN, and later the GKNV (Liberated). Their views are almost identical, and we will present them as one and, at the proper place, point out the one difference that existed between them. The purpose for setting forth their views is not to take them to task, as such. The goal is rather to set forth the covenant theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches as clearly as possible. The covenant

theology of the PRC was developed in the context of these other, conditional covenant views, and to a certain extent, over against these views. The PRC came out of the Christian Reformed Church, where

the covenant views of Heyns held sway. And the PRC dealt with the covenant views of Schilder in 1953 in what is known in our history as the "split of 1953."

Conditional covenant proponents Heyns and Schilder maintained that the covenant of God consists of a promise spoken by God, namely, "I will be your God."

God establishes his covenant with every baptized member of the church. At baptism, God gives to the child the objective promise of salvation. In fact the baptism form is interpreted to mean this:

When we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he *doth make* an everlasting covenant of grace with us.... And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he *doth wash* us in his blood from all our sins.... In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us ... that he *will dwell* in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us what we have in Christ.... [My emphasis, to explain the conditional covenant understanding of the form, RJD.]

In other words, the form is understood to mean that the covenant is objectively realized with each baptized child, the Father making the covenant, the Son sealing to the child the benefits, and the Spirit *expressing the desire* to apply all the

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* "Protestant Reformed," *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 26, March 15, 1950, p. 269.

blessings of the covenant to the child.

One justification offered for this is the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 74, which teaches that infants are to be baptized because "they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost...is promised to them...." This is taken to mean that *all* children of believers are included in the church and covenant of God, and the promises are to every one of them.

When and how do the promised blessings of the covenant become the possession of the child? When he believes. Faith thus becomes the condition for receiving the blessings of the covenant.

The illustration is often used of a blank check. At baptism, it is said, the child receives a check which is made out to him, signed by God, and written out for the amount of salvation and eternal life. That represents the objective promise given to the child at baptism. It is very really his. The child can then do one of three things with that check. First of all, he can keep it all his life, even frame it and put it on the wall, pointing to it with a measure of pride and assurance. He is a baptized member of the church. He has this promise from God. However, just as an uncashed check is of no value in itself, so the individual who never "cashes" the check of God's promise, has nothing. When he dies, he perishes.

Secondly, the baptized member can reject the promises of God. He might tear up the check and throw it away. Such a one incurs God's wrath, forfeits any right to the inheritance, and perishes. He is called a covenant breaker.

Thirdly, the baptized member can "endorse" the check and receive the substance of the covenant promise, salvation from sin and eternal life. This he does by means of faith, that is, by believing the

promise of God. Faith, then, is the condition that must be met in order to receive the blessings of the covenant.

In such a covenant view, the covenant is unilateral, or one-sided in its institution, that is, as established by God; but it is bilateral in its execution. The covenant is ratified by man's act of believing.

Admittedly, the word *condition* can be used in various ways, and Schilder rejected what he called the Arminian use of conditions – as a prerequisite. Nonetheless, the explanation he gave of his conception of conditions in the covenant is less than satisfactory. He spoke of conditions as the means to an end. And, if the problem was that man fulfilled a condition, then the response was ever that God gave man the faith, thus it was all of God and all of grace. (We will return to this below.)

The only point at which Heyns and Schilder differed was over the existence of common grace. Heyns insisted that every baptized child received a subjective grace that enabled him to respond to the offer of God in baptism. Schilder rejected such a notion. He did not deny that such a child enjoyed blessings of the covenant. But he did not allow that this was a grace operating in each child.

In the practical working out of this view, it has much in common with Meredith Kline's presentation of the covenant. God makes a covenant with man that is patterned after the suzerainty covenants made by Hittite kings with their subjects. In this "covenant," God holds before man the demand to love and obey God. If man does that, he will live. If he does not, he will die and the curse of the law comes on that man. However, while Kline maintains that that covenant is with all men, Schilder and Heyns limit it to the sphere of the church. Consequently, with Schilder and Heyns' view, all members of the church are in God's covenant.

Other important features of this covenant view include the cutting asunder of election from the covenant. The Liberated rail against an "election theology of the covenant" and insist that the PRC equate election with the covenant. A concomitant teaching is that the place of Christ is not the Head of the covenant, but only the Mediator. To make Christ the Head would connect election and the covenant. And finally, many proponents of the conditional covenant view also hold that the covenant is temporary. It lasts until God's purpose is fulfilled, namely, the salvation of His people. The covenant is not eternal in the sense that God eternally established the covenant with His people in Christ. Some would insist that it is eternal because it lasts into eternity. However, the covenant of grace is viewed as the means to another end, i.e., salvation.

A Critique

The Protestant Reformed Churches object to this conception of the covenant of grace for numerous reasons. First of all, it conflicts with our conviction that common grace and the well-meant offer are Arminian, not Reformed. Heyns' conditional covenant included the doctrine of common grace. Although Schilder rejected that, Liberated theology today apparently allows for this common grace also. In addition, both Heyns and Schilder in effect maintained a well-meant offer of the gospel, limited to the sphere of the covenant. To each and every baptized child, God comes with a sure promise: "I will be your God. I desire to apply to you the blessing of salvation." It is self-evident that a rejection of the conditional covenant is necessary and consistent with a rejection of common grace and the well-meant offer.

Secondly, in that connection, as is necessarily the case with the well-meant offer that the doctrine of the atonement is affected, so is

it true in connection with the conditional covenant. If God promises salvation to every baptized child, salvation must be available to every baptized child. If salvation is available, then Christ must have earned it on the cross. Thus a sort of hypothetical universalism (within the covenant) is introduced. If God sincerely promises and the Spirit sincerely desires to apply salvation, then salvation must be available. Christ must have atoned for the sins of every baptized child. This is Amyraldism applied to the covenant.

Thirdly, we reject the notion that faith is a condition of, that is, a prerequisite of, realizing God's covenant. It is not sufficient to assert that God fulfills the condition by His grace and gift of faith, for the conditional view maintains that man's act of believing is still necessary to obtain these blessings of the covenant, which are the blessings of salvation. As far as the relationship between faith and salvation is concerned, we insist that only one of two things can be true. Either faith is a condition unto salvation (man gets faith, and then by means of faith he obtains the salvation that he did not have prior to believing); or, faith is part of the salvation that God gives to the elect sinner. With the latter, when a man is given faith, he is already saved, because faith is part of the "package" of salvation. Scripture and the Reformed confessions teach that faith is part of our salvation, and salvation is all of God, even the act of believing (Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29; Canons III, IV, Art. 12-14).

Fourthly, the promises of God fail in a conditional covenant. God comes to every baptized child and promises salvation. Yet, He will not necessarily give salvation and eternal life to the child. In fact, it depends on whether or not the child will believe. The proponents of the conditional covenant charge that the Protestant Reformed conception of the covenant makes God to be insincere in the promises given at baptism, in that God promises

to give salvation but does not really intend to give it to each child. They insist that God means it, sincerely promising salvation to every baptized child. Every child can know that God solemnly stated at baptism—"You, John, you Jane, have my promise."

Our response is that God's promise is not to every child baptized any more than God's promise is to every child or adult sitting under the preaching. The promise of God is real, unchanging, and certain. He will not promise and then renege. But His promise is particular, that is, to the elect alone.

Fifthly, we reject the conditional covenant view because it treats the covenant not as a covenant of grace, but a covenant of both grace and wrath. That because in a conditional covenant God gives both promises and threats to all members of the covenant. If the covenant child walks in faith and obedience, God blesses him. If he walks in unbelief and disobedience, God curses him. A conditional covenant is not the "covenant of grace and reconciliation" as the Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper describes it.


Finally, we maintain that the covenant of grace is not established with the reprobate, but only with God's chosen people in Christ. The proponents of a conditional covenant insist that God establishes His covenant with all baptized children. We consider it totally contrary to Scripture that God establishes His covenant with the Esaus, with Ishmaels, with Judas Iscariots in the church on earth! Admittedly, the Bible sometimes uses language that, at first blush, seems to include elect and reprobate in the covenant, as when God addressed Israel as a nation. No one argues that Israel as a nation consisted of elect alone. When God addresses Israel as His covenant people, or as the preaching addresses the congregation of Jesus Christ, what are we to say of the carnal seed in the congregation? Are they not somehow *in* the

covenant of grace?

Our answer is that the covenant people must be considered *organically*, that is, as a living whole. The nation of Israel is described as a tree (Rom. 11) and the church as branches of a living vine (John 15) or as a field of wheat (Matt. 13). The elect Israel is the tree that God will save. In time, there is a reprobate element that is part of the tree, by virtue of birth. However, God does not intend to save that reprobate element. They are eventually cut out of the tree by God Himself. In the meantime, the carnal element is in the sphere of the covenant. They enjoy some of the external benefits of being part of God's chosen nation. However, God never promises to save them. All His promises are particular – for the seed of the promise. The good things that the carnal seed enjoys in the company of Israel only add to their condemnation. With this carnal element, therefore, God does not establish His covenant.

Thus it is our judgment that the conditional covenant is contrary to the Reformed doctrines of sovereign grace. It may be that a church is able to hold to the "Five Points of Calvinism" and a conditional covenant inconsistently – for a time. But these doctrines conflict, and, since the covenant is a crucially important Reformed doctrine, adopting a conditional view, we are convinced, will result in the eventual loss of the Reformed stand on salvation.

In addition, let it be noted that a conditional covenant is a cold, business-like arrangement that holds no joy for the people of God. Who can get excited about a contractual relationship? Especially when it holds over the believer's head the constant threat of the curse? Liberated theologians on both sides of the ocean are finding it necessary to inject some warmth and life into the covenant.

... to be continued. 

SHALL WE DANCE, ROCK, AND PLAY?

(RESPONSES)

Recently I received a telephone call and a letter taking issue with the contents of one of my articles under the title "Shall We Dance, Rock, and Play: Or, How Shall We Judge Contemporary Worship?"

I am thankful that the *Standard Bearer* is read and that the articles provoke discussion and comment. And I am thankful to both who responded for their stimulating comments.

The telephone call was from one of the pastors of Mars Hill Church, who indicated that my representation of his church was not accurate. By this public letter, I apologize for that. In the article in question I had placed Mars Hill and Calvary Undenominational Church in the same category. Since Mars Hill had her origins in Calvary, and since the pastor of Calvary has written a book describing and promoting "seeker services," which I was criticizing, I assumed that the churches were fundamentally the same. The pastor indicated that although Mars Hill is a daughter of Calvary Undenominational, she is different in significant ways. There is no drama in his church, no pulsating lights, no stool for preaching. The pastor I spoke to is personally opposed to "certain aspects of" the theology and practice of "certain seeker services." I gladly publicize this correction.

The letter was from a reader whose past experience included membership in what he described as a "seeker-service" kind of church. Since the letter was interesting, and the written response of one often represents the unspoken concerns of others, I take this opportunity to further the discussion of the important subject of our worship.

It should be noted that the articles in question were not attempting to describe any one particular church, but the *practices* that are found in many churches. Thus, both the caller and the writer correctly observed that the articles did not completely and accurately describe their own church. That may be the case, since there will be differences from one modern service to another. But all who take seriously that God is interested in *proper* worship must hear the warning against the *practices* mentioned.

My prayer and hope now is not that my article can be vindicated, but that we may be understood clearly and the proper worship of God may be promoted.

One objection to the article was stated this way: *I didn't know that God was concerned with our clothes, what the actual building looked like, if there are lights or not.... These are all personal and denominational preferences.* A similar defense was made of projection machines and different kinds of instruments.

Certainly, God's Word does not condemn one kind of clothing, a certain style of building, or particular lights. There is no biblical prohibition of a projection machine.

Rev. Barry Gritters

An organ is not more Reformed or Christian than a piano or a trumpet. However, when the clothing, building, lights, instruments, etc., are used to promote an atmosphere and attitude that does not exude a childlike awe, a humble reverence of God, and an "other-worldly" sense, they are certainly not what the Scripture requires. That was the purpose of the articles, for many who advise churches on worship today directly aim for a worship whose atmosphere is *familiar* to and *comfortable* for the unbeliever. Our clothing, building, lighting, and music must not be judged in light of our comfort, but of God's glory. We will not help to undermine the work of the church for the past 2000 years that reminded the believers: "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Note the "worship" context of that New Testament phrase: "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

As to music, the letter said: *I don't know where you got your figure of 45 minutes of the praise band before the sermon.* My response: Please read some of the books that promote "seeker-services."

Also, with regard to music: *Who are we to judge that those songs... are wrong... it's in the person's heart that God looks at....* This is a very common objection to criticism of improper worship. It really means: "Don't judge good intentions." To which the church has sometimes sternly responded: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." They did not mean by

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that, that anyone they have warned is going to hell; only that *in addition to good intentions*, there must also be obedience and faithfulness to God's Word. God's judgment of Uzzah's good intentions is a painfully clear example that God requires *obedience and proper service* as well as a rightly motivated heart (see II Sam. 6).

A similar objection is this one: *God is the judge... let Him do His job... when it comes to our faith and where God takes us on Sunday that is between that person and God!* Where we go and what we do is certainly between us and our God. God's people all make decisions, and they are accountable for them. Our purpose here in the *Standard Bearer* is to aid the people of God to make *informed* decisions. More, according to the vows my church required me to take, and the Church Order that binds me in my ministry, I must do all in my power to warn the people of God against "false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings...." I cannot fail to do that, for I must answer to Jesus, who said what He did in Ezekiel 3:16-21 and Acts 20:26-31. No faithful minister can ever forget those words.

Now, warnings to the sheep


will not always be appreciated, my friend, but they must be made. That's why God had to encourage Ezekiel to be faithful in warning the sheep: "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks...." Warnings must come. And God will use them. I pray that we may make them in a spirit of love and concern for the whole church.

Believe it or not they (these churches) are full of very Christian people. And, Please don't down fellow believers in Christ. To have to answer this objection is most difficult, for the impression has been left that there are no Christians in these churches. I would urge you to re-read the articles after you have finished this response. Indeed! I would not deny that there are believers in these churches. Of course there are Christians there. Just as there were Christians in the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. Luther never denied this. But his (and our) purpose in exposing improper forms of worship (or doctrine) is twofold: To call believers out of those churches to a pure worship of God, and to warn our own members

against adopting or returning to these errors.

Finally, I note in the letter the good reminder that *Jesus didn't only talk to the nicely dressed, in fancy clothes. He talked to the prostitutes, the taxpayers, the poor and those whom others turned away from.*

How important to remember! God help us to seek out those who are lost, to call sinners to repentance, to warn those who claim to need no physician that they are perishing in their self-righteousness. But let's remember this, too: There is a difference between *whom we speak to*, and *how we behave* in public worship. We speak to and show the love of Christ to all our neighbors, calling them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, promising that whoever believes shall be saved. To find and speak to them, we are willing to go to the most uncomfortable and filthy places. But when it comes to our public worship, we do not conform to the world's dress and behavior, the unbeliever's music and way of thinking, but to God's ways—of holy awe and joyful reverence.

"Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire." 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Innocent III and Papal Hierarchy (2)

Introduction

In the last article we left Innocent III, the greatest of all popes before or since, occupying the papal chair in Rome.

In this article our attention is going to be concentrated on Innocent's theory of the papacy, his achievements, and his efforts to make the power of the papacy su-

preme in Europe — efforts in which he was altogether too successful.

It seems to me that any effort to judge Innocent's role in history is going to have to take into account the fact that he came the closest of any man in the world to defining what the final Antichrist will be like when, at the end of the ages,

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the man of sin occupies a world-wide throne and exercises universal rule.

Innocent's View of the Papacy

Innocent III did not invent the theory of the papacy which he promoted and which is still official Roman Catholic policy. The theory was held by his predecessors and practiced by them insofar as they were able to extend their rule. But Innocent did develop the theory and did succeed in putting it into practice.

At the time of his coronation he spoke on the faithful and wise servant who did his lord's will. These are his words, in which, early in his pontificate, he tipped his hand.

Ye see what manner of servant it is whom the Lord hath set over his people, no other than the vicegerent of Christ, the successor of Peter. He stands in the midst between God and man; below God, above man; less than God, more than man. He judges all and is judged by none.

The arrogance of such statements leaves one breathless. Innocent defines his office as that of mediator between God and man, a position which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies. Does not the very name "antichrist" mean not only "one opposed to Christ," but also "one who claims to be in Christ's place"?

But such arrogance was quickly covered by a show of humility. Innocent went on to say:

But he, whom the pre-eminence of dignity exalts, is humbled by his vocation as a servant, that so humility may be exalted and pride be cast down; for God is against the high-minded, and to the lowly He shows mercy; and whoso exalteth himself shall be abased.

In spelling out his views concerning the papacy, Innocent really made himself equal to Christ. He

did not hesitate to say that God gave all authority to Christ at the time of His exaltation; but he insisted that Christ conferred that authority on Peter, and, following Peter, on the popes who are Peter's successors.

In conferring authority on the popes, Christ, in effect, made the popes as great as Himself. *All* the authority of Christ is given to the popes. This means, as anyone can see, that authority in the church *and over the nations* is given to the pope.

Innocent put himself on a level with Christ also with respect to Christ's offices. He claimed not only to be prophet (teacher in the church) as Christ is; he claimed also to be king and priest. Nor did he mean by that merely (though extravagant enough) that he combined in himself the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. He meant that Christ's office of priest enabled him to exercise sole authority in the church, and Christ's office of king conferred on him rule over the nations.

In keeping with this role which he claimed for himself, Innocent was the first among the popes to call himself "Vicar of God." Other popes had, with intolerable pride, called themselves "vicars of Christ." Innocent went beyond that and, in effect, made himself equal with Christ, by claiming to be God's vicar.

The Fourth Lateran Council

The council meeting called the Fourth Lateran Council effectively extended Innocent's rule over the entire church. It was the largest council meeting that had ever been held in the West.

It met on November 11, 20, and 30 in the year 1215 and was totally dominated by Innocent himself. It was controlled so completely by him that not one matter was treated except those introduced by Innocent, and not one decision was made without his consent.

The council was held in the Lateran in Rome (hence its name)

and was attended by 412 bishops, 800 abbots and priors, a large number of delegates representing absent prelates, and representatives of emperor Frederick II and emperor Henry of Constantinople. The kings of England, France, Aragon (Spain), Hungary, Jerusalem, and others were also present.

The council did many things.

The council, in various doctrinal pronouncements, set down the orthodox teachings of the church. It established transubstantiation as official church dogma in the universal church of Rome "outside of which there is no possibility of salvation." It condemned various heresies present in the church, particularly a heresy which was a denial of the Trinity.

But the council did more. It authorized a new crusade, the Fourth. This crusade, though executed by Innocent, accomplished nothing in its efforts to take the Holy Land from the infidel Mohammedans. All it really accomplished was to widen the breach between the Western Church and the Eastern Church when the crusaders decided to sack Constantinople on their way to Palestine.

Perhaps the most ominous decision of the council was the establishment of the Inquisition. This institution, under the direction of the pope, was set up to enforce the church's teachings throughout the whole of Europe. It was an ecclesiastical court in which prelates of various kinds served as police, prosecutor, jury, judge, and executioner. Its powers went far beyond anything acceptable in civil law in the present day. It could make use of mere suspicion, torture to extract confession, confiscation of goods, exquisitely painful methods of execution, and indescribable cruelty in its efforts to make every person conform to the teaching of the church.

The inquisition was used to exterminate the Albigensians, a sect mostly in Southern France which diverged from the teaching of the

church. It was brought to bear in all its horror against the Waldensians, that group of saints which suffered untold cruelty for the doctrines of Scripture, endured for several hundred years hidden in the Alpine Valleys of France and Italy, and many of whom joined the Reformation when it dawned in the sixteenth century.

Under its bloody work countless people of God suffered torture and death during the time of the Reformation, especially in the Lowlands.

Innocent III was the one who instituted this apparatus, gave it its power, and forever branded the Romish Church as that church which "persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry" (Confession of Faith, Art. 29). It thus bears one of the marks of the false church.

Innocent's Struggle with Europe's Kings

We are told in the Scriptures that the rule of Antichrist will be a worldwide rule in which all the nations of the earth are united in one political world power. To this political world power will be joined the false church. Revelation 13 depicts this union of church and state, as does chapter 17 of the same book.

No institution comes closer to that description than the papacy, and no single man came closer to realizing that goal than Innocent III.

It happened in Innocent's struggle with Europe's kings. It happened in what has become known as the Investiture Controversy.

A brief description of the Investiture Controversy is necessary to understand the issues at stake.

Simply put, the controversy was carried on between Europe's kings and the pope. It was a controversy of long standing. By the time Innocent put on the papal ti-

ara, the controversy had been going on for at least 400 years. The issue was this. Who has the authority to consecrate to office the clergy in the Romish Church, especially the bishops and archbishops? Does this right belong to the church or to the king?

It appears at first glance to be an easy question to answer. Why, of course, the church. In the Middle Ages, that means the pope. Are not clergy officebearers in the church? Ought they not, therefore, be appointed and consecrated by the church?

It would seem that this is true. But there was one difficulty. Many, especially of the higher clergy (bishops and archbishops), had become owners and rulers of huge tracts of land. This had happened over the years as wealthy men had willed their estates and land to the church in an effort to buy their way out of purgatory. Thus clerics ruled vast domains over which they were sovereign, in which they had absolute authority, from which they organized armies of knights to wage war, and by means of the revenues of which estates they lived like royalty.

In other words, within various kingdoms there were sub-kingdoms ruled by the clergy who, although they may have expressed loyalty to the king, nevertheless owed their first allegiance to the church and fed into the church's coffers vast amounts of money on which they lived and on which Rome maintained its extravagant life-style.

The pope argued that he had the right to appoint clerics because they held ecclesiastical office. The kings argued they had the right to appoint these clerics because they were political rulers and owed allegiance to the crown.

And, as is usually the case, the bottom line was money. Who is going to get the money? The pope or the king?

It was a problem of no little importance, especially if we consider

the fact that at one time the church owned over half of the landed estate of Europe.

Innocent's solution to the problem was simple. Make the pope the sole ruler in Europe, even over kings. And this he set about doing.

It is useless to go into all that went on in France, Germany, and England during this struggle. It is complicated and not edifying. But the result was that all the kings of Europe were brought to heel, one by one, until only England remained.

England was ruled by the powerful, usually able, but thoroughly corrupt Plantagenet kings, known by every schoolboy who has been taught history. They were sometimes called Angevin kings because they traced their dynasty back to William the Conqueror, the Frenchman from Anjou who conquered England and put England under the rule of this line. Their power was something with which to reckon.

However, the pope was by no means without any power of his own. He could make decrees, issue edicts, and aim directives at Europe's kings, but he had various tools at his disposal to enforce his will. There were three such tools.

One was the horde of monks who lived in all Europe, were a drain on every country, inhabited the monasteries, but were totally loyal to the pope. He controlled them, manipulated them, and used them as a standing army to enforce his will. In every country they numbered in the thousands.

The second weapon was excommunication, and, along with it, the anathemas which so frightened Europe's superstitious throngs. It was a decree of the pope which declared a man outside the church, outside of which was no salvation. But excommunication in those days when society was entirely under the control of the church meant ostracism from society itself. An excommunicated person could not

get a job. He could not buy or sell. He could not have any kind of intercourse with his fellow men. He was an outcast in the literal sense of the word.

Kings could be and were excommunicated when they defied the pope. Frederick II of Germany must have been excommunicated three or four times at least. But when a king was excommunicated by the pope, that automatically freed the people from submission to that king. Now the people could, of course, give their loyalty to the king in spite of what the pope said or did, but two things often prevented that. One was that army of monks roaming the land to enforce the pope's edicts. The other was the interdict.

This last tool in the pope's hand was perhaps the most feared of all. When the pope put a region or a country under the interdict, that region or country could not have any religious exercises or ceremonies performed in it until the interdict was lifted. During the interdict the churches were closed, no sermons were preached, no babies were baptized, no masses were performed, no marriages took place, no deaths were followed by church burial, no consecrated burial grounds could be used.

In medieval Europe this was ecclesiastical suicide. Rome had taught, and the people believed it, that the church alone could give its members the right to heaven. The church determined their salvation. The church regulated and directed their religious life. The church determined their stay in purgatory. The church released them from purgatory so that they might enter heavenly bliss. Without the church's work the people went to hell.

In any contest, a pope could almost certainly have his way, if he could make an interdict stick.

This is what happened in England. It happened in the days of King John, that monstrously wicked Plantagenet who was guilty

of every crime under heaven, and whose arbitrary tyranny was even too much at last for the people. It was this King John who, after the issue of investiture was resolved, was brought to heel by the barons and forced to sign the Magna Charta on the plains of Runnymede.

The controversy was over the ordination of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. The pope wanted him; John did not. The struggle was fierce. The pope excommunicated John; John thumbed his nose at the pope. But then the pope put all England under the interdict, and the people, weary of John's brutal reign, threatened to take matters into their own hands. The dukes and earls, the powerful nobility of England, all agreed that John had better knuckle under.

And so he did. He gave all England to the pope, and the pope returned it to him, but as a papal fief. That is, John was, from henceforth, a minor lord ruling in the pope's name. And, most galling of all, he had to pay an enormous sum into the papal treasury, thus depleting his own and curbing sharply his own luxurious lifestyle.

So all Europe bowed before the papal throne. Innocent had won. Hungary, Bohemia, Sicily, France, England, the Danes, Spain, Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, Bulgaria, Sweden — all Europe submitted to the pope and acknowledged him as their head. The only exception to this universal rule was the Eastern Church.

Innocent's rule was complete. He was sole head of the church and sole ruler of Europe.

Conclusion

Innocent's tremendous power did not last. Europe's kings were becoming more and more powerful, and no subsequent popes were as strong as Innocent. Gradually the papal power began to crumble, and by the time the Reformation

dawned, though the pope still tried to exert his will, he was stymied by independent rulers who simply refused to do what he said. Frederick the Wise is a case in point, for Luther's work would have been impossible, from a human point of view, without the defiance of papal edicts by Luther's ruler and sovereign in Saxony.

Within the context of the work of the Reformation, the true government of the church was restored to the church. It is not our purpose to go into this in detail, but our own time-tested Church Order of Dordt was forged in the fires of the Reformation, especially the Reformation under Calvin.

Central to all biblical church order is the concept of the office of believers, which Rome, in the papal hierarchy of its day, had denied. All God's people are prophets, priests, and kings in the church of God. We can, I think, scarcely imagine what an ocean of difference lies between that simple concept and Rome's hierarchy. It was Luther who laid this foundation.

God has established special offices in the church as well, to reflect the threefold office of Christ: ministers (prophets), elders (kings), and deacons (priests). By their work in the congregation Christ is present in the congregation as the true Prophet, Priest, and King. Thus every congregation is autonomous.

Yet the church is called to express its unity in Christ. So broader assemblies are formed and denominations come into being. And denominations of like precious faith throughout the world seek each other to work with them and have fellowship with them.


But the unity of the church is not only the external unity of an institution, as Rome taught. It is the unity of the body of Christ, the unity of one faith, one hope, one calling, one baptism. In short, it is the unity of Christ's body itself come to visible manifestation in the congregation of believers.

The church had seen what the tyranny of hierarchical Rome could do to the church. God led the Reformers into an understanding of the Scriptures in matters of church polity over against Rome's corruptions. These truths are precious principles, so important that for them too we ought to fight, and in

defense of them be willing to die.

Over against them stands Rome's claims. Can it be denied that Rome's claims bear all the resemblances of the claims of Antichrist himself? Whether Antichrist as he finally reveals himself is one who arises out of the political sphere (which Revelation 13 and 17 seem to indicate), or whether he is

predominantly a religious figure, makes no difference in the end. He does claim to be Christ, and he sets himself up in the temple of God claiming that he is God.

God's people acknowledge Christ as their Head and give their unswerving and joyful loyalty to Him. 

Book Reviews



Writings of Thomas E. Peck. Selected and arranged by T. C. Johnson. 3 vols. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. \$79.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Thomas E. Peck was a nineteenth century southern Presbyterian in the school of Thornwell and Dabney. Born in 1822, he taught at Union Theological Seminary from 1860 until his death in 1893. He taught church history for the first 23 years and theology for the last 10 years.

The contents of the three volumes are individual articles, sermons, and lectures gathered for publication as a collection of miscellaneous writings after Peck's death. Some had been published in various journals while Peck was living; others had not. The book suffers, therefore, from the lack of any relation of topics and chapters. On the other hand, the subjects of certain chapters are of great importance to Reformed theology and life. Overall, the volumes flesh out the theology of nineteenth century Presbyterianism in the south of the United States.

Volume 1 is mostly devoted to public worship. Peck was an ardent advocate of the regulative principle of worship. The opening chapter excellently argues the necessity of defending the truth against false doctrine. Peck wrote the piece against certain who


pleaded that there be only a positive proclamation of the truth. Like the poor, these church members are with us always. Peck charitably called them the "brothers of charity." The first volume ends with a few biographies, including a good sketch of Luther ("terribly in earnest").

Volume 2 is theological. Included are a helpful account of the call to the ministry; Peck's inaugural address on church history at his installation at Union Seminary; a chapter on "The Judicial Law of Moses," in which Peck contends that the judicial, or civil, laws were intended only for Old Testament Israel; and some explanation of the book of Revelation. The second volume concludes with a treatment of issues of church polity, including an interesting chapter on "Church and State." The impending division of the war between the states, affecting both the nation and the Presbyterian Church, looms large in Peck's discussions of church government.

The last volume is exegetical, consisting largely of explanatory notes on various passages of Scripture and of sermons on the book of Acts, although there is also brief sermon material on other passages.

One of these is a sermon on II Peter 3:8, 9, God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. This

is the passage that many professing Calvinists, not least the Banner of Truth men, who publish these volumes, are determined to press into the service of the heresy of universal, resistible grace in the preaching of the gospel, the "well-meant offer." Peck would have none of it. His exposition of "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" goes like this:

The time is fixed; but so long as there breathes upon earth one solitary human being for whom Jesus has laid down his life, who has been ordained to faith, repentance, and life eternal, and destined to be an assessor with Jesus upon his throne, so long shall the heavens contain him whom our soul loveth but after the number of the elect shall have been accomplished, not one moment longer. Then shall he be revealed, and the earth with all its works and wickedness be given to the flames (p. 390). 



Mission Activities

In recent news from Ghana we learn that the work on their new permanent place of worship is nearing completion. As of mid-February, the plastering was nearly finished on the inside of the church building and the roof was very near completion.

In addition to that positive news, we also found that the council of the Hull, Iowa PRC, the calling church for Ghana, as well as our churches' Foreign Mission Committee, have approved new volunteers to go to Ghana when the Boumas leave. They are Arnold and Charlotte Bleyenbergh from the Edgerton, MN congregation.

Still more, we read that both the Hull, IA PRC and our churches' FMC have decided, with recommendation from the missionary and committees that have visited the field, that a second missionary should be called to labor in Ghana. This recommendation will be treated by this year's synod, which will meet in June.

Rev. Moore was also able to speak to about 65 students at the La Presby School in early February. He spoke on the topic of the Holy Spirit and His work in the church. Also, on the 28th of February Rev. Moore was scheduled to speak at the Morning Star School, one of Ghana's leading schools.

On behalf of our Foreign Mission Committee, Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, and Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, traveled to the Philippines on February 12 in order to labor among several groups who have contact with our churches. They were scheduled to remain in the Philippines for two

weeks, returning on February 26. On the two Sundays they were there, they planned to preach for the Bacolod Reformed Fellowship and the Cubao Berean Fellowship (Manila). During the week they planned to labor in Daet (Body of Christ Bible Churches) and in Cagayan de Oro (Bible Study Fellowship). The purpose of this work is to determine whether synod 2001 should declare the Philippines a mission field of our churches.

The small group in Fayetteville, NC with which our churches have a growing relationship has now the added blessing of monthly lively preaching, either from our missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, or one of our pastors from the west Michigan area. Each minister will preach two Sundays, hold mid-week Bible study and children's catechism classes, and make contacts and visitations. In addition, plans also call for a monthly series of Bible studies on the doctrine of marriage. This will be each Saturday at 6:00 P.M. In an effort to reflect this growing relationship, the group of saints there is now known as the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Fayetteville.

School Activities

On February 8 Seminarian Angus Stewart spoke at the PTA meeting of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI on the broad subject of the public school system in Ireland and how it differs from our schools here in this country.

With thanksgiving to God we are happy to report that progress continues toward the opening of a new Protestant Reformed High School this fall in the Lansing, IL area. Recent news from there indicates that the PR Secondary Board has now contracted a man to serve as the administrator of the new high school. Besides that, the Board also recently extended invitations to parents of 8th and 9th

grade students in the South Holland, Peace, and Cornerstone churches to attend an informational meeting at the 1st Lansing Church of Nazarene, the proposed rental facilities for the high school.

Congregation Activities

A special Society night was planned for the congregation of the First PRC of Holland, MI on January 30. Rev. B. Woudenberg, an emeritus minister in our churches, agreed to come back to Holland and treat the doctrinal side of the 1953 controversy.

Young People's Activities


The Young People's Society of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada hosted an elegant Valentine Supper for all adults and young adults, single or married, in the congregation on February 14. Likewise, the Young People's Society of the South Holland, IL PRC invited all the adults of their congregation to an Elegant Dinner on February 16. Guests could choose to be served either at 5:30 or 7:30 P.M. and to be seated either with 2 or up to 8 at a table. Both dinners were fund-raisers for the 2001 Young People's Convention.

Minister Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma has declined the call to be missionary-on-loan to Singapore. The Randolph, WI PRC formed a trio consisting of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, J. Laning, and J. Slopsema, and on February 12 they extended a call to Rev. Laning.

Food For Thought

"To pray against temptation and yet to rush into occasion, is to thrust your fingers into the fire and then pray that they might not be burnt."

—Thomas Secker 

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

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Announcements

NOTICE!!

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan is inviting applications for a full-time high school teacher with a major/minor in math and/or science for the 2001-2002 school year. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and résumé to:

Tom Nagel
18230 Michigan Ave.

Three Rivers, MI 490933.

For more information, phone 1-616-279-7373.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. John Bouma and family in the death of John's brother-in-law,

MR. GOOCH VANDEN HEUVEL;

to Mr. and Mrs. Rod Kooiman and family in the death of Rod's brother-in-law,

MR. ALAN VISSER;

and to Mr. and Mrs. Greg Engelsma and family in the death of Elaine's father,

MR. ALBERT KARSEMEYER.

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

Rev. Spriensma, President
Jack Brands, Assistant clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 30, 2001, our parents and grandparents,

LAMMERT and MARY BETH LUBBERS, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. Truly, they have been a source of love, inspiration, instruction, and encouragement to us. We wish them God's blessing and all our love as they continue their lives together.

"For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Psalm 61:5).

- * Nathan and Lisa Lubbers
Austin, Jordan, Marshal, Natalie
- * Erik and Laura Lubbers
Megan and Eleanor
- * George and Monica Lanting
Magdalene, Jesse, Ethan, Connor,
Liam, Sophia, Georgia
- * Thaddeus and Lisa Lubbers
Jalen, Lydia, Evan, Levi, Alaina
- * Jeremy and Lynn Lubbers
Nicholas, Alexander, Michala, Kathryn
- * John and Lara Moore
Samuel, Jonathan, Molly

South Holland, Illinois

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow member Jeanne Karsemeyer in the recent loss of her father-in-law,

MR. ALBERT KARSEMEYER.

May the truth as found in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" be a great comfort to her and her family.

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Marlys Mantel, Secretary

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address synod 2001, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

MARCH 2001 LECTURE SERIES

***Pentecostalism:
Spirit-filled Blessing
or a Dangerous Heresy?***

The Evangelism Committees of First PRC and Southeast PRC are sponsoring three lectures in the auditorium of the First Protestant Reformed Church — Grand Rapids.

— *Pentecostalism: Its Identity, History, and Influence*

Professor David Engelsma
Friday, March 16, 7:30 P.M.

— *Pentecostalism: Its View of Special Gifts* (speaking in tongues, faith healing, prayer, on-going revelation)

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma
Friday March 23, 7:30 P.M.

— *Pentecostalism: Its View of the Christian Life* (second baptism, perfectionism, joy, etc.)

Rev. Charles Terpstra
Thursday, March 29, 7:30 P.M.