

# THE *February 15, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

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Volume 80 ◆ Number 10



# They Preached Christ Everywhere

*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

Acts 8:3, 4

**T**hey preached Christ everywhere!

In these first four verses we are told why this took place. A fierce persecution against the Jews had arisen, with the result that the Jews were scattered. This was a fulfillment of what Jesus had said before He ascended, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This shows that the persecution that followed upon the martyrdom of Stephen was futile on the part of the enemy. It did not destroy the church, nor did it thwart the

spread of the gospel. Rather, it was a means in the Lord's hand to fulfill His own word of Acts 1:8. In this way the text plainly forms an integral part in the narrative of "the things which Jesus continued to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1).

The intense persecution at this time was led by Saul, who later was to be the apostle Paul. He had just participated in Stephen's stoning. Although he took no active part in the prosecution, he no doubt concerned himself vitally with the proceedings of the trial. He undoubtedly came to some conclusions at this time that led to his open opposition against the cause that Stephen represented. At the stoning itself, even though he picked up not a stone, yet he participated in that he was there and in that the witnesses laid their clothes at his feet. In Acts 7:58 we read, "and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." We furthermore read that he consented unto Stephen's death. This he confesses himself in Acts 22:20, "And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his

death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

After that day when he stood by, he became the leader of those persecuting the church. Believing that he was doing this for God's sake, he was very zealous in this work. He was born a Jew, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers (Acts 22:3). He even had the support and the backing of the council.

He imprisoned many because of their faith. "Haling men and women" means that he went into the homes of the Christians, dragged them out, and brought them to prison. This was of such a nature that Saul "made havock of the church" in that he ravaged the church as a wild beast pounces on his prey. Many of these who were placed in prison also suffered death. "Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (Acts 26:10). Later, as the apostle Paul, he grieved deeply because of this involvement.

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However, as a result of this persecution many were forced to flee Jerusalem. And rightly so. Many people who are fainthearted flee at the slightest rumor of persecution. But the saints at Jerusalem fled because they saw that the fury of the ungodly could not be brought to an end in any other way. Their flight brought them to all parts of the known world.

One sees the wonderful work of the providence of God here. This was not out of God's control. As Jerusalem for the Old Testament saints was a magnet to which they were drawn, so now in the New Testament the saints are propelled from Jerusalem as if by some great centrifugal force. Nothing happens apart from the providential care of our Father.

God uses even the activity of sinful men to serve His purpose. An example of this is Joseph and his brethren. Joseph says in Genesis 50:20, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." The ultimate example is that of Christ Himself. Christ was crucified by sinful hands, but that was the means of cleansing His own by His precious blood. The middle wall of partition was broken down so that both Jews and Gentiles could be incorporated into the kingdom of God. Then, prior to His ascension, the Lord commanded His disciples, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations..." (Matt. 28:20).

However, up to the time of our text, the apostles had no clear indication as to when they were to venture outside of Jerusalem. But this persecution was the Lord's answer and direction at the same time. Thus, we have an illustration of the providential law according to which what appears to be an irretrievable calamity is not only overruled, but designed from the beginning to promote the very cause that it seemed to have threatened with disaster and defeat.

Thus, they preached!

Just exactly what was involved

in their preaching? The word used here is not the word that means "to herald." To herald is to preach officially. This can be done only by those whom Christ officially calls through the church to be ministers of the Word. It is this kind of preaching that is not open to everyone.

Rather, the reference is to the speaking of the gospel to others. This is a joyful and spontaneous diffusion of the truth, which is permitted and required of all believers, whether lay or clerical, ordained or not ordained. This is the ready answer of I Peter 3:15: "and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." This includes our whole life, which must be a living testimony to all those about us that we belong to Jesus Christ. This we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, Q & A 86. "Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works? Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ."

We could ask ourselves a couple of questions in this regard. How can I in my life speak the gospel to others? Do I do this when God gives me the opportunity? It basically comes down to this, Am I living and manifesting the life of Christ in me in such a way that I am a living witness of my risen Lord?

God uses means to bring to others the knowledge of salvation. God has the ability to save anyone directly, without the use of means. But He has chosen to use means,

means that we, therefore, must use. The first and primary means is the official preaching of the Word by men ordained for this purpose. Of such the text is not speaking. The means spoken of in the text is the testimony of God's people, which gets its strength and power from the primary means. The testimony of God's people will be in direct proportion to the Word preached faithfully and purely from the pulpit. Where the Word is preached in all its fullness, God's people will be filled to overflowing with the good news of the gospel, which they will not be able to keep to themselves.

Yes, they preached the Word!

The persecuted ones did not complain about the abuse of "rights." Today when people are displaced, the last thing they think about proclaiming is the good news of the gospel. Rather they complain how their rights have been infringed upon and violated. Nor did these scattered Jews complain about all the social ills that plagued them. No, they presented Christ crucified. In this way they would simply tell what they had heard from the preacher. At the center of every sermon there must be Jesus Christ crucified. There simply is no other gospel. Just take note of the sermons recorded in the Scriptures.

Having presented Christ they would then present the wonder of grace whereby God has saved His people. A wonder because of sin. A wonder because of the incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. All of salvation is indeed a wonder because it is purely of God's sovereign grace and no way attributable to us.

This Christ, this wonder of God's grace, they preached everywhere.


There was a mass migration to many different places. They traveled to various areas of the known world. In each place they spoke the Word of God. They were not first



interested in establishing a new home. Instead they took the opportunity to speak to many people. In this way the gospel finally went over the whole earth. Churches were established in many places.

God's people were gathered from every place. Each spoke the Word where they were.

We have that same calling today. Wherever the Lord places us

by whatever means and for whatever reason, He calls us to preach the Word both officially and by personal testimony. God blesses this faithfulness in the gathering and preservation of His church. 

## Editorial

# Confessional Certainty

**A**ssurance is certainty of personal salvation.

As the loving Father of His human family in Jesus Christ, God wills that all His children have assurance. It is not His will that only a very few of His children, His "best and dearest friends," as the Puritans and their followers today call these favored few, ever attain to certainty of salvation.

The previous editorial demonstrated from Scripture that God wills all His children to have and enjoy assurance.

### Certainty in Q. 1 of the Catechism

That God wills all His children to have assurance of their salvation is the joyful—and binding—doctrine of the "Three Forms of Unity, our Reformed confessions." Upon the lips of every one who believes the gospel of grace as set forth in the Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism confidently places this confession:

[My only comfort in life and death is] that I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of

eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him (Q. 1).

This is certainty. The one who confesses has no doubt about his belonging to Jesus Christ, for his certainty is assurance worked by the Holy Spirit. This assurance is not a doubtful assurance, which would be no assurance at all.

The assurance of Q. 1 of the Catechism is certainty of one's own personal salvation. It is not merely a certainty that Jesus is a Savior. It is not merely a certainty that Jesus has satisfied for some people's sins. It is not merely a certainty that Jesus would be adequate for my salvation, if some day I should attain to assurance that He is my Savior. Such a certainty is worthless. Satan has this certainty.

The one who confesses the first answer of the Catechism is certain that "I" *myself personally* belong to Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is "my" Savior, that Christ died to satisfy for all "my sins" and to deliver "me" from Satan's power, that everything must serve "my salvation," and that Christ "assures me of eternal life." Belonging to Jesus Christ is "my only comfort."

This certainty is a reality in the consciousness of the one who confesses Q. 1 of the Catechism. He does not express wistful hope of eventually acquiring certainty. He is not voicing an ideal that every-

one should strive for, but that hardly anyone in the church—including himself—ever attains. He is not promising to seek assurance, until (perhaps) he obtains it.

To explain the first question and answer of the Catechism this way (as they must who follow the Puritans in restricting assurance to only a few special friends of God in the church) is violent wrenching of the confession.

"What is thy comfort?" is the question. "What is the comfort that you personally do truly have and enjoy?" And the living member of the Reformed congregation—*every* living member of the congregation—responds by declaring what is true of him by the Spirit of Christ: "I have comfort." "I belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." "I am certain that Christ 'hath fully satisfied for all my sins.'" "Jesus Christ 'assures me of eternal life.'"

It is possible that a believing child of God so comes under the power of sinful doubt for a time that he loses his assurance of salvation and cannot make Q. 1 of the Catechism his own. The reasons for this spiritual disease, as well as the cure, we consider later in this series of articles. The Reformed church is compassionate to this member in the preaching. If the sad condition of this member comes to the attention of the pastor and elders, as it should if it con-



tinues for any time, the pastor and elders are to be pitiful and patient—*very* pitiful and *very* patient—with this diseased soul.

But the presence in a Reformed congregation of one or two sick sheep is not the same as a church full of members, many of them adults who have grown up in the church from their birth, who, by their own admission, do not have, and have never had, assurance of salvation. These *cannot* confess Q. 1 of the Catechism. If they repeat it, they merely recite significant words as they would recite any other document of general interest, say, the Gettysburg Address, or they lie. Q. 1 is not their confession.

They do not know that they belong to Christ. They do not trust that He died for them. Christ does not assure them of eternal life by His Spirit. They *lack* the only comfort. If they are honest men and women, when the first question of the Catechism is read out in church on a Sunday morning they reply in anguish of soul, "I do not have the only comfort of belonging to Jesus, and therefore I have no comfort at all—no comfort in living and no comfort in dying."

Who he is who readily confesses assurance in Q. 1 of the Catechism, the Catechism itself makes plain in following Lord's Days. It is the believer who is speaking in Q. 1. It is the man, woman, or child in whom God has worked true faith, so that he or she believes all things promised him or her in the gospel and trusts in Jesus Christ for remission of sin (L. D. 7). It is *every* believer who speaks in Q. 1. The Catechism knows nothing of a restriction of assurance to a few favored believers, mostly old and gray, after they have lived in doubt for many years.

The one speaking confidently of his assurance in Q. 1 is identi-

fied already in Q. 2: the man, woman, or child who knows his or her sins and miseries, how he or she may be delivered from those sins and miseries, and how he or she shall express gratitude to God for such deliverance.

The certainty of salvation of Q. 1 of the Catechism belongs to ev-

ery living member of the church. Since, as Q. 74 of the Catechism teaches, the children of believers are included in the church, also the children and young people of godly parents have assurance of their salvation and are able to confess the opening question and answer of the Catechism. Indeed, Ursinus and Olevianus wrote the Catechism es-

pecially for the benefit of the covenant children and young people. On the lips of covenant children and young people, as their own truthful confession, did these Reformed ministers place the words of Q. 1.

#### **Certainty in the Rest of the Catechism**

Q. 1 rules the rest of the Heidelberg Catechism. Q. 54 has every believer freely confessing that he is and ever shall remain a living member of the holy catholic church of Christ. This is assurance that he is saved: gathered, defended, and preserved by the Son of God by His Spirit and Word and possessing "true faith." This is assurance that he will persevere unto everlasting life and glory: "ever shall remain" a member of the church. This is assurance of election by God in eternity: Because the church is "chosen to everlasting life," to be member of the church is to be among the chosen. To *know* oneself as a member of the church is to *know* oneself as one of the elect.

*Every* believer has this assurance (such is the viewpoint of the

Catechism), and he has it by virtue of *faith*.

That God wills the assurance of all His children is expressly stated in Q. 86 of the Catechism. It is the gracious, Fatherly will of God that "every one [of His elect children, whom Christ redeemed] may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof." To realize this gracious will, Christ renews every one of them, so that they do good works as fruits of faith. The Spirit uses these good works to assure every one of them of his faith: Where the fruits of faith are found, there faith must be, which produces these fruits. Assured that he has a true and living faith, every one of God's redeemed and renewed children is certain of his salvation, for the promise is that whoever believes is, and shall be, saved.

The previous editorial pointed out that the address of the model prayer, "Our Father," reveals the will of God that all His children have the certainty of His Fatherly love to them, which is the assurance of salvation. This certainty of salvation, without which one cannot pray—and may not "*try* to pray"—runs throughout the Catechism's explanation of the model prayer in Lord's Days 45-52. Confidence that God is become our Father in Christ, which is confidence of our salvation, is the very "foundation of our prayer" (Q. 120).

#### **Certainty in the Belgic Confession and the Canons**

The Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt are one with the Catechism in teaching that God wills assurance for all His people, and gives it to them. In these Reformed creeds are any number of statements expressing that all believers have, and are expected to have, assurance of salvation. Article 23 of the Belgic Confession affirms that justification, which every believer has by his faith in Christ, gives "us confidence in ap-

*The Catechism knows nothing of a restriction of assurance to a few favored believers, mostly old and gray, after they have lived in doubt for many years.*



proaching to God, freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread." Article 24 warns that if we found our salvation on our good works we "would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty." The implication is that when we found our salvation only on the work of Christ for us, as faith does, we are *not* in doubt, but have certainty of our salvation. Article 33 teaches that by the sacraments God works "inwardly in our hearts" that is, in the hearts of all believers who use the sacraments in obedience to Christ's command, "assuring and confirming in us the salvation which He imparts to us."

A main purpose of the Canons of Dordt is to safeguard for Reformed believers the assurance that the Arminian heresy robs them of. I/12, although recognizing with a pastoral spirit that some struggle for a time with doubt and that the strength of assurance, like the strength of faith itself, is not the same for all, declares that all "the elect ... attain the assurance of ... their eternal and unchangeable election." All attain assurance of their election *in time*. In Rejection of Errors/7 of the first head, the Canons insist that this assurance of election is "certainty," repudiating as absurdity the notion of "an uncertain certainty."

Canons V/9 declares as glorious gospel-truth and official Reformed doctrine that "true believers"—*all* true believers—"may and do obtain assurance" both of their present salvation in Christ and of their persevering in the faith unto eternal life. This assurance is "*certain* persuasion." True believers are *certain* of the forgiveness of their sins, of being living members of the church, and of eternal life.

The Canons reject as an error any teaching that in any way denies or threatens this assurance by all true believers. Such teaching

again introduces "the doubts of the papist" into the Reformed church. This is particularly true of the teaching that assurance is reserved for a few, favored saints who enjoy it by a "special and extraordinary revelation." "Special revelation" includes mystical experiences, a direct voice from heaven, a strange event in one's everyday life, and opening the Bible at random to a supposedly significant text (Canons V, Rejection of Errors/5).

### Certainty, Not a Problem

What stands out so prominently concerning assurance in the "Three Forms of Unity," and can for this reason be overlooked, is that the certainty of believers is matter-of-factly *taken for granted*.

(Lest any misunderstand, this taking of the assurance of the believer for granted is faith's undoubted conviction about faith.) Against the Arminian denial of any certainty of salvation, the Canons must argue for assurance, but also the

Canons regard the assurance of salvation as the normal experience of all who believe the gospel of grace from the heart.

Assurance is not a special problem for the "Three Forms of Unity." Lack of assurance by many church members is not a major issue demanding careful attention by the creeds and virtually controlling the preaching and teaching of the church. Widespread and deep-seated doubt in the church does not demand all kinds of distinctions among church members, especially the distinction between a few members who are God's "best and dearest friends," who have no doubt, and the majority who doubt their salvation.

On the very surface of the confessions, perfectly obvious to everyone, is the truth that the "I," "me," "we," and "us" who speak

or are spoken of in the confessions are people of certainty. They are certain about everything. They are certain about Scripture, about the Trinity, about creation, about angels and devils, about the fall, about the incarnation, about justification, about the church, and about heaven and hell. They are also certain about their salvation: that God elected "us"; that Christ made satisfaction "for us"; that "we" have faith; that providence governs all things for "our benefit"; and countless other, similar expressions, using the first person, personal pronouns.

These "I," "me," "we," and "us" are believers. They are *simply* believers. They are believers and nothing more—not old believers, not believers with great faith, not believers who have struggled and worked heroically for years in order finally to be able to speak of certainty as the confessions do, and certainly not believers who presume on special experiences.

This undeniable feature of the creeds regarding assurance is part and parcel of the fundamental gospel truth that God saves His elect *by faith only*.

"Easy believism" charge the Reformed doubters against the confession that all believers have, and have a right to have, assurance—*full* assurance. Works must be added: the work of agonizing doubting; the work of ardently seeking assurance; all kinds of works making the seeker worthy of assurance—worthy of becoming God's "best and dearest friend"; the works of doubting, seeking, and striving to be worthy *for many years*.

To which the Reformed confessions respond with the testimony of the gospel of grace: by faith alone.

To be sure, assurance is rare and precious.

It is as rare and precious as the faith itself of which assurance is an essential element.

And this is the issue.

— DJE 

*... when we found  
our salvation  
only on the work  
of Christ for us,  
as faith does,  
we are not  
in doubt....*



# A Presbyterian Case for the Baptist Rejection of Infant Baptism

*The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2003. 330 pages. \$16.99 (paper).

A number of prominent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians, representing almost (but not quite) all the reputedly conservative churches, argue for infant baptism on the basis of the covenant.

## A Ceremony of (Outward) Dedication

The majority report, again representing almost (but not quite) all the conservative churches, is that infant baptism signifies nothing more than formally setting apart the offspring of believing parents for God. It is merely a ceremony of dedication. It signifies nothing as to God's salvation of the infants in their infancy. Most of the Reformed and Presbyterian ministers who write this book regard the baptized children as unregenerated members of the church. The significance of infant baptism is that it puts the children in a privileged position in the visible church. Through the evangelistic work of their parents and others, they are more likely to fulfill the conditions upon which their salvation is said to depend: repentance and faith.

[Baptized children] are different from children who are not from believing parents. They are covenant members, and as such are more privileged (in view of their life inside the covenant), but they are not automatically saved by their covenant membership (p. 107).

The baptism of a covenant child is the *parents'* declaration that their child belongs to God: "When a child is baptized, his parents declare that their child belongs to God" (p. 40).

## A Universal, Conditional Promise of Grace

As for any Word of God in infant baptism, His Word is a conditional promise to every child that is baptized. God promises that He will save the child on the condition that the child one day will repent and believe.

The seal [of circumcision in the Old Testament and of baptism in the New Testament] was simply *the visible pledge of God that when the conditions of his covenant were met, the blessings he promised would apply* (p. 15; the emphasis is the author's).

Describing the Word of God in infant baptism as a conditional promise of salvation enforces the view of the children as unregenerated. Salvation cannot be expected for them until they are sufficiently mature to be able to fulfill the conditions of covenant salvation. At baptism, God "assures us

that when such children as this one express faith in Christ, all the promises of his covenant of grace will apply to them" (p. 28).

This now is the unhappy life of the covenant in a Reformed or Presbyterian home: Godly parents are thrust into closest contact, day and night, with spiritually dead children and young people. The parents can neither worship with the children, nor rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Worship and nurture require spiritual life. All the parents can do is evangelize the little unregenerates, pleading with them to fulfill the conditions of salvation.

Since the authors of this study profess Reformed Christianity, the reader may be excused for asking what has become of the gospel of sovereign, particular grace in all this exposition of the covenant as it applies to the children of believers. Does the truth set forth in the Canons of Dordt not apply to the salvation worked in the covenant? Do professing Reformed theologians, all of whom advertise impressive credentials of Reformed academic training and achievements in the Reformed community, really suppose it satisfactory to explain infant baptism as a universal gracious promise dependent for its fulfillment on the performance of conditions by unregenerated children?

## A Case for the Baptist Position

The case in *The Case* is not, in fact, a case for Reformed covenant

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tal infant baptism at all, but a case for the Baptist rejection of infant baptism, and an Arminian Baptist rejection at that. It is Baptist doctrine that all infants are, and must be viewed as, unregenerated. It is Baptist doctrine that salvation is exclusively a matter of a "conversion experience." It is Baptist doctrine that the sacrament (or ordinance as the Baptist calls it) signifies a decision and act of man, rather than a decision and act of God. And it is Arminian Baptist doctrine that makes the salvation promised in the gospel and the sacraments dependent on conditions that the sinner must fulfill.

If God does not save the infants of godly parents, *in their infancy*, and if the sprinkling with water merely means that the parents declare that they dedicate the child to God, and if God's involvement is nothing more than a gracious promise to every child that He will one day save the child on the condition that that child believes and obeys, the Baptists are right. Let us have a human ceremony of dedication for our babies, set about to evangelize them, and, when they one day make plain that they fulfill the conditions, baptize them as believers. The basis of baptism, in this case (and *Case*), is not the covenant of God, but the faith and obedience of the baptized.

### A Mortal Dread of Election

The reason for these Reformed men's defending the Baptist view of infants and of dealing with infants is their mortal dread of divine election. The word may be mentioned occasionally, but election must not determine the covenant promise and salvation or enter decisively, if at all, into the explanation of the baptism of the children of believers (as, of course, it does in Paul's explanation of circumcision, the covenant promise, and covenant salvation in Romans 9).

After forty-odd years of studying the treatment of the covenant by Reformed theologians, I am con-

vinced that nothing so frightens most Reformed theologians as election. To scare little children, especially in the dark, one says "Boo!" loudly. If one wanted to terrify most Reformed and Presbyterian theologians, especially at a conference on the covenant, he would utter a moderately voiced "Election."

### Twisting Scripture

Refusal to acknowledge sovereignty, particular grace in the covenant of God with the infants of believers results in outrageous twisting of Scripture. One writer in *The Case* is sorely troubled by Jeremiah 31:31-34, as well he might be. The writer holds that all baptized children alike are in the covenant. God at baptism makes His covenant with all of them alike by His covenant promise to all. But the covenant with all of them is conditional: God's act of saving them depends on their act of obeying Him. Therefore, the covenant is eminently breakable, not in the sense that some who are in the sphere of the covenant despise and transgress the covenant, but in the sense that God breaks, or allows men to break, the covenant that He very really established with them, as much as He established it with those who persevere.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 contradicts this doctrine of the covenant at every point. The covenant is unbreakable. Every one of those with whom God makes the new covenant is saved in it and by it. So far is it from being true that the covenant is dependent upon some act or other of those to whom the covenant is promised that the covenant itself consists of God's putting His law in the inward parts and writing His law in the hearts of the members of the covenant. That is, the new covenant in Christ, for this is the grand subject of Jeremiah 31, is not established by a divine promise conditioned on human obedience. But it is established by a divine promise of human obedience. God does not

promise to save the members of the new covenant on the condition that they obey Him. But He promises them—*all* of them—that He will make them obedient. "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).

Jeremiah 31 poses a huge problem for our writer. He admits his problem. How he views his problem is significant: Jeremiah 31 seems to rule out infant baptism. Since, on the covenant doctrine of the writer, infant baptism means that God establishes the covenant with all the infants conditionally, that some children fail to fulfill the conditions, and therefore that the covenant is broken with many, Jeremiah 31 seems to rule out infant baptism. Of course, on this thinking it rules out adult baptism as well, for also many baptized as adults prove unfaithful, and perish.

Apparently, it never crosses the writer's mind that Jeremiah 31 teaches that God makes the new covenant with Jesus Christ as head of the covenant of grace and with the elect in Him, including the elect infants. Jeremiah 31 does not rule out infant baptism. Jeremiah 31 rules out the writer's false doctrine of the covenant.

Ignoring election and committed to his doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant, the writer goes to exegetical work on Jeremiah 31:31-34. When he has finished, the passage teaches the exact opposite of that inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by the prophet. The new covenant is made with many more than those who are saved in it, is in large part only external, is conditional, and is breakable. "The new covenant ... continue(s) to include people who become covenant breakers, who benefit only from the external aspects of the new covenant, and who have never been



regenerated" (pp. 173, 174). Only in heaven will the new covenant be what Jeremiah prophesied. Until then the covenant is as described by the writer's exegesis of Jeremiah, that is, completely different from what it will be in heaven. Fatal to the writer's explanation is the teaching of Hebrews 8-10 that the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah is a reality *now*.

### An Equal but Opposite Error

As though to balance one grievous error with another, opposite error, the next-to-the-last chapter, "Baptism and Children: Their Place in the Old and New Testaments," is written by an independent who proclaims that all baptized children alike are united to Christ. All share in the salvation of the covenant. The implication is that many fall away from Christ, the covenant, and salvation. A volume advertising itself as a Presbyterian and Reformed defense of the covenant, particularly as regards the inclusion of covenant children, denies the preservation of saints.

This denial of the preservation of saints is startling, but not surprising. The doctrine that all baptized children are united to Christ is essentially the same as the doctrine that all baptized children are the objects of the gracious promise of God. Both doctrines teach that many children fall away from grace. In fact, the current doctrine of the perishing of children once covenantally united to Christ is the logical and inevitable development of the older doctrine that God graciously, though conditionally, promises to save all the children of believers.

In the course of his contribution, the independent is permitted to advocate child-communion. He castigates Reformed churches that reject child-communion for destroying the children. He threatens those who admit children to the Table only in the way of confession of faith with damnation (pp. 298-301).

### A Blessed Contrast

One chapter outlines the sound Reformed doctrine of infant baptism. Significantly, this is the chapter on "Infant Baptism in the Reformed Confessions." On the basis of the creeds, Lyle D. Bierma explains baptism as "God's speaking to us, not our speaking to him." He is not afraid to affirm, against Jewett's challenge to infant baptism, that "the regeneration of elect covenant infants that is signified and sealed in baptism can take place before or after their baptism." And in blessed contrast to the emphasis on conditions and the avoidance of election elsewhere in the book, Bierma maintains that "the baptism of infants is fully in keeping with this emphasis in the Reformed confessions on the sovereignty of grace in salvation." He continues:

Divine election, the ultimate ground of our salvation, is unconditional; that is, it is not conditioned upon any merits or acts or claims of human beings. Likewise, it is only at God's initiative that the covenant community of the saved is called into being and continues to exist. It is fitting, then, that baptism—as a sign and seal of God's promises of salvation and of his placement of the baptized into the arena where he brings these promises to fruition—be viewed first of all as something that God does. Baptism is primarily God's speaking to us, not our speaking to him. It is there that *he* signifies and seals an operation of grace that *he* performs in the context of a community that *he* has established. How can this salvation *sola gratia* ("by grace alone") be any more graphically demonstrated than in the baptism of a tiny covenant child—helpless, uncomprehending, and wholly incapable of any meritorious work? Infant baptism sets before the church in sacramental shorthand the entire doctrine of God's sovereignty in the salvation of the elect (pp. 230-245).

To this account of infant bap-

tism, every Reformed heart responds with an amen.

In view of the understanding of infant baptism that prevails in *The Case*, it is not surprising that Reformed and Presbyterian people increasingly turn Baptist. Herman Hoeksema warned of this some seventy-five years ago in the first chapter of his classic treatise on infant baptism, *Believers and Their Seed: Children in the Covenant*:

There are many in the Reformed churches who still walk about with the question in their souls: how are we to conceive of God's covenant with respect to our children? There are many who remain in the Reformed churches but who by conviction are wholly Baptist. And there are not a few also who openly join with the Baptists and break with the Reformed churches (*Believers and Their Seed: Children in the Covenant*, RFPA, repr. 1997, p. 5).


Reformed people ought to read *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* to learn the thinking on the covenant and covenant children that prevails in the Reformed churches. But they must baptize, receive, and rear their precious children—precious because they are God's children, already from conception and birth—on the basis of the covenant as explained in *Believers and Their Seed*. This is demanded by the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism," particularly, the prayer of thanksgiving after the baptism of infants.

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise thee, that Thou hast forgiven ["*hast forgiven*," not: "perhaps will forgive"] us, and our children ["our children"—our just baptized *infant* children], all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us ["*received* us," that is, us and our children, not: "will perhaps receive us, if we fulfill conditions"] through thy Holy Spirit [whom the infant children have as well as we their par-



ents] as members of thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism; we beseech thee, through the same Son of thy love, that Thou wilt be pleased always to

govern these baptized children by thy Holy Spirit [whom they have as well as we their parents], that they may be piously and religiously educated ["educated," not: evangelized as though they were

little unregenerated heathens], increase ["increase," not: some day by a dramatic "conversion experience" finally make a beginning in spiritual life] and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ, etc. (*The Psalter*, Eerdmans, 1977, p. 56). 

## Letters

### ■ A "Pop Treatment" of Culture

I read your one-sentence review of the book, *Redeeming Pop Culture: A Kingdom Approach*, and the quotation from the book that followed (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 15, 2004, p. 190). I wonder about your judgment of the attitude toward worldly culture shown in the quotation. It seems to me that the author goes along with the trash of the world. A worship service with guitars and praise songs does not seem like a God-honoring service to me, especially when the guitarist and minister are playing and singing "Love Me Two Times, Baby" right after the service, in the sanctuary.

Fred Ondersma  
Grandville, MI

#### Response:

Your judgment, I expressed by describing the book as a "pop treatment" of culture.

— Ed.

### ■ Needed: A Book on Reformed Worldview

I just finished reading your editorials on "Reformed Worldview" from 1998 in the *Standard Bearer*, and I am almost through reading your book *Reformed Education* a second time. I first read that book after I had been thoroughly confused about my own worldview and how I would conceptualize it because, to me, it could never include common grace, but I was not sure what it positively could be.

To give you some background, I am in my fourth year at Dordt

College and actually recently read a book by a prominent former Calvin College professor that appealed to common grace as the only reason she studied sociology. Anyway, before I read your book and that one, I had been struggling with the issue for over a month. I finally met with Pastor Key about it (I'm a member of Hull PRC), and reading your book resolved most (I think all) of the issues for me.

However, the chapter on "Culture in Reformed Education" is the first time I've ever seen a positive explanation of our worldview by anyone in our churches. Add this to the fact that at Dordt, as a student (especially, but not exclusively in my education classes), I have been immersed in worldview. Some professors mention common grace; some do not. One professor explained that we study psychology because of general revelation, which is a little more accurate.

What I want to explain is that in your book, in a few different places, you mention that there has not been enough development in our churches about a positive worldview (or God's covenant with creation?). Sadly, I was nodding in agreement. I tried to look for literature, but I couldn't find any; perhaps I was looking in the wrong places. I was also confused by references to common grace in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (which I read for a class) and by the quote from Herman Hoeksema you cited in your book — because the language he uses, "redeeming" and "claim for Christ," probably holds much different connotations today than it

did back then.

Really, the purpose of this letter is to ask you or someone in our churches to write a book explaining our worldview. I would envision it as a very thorough book, developing our churches' biblical views of creation, providence, the covenant of God with creation, and the fact that everything serves the salvation of the elect, including the works and products of the ungodly. At least that's my understanding of the way in which we should view culture.

I know that I am not the only person that would benefit from such a book. I think even those who thoroughly support common grace would benefit from such a book. I read your debate with Dr. Mouw — he seemed to want to know again and again what other choices there were if one did not believe in common grace. I even wanted to debate with him after I read it — I understood where he came to wrong conclusions. However, I don't remember if you set out a positive view or not. Still, I think that if we present what's wrong without presenting what's right, it is almost (dare I say it?) like presenting our sin without presenting salvation.

I think perhaps I am too harsh, but I want to lay on your heart the need for such literature as described. Perhaps it is already available, then I would gratefully ask that you could point me to it. If it is not, I hope that you or another in our churches can write it.

Valerie Westra  
Hull, IA

#### Response:



I agree with your concerns and support your proposal that we produce a book setting forth the right Reformed worldview. Such a book is long overdue.

Perhaps a conference in north-west Iowa on the subject could help fill the lack for the time being.

The Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools has a special course on worldview that

all our aspiring and younger teachers should take.

I am delighted to learn from a subsequent letter that you aspire to teach in one of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. We must have teachers who, having thoroughly understood the prevailing worldview of common grace, reject it, root and branch. We must

have teachers who, at the same time, thoroughly understand, firmly take their stand in, and enthusiastically teach the world view of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, as maintained — sometimes more implicitly than explicitly — by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

— Ed. 

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanks

# Haggai: Rebuilding the Church

### The First Prophecy (cont.)

7. *Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.*

8. *Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.*

**A**s in verse 5, the Lord again admonishes His people and calls them to self-examination and repentance with the words, “Consider your ways.” All too often because we are so sluggish the Word of God must come repeatedly before we are roused from our sloth and begin to do what God requires. In this also we are no different from Judah. That God does continue to send His Word and its admonitions is itself an evidence of His faithfulness and mercy. Instead of saying, “Enough is enough,” He continues to call.

In this second call we see another side of repentance and conversion, that it is not only a turning

from sin, but a returning to God’s ways and to God Himself. God shows this here by calling the people back to the work of building His house and by promising that He will bless them if they do turn.

We may never think, though, that God’s call, this or any other, implies that we have in ourselves the ability or power to do what God says. There are those who draw that conclusion, but the biblical doctrine of total depravity, that we can of ourselves do no good, and the words of Scripture in Galatians 6:17, prove that it is not so, not even with Christians. Of ourselves we can do nothing.

The power to obey is in the command, and it is there because the command comes from Almighty God. Augustine showed that he understood this when he said that the command was the grace. That is an important truth for us all. It is important for the preacher and elders, lest they begin to think that the power of their preaching and admonitions lies in themselves, or the power to obey in his hearers. Then they will begin to preach unsound doctrine, use unbiblical practices, and think themselves more than they are. It

is important for those who hear the Word, that they look to God for the grace and help they need.

Here God calls Judah both to make the necessary preparation for their work by going into the mountains to gather timber, and to do the work of building His temple. For us, however, that house is not made of timber and stones, but it is a spiritual house. The work and the tools, therefore, that belong to the building of that spiritual house are also spiritual. Nevertheless, to think of the church as a building helps us to understand how it is that we fulfill our calling to build.

When Scripture describes that spiritual house, the church, it tells us that the foundation is sound doctrine, the doctrine of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20-22). The cornerstone is Jesus Christ Himself. Believers are the living stones out of which the house is built (1 Pet. 2:4-8) and the love of the brethren the cement that binds the stones of that house together (Col. 3:14).

Building that spiritual house means, therefore, that we insure that the foundation is well laid in relation to Christ the chief cornerstone. That foundation is laid

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through the preaching of the gospel, through prayer for the ministry of the gospel, through our hearing, receiving, and submitting to the truth of the gospel, and through reading and studying the Word of God both publicly and privately. In that way every member has a firm foundation for his faith and for his relationship to the other members.

That is, however, only the beginning of the work of building. Also through the gospel, as well as by worship, prayer, and Christian fellowship, by admonition, the sacraments, and church discipline every member of the church is cut and shaped like timber and stone and himself built up in faith and holiness, and all the members are built up in relationship to one another. To this work belong both the instruction of the church's children and the work of evangelism, including both the gathering and teaching of new converts. It is not at all difficult to see that these are essential to the work of building the church. Through them the church has the assurance that she is not only well built for the present but will continue to be well built in the future.

To the building up and rebuilding of the church belongs also the work of the elders and deacons, each in their offices. When properly carried out, their work of ruling the church and of caring for the needs of the widows, the orphans, and the poor builds up the congregation in which they perform their labors and becomes another means by which each member grows and all grow together, so that the church is strong and faithful and stands like a fortress against the assaults of Satan.

Ultimately, even the work that is done by godly parents in the home fulfills the calling that God lays on His people here in Haggai 1, as Paul so eloquently shows in the last chapters of Ephesians. In that book's great description of the church as the body of Christ, the

closing chapters, which have to do with marriage and family life as well as with our daily work and walk in the world, are not unconnected to the rest, but part of what the Spirit has to say about the church. The man who fears Jehovah and walks in His ways will not only experience family blessedness and happiness, but will see the good of Jerusalem, the church (Heb. 12:22, 23; Rev. 21:9, 10), all the days of his life, and peace on Israel (Ps. 128:5, 6).

When the church has fallen into ruin and when its foundations are crumbling, then the church needs to be rebuilt in the way of church reformation, whether that comes through purifying a church or through leaving an apostate church for one that is not apostate. That happened in the sixteenth century through the work of Luther, Calvin, and many others. It has happened on a smaller scale at other times. It is a constant need. It is very much needed today.

The word edification, used so often in connection with the preaching and teaching of the church, means "building up" and refers to the strengthening and blessing of each individual believer, so that through him the whole church is built up, strengthened, and blessed. Everything that is done in the church must be for "edification" (Rom. 15:2; I Cor. 10:23; I Thess. 5:11).

That calling in all its different facets belongs to every believer. Even the preaching of the gospel and church discipline are the responsibility of everyone, not just of the leaders. All are to be builders in the house of God. None may leave the work to others or be too busy with his own affairs to have time for God's house.

This call God urges upon Judah and upon us — upon Judah in its

Old Testament typical form, and upon us in its New Testament reality. He urges that call with the promise that He will take pleasure in the house and be glorified in it. For Judah, that was the promise that He would reveal Himself in the temple they were building as He had done in the days of Moses and in the days of Solomon — that He would be present in all of His power and grace and goodness as the Savior of His people.

For us, that promise is the promise that the church will be the place of God's covenant, where He is the God of His people and is worshiped and glorified as God — the promise that the church will serve the purpose for which God chose her and saved her, the glory of His own great name. It is also the promise that He will

rejoice in His people and they in Him, thus fulfilling the promise to be their God and Father.

Such encouragement we always need. By such encouragement God Himself draws us into and along the way of obedience, not as dumb beasts, but as those who have learned to know Him and love Him.

*None may leave the work to others or be too busy with his own affairs to have time for God's house.*

9. *Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own house.*

10. *Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.*

11. *And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.*

In this closing section of the first prophecy, God elaborates on what He had told the Jews in verses 4-6. He reminds them once



again of their sin, now described as a running of every man to his own house. That is really no different than their living in ceiled house, only it emphasizes Israel's complete abandonment of the work God had given them to do. That they had forsaken God's house for their own materialistic endeavors to establish for themselves a place in Canaan and to become prosperous. A similar expression is found in Proverbs 1:16 and in Psalm 119:32. In the Hebrew, however, the verb "running" is in the present tense, indicating that at the time God spoke they still had not turned from their sins. They were still running every man to his own house.

Certainly we may learn from this how difficult it is for us to see our sins. By nature we are blind especially to our own sins. We can

see them only when they are repeatedly pointed out by God. That is the result of our natural depravity, and it ought to be remembered whenever our sins are brought to our attention, whether it be by others or by God Himself through His Word.

In the same way God speaks in more detail of the troubles they had suffered for their sins. It is here that He explains their lack of material prosperity by telling them that the drought they had suffered was from Him. Later on He speaks of other judgments (2:17), but apparently it was a drought that was the chief cause of poverty and starvation among them. The word "drought" is a play on words not evident in English. The word so translated is the same word used to describe the ruined condition of God's house in verse 9. In effect God says: "My house lies *waste*,

and therefore I have called for a *waste* upon the land," thus connecting the punishment with the sin and showing how the one fits the other.

God even suggests in a figure of speech that the heavens and earth agree with Him concerning Judah's sin. Literally verse 10 says: "The heavens over you refrained from dew and the earth refrained from its fruit," as if the creation itself understood Judah's sin and willingly held back its gifts from an ungrateful and unrepentant nation. It was as if the creation had more regard for God than did His own people. May we not be so spiritually insensitive to the admonitions of the gospel here in Haggai that even the creation becomes a witness against us by its desire to glorify God where we have none.



In His Fear

Rev. Richard Smit

## Handmaidens of Jehovah (2)

### Redeemed by Christ

**T**he truth that these women were handmaidens of Jehovah is based upon the truth of their redemption. We with them were lost in the service and bondage of sin. We were enemies of Jehovah and slaves to sin and the curse of the law. We were by nature those who enjoyed the lusts

of the flesh and being lords unto ourselves. But Jehovah, who is rich in mercy, redeemed us unto Himself. He made us His own property. He purchased us through the blood of Jesus Christ. By the Spirit of Christ, through regeneration and conversion, we were made the servants of Jehovah.

That emphasizes the fact that being handmaidens of Jehovah is possible only because of Jesus Christ. To become and to continue to be a faithful handmaiden of Jehovah is humanly impossible. That means that not only was the virgin birth of our Savior humanly impossible, but also for Mary to become and to be a handmaiden of Jehovah was humanly impossible. Yet, as God said to Mary, what is impossible for us is possible with

God. God does accomplish His wonder of grace in us for Christ's sake alone.

This is a truth that we have learned to confess from our youth. We cannot say before God, "This is my life, my marriage, my home, my children, my possessions, my money, and I am going to do my own will and do what is right in my own eyes!" Not at all. Rather, we have learned to confess,

"That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from the power of the devil..." (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1).

In light of that truth, whether

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you are single, married, or widowed, you are not your own masters and lords. Christ's blood has marked you as His handmaiden to serve and to do His will.

That was exactly at the heart of Hannah's confession. Unlike many of her day, Hannah confessed correctly that her will was to do Jehovah's will. She wanted what Jehovah desired and had promised for His covenant people. In submission to that, she asked for a covenant son whom she could return to Jehovah for the good of Israel.

Handmaidens of Jehovah, your duty is to know that you belong unto Him, and then in that knowledge serve Him faithfully in thanksgiving and praise.

### **Dedicated to Jehovah's Covenant**

Hannah, Jesse's wife, and Mary served Jehovah faithfully. Let us consider some of the characteristics of faithful handmaidens of Jehovah that they showed.

First, they were given the virtue of spiritual dedication towards God's covenant. Today, women are faced with many temptations to be dedicated to many other things. The world beckons to have you conform to their goals in this life. They tempt you to seek wealth and possessions as a goal in life. They tempt you to dedicate yourself to goals far beyond the scope of your marriage, your home, and your church. They tempt you to dedicate your life and yourself to *yourself*. The world tells you to break free from the bondage of the home and many children, or the bondage of the marriage. The world tells you to achieve your real potential, even if that means you have to discard your husband for another "husband." The world tells the Christian woman today that the most important thing for you in life is how *you* feel and whether *your* potential is achieved.

There is always the strong temptation to listen to the evil world. Easy it is for us to compro-

mise even just a little bit in order to have some of those things that the world promotes and that our flesh craves and covets.

By God's grace, Hannah rejected that. Her goal in life was not simply even to be a mother. Her life as a handmaiden of Jehovah went far beyond that of simply having the earthly relationship of a mother to a child. Her great concern and goal was the prosperity and continuation of God's covenant in Israel. In light of the sad state of affairs in Israel, her desire was made more acute. She desired a son whom she could dedicate for lifetime service to Jehovah for the good of Israel and for the sake of God's covenant promise. Understand, then, that to train her son for lifetime service and devotion to Jehovah required her own lifetime devotion and dedication to Jehovah as His handmaiden first. The evidence of that was on the day when at the appointed time she brought Samuel to the tabernacle and to Jehovah to begin his lifetime of service.

You, handmaidens of Jehovah, must also be dedicated to Jehovah in a lifetime of service. In whatever situation God has placed you, therein you must be content and dedicated to Jehovah's covenant, to the communion of His saints, and the continuing of His covenant in the generations of God's people, not just your own. Whether she has children or is without children, the believing woman is called to be dedicated unto Jehovah and have as her burning concern the welfare of God's covenant people. Her life must revolve around that, whether in the single state, in marriage, in a home with few children, no children, or with many children, like the homes of Jesse's wife and Mary.

Your goal in life must be God's covenant and kingdom. That goal may not be yourselves, your will, your convenience, and what is easi-

est and the most fun for you. The handmaiden of Jehovah must willingly submit herself to whatever He calls her to do in whatsoever state He may providentially place her.

### **The True Freedom of a Handmaiden**

Did they consider that service to be misery? No, they showed that it was a blessed privilege to be a handmaiden of Jehovah.

Of course, that is not what the world is telling you today. The world tells you that to sacrifice and to deny yourself for faithful service to Jehovah is bondage. To be like Jesse's wife and be given the burden of the needs of ten children is only bondage. To be like Jesse's wife and never be mentioned by name, and just to be known as a mother and as Mrs. Jesse, is degradation, humiliation, and bondage.

The world's message is: "Liberate yourselves! Break free from the bondage of being a handmaiden of Jehovah. Break out of the prison house of the home and find your fulfilment away from and out from underneath the authority and will of your husband. Break free from those endless stacks of dishes, those dirty diapers, those never-ending mountains of laundry, and a life of seemingly thankless labor. Be your own master! Let your husbands answer to your will and desires. Let them submit to your decisions and will once in a while. Force

them to approve of your search for fulfilment outside of the home. Let them be the homemakers, and you be the breadwinners. Break free from the life of having to follow the example of Christ, who washed His disciples' feet. Don't be burdened down with bearing the burdens of others. You do not have time to help and visit the widows, the single mothers with infants, the mothers with many children, the orphans, the fatherless, and the motherless teenage girls. Use your time

*Your goal in life must be God's covenant and kingdom.*



money, energy, abilities, and talents *your way!* After all, you deserve and have a right to the good life!"

I ask you, what would have happened if Hannah and Jesse's wife were of that worldly mentality? Humanly speaking, we may suppose if Jesse and his wife listened to that devilish philosophy that poured over the borders of Israel from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and elsewhere, they would not have had and wanted their eighth son, their youngest son, David, the man after God's own heart, the type of Christ, the king of Israel, and the father of Jesus.

What about Hannah? What would have happened if she listened to that old, anti-Jehovah message of the world? Would she have desired a son for the right reasons? Would she have returned her son to Jehovah? Would he not have become another son of Belial, like Eli's sons?

Yes, you, handmaidens of Jehovah, are called to be truly liberated. However, your true freedom is not outside the boundaries of the truth and the will of Christ. There is no freedom in living apart from Christ. No freedom in finding supposed fulfillment apart from your husbands and the covenant children. No freedom apart from being faithful slaves of Jehovah.

True freedom for you is enjoyed in the way of submitting to Jehovah's will. That is the truly blessed life. That is exactly what Mary confessed by faith: "My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour!" (Luke 1:46-47).

That was not a blessedness unique to her alone. That is the blessedness that God gives to His daughters who serve Him faithfully in the single life, in the home with no children, in a home with few children, in a home with many children, or as a widow. To serve Jehovah and His covenant is a blessed privilege all the days of your life.

### **A Mother's Relationship to Her Children**

Further, these godly women demonstrate the importance of the covenantal relationship between mother and child. In the first place, they showed this from the viewpoint of God's covenant promise. Jehovah promised to establish and fulfill His covenant in the line of believers and their seed in their generations. To each of these three women, God gave a son for the purpose of His covenant. Samuel was given to be a judge and prophet in Israel. David was given to be king for Israel and to be one through whom Christ would come. Jesus Himself was given to Mary as the fulfillment of that covenant promise.

That relationship between mother and child is no less important for the sake of God's covenant today. In I Timothy 2, the apostle Paul teaches that the believing woman is saved through child-bearing and rearing. That means that, through the God ordained way of child-bearing and rearing, the believing woman is spiritually enriched. It also means that God is pleased to gather the generations of His covenant in this way and fulfill His promise.

In the second place, these godly women are evidence of the utmost importance of the relationship between the mother and the child in the work of covenant instruction. How could Samuel be given to the service of the tabernacle at such a young age, unless Hannah first had diligently taught Samuel all that he needed to know for that faithful service!

From whom did David learn to sing and to develop his musical talents for the glory of God? Under whose hand did he grow up to be the man after God's own heart? God used the means of the instruction of his mother to accomplish this.

Think about Jesus, too. From whom did He learn the Old Testa-

ment Scriptures? Jesus, who is like us in all things except sin, learned and memorized perfectly the Scriptures under the instruction of His mother. He learned the songs of Zion in the arms of Mary and around the table of Joseph and Mary.

Jehovah prepared these men in the arms and upon the knees of Hannah, Jesse's wife, and Mary.

Let us remember that the manner of faithful instruction for your children is essentially unchanged from the days of these godly women.

Where will your daughters learn godliness, meekness, and modesty? Not from the world, but from you!

Where do your sons grow up to be strong in the Lord and in His wisdom? Not from the world, but from you!

Where do they learn to be faithful servants of Jehovah in their life? Not from the world, but from you, sisters!

### **Preparing Your Sons for Church Office**

That applies particularly to our need for ministers in our churches.

The need is great and growing. In light of the vacancies and the few students in our seminary, does not the care of the churches burden your souls? Are not your souls heavy with the concern that solidly Reformed preaching continue by God's grace in your pulpits?

In response to that concern, what must you do? Those sons in your arms and upon your knees you must prepare to be returned unto the Lord for a lifetime of service in His church as ministers, elders, deacons, spiritual leaders, fathers, and faithful husbands. Those spiritual sons are not yours to train for what *you* might want them to be. These sons are the heritage of *Jehovah*. Jehovah has given those sons to you for a little while so that

*Where will  
your daughters  
learn godliness,  
meekness,  
and modesty?*



they may be returned unto Him.

Normally, by the instruction, the example, the modesty, the humility, the dedication, the wholehearted devotion, and faithfulness of Jehovah's handmaidens, God grants His church the gifts of Samuels and Davids for the welfare of His covenant in our generations and, particularly, for the pulpits of our churches and mission fields.

Are you preparing those Samuels and Davids for a lifetime of dedicated service in the office of believer? Or in the special offices of the church, especially the ministry of the Word?

If you do not do that, who will?  
By faith, *you* must!

#### **The Gracious Reward for Faithfulness**

To follow the godly example of

Hannah, Jesse's wife, and Mary is the urgent calling of godly women today. We live in spiritual times that are strikingly similar to their times. The world continues to grow in wickedness. The apostasy in the church world continues to increase. Clearly, these are the times in which we need faithful handmaidens of Jehovah, who know the times and what the churches need!

We need Hannahs whose eyes of faith are fixed on Jehovah's covenant. We need those faithful wives who are not ashamed to be joined in marriage in the Lord unto the lowly and meek Jesses of the earth who shall inherit eternal glory. We need those who, like Mary, are willing to submit wholeheartedly and unashamedly to the will of God alone.

Be assured that in such faithfulness there is great reward. There is in that faithfulness the expectation that in the judgment the Lord shall say unto you, "Even as ye have done it unto the least of my brethren, so ye have done it unto me. Enter into my everlasting joy and glory!" Christ shall give His handmaidens the glorious reward of a faithful handmaiden of Jehovah, which He has merited for them.

Therefore, what a blessing it is when the most outstanding memory about you that your spiritual sons and daughters have all the days of their life and before the throne of Christ is:

"Behold, she was a handmaiden of Jehovah!

And I had the blessed privilege to be her son!" 

*That They May Teach them to their Children*

*Prof. Russell Dykstra*

## *Two Different Covenants, Two Different Schools*

**E**very builder will testify that the foundation of a building is of crucial importance for the building as a whole. The foundation not only determines the size and the shape of the building, but affects its value and longevity. A well-constructed building on a sure foundation should stand strong and function well in the purpose for which it was constructed.

The foundation of the Christian school (not the school *building*, now, but the school itself) is like-

wise crucial. The foundation of the school will reflect its conceived purpose and what motivated the parents to establish the school. In the history of the Reformed churches, the foundation of the Christian school has been God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed.

Christian schools have a long and honorable history within the Reformed camp, dating back to Calvin, and especially maintained in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Believing parents have considered it an obligation of the covenant to establish parental, Christian schools where the covenant seed might be reared in the fear of God and taught His truth. The great Synod of Dordt made ref-

erence to Christian schools and/or teachers in three separate articles of the church order.

The doctrine of the covenant is also the heart of the Reformed faith. It ties together all the doctrines of the Reformed truth. The covenant gives warmth and beauty to the doctrines of Calvinism. The covenant is religion! It determines our relationship to God as well as our walk of life. The doctrine of the covenant of grace has uniquely a Reformed heritage.

Sad to say, there is much disagreement within the Reformed camp on the doctrine of the covenant. Different views of the covenant have been set forth by theologians since the Reformation. These differences on the covenant

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came into sharp contrast in the controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches resulting in the split of 1953. That controversy made plain that there are essentially but two covenant views possible, namely, a conditional covenant, and an unconditional covenant.

The question that we face is this: How does the particular covenant doctrine affect the schools that believers establish for their children? The point of this article is that the covenant view of the parents and teachers has far-reaching effects on the school. As the foundation of the building determines many significant elements of a building, so the covenantal foundation of the school determines the character of the school, including the purpose, content, and focus of the instruction, the discipline administered, and the very social life within the school.

A word of caution is in order. Parents, school boards, and teachers are not always consistent, and they may not necessarily establish and maintain a school that follows the principles of the covenant that they confess. Foundations can be forgotten, even abandoned. That can be true of Protestant Reformed schools, as well as Christian Reformed schools, or Canadian Reformed schools, or Netherlands Reformed schools. And, on the other hand, there are "happy inconsistencies" in schools where the (erroneous) principles have not yet been carried through to all the instruction.

In addition, it should be evident to all that there can be other significant influences on the Christian school than merely the doctrinal foundation of the covenant. Other beliefs and practices can have an impact for good or for evil. The doctrine of common grace, particularly if it posits good in the activities of the ungodly, opens the floodgates to the world's influence. The AACCS movement (now centered in the Institute for Christian Studies, ICS, in Toronto) forces the

instruction into the post-millennial mold that ever directs students to dominate the world for Christ.

Hence, in this evaluation, allowance must be made for possible inconsistency in application of the principles, as well as the possibility of other influences in a school. Nevertheless, so determinative is the doctrine of the covenant in the school, that we maintain that these two different doctrines of the covenant will produce two different kinds of Christian schools.

These articles will highlight the differences between schools founded on the basis of a conditional covenant, and those maintaining an unconditional covenant. There are obvious difficulties in this enterprise. It is difficult for one committed all his life to the unconditional covenant to get a handle on the character of a school founded on the conditional covenant, and that with limited firsthand experience in such a school. School handbooks and mission statements are brief, and do not always even specify that a school is based on the covenant. Thus some of the conclusions will be based on the logical implications of the conditional covenant, and then substantiated as much as possible by the experience of others and the writings that are available.

It is necessary, first of all, briefly to set forth these two opposing views of the covenant, that is, conditional and unconditional. As any regular reader of the *Standard Bearer* knows, the Protestant Reformed Churches are solidly committed to the doctrine of an unconditional covenant of grace, and this is the view explained here.

We who confess that God's covenant is unconditional define this covenant as the relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with His elect in Christ. This emphasizes that the covenant

is God's. He planned it, determined what it would be, how it would be realized, as well as with whom it would be established. Such a covenant is one-sided (unilateral); the covenant is all of God.

Christ is the Mediator of God's covenant, as well as its Head, with whom God established the covenant eternally. Christ is not only the Seed of the woman referred to in the "mother promise" (Gen. 3:15), but also the Seed of Abraham in Genesis 17 with whom God established His covenant (cf. Gal. 3:16). In Christ, God established the covenant with all those who are in Christ, namely, the elect.

Thus, God's covenant is eternal, being before the time and history of this world, and continuing after the time and history of this present creation. This covenant is established with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations.

This covenant is not a conditional agreement, but an unconditional relationship formed by God. God takes His people unto Himself and makes them to be of His own party. Within the covenant, they become living and active in the life of fellowship with God. Therefore, this covenant is not a means to an end, not the means to save, which means can be done away with once it has accomplished its purpose. Rather, the covenant is itself the goal of God, namely, it is God's purpose to live in covenant fellowship with His people forever, in and through Christ.

Standing in contrast and opposition to that conception of the covenant is the conditional covenant. It may be defined as the arrangement that God makes with believers and their children in which the blessings of salvation are given to them, on condition of faith and obedience. In this covenant, God

... the covenant view of the parents and teachers has far-reaching effects on the school.



comes to His covenant people with both promise and demand.<sup>1</sup> The promise is eternal life. The demand is faith and obedience. God makes the promise to every covenant member, but the actual receipt of the promises depends on the demand being met by the individual.

The proponents of the conditional covenant teach that the covenant is unilateral in its establishment, but bilateral in its manifestation. God and His people are two parties in the covenant, each with his own necessary activity. God takes into His covenant all believers and all their baptized children. The covenant is a means to an end, the goal being to give the blessings of salvation to some of them.

In this view, Christ is the Mediator of the covenant, but not the Head of the covenant. The covenant is not made collectively with Christ and His people, but individually. Election is taken into account only as an explanation of who is saved — after the fact. Election must not be introduced into the discussion of the covenant. Election unto salvation is narrower than the establishment of the covenant with its members.

That brings up the place of children in the covenant. In the conditional covenant conception, all baptized children (Jacobs and Esau alike) are members of God's covenant. At baptism, God declares that He establishes His covenant with the child, and promises eternal life and redemption in the blood of Christ — objectively.<sup>2</sup> In addition, God promises that the Spirit will dwell in this child and will apply all these blessings subjectively. The Reformed form for the administration of infant baptism is interpreted to mean that the Father and Son promise existing realities, but that the words "the Spirit will dwell..." mean something different. Most of those espousing a conditional covenant insist that these words are not a continuous future, that is, the Spirit

will dwell with you constantly. Rather, they insist that "will" means "desires to" or that He "will under certain conditions." Such are the promises in the conditional covenant.

But, they aver, God also makes demands on the child in the covenant (by which is meant every baptized child), namely faith and obedience as a condition. They would insist that this is not a condition in the Arminian sense. Rather, it is a condition as a necessary way by which God has determined to save. Such insist that God is not giving a condition to get into the covenant, because He lays these demands upon the children who are already in the covenant. And finally, it is affirmed that because God's promise is inseparable from the demand as condition, that God always keeps His word. He punishes the covenant breakers, and blesses the faithful.

In this covenant doctrine, all the baptized are sanctified. This is drawn from I Corinthians 7:14, where Paul writes, "...now are your children holy." This is understood to mean that *all* the children of believers are "sanctified," that is, not necessarily made holy, but sanctified in the sense of being set apart from the children of unbelievers, and identified as God's. God has a claim on them, as His children.<sup>3</sup>

In harmony with that, it is claimed that grace is bestowed upon all these baptized children. Different explanations are given as to what this grace really is. For some, the promise itself is grace in some undefined way. For others, a kind of common grace works within each child, enabling each to make the choice of whether or not to believe God's promise. Some are so bold as to teach that at baptism God promises to the child, "You are one of my elect."

Often the figure of a bank check is used to illustrate the conditional promise of God to the baptized child. It is said that every

child receives at baptism what amounts to a check, written out to the child, and signed by God. The check promises eternal life to the child.

That child can do one of three things with this check. He can shred it, and thereby indicate that he wants nothing to do with this God or the promise of life. By this act he becomes a covenant breaker, and there is no hope for him. A second possibility is that the child never cashes it, which is to say, never claims the promise. Perhaps he merely takes pride in the fact that he has this wonderful promise from God. Perhaps he wanders far from the church and godliness. But if he never cashes it, the "check" becomes worthless, and he dies without receiving the eternal life God promised him. A third possibility is that the child endorses the check. He does that by believing the promises of God. He then receives all that God has promised, and has eternal life.

Thus, what every baptized child is taught amounts to this: "The promises are for you, personally. Your baptism is a guarantee that God spoke the promises to you. God promises you the blessings of salvation. The promises were sealed to you personally at baptism. Claim them! Take hold of the promises. Believe that God means what He says."

In contrast to that is the teaching of the unconditional covenant concerning the place of children in God's covenant. Since this has been set forth a number of times in the *Standard Bearer* and in this rubric, we can be brief. We maintain that with the *elect* children of believers alone does God establish His covenant of friendship. The promises at baptism are spoken to the elect, as are all the promises in the preaching only to the elect. They are sealed only to the elect in baptism. And God keeps His promises to them, unfailingly. Those promises include faith as God's gift. God works faith, but




not as the fulfillment of a condition. Faith is rather a fruit of the promises, a work and gift of sovereign grace, and is thus part of God's work of salvation in His chosen people.

The unconditional covenant teaches that these elect children are sanctified in Christ, really so! They are regenerated, and thus made holy in principle. The Holy Spirit does dwell in each and apply the blessing of the cross.

There are demands made of these children, but not as covenantal conditions. God comes to the elect seed with many commands, as for example, Repent of your sins! Believe in Christ! Obey Me! The baptism form teaches the same: "Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we ... admonished of and obliged unto new obedience...."

These covenant children live in fellowship with God and are to show their thankfulness by an obedient life. They are called to live

as God's friends by living the antithetical life. Obviously, that demands obedience to the Word of God.

How does this apply to the schools? What differences will exist between schools that maintain the conditional covenant and those who hold to the unconditional covenant? That will be the focus next time. 

1. Some have adopted a form for the administration which uses that language, specifically. The form used by the Canadian Reformed Churches reads: "Third, since every covenant contains two parts, a promise and an obligation...."

2. I freely admit that I do not know what it means to have the blessings of eternal life and redemption in the blood of Christ *objectively*, as here presented. It is maintained that these blessings are really the property of the child, objectively, but that if the child never believes, he will never have the benefits of the cross of Christ. That seems to imply Christ died for all the

baptized children of believers, but whether they receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is conditioned on faith. That is virtually identical to the Arminian teaching of the atonement, except that here it is limited to the covenant. The more Reformed proponents of the conditional covenant would reject that. However, I have yet to find an understandable, consistently Reformed explanation for the idea that these blessings belong to every baptized child objectively.

3. The third form for the administration of infant baptism found in the 1957 edition of the Psalter Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church includes the following: "God graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us.... We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God's own children." Though not explicitly stated, it appears to be teaching that all the baptized children are God's children. The first prayer in the form adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches asks God to "look upon *this child of Thine* and incorporate him ..." (my emphasis, RJD).

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

## All Creatures Created for the Service of Man

**A**rticle 12 of our Belgic Confession of Faith begins "We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures as it seemed good unto Him, giv-

ing unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; *that He doth also still uphold and govern them by His eternal providence and infinite power, for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God.*"

Most certainly the creatures of God display His handiwork and thereby bring praise to God. "Let them praise the name of the Lord; for he commanded and they were created. He hath also established them for ever and ever; he hath made a decree which shall not

pass" (Ps. 148: 5-6). We noticed this previously when we observed the various aspects of nitrogen and its compounds. The order, beauty, and intricacy found in the creation reveal the power and divinity of God. In the very nature and essence of each creature, the creature itself brings glory and praise to God.

But there is another aspect to the creation, explained by Article 12, that brings glory to God and humbles us. Not only did God create each creature and give unto

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each creature its unique essence, but God sovereignly upholds and governs those creatures and their essence for the service of us His people so that we might serve Him! What a marvel! Consider all the creatures! All these creatures serve us?! How humbled we ought to be! And so too we must recognize that God made nitrogen with all its aspects and unique characteristics to serve us! God uses the nitrogen cycle for our care and service as well. These things are upheld to serve us, so that we might be able to partake in our spiritual work — that we might serve our God!

This truth was part of the controversy in the CRC in the 1920s. Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Danhof appealed to the truth of Article 12 in their book *Van Zonde en Genade* in the common grace controversy of the early 1920s. Hoeksema and Danhof explained that Kuyper and Bavinck taught that the development of things in the creation is not related to the spiritual-moral development of the rational creature. “But Bavinck, just as Kuyper, wants a one-sided separate cosmic development of the creation through common grace, which development is neither rational, spiritual, nor normal.”<sup>1</sup>

And they admit that the purpose of the life of all creatures is indeed the honor of God. But that life, though proceeding from one source, goes in two directions. The mistake is that in this way the idea of the honor of God is actually without any content, because they place the life of the creation outside the foreordination of the life of the rational and moral creatures. And so they make a division between that which we insist must be as closely united as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Hoeksema and Danhof viewed the work of God in light of Article 12 of the Belgic Confession, and they saw that all things, even the creatures of creation and the development of the powers within that cre-

ation, are in the counsel of God for the purpose of the salvation of His church! The salvation of the church through Jesus Christ, in worshiping God alone in covenant friendship, is all important! All things must serve that end! They write,

Sin did not remove the creation, nor did it destroy the original unity of the creation. God continued to work in all creatures by His infinite power and according to the counsel of His providence.... All things continue to develop according to their own natures and in an underlying organic relationship to each other. But they develop out of the principles of sin and grace, and in eternal, spiritual-ethical antithesis of friendship with God, on the one hand, and enmity towards the God of the covenant, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Part of the common grace controversy involved an understanding of how all things, even the creatures, fit into the counsel of God. Article 12 maintains that all creatures are created and maintained in the providence of God *for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God*.

#### **For the service of mankind**

In previous articles we have examined nitrogen, its compounds, and the nitrogen cycle in light of the first phrases of Article 12. We now observe how these particular creatures serve us in our various callings in this life.

Some brief examples of how nitrogen atoms are used for our service should be discussed. It is clear that we cannot have our physical life apart from the food and nutrients that we must receive on a regular basis. Part of this nourishment is the receiving of a very important element — nitrogen. The nitrogen atoms, as has been stated before, are a necessary part of the very basic molecules of man — DNA, enzymes, proteins, etc. Therefore, the nitrogen cycle serves

us in providing us the basic components that give us our physical life.

The nitrogen cycle serves the plant world so that the plants are nourished and can grow. In this way the plants themselves develop and grow beautifully and praise God in that they show God’s power and wisdom. But the plants themselves can then be used by us that we might receive nourishment and energy to take up our labors. The food that we eat gives us the energy we need to do whatever our calling is, whether in the church, home, our realm of labor, or as a citizen of the country. “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth” (Ps. 104: 14). Thereby we are equipped to serve our God in faithful labor.

Scripture also says that the plants and the fruit of the plants are for our enjoyment. In the proper enjoyment of those good gifts, God is glorified. “And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart” (Ps. 104: 15: See also Eccl. 2:10, 24; 9:7-10). We also exercise dominion over the creation and press the powers of the creation for our service. For example, nitrogen gas molecules are used in the food-packaging industry to preserve foods. Man uses nitrogen molecules in the liquid form — liquid nitrogen — to keep items frozen. This allows objects to be preserved and to be kept from being damaged. And we have in previous articles seen how the farmer efficiently uses nitrogen to add fertilizers to his fields and how the mother uses nitrogen products in household cleaners. These are just a few of the many examples of how nitrogen is used for the service of man.

#### **To the end that man may serve his God**

Article 12 teaches that God created all things for the service of



mankind (Ps. 8:6, Ps. 104:14-15) so that man might serve his God. To understand this properly we must see clearly what it means to serve God. Some have incorrect views of this service of God or of "kingdom service." There are those who teach that to serve God one must be involved in grandiose works in the political and social arenas. Prof. Dykstra recognized this trend when he wrote about "Christian humanism" in a recent *Standard Bearer* article. He writes:

The social calling of this humanism is the obligation to *do* something in this creation and in society to improve both.... If you attended Dordt, Calvin, Trinity, or any other Christian college, you heard that you *can do* something for Christ, you *can* make a difference in this world, and you *must* make a difference in this world.... This movement may sound very pious and pressure the Christian school to do its "Christian duty," but it is humanism for all that. The cry is: "Christ has redeemed the world, and now it is up to *you* to make the whole creation subservient to Christ. We must save the world. Christ will come after our mission is accomplished." <sup>4</sup>

This kind of "kingdom service" involves having a "reforming" influence on society. "To serve God" we apparently must be "world-shakers," transforming and changing societal institutions for the betterment of society, fixing the problems of society, reclaiming and redeeming all of creation for Christ. This work, this idea of "kingdom service," is a work of "building" an earthly kingdom of God.

When we consider Article 12's statement that all creatures are governed and sustained by God's providence for the service of mankind, *to the end that man may serve his God*, we see that the point of the service of God is not the kind of "kingdom service" mentioned above. The idea is that God created all creatures to be used by man in the everyday, seemingly in-

significant, activities of faithfully laboring and living in the calling God gives to him for the glory of God. The work in the kingdom is the normal everyday activities of living the life of God's people. It is generally not extraordinary or spectacular labors. It is the common work of the people of God. It is not the "world shaking," the "transforming" and "redeeming" of creation, that others have in mind. *It is the faithful service of God in the callings He gives to His people.* God created all creatures for the service of mankind in his common, everyday labor that brings all glory to God.

Jesus taught us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread." When we pray this, we are to acknowledge that God is the fountain of all good and that He created all things to serve us. It is a prayer that teaches us to trust in God and to renounce all our trust in man and in the creation. How gloriously is this evident in the topics we have recently studied! Do we place our trust in the creation? Do we look at nitrogen and its compounds and trust in them? When we look at the nitrogen cycle we

must see a sovereign God providing us our daily bread. We might consider God's provision of nourishment of Elijah from the ravens or His provision of meal and oil for the widow as great wonders of God. Yet, no more wondrous were those events than the amazing government of nitrogen and its compounds for our service. These microscopic creatures are servants of the living God to serve us and provide us what we truly need in our spiritual pilgrimage here below. Do we recognize this as we ought? Do we acknowledge and thank God for this? When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we thereby confess to God our complete dependence on Him and in so doing we worship and serve Him.

*When we look at the nitrogen cycle we must see a sovereign God providing us our daily bread.*

By looking at nitrogen we have seen how our great God provides and cares for us. May this stir us on in faithful obedience in our callings, whatever that calling may be. In faithful acknowledgment and thanks to Jehovah God for all things, we serve Him. Unbelievers refuse to bow before Jehovah. They rebel when they see an almighty God in creation and turn what they see into the lie of evolution. In the previous articles we have seen how God made all aspects of nitrogen, all its compounds, and weaved them intricately into the lives of every living organism. God upholds and governs the amazing nitrogen cycle with the lightning, bacteria, and plants that all work together to serve us. Yet, unbelieving man rebels and denies that God has a hand in this. Unbelieving man, who is often given much ability to research and investigate the crea-

tion, denies what is so obviously the work of an almighty Creator sovereignly upholding His creation every moment of the day. Yes, even the being, shape, form, and several offices of nitrogen testify to the unbe-

liever of God's "eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Besides their rebellion and denial of God, unbelievers use the creation to serve themselves. They use the powers in the creation to serve mankind that man may serve man. But, by the grace of God, our eyes are opened to see His work in the

1. Danhof, Henry and Herman Hoeksema. *Sin and Grace*. Reformed Free Publishing Association. Grandville, MI, 2003, p. 160.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 149

4. Dykstra, R. "Humanism and the PR Teacher: No R and R (2)." *Standard Bearer*, 79, pp. 425-6.




creation so that we begin to serve our faithful Father as we grow in closer covenant friendship and dependence upon Him.

Therefore, nitrogen, its compounds, and the nitrogen cycle serve us in our callings of labor, marriage, church, family life, society life, and so on. And thereby we serve our God in as much as we faithfully use these good gifts in our various callings in life to the end that we might better know our God, fear Him, and obey His commands. Nitrogen atoms, its compounds, the nitrogen cycle, and all creatures were not created, are not

maintained, do not develop *alongside* the decrees of election and reprobation, but they *serve* the decrees of election and reprobation. Thus, as Article 12 maintains, all things, even nitrogen atoms, are created and maintained by God so that we can serve our God.

Consider the wondrous works of God! God created and maintains all things, even the tiny particles of creation, that by His providence these creatures might serve the king of creation — mankind — in order that man ultimately may serve and honor Him. May we

learn to confess the truth as expressed in Article 12. May we be diligent in observing God's handiwork in the creation as He gives to each creature its being, shape, form, and several offices. May we be humbled to see that God made all things and that He continues to govern and sustain all creatures for man's good, for man's service. And may we see that our calling is to use all these good gifts for the glory and service of God by acknowledging that they come from our Father and that they bring us in closer friendship and dependence on Him. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

**R**ev. A. Spriensma, our denomination's missionary to the Philippines, continues to be very busy heading into the new year. On a Saturday morning in early January, he began his day with a church meeting with all the heads of households of the members of the Berean Church of God Reformed in Manila, followed by teaching a Reformed church government class, and then a Board of Trustees meeting. On Sunday he preached two services, with an Essentials catechism class in between. The following weekend he planned to travel to the island of Negros, and meet with a small group in the city of Bacolod to hold a conference and preach again. During the week he continues to mentor and teach some of the pastors and Bible students with whom he has recently started meeting.

Rev. Rodney and Sharon Miersma left around 5 P.M. on Tuesday, January 13, from Sioux Falls, S.D., arriving in Ghana and the city

of Accra the following day at 7 P.M. They were met there by members of the Fellowship, along with Rev. Wayne and Phyllis Bekkering and Justin and Kathy Koole. Pray for the Miersmas as they begin their missionary labors with the Bekkerings and Kooles and the Fellowship.

Rev. R. Cammenga, Elders William DeKraker, Roger Groenendyk, and Dave Rau, as well as Deacons Marc Kuiper and Steve Kuiper, members of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA, visited the field January 15-19. Their visit was to include meeting with our missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, and the steering committee of the Fellowship. Plans also called for the elders to conduct family visitation, under the theme, "As for me and my house," and the deacons to make some diaconal visits. As a denomination we can be thankful for this supervision of our calling church, and we pray that God will make their work profitable for our missionary and the saints in Pittsburgh.

An effort is also underway to organize pen pals between the Pittsburgh Mission and the mem-

bers of Southwest PRC. Mr. Brian Suber, a member of the Mission, recently developed a questionnaire for the members to complete. From this questionnaire he planned to develop a brief article on each one of them to be included in future publications of Southwest's *Messenger*.

### School Activities

**M**onday, January 5, members of the Hope PR Christian School Society in Grand Rapids, MI gathered together for a special society meeting to consider their Board's plans for building expansion. The Board reminded the school society members that having the need for building expansion is evidence of God's continued faithfulness at Hope School. Plans approved that evening call for the construction of four classrooms and a gym, with bathrooms, storage area, and lobby area, along with parking lot, new well, and site work for relocation of the playground.

Saturday evening, January 17, supporters of Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to come and visit "Yellowstone High Country Treasure" at Grandville Middle School

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



for the first of four travelogues to benefit the Hope School Foundation.

Teachers, prospective teachers, and parents in and around our churches in the Grand Rapids, MI area were invited to enroll in a college credit seminar, sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, entitled, "Principles and Practices of Reformed Education." This seminar began meeting in January at our Seminary and was scheduled to continue every other Wednesday evening through May.

Starting in the spring of 2004, the city of Wyoming, MI will begin a project to expand Byron Center Ave. As a landowner along this section, Adams Christian School will be compelled to sell a strip of land to the city. The strip is 17 feet wide and runs the entire length of Adams' property, making a total of about a quarter of an acre. This expansion will include improving the street with curb and gutter, cement sidewalks, and cement approaches for all driveways

connected to the street. Adams will also use this street expansion project to relocate their existing north driveway and add a new south driveway to 56<sup>th</sup> Ave. Plans also call for Adams to use this opportunity to hook up to sanitary sewer.

### **Congregation Activities**


**F**or some time now we have noticed that bulletins at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI have included announcements concerning a Boy's G.R.O.W. Group at their church. G.R.O.W. is an effort by members of Georgetown to have their boys from the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade grow spiritually in giving, righteousness, obedience, and wisdom, hence the acronym G.R.O.W. Under the direction of several men at Georgetown, 25 boys meet together on Tuesday nights for a Bible Study followed by some time spent with assorted craft projects. On January 20 they were scheduled to tour our own PR Seminary. Besides such activities they also recently had a visit from a member of the

Ottawa County sheriff department and his K-9 Unit.

With great joy and gladness in our hearts to our heavenly Father, Classis East, meeting January 14 at the Grandville, MI PRC, received the Wingham, Ontario congregation, formerly of the OCRC, into our churches. This group consists of 13 families and 27 communicant members. A committee consisting of the church visitors was appointed to assist them in making the transition out of the OCRC and into our denomination.

### **Minister Activities**

**R**ev. W. Bruinsma declined the call extended to him from the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB Canada to be their next pastor. Immanuel will meet together on January 29 to call a pastor from a trio of the Revs. A. Brummel, C. Haak, and C. Terpstra.

On Sunday, January 18, Rev. C. Haak declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. 

## **Announcements**

### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The council of Kalamazoo PRC expresses sincere Christian sympathy to fellow member Paul Hoekstra in the death of his grandfather,

#### **GEORGE HOEKSTRA.**

May God comfort you with His word from Revelation 14:13: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President  
Thomas Kiel, Clerk

### **NOTICE**

Please note that the mailing address of Cornerstone PRC is Dyer, IN 46311.

Also, the new telephone number of Southeast PRC parsonage is: (616) 475-0996.

### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

On January 12, 2004, the Lord in His sovereign good pleasure called home

#### **MRS. MARIE DE VRIES.**

The consistory and congregation of South Holland PRC convey their sincere sympathy to Mary Ann DeVries as we together mourn the death of her mother and our sister in the Lord. May our strength and comfort be found in our sure hope of eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Allen Brummel, President  
George DeJong, Clerk

### **WEDDING ANNIVERSARY**

On February 8, 2004,

#### **GYSBERT and JOANNE VAN BAREN**

celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, are grateful to God for the years He has given them, and for the love, care, and godly upbringing they have given us. We pray that God will continue to bless their marriage in the years to come. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18).

- \* Phil & Karen Van Baren  
Gwen, Isaac, Calvin, Thad
- \* Christy Van Baren
- \* Michelle Van Baren
- \* Eric & Tiffany Van Baren  
Luke, Jared
- \* Todd Van Baren

Dyer, Indiana



## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the First PRC of Edmonton express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Tina van den Boogaard, and her family, in the passing of her husband,

### KORS VAN DEN BOOGAARD.

May the Lord continue to give comfort by His Word and Spirit: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27a).

Rev. Michael DeVries, Pres.  
George Tolsma, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Paul and Genny Machiele in the death of Genny's brother,

### MR. JOHN DE YOUNG.

May they be comforted by God's Word, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
Dan Key, Assistant Clerk

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With praise and thanks to our covenant God, we announce the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

### HAROLD and LOIS VAN MAANEN,

on February 19, 2004.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the years they have had together and the covenant care and instruction they have given to us. Our humble prayer is that God will continue to sustain them and bless their marriage in the years to come. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- \* Evert and Jennie VanMaanen  
Stephanie, Sheila, Mark, Kevin  
Terry and Becky (Bryce)
- \* Henry and Jacque VanMaanen  
Harrison, Hannah, Louise
- \* Minerva and Roger Grevengoed  
Scott and Sara (Mackelle)  
Brad and fiancée Nanci Statema  
Amy, Michael
- \* Harlan and Clarice VanMaanen  
Hailey, Jestin
- \* Marlys and Ronald Kuiper  
Abbie, Colton
- \* Lyle and Joann VanMaanen  
Kayla, Dana, Brianna, Alexa
- \* Daryl and Gretta VanMaanen  
Alyssa, Daniel, Kaitlyn, Tyler
- \* Dennis and Melanie VanMaanen  
Morgan, Sawyer, Jordyn  
Hull, Iowa

## CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2004 - 2005 academic year should make application at the March 18, 2004 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 18 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue  
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

## GODLY LIVING IN MARRIAGE

- ◆ Priorities in Marriage
- ◆ Resolving Conflict in Marriage
- ◆ The Man's Role as Husband and Father
- ◆ The Woman's Role as Wife and Mother

Audio recordings of these four speeches are available from Trinity PRC by contacting Chuck Ensink at (616) 669 2412 or by email [chensink@iserv.net](mailto:chensink@iserv.net). You can also mail your order to Chuck Ensink at 3116 New Holland St. Hudsonville, MI, 49426. (Tapes — \$6, CDs — \$10).