Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* begins by paying tribute to a key figure in the reform movement within the Reformed church in the Netherlands in 1834, the movement known as the *Afscheiding*. That key figure is Simon van Velzen (1809-1896), who was early on a pastor in the *Afscheiding* churches and in 1854 became one of the four original faculty members of the Theological School of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland* established in Kampen. Mr. Joshua Engelsma, a third-year student in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, introduces us to Simon van Velzen in his article entitled "'Father' van Velzen." In his overview of van Velzen's life, Mr. Engelsma takes us from his early years and education, to the time when he cast his lot in with the *Afscheiding*, through the years he spent in the pastorate, which were also the formative years of the fledgling denomination, to the forty years he spent in the service of his denomination teaching in its seminary. His is a fascinating history of a theologian to whom the Protestant Reformed Churches, and all Reformed churches who have their roots in the *Afscheiding*, owe a great debt.

Complementing van Velzen's biography is Mr. Marvin Kamps' translation of van Velzen's inaugural speech, which was given on the occasion of his appointment as Rector of the Theological School in Kampen. The subject of his speech is significant: "The Value of Symbolic Documents." The contention of Prof. van Velzen was that the Reformed confessions must serve as the standard for the life and instruction of the Reformed seminary. The creeds must be authoritative in the life of Reformed churches, also in the Reformed seminaries. In addition, that instruction must endear the confessions to future Reformed ministers, so that they take the creeds with them into their pastorates in the congregations. Van Velzen's call to the seminary and the church of his day to honor the authority of the confessions is as applicable to the church of our day as it was to the church of his day. Our day is a day in which, at least in many places, the creeds are dismissed altogether. In other places the creeds have become a wax nose; officebearers subscribe to them tongue-in-check. The church

needs to be convinced that the creeds are her safety—the walls of defense that encircle her, keeping out the world and false doctrine.

Recently Miss Agatha Lubbers, long-time educator in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools, came into possession of a booklet containing the two sermons preached by Rev. Herman Hoeksema on the first Sunday after his installation as minister of the Word and sacraments in the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One of these inaugural sermons was in Dutch and the other in English. She immediately took it upon herself to translate the Dutch sermon. Struck by its message, as well as by the accompanying English sermon, she brought them to me. We gave the Dutch sermon to Mr. Marvin Kamps. Having read Miss Lubbers' translation, Mr. Kamps produced his own, which we include in this issue of *PRTJ*. The sermons are stirring! They encapsulate Hoeksema's entire ministry. And they serve as a powerful reminder to the Reformed minister today concerning the nature of his calling. You will want to read both sermons.

You will find in this issue a number of book reviews, including a special review article by Prof. David Engelsma of *Obedient Faith: A Festschrift for Norman Shepherd*. This is another book promoting the heresy of the Federal Vision, in particular the heresiarch of the Federal Vision, Dr. Norman Shepherd. May the Lord use the review to confirm those who are standing against this grievous error and convince those who are presently blinded by this deceptive error.

We hope that you will find this issue profitable intellectually and spiritually.

Soli Deo Gloria!

—RLC ●

"Father" van Velzen:
The Significance of Simon van Velzen for the Reformation of 1834

Joshua Engelsma

Introduction

The date was June 17, 1892.

An event of tremendous significance was underway in the city of Amsterdam. The two large reformatory groups in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century—the *Afscheiding* churches of 1834 and the *Doleantie* churches of 1886—were about to become one. After much debate and discussion, the union was finally going to be effected. While the strong and capable churchmen from both sides were taking their seats, suddenly a hush fell over the large crowd. All eyes turned to see a rather unusual sight: two strapping young men carrying in a chair on which was seated a very old man.

That man was Simon van Velzen.

At the time he was eighty-two years old, but he was a man highly respected by all in attendance. He was the only original "father" of the *Afscheiding* still living, and during the height of his career he had distinguished himself as a staunch defender of the truths of sovereign grace. The speakers that summer day all paid tribute to this beloved minister and professor. One man, recognizing the frailty of the brother, said,

> I do not know what it is like in heaven, but if the saints talk with each other there and are interested in the struggle and joy of the church here on earth, then you must tell your former fellow battlers what you have seen here, and their joy will be great when you cry out to them: They are one![1]

1 Hendrik Bouma, *Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834-1892*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1995), 211.

Abraham Kuyper, prominent leader of the *Doleantie* churches, added some touching words of his own: "In you, more than in any other, lies the seal of the historical unity and communion of our Churches."[2]

The delegates called for van Velzen to speak, but he was too weak to do so. Instead, his son spoke for him, saying that the elder van Velzen considered this a "fulfillment of the great wish of his heart." So captivated was the audience by this man that those seated in the balcony asked that he be moved so that they might get a better look at him. This aged minister was obviously held in the highest regard, so much so that he was known by all as "Father" van Velzen.[3]

It seems strange, then, that van Velzen remains largely unknown today. Most works on the *Afscheiding* mention him only briefly, and almost nothing has appeared in English on his life and work.[4] Where he is mentioned, his influence is largely discredited on account of his forceful character. Dutch historian Harm Bouwman wrote, "Van Velzen was a man of great gifts and abilities, a man of broad classical education, of great learning, of knowledge and study." But he went on to say that just as van Velzen's outward appearance was "long, thin, angular, and stiff, so too was he in his character. He had an inborn lust for polemics…furthermore he was unyielding [*onverzettelijk*], obstinate [*doordrijvend*], and domineering [*heerschzuchtig*]."[5] P. Y. de Jong wrote similarly, "Simon van Velzen was…a man of strong character and convictions whose zeal for the Reformed faith was not always exercised without blemish." Later, in reference to a dispute in which van Velzen was involved, de Jong said, "Van Velzen was not above seeking for himself a powerful place in the church."[6] Though

2 Bouma, *Union*, 211.

3 Bouma, *Union*, 210-1.

4 One reason why van Velzen remains largely unknown may be that toward the end of his life he destroyed almost all his personal papers and correspondence. What was left after van Velzen's death was destroyed by his son-in-law on his orders. Cf. C. Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834* (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1977), 3:132-3.

5 Harm Bouwman, *De crisis der jeugd: Eenige bladzijden uit de geschiedenis van de kerken der Afscheiding* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1914), 39.

6 Peter Y. de Jong, "The Dawn of a New Day," in *The Reformation of*

he presented a more balanced view of van Velzen, John Kromminga nevertheless concluded, "Van Velzen…had a tendency toward polemics that limited his influence."[7]

I contend that these negative evaluations of van Velzen's life and influence are incorrect. I intend to demonstrate that, despite his faults, van Velzen was one of the most significant fathers of the *Afscheiding*. He was more balanced than most assume, and, when he did enter the polemical arena, he did so out of a conviction for the truth and a love for the churches that he served. He was one of the most, if not *the* most, influential leader in this reformation movement. At best, van Velzen has been largely ignored; at worst, his character has been called into question and his influence has been minimized. Both are mistakes.

A Reformer Is Prepared (1809-1834)

Van Velzen's father, also named Simon van Velzen (1768-1833), was born and raised in the small village of Nigtevecht in the province of Utrecht. On April 28, 1799, he was joined in marriage to Neeltje Johanna Geselschap (1776-1865), a woman eight years his junior.[8] They made their home on Bloemgracht street in the bustling city of Amsterdam, in the same building where Simon operated a boarding school. His wife was the daughter of German immigrants and grew up in a very pious home environment, something she undoubtedly tried to pass along to her six children.[9]

On December 14, 1809, Neeltje gave birth to the couple's fourth

1834: Essays in Commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return, ed. Peter Y. de Jong and Nelson D. Kloosterman (Orange City, IA: Pluim Publishing, 1984), 30, 34.

7 John H. Kromminga, "'De Afscheiding'—Review and Evaluation" *Calvin Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (April 1985): 48.

8 Elton J. Bruins et al., *Albertus and Christina: The Van Raalte Family, Home and Roots* (Holland, MI: A. C. van Raalte Institute/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 208.

9 Jaap van Gelderen, *Simon van Velzen: Capita selecta*, Kamper Miniaturen 1 (Kampen: *Vereniging van Oud-Studenten van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen,* 1999), 7.

child, a son whom they named Simon after his father.[10] Being faithful members of the *Hervormde Kerk* in Amsterdam, Simon's parents raised their son in this church, and he was catechized there until his studies removed him from his parents' home. It is impossible to determine the nature of the instruction he received in these early years, but it is probably safe to assume that this instruction was tinged by the modernism rampant in the *Hervormde Kerk*.

When he reached his teens, van Velzen was sent to the local *gymnasium* in preparation for university studies. After he completed his work there in 1827, his parents enrolled their eighteen-year-old son in Amsterdam's *Athenaeum Illustre*.[11] While he was there, van Velzen became acquainted with fellow students Hendrik P. Scholte and Anthony Brummelkamp, an acquaintance that would blossom into a close friendship in later years.[12] At this time van Velzen began to express an interest in pursuing the pastoral ministry and focused his studies on theology.[13] While he may have sincerely desired to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, it was not at all uncommon in those days for young men who aspired to the ministry to be devoid of a vibrant spiritual life. Such men saw the office of minister simply as another way of making a living or of pursuing scholarly interests and nothing more.[14]

10 J. A. Wormser, *Karakter en genade: Het leven van Simon van Velzen*, vol. 4 of *Een schat in aarden vaten: "De Afscheiding" in levensbeschrijvingen geschetst* (Nijverdal: E. J. Bosch, 1916), 5. J. C. Rullmann mistakenly gives the year of his birth as 1819 (*Christelijke Encyclopaedie voor het Nederlandsche Volk*, s.v. "Velzen [Van]"), an error repeated by Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 22. F. L. Bos mistakenly gives the day of his birth as December 25 (*Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme*, s.v. "Velzen, Simon van").

11 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 9.

12 Lubbertus Oostendorp, *H. P. Scholte: Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1964), 37.

13 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 9.

14 One such young man was Abraham Kuyper, who entered the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1863. Cf. Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper:*

Van Velzen graduated from the *Athenaeum* in 1829. He took up his studies for the ministry that same year at the prestigious University of Leiden under the tutelage of such men as J. H. van der Palm, N. C. Kist, and Johannes Clarisse. van Velzen later described Clarisse as "a man, whose colossal knowledge demanded everyone's respect, whose powerful speech controlled the minds, whose charm won all hearts, and sometimes was a highly serious champion of orthodoxy and of pious people of former times."[15] Despite van Velzen's opinion of Clarisse, the theological faculty at Leiden by that time had succumbed almost entirely to the waves of enlightenment and rationalism. One historian wrote, "In fact, the whole school was controlled by a mild-mannered, polished liberalism." One of van Velzen's fellow students at Leiden, when quizzed on why he refused to attend the lectures of the professors, responded, "I do not have to be taught lying by the professors. I already know how to do that better than they."[16]

But there at Leiden, among the throngs of liberal-minded seminarians, van Velzen discovered a handful of students who were opposed to this theological liberalism and desired the "old paths" of the Reformation and of Dordt. Chief among the handful of students was H. P. Scholte, van Velzen's old friend from the *Athenaeum*. Van Velzen and others were attracted to him because of his age and maturity, and for that reason their group became commonly known as the "Scholte Club." Included in this group were such men as George F. Gezelle Meerburg and Louis Bahler. Also included in the Club was Anthony Brummelkamp, a man whose life from this time on was uniquely intertwined with van Velzen's. This group of students, with the exception of Bahler, would later form the nucleus of ministers in the *Afscheiding* churches.[17]

A Biography (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), 17, 18, 31.

15 Quoted in Jasper Vree, "The Dominating Theology Within the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk after 1815 in its Relation to the Secession of 1834," in *Breaches and Bridges: Reformed Subcultures in the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States*, ed. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, VU Studies on Protestant History 4 (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 36.

16 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 37-8.

17 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 37.

Besides skipping classes, the Scholte Club also frequented meetings led by Isaac da Costa and Baron Twent van Roosenburg, leading lights of the Reveil movement.[18] In addition, van Velzen and his comrades attended a conventicle held in the home of a "pious old grain merchant" by the name of Johannes le Feburé (1776-1843). Le Feburé taught the Bible and the Reformed faith to sizable crowds three nights every week. He undoubtedly had a hand in grounding van Velzen and the others in the Reformed faith.[19]

It was very likely at these meetings that van Velzen and the other members of the Scholte Club came into contact with the de Moen family.[20] This wealthy family consisted of a widow woman and her four children who had inherited a great deal of property in and around Leiden when their husband and father died.[21] Van Velzen and the others quickly became friends with the de Moen's son Carel, a fellow student at Leiden who would later join them as a leader in the *Afscheiding* churches.[22] Carel introduced his young friends into the de Moen household, where they were welcomed with open arms.

18 Cf. Melis te Velde's entry in *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme*, s.v. "Brummelkamp, Anthony."

19 Robert P. Swierenga and Elton J. Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century*, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America 32 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 22; Gerrit J. tenZythoff, *Sources of Secession: The Netherlands Hervormde Kerk on the Eve of the Dutch Immigration to the Midwest*, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America 17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 130-1; G. Keizer, *De Afscheiding van 1834: Haar aanleiding, naar authentieke brieven en bescheiden beschreven* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1934), 45-49; Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 39.

20 TenZythoff, *Sources of Secession*, 130.

21 Bruins, *Albertus and Christina*, 205.

22 Carel Godefroi de Moen (1811-1879) was a practicing surgeon in the city of Hattem who later became a respected minister in the *Afscheiding* churches from 1842-1879. Cf. Leonard Sweetman's editorial note in *From Heart to Heart: Letters from the Rev. Albertus Christiaan van Raalte to His Wife, Christina Johanna van Raalte-de Moen, 1836-1847* (Grand Rapids: Heritage Hall Publications, 1997), 20; Bruins, *Albertus and Christina*, 206-7.

Like the home of Le Feburé, the de Moen's home became a regular haunt of the Scholte Club. Although they enjoyed the stimulating conversation, there may have been other motives for their frequent visits. After all, Carel had three sisters.[23]

The studies of van Velzen and his friends were interrupted, however, in 1830. In that year the Belgians took up arms against the Netherlands in order to win their independence. Along with Scholte and Brummelkamp, van Velzen quickly enlisted in a local volunteer unit and marched off with the Dutch army to win back their southern lands.[24] The campaign ended rather quickly and was an utter failure for the Netherlands, for Belgium gained her independence.[25] Van Velzen and his fellow combatants returned to Leiden to resume their studies, but now with metal crosses of bravery pinned proudly to their chests.[26]

This brief incident seems to have brought about a significant change in van Velzen's life. According to Lubbertus Oostendorp, "van Velzen was now [after the war – JDE] also closer to Scholte than ever. The war had so deepened his spiritual life that while formerly he had been somewhat associated, now he became a zealous member of the group [Scholte Club – JDE]."[27]

Back at the university, van Velzen and his comrades were held in open contempt by faculty and students alike. This was due to the Club's unabashed opposition to the liberal teachings of their professors. In spite of their unpopularity, almost all the members of the group managed to graduate from Leiden before any action could be taken against them. Scholte, the eldest member of the group, was the first to do so. He was ordained into the *Hervormde Kerk* on March 17, 1833, and served the combined congregations of Doeveren and Genderen in the province of North Brabant.[28] Meerburg was next;

23 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 18.

24 Their unit was called the *Leidse Vrijwillige Jagers* (Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 6).

25 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 38.

26 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 6.

27 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 39.

28 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 42.

he was ordained on October 20, 1833, in Almkerk, North Brabant.[29] van Velzen and Brummelkamp were ordained in the following year.

The only member of the group that was denied entrance into the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk* was the youngest member, Albertus C. van Raalte. He came into contact with van Velzen during the summer of 1832, after Scholte and Meerburg had graduated and left Leiden. Van Velzen introduced van Raalte to Brummelkamp, and the three became close friends.[30] Brummelkamp wrote, "We found in that young student a wonderful addition."[31] Van Raalte was not allowed into the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk* but had to wait to be examined and declared a candidate until 1836, when the first synod of the *Afscheiding* churches was able to meet.

Van Velzen graduated from Leiden in the spring of 1834 and sat for his examination before the Provincial Church Board of South Holland on May 15.[32] According to the official records, van Velzen passed "with ample frankness" although he was told that when he matured he would have "clearer opinions" since "young men who had initially quite rigid opinions, had showed proofs of a milder view afterwards."[33]

29 J. A. Wormser and J. C. Rullmann, *Ernst en vrede: Het leven van George Frans Gezelle Meerburg*, vol. 5 of *Een schat in aarden vaten: "De Afscheiding" in levensbeschrijvingen geschetst* (Baarn: E. J. Bosch, 1919), 23.

30 Henry E. Dosker, *Levensschets van Rev. A. C. van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk: C. C. Callenbach, 1893), 3; J. A. Wormser, *In twee werelddeelen: Het leven van Albertus Christiaan van Raalte*, vol. 1 of *Een schat in aarden vaten: "De Afscheiding" in levensbeschrijvingen geschetst* (Nijverdal: E. J. Bosch, 1915), 15.

31 Quoted in Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 31.

32 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 10. The Provincial Church Board of South Holland was equivalent to the provincial synod mentioned in the Church Order of Dordt. The government of the church had been corrupted by King William I's reorganization of the church in 1816. One thing that he did was replace the broader assemblies with standing *kerkbesturen* (church boards).

33 Quoted in Vree, "Dominating Theology," in *Breaches and Bridges*, 39.

Shortly after his examination, young Candidate van Velzen was asked to fill the pulpit for the vacant congregation in the little village of Drogeham, Friesland. Van Velzen led the morning worship service and delivered an orthodox sermon that was well received by the congregation. That evening another man was scheduled to preach, so van Velzen sat in the auditorium in the elders' row. The minister preached a modernist sermon, one that contrasted so sharply with van Velzen's that many members of the congregation left during the middle of the service. It was customary after the service for the elders to shake the dominee's hand as an expression of the fact that they had no objections to his sermon. Since van Velzen was sitting with the elders, he was expected to do so as well. But when it came time to shake the man's hand, van Velzen refused. He objected to the man's liberal preaching and publicly told him so.[34]

Van Velzen's actions were polarizing. News of what he had done spread quickly, and back in Leiden a certain Rev. Lucas Egeling raised serious objections to the antics of this young upstart. On the other hand, the Drogeham congregation was deeply impressed by this orthodox man. So impressed were they that they immediately sent a call letter to him to "come over and help." Van Velzen accepted the call and began making plans to leave Leiden.[35]

However, before he could leave for Drogeham, van Velzen had to attend to other important business: marriage. His wife-to-be was none other than one of the de Moen girls. In fact, all three of the de Moen daughters married members of the old Scholte Club. The eldest daughter, Maria Willemina Tieleman, married Anthony Brummelkamp. Christina Johanna, the second daughter, married Albertus van Raalte. And the youngest of the trio, Johanna Maria Wilhelmina, was to be van Velzen's wife.[36]

On August 16, 1834, during the narrow window of time between graduation and installation, Simon and Johanna were married. Simon was twenty-four years old; his *jevrouw* was seventeen. On the same day van Velzen's close friend Brummelkamp married Johanna's oldest

34 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 10.
35 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 11.
36 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 18.

sister. This situation was not uncommon at that time for an aspiring minister. He was discouraged from marrying during his seminary days because his focus was supposed to be only on his studies. But he was strongly encouraged to marry before going into the ministry so as not to raise any suspicions.[37]

Within a few weeks after being married, van Velzen and his new bride moved from Leiden to the parsonage in Drogeham. Drogeham was a small village, boasting only 450 inhabitants. The church was correspondingly small, with only two elders and two deacons.[38] Van Velzen was ordained and installed into the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk* there on November 9, by the counselor, Rev. L. D. Westerloo.[39] Van Velzen had asked his friend Scholte to ordain him, and Scholte came to Drogeham to do so. But on Saturday night, Scholte told him, "In the morning I cannot come with you to church, because I have seceded from the Hervormde denomination."[40] That Sunday, with his

37 Van Velzen's future colleagues Hendrik de Cock, H. P. Scholte, and Albertus van Raalte followed this marriage track as well. For de Cock, cf. de Jong, "The Dawn of a New Day," 21-2. For Scholte, cf. Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 42. For van Raalte, cf. Hyma, *Van Raalte*, 35. Interestingly, this was the same advice given by Rev. Herman Hoeksema to his students in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Prof. David Engelsma, one of his former students, recalls, "Shortly after I began seminary, Hoeksema made it clear that he strongly disapproved of seminarians marrying while in school. 'It detracts from their studies.' During my last year, with a studied casualness that did not fool me, he indicated that he did not think it wise for a seminary graduate to take a charge unmarried. He spoke vaguely of the possibility of 'talk.'" Cf. David J. Engelsma, "I Remember Herman Hoeksema: Personal Remembrances of a Great Man (10)," *Beacon Lights* 50, no. 7 (July 2009): 11.

38 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 23.

39 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 11. Gerrit tenZythoff mistakenly gives the date of his ordination and installation as October 9 (*Sources of Secession*, 130).

40 J. C. Rullmann, *De Afscheiding in de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk der XIXe Eeuw*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: W. Kirchner, 1916), 187. Scholte and the congregations of Doeveren and Genderen had seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* on November 1, only a few days before van Velzen was ordained (cf.

widowed mother in the audience, van Velzen preached his inaugural sermon, choosing as his text I Cor. 9:16b: "Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"[41] This was a fitting passage, indicative of the conviction of van Velzen's heart at this time but also for the rest of his difficult ministry.

Van Velzen did not, however, remain a minister in the *Hervormde Kerk* for very long. In a little over a year's time, he would leave the mother church and throw his lot in with the churches of the *Afscheiding*.

The *Afscheiding* (1834-1835)

Before we recount van Velzen's break with the *Hervormde Kerk*, we ought to consider briefly the broader reformatory movement of which he was a part. In order to do this, it is necessary first to understand the spiritual state of the mother denomination at that time.

The *Hervormde Kerk* was the church of the Reformation in the Lowlands. It was the church of Dordt in 1618-1619. However, after the great Synod of Dordt and the victory over Arminianism, the *Hervormde Kerk* fell quickly and deeply into apostasy. She was influenced greatly by the thinking of the Enlightenment. By the early 1800s, she had succumbed almost entirely to the waves of modernism and rationalism. A further blow came in 1816 when King William I reorganized the church. Robert Swierenga explains that William I "changed church polity by creating a standing executive committee to run the church and by making delegates to all classes and synods royal appointees. Instead of the revered Dortian polity, the national church now became virtually an administrative arm of the state." He goes on to say, "Given the ever closer bond between church and state, this change meant that any future church conflict would inevitably become a threat to the political order. In one stroke the king undermined the historic national church and…further weakened the church and the nation."[42] The *Hervormde Kerk* had become, in the eyes of many, a false church. Reformation was needed.

Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 62-3).

41 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 22.

42 Swierenga and Bruins, *Family Quarrels*, 11-2. For more on the background to the *Afscheiding,* confer TenZythoff, *Sources of Secession*.

That reformation was sparked by a little congregation in the town of Ulrum, Groningen. For several years prior to the lighting of this spark, God had worked in the heart of Rev. Hendrik de Cock a love for the truths of sovereign grace and a desire to preach them to his congregation. For this he was much maligned and persecuted. Finally, on October 13, 1834, de Cock and his consistory composed an "Act of Secession or Return" in which they formally broke off ties with the *Hervormde Kerk*, declaring her to be a false church.[43]

De Cock and his congregation were soon joined by H. P. Scholte and his congregation. Scholte had been mistreated by the *Hervormde Kerk* for his orthodox stand as well as his close relationship with de Cock. On October 29, he was suspended by Classis Heusden, and shortly thereafter he and his congregation left the mother church and joined de Cock.[44]

Van Velzen did not immediately ally himself with de Cock and Scholte. In fact, he and Brummelkamp both were ordained into the *Hervormde Kerk* after Ulrum had signed the "Act of Secession." Nevertheless, the two of them were not satisfied with the state of the mother church. And they were not prepared to keep quiet.

Van Velzen expressed his convictions first of all in his preaching. His preaching stood in sharp contrast to the modernistic, moralistic homilies so prevalent in the church. Instead he proclaimed the precious truths contained in God's Word and the Reformed confessions, and this brought hundreds of spiritually-starved Dutchmen to Drogeham to be fed. One historian said, "He began his ministerial career in Drogeham, Friesland, where many hundreds came from afar to listen to his soul-stirring sermons. Often because of the multitudes services were conducted in open fields, much as in the early days of the Reformation."[45]

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43 For a translation of this significant document, cf. the translation by Homer C. Hoeksema in *Always Reforming: Continuation of the Sixteenth-Century Reformation*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 45-7. The Dutch original can be found in Keizer, *Afscheiding*, 575-6.

44 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 61-3.

45 De Jong, "The Dawn of a New Day," 30. The same thing was true

There were especially two matters about which van Velzen expressed concern. The primary issue was the Reformed confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. These sixteenth and seventeenth century creeds had been ignored for years and were largely unknown by many leaders in the church.[46] The fundamental truths contained in these documents were rejected out of hand. And such a denial was permissible thanks to the reorganization of William I in 1816. In that year the old formula of subscription used since the Synod of Dordt was modified. Donald Sinnema explains, "Instead of the declaration that the three confessional standards 'do fully agree with the Word of God,' the new version contained a weaker declaration of agreement with 'the doctrine, which, in agreement with God's Holy Word, is contained in the accepted forms of unity.'" Sinnema adds,

> There was deliberate ambiguity in the phrase, "which, in agreement with God's Holy Word," to allow greater freedom on the part of the subscribers. The phrase could be understood either as meaning that the subscriber accepted the doctrine contained in the forms of unity *because* (*quia*), or *insofar as* (*quatenus*) *it agreed with God's Word*."[47]

Van Velzen was opposed to this disregard for and disparagement

of Hendrik de Cock: "The more [de Cock] came to understand the great historic doctrines of God's sovereign and particular grace, the clearer became his sermons as they set forth salvation by grace through faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice. It is not surprising that, as word of this kind of preaching spread like wildfire through the surrounding countryside, people starving for the Bread of Life streamed to Ulrum to hear de Cock preach." Cf. Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1999), 352.

46 We are told that Hendrik de Cock, prior to his coming to Ulrum, had "never read the creeds of the Reformed Church even though he pledged to teach them faithfully by his official subscription." Cf. de Jong, "The Dawn of a New Day," 22.

47 Donald Sinnema, "The Origin of the Form of Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (November 2007): 279-80. Emphasis is Sinnema's.

of the historic Reformed confessions. He wanted the *Hervormde Kerk* to restore faithful adherence to these creeds. Before he had even graduated from Leiden, he had expressed his convictions concerning the forms of unity: "Earlier already I was heartily and in all points agreed with the confessions of the Reformed church."[48]

Not a man to shy from controversy, van Velzen decided to bring the matter of the confessions to the June 1835 meeting of Classis Dokkum in which his congregation resided.[49] According to Melis te Velde,

> The classical board consisted of five to seven men, mostly ministers, who formed a permanent body supervising…the consistories. This classical board could place its own concerns on the agenda. This top-down construction opened up the possibility of a supra-local hierarchy, which contradicted the principles of the original Reformed church order.[50]

When van Velzen arrived before the classical board, the meeting had already adjourned, and the members of this board were enjoying a fine meal together. Undeterred, van Velzen read his address defending the creeds to the group. The reception he received was far from cordial. His colleagues openly laughed at and ridiculed him. One colleague, presumably half-drunk,[51] shouted, "I'd rather have my neck wrung than subscribe to the Canons of Dordt."[52]

Although disappointed, van Velzen was not yet finished. With the help of a friend, he tried to call a meeting of all orthodox ministers

48 Simon van Velzen, *Stem eens wachters op Zions muren* in *Kompleete uitgave van de officiëele stukken betreffende den uitgang uit het Nederl. Herv. Kerkgenootschap* (Kampen: S. van Velzen Jr., 1863), 2:170.

49 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 25.

50 Melis te Velde, "The Dutch Background of the American Secession from the RCA in 1857," in *Breaches and Bridges*, 90.

51 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 25.

52 The Dutch is: *"Ik laat me liever den hals afsnijden, dan dat ik de Dordtsche Leerregels zou onderteekenen"* (cf. Rullmann, *Afscheiding*, 188). Quoted in David J. Engelsma, "The Covenant Doctrine of the Fathers of the Secession," in *Always Reforming*, 102.

in the area, but only one other man showed up.[53] Van Velzen then addressed a letter dated July 6, 1835, to the synodical board of the *Hervormde Kerk*. After making the observation that the Reformed confessions and the doctrines contained in them were rejected and hated by many ministers, van Velzen made three requests:

1. That our three forms of unity have a binding power for all who occupy the office of preacher in our Reformed Church, and accordingly all ministers be required to proclaim this doctrine.
2. That all ministers who reject the forms and thus despise the truth and love the lie be prevented from introducing their errors in our church and seducing the congregation of the Lord.
3. That the faithful servants of the Lord who openly show their devotion to the true doctrine not be reproached or excluded by the only board in the church but be protected.[54]

Eight days later, on July 14, synod responded to van Velzen and rejected his proposal.[55]

The second issue raised by van Velzen had to do with the singing of hymns. In 1807, the churches adopted a songbook that included 192 "evangelical hymns." One author said, "These hymns were deeply influenced by the spirit of the times and spoke in a very 'enlightened' way about morals, progress, and peace and blessing for virtuous people. But there was hardly any emphasis on the doctrines of grace." Not only was this hymnbook approved, but later the synodical board mandated every minister to include at least one of these hymns in every worship service.[56] Van Velzen was leery of these Arminian hymns and was especially opposed to the idea of forcing these hymns upon an

53 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 15.

54 Van Velzen, *Stem eens wachters*, in *Kompleete uitgave*, 2:183.

55 Van Velzen, *Stem eens wachters*, in *Kompleete uitgave*, 2:184-5.

56 Arie Baars, *The Secession of 1834* (Mitchell, Ontario: Free Reformed Publications, 2011), 7. Cf. also Barrett L. Gritters, "The *Afscheiding*'s Commitment to Psalm Singing," in *Always Reforming*, 81; TenZythoff, *Sources of Secession*, 50-3.

unwilling congregation.[57] The small church in Drogeham, comprised as it was of orthodox folk, was one such unwilling congregation.

Because of van Velzen's stance on these two issues, he received a visit from a committee of Classis Dokkum a week after his exchange with the synodical board. The committee wanted to discuss with him his letter to the synodical board, his refusal to use hymns, and his permitting Brummelkamp and van Raalte to preach in his congregation without using hymns. Van Velzen appeared again before a full meeting of the Classis on September 30, and on October 15 he was finally suspended by that body for six weeks. When that suspension was up, he again had to appear before Classis Dokkum, and the Classis again suspended him on December 9. The Provincial Synod of Friesland finally deposed van Velzen on January 13, 1836, and fined him 257 florins for the troubles he caused them.[58]

However, the action of the Provincial Synod was too little, too late. Van Velzen had already joined the ranks of the *Afscheiding*. With only twenty-eight members of his congregation, van Velzen seceded from the *Hervormde Kerk* on December 11, 1835, three days before his twenty-sixth birthday.[59]

In the midst of all this conflict and struggle, God blessed Simon and his wife with the birth of a son, also named Simon, on November 2, 1835.[60]

Father of the Reformation (1835-1854)

By seceding from the mother church, van Velzen and the Drogeham congregation joined a small group of churches and an even smaller band of ministers. Besides de Cock and Scholte, the only other *Afscheiding* ministers at that time were Anthony Brummelkamp and George F. Gezelle Meerburg. The former seceded on November 21,

57 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 78.

58 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 20-25.

59 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 25. D. H. Kromminga says that "Drogeham left van Velzen almost alone" (*The Christian Reformed Tradition: From the Reformation Till the Present* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943], 87).

60 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 37.

1835, and the latter on November 24.[61] Albertus van Raalte joined the ranks in 1836, when the first synod of the *Afscheiding* churches was finally able to meet and examine him.[62]

Van Velzen faced many of the same struggles that his fellow *Afscheiding* ministers did. For one thing, he was essentially responsible for the spiritual care of an entire province. Because of the growing number of churches and the shortage of ministers at this early stage of the reformation, each minister became responsible for all the *Afscheiding* churches in a particular province.[63] De Cock labored primarily in the province of Groningen; Scholte worked among the people of North and South Holland; Brummelkamp was assigned the province of Gelderland; Gezelle Meerburg had North Brabant; and van Raalte labored in Overijsel.[64]

Likewise, van Velzen tended to the needs of the entire province of Friesland, something that he could not do effectively from the small village of Drogeham. On January 1, 1836, delegates from thirteen churches in the province of Friesland met in the capital city of Leeuwarden. They convened the first Provincial Synod of Friesland and unanimously called van Velzen to be pastor and teacher for the entire province.[65] Van Velzen accepted this call and was settled in Leeuwar-

61 Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp*, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America 52 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 54.

62 At the union of the *Afscheiding* and *Doleantie* churches in 1892, Rev. W. H. Gispen said of this first synod: "That Synod was held in a warehouse on the Baangracht. Because of the possibility of persecution, it had to meet without any fanfare and in a place which the police would not easily be able to find." Quoted in Bouma, *Union*, 209.

63 In 1836, there were 137 *Afscheiding* congregations and just a handful of ministers to serve them. Cf. Martijn de Groot, *"Geruisloze verandering: Onderzoek naar de identiteitsontwikkeling van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland na de Vrijmaking* (1944-1961)" (master's thesis, Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2010), 8, http://www.hdc.vu.nl/nl/Images/groot.Masterscriptie%20Geruisloze%20verandering_tcm99-169525.pdf (accessed November 26, 2012).

64 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 81.

65 Simon van Velzen, *Gedenkschrift der Christelijke Gereformeerde*

den by the end of February.[66] Such a position involved constant travel through the countryside in order to organize new congregations and to preach and administer the sacraments for existing congregations.

Like his colleagues, van Velzen also felt the sting of persecution. The Dutch government and the old mother church went to great extremes to squash the *Afscheiding*. They billeted soldiers in the homes of the ministers and members; they levied fines on those who attended meetings and those who housed such services; they broke up meetings and assaulted the participants; they imprisoned those who were unable or refused to pay their fines. From 1835 to 1838, many of the worship services that van Velzen led were broken up by the authorities, and he was forced to pay a number of fines.[67]

The following anecdote shows not only the persecution that van Velzen faced, but also the heavy workload placed upon him. On September 18, 1836, van Velzen was asked to preach in the small Friesian town of Tjalleberd. Because that congregation did not have its own pastor, they asked van Velzen to preach twice, baptize a baby, administer the Lord's Supper, install a deacon, and perform a wedding ceremony. All in one day! During the middle of the first worship service, the authorities entered and attempted to break up the meeting, citing an ancient law from the code of Napoleon that forbade gatherings of more than twenty people. Van Velzen was forced to bounce between four smaller groups meeting in four different homes in order to perform all the duties asked of him on that day.[68]

Kerk, bij Vijftig-jarig Jubilé, 14 October 1884 (Kampen: G.Ph. Zalsman, 1884), http://www.neocalvinisme.nl/tekstframes.html (accessed December 11, 2012). Cf. also Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 37.

66 J. C. van der Does, *De Afscheiding in haar wording en beginperiode* (Delft: W. D. Weinema, 1933), 156.

67 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 33-5.

68 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 27-30; Rullmann, *Afscheiding*, 238-41. Article 291 of the Napoleonic Code stated, "No association of more than 20 persons, whose aim is to convene daily or on certain days in order to be engaged in matters of religion, literature, politics, or other subjects, may be organized except by approbation of the High Government and under such conditions as the public authority will impose upon the association. Those who live in the house where the association congregates shall not be included

Van Velzen's family was not exempt from the persecution either. Van Velzen recounted the following incident that took place early in his ministry:

> My wife with our child in her arms climbed into the wagon that stood in a place next to our dwelling. Now a wild uproar was heard. Stones, mud, clay were thrown over the fence; I saw my wife falter; the head and the clothes of our little son defiled with sludge. Then I realized the danger to my wife and child. Go back! I called…As soon as we were in the house again the windows were smashed; the uproar was increased. I sent someone to the head of the commune…to ask for protection…. The police took positions in front of the house and we were safe during the night. The next day we went to Wolvega…. As soon as we had ridden off after the noon meal…the people came into action. The shouting and casting things at the horse became so serious, that our waggoneer, completely confused, I thought, could no longer manage the horse, but we got out of the place safely. Now, however, my wife was so terrified that she had to leave the vehicle to calm herself.[69]

On May 25, 1837, shortly after this event, van Velzen's faithful, God-fearing wife Johanna died of tuberculosis after only three years of marriage.[70] She died, however, in the full assurance of faith. Her last words, recorded by her husband, were: "I believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and also me. I hear the Hallelujah of the angels."[71]

In the midst of persecution and the busyness of his work, Van Velzen married again. He was joined in marriage to Johanna Alijda Lucia van Voss on June 2, 1838. On October 17, 1839, Johanna gave birth to a stillborn child, not an uncommon occurrence at that time but a terrible loss nonetheless. Van Velzen's grief was compounded

in the number of persons meant in this article." Articles 292 and 294 added that those who were guilty of leading these associations or of housing them would be fined 16 to 200 francs. Cf. TenZythoff, *Sources of Secession*, 49.

69 Quoted in Bruins, *Albertus and Christina*, 208-9.

70 Bruins, *Albertus and Christina*, 208-9.

71 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 7-8.

by the fact that his wife also died that same day due to complications from the pregnancy.[72]

While coping with these painful personal losses and enduring persecution at the hands of the government, van Velzen was also involved in a number of internal struggles with his fellow *Afscheiding* ministers.[73]

One such struggle arose already in 1837, a mere four years after the *Afscheiding* began. From September 28 to October 11, the Synod of the *Afscheiding* churches met in the city of Utrecht with van Velzen serving as president. The spirit that prevailed at this synod was captured by Albertus van Raalte in a letter to his wife, which he wrote "in haste in a dark corner while the disputation [was] going on":

> Now something about the meeting: van Velzen was chosen as chairman and Scholte as clerk. Up to the present time there has been no discussion of the main issues. The different points of view which come to expression are numerous and are expressed frequently. I cannot disguise the fact that the difficulties often make me depressed. I feel the Lord alone can guard, protect and build the churches. In the eyes of people this is mysterious! Very mysterious indeed! O that the Lord would propitiate the sins of his people for sin is the cause of the great fractures in Zion.[74]

In another letter, van Raalte wrote,

> When I regard things from God's point of view, now and then I en-

72 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 32; Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 163. Van Velzen's second wife was the younger sister of Carel de Moen's wife, Agatha Sophia van Voss. Cf. Bruins, *Albertus and Christina*, 206.

73 The internal difficulties between these young ministers has been captured in Harm Bouwman's work *De crisis der jeugd* [ET: *The Crisis of Youth*].

74 Van Raalte to Christina Johanna van Raalte-de Moen, Utrecht, October 2, 1837, in *From Heart to Heart*, 15, 16. Van Raalte also mentioned in the letter that "Br. van Velzen does not have time to write." Oostendorp writes, "Van Velzen tells us that no one dared to leave the building, but all ate, slept, etc., together for almost two weeks" (*Scholte*, 107).

> joy relief. He does not deal with his people according to their sins. When, however, I observe desecrating disorder flowing into the church out of blindness, distrust and pride, then I become fearful…. The distrust and misunderstanding…have not been taken away. If something good emerges from this meeting that will be the result of the Lord's action.[75]

One of the knotty questions faced by this significant synod concerned the adoption of a church order. Many, including Hendrik de Cock, were in favor of adopting the old Church Order of Dordt. Scholte, on the other hand, presented a proposal that called for a thorough revision of the Church Order of Dordt. With some changes, Scholte's proposal was adopted and became known as the Church Order of Utrecht. In this new church order thirty-six of the original articles were retained, but forty-two of the articles were modified and eight were deleted. However, this decision was by no means unanimous, and many churches chose to flout the decision of the synod, President van Velzen's warnings notwithstanding.[76]

At this same synod another significant issue was raised. Van Velzen proposed that the adopted Church Order of Utrecht be prefaced by five doctrinal articles, known later as "The Dogmatic Articles of Utrecht."[77] These five articles addressed the important truths of baptism and the covenant. At that time a heated debate was being carried on between de Cock and Scholte over these doctrines, with de Cock even bringing a formal protest to synod against the views of Scholte. The official minutes record that "the President [van

75 Van Raalte to Christina Johanna van Raalte-de Moen, Utrecht, October 4, 1837, in *From Heart to Heart*, 19.

76 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 58-9; Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 110-4; Ronald L. Cammenga, "The Secession of 1834 and the Struggle for the Church Order of Dordt," in *Always Reforming*, 93-9. In the introduction to the Acts of Synod, van Velzen warned that those who did not accept the synodical decisions would be like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Cf. Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 115.

77 E. Smilde, *Een eeuw van strijd over verbond en doop* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1946), 9. For the text of these five articles, cf. Smilde, *Eeuw van strijd*, 12-3.

Velzen—JDE] admonishes de Cock to let those unfounded suspicions go and to work in fellowship for the building of Christ's body."[78] Van Velzen then proposed his five articles in order to give the churches of the *Afscheiding* direction on these significant doctrines. There was much discussion over these articles, but the synod did finally make this significant pronouncement:

> The children of believers are included in the covenant of God and his congregation with their parents by virtue of the promises of God. Therefore, synod believes with Article 17 of Head 1 of the Canons of Dordt that godly parents must be admonished not to doubt the election and salvation of their children, whom God takes away in their infancy. Therefore, synod, with the baptism form, counts the children of believers to have to be regarded as members of the congregation of Christ, as heirs of the kingdom of God and of his covenant. Since, however, the word of God plainly teaches that not all are Israel who are of Israel, and the children of the promises are counted for the seed, therefore synod by no means regards all and every one head for head, whether children or adult confessors, as true objects of the grace of God or regenerated.[79]

This debate over baptism and the covenant would not end here. It would be raised again in the churches a few years later, and once again van Velzen would be in the thick of it.

So divisive were the two issues faced in 1837 that de Cock and a number of congregations in the northern provinces left the *Afscheiding* churches. They formed a new denomination, which they called the *Kerken onder het Kruis* [Churches under the Cross]. De Cock was persuaded to return shortly thereafter, but the *Kruisgezinden* (as those churches were known) as a group did not return until 1869.[80]

Shortly after the Synod of Utrecht, van Velzen became involved in a different conflict, a debacle that became known as the "Amsterdam affair" [*Amsterdamsche twist*]. This was a controversy between van

78 Quoted in Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 109.

79 Quoted in David J. Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 11.

80 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 58-9.

Velzen and Scholte that stemmed from the decisions of the synod. After synod, van Velzen became the outspoken leader of those who wanted to return to the Church Order of Dordt, while Scholte began to drift in the direction of independentism. Oostendorp says that van Velzen "was beginning to discover that Scholte was the fly in the ointment of synodical peace."[81]

These differences quickly developed into an ecclesiastical storm. The center of this storm was the vacant church in the city of Amsterdam. On October 5, 1838, this congregation sent a call letter to Scholte. Although he was inclined to accept the call, Scholte declined it instead. He did so because he had received only 27 out of 108 votes at the congregational meeting, and this did not constitute a majority. Amsterdam held another congregational meeting on November 28, at which time Scholte received 27 votes out of a total of 68 while van Velzen received 32 votes. The men voted again and on the second ballot Scholte received 33 votes and van Velzen received 35. A call was extended, therefore, to van Velzen rather than Scholte.[82] On January 28, 1839, van Velzen sent a letter to the church in Amsterdam informing them that he had accepted their call.[83]

Problems arose after van Velzen announced his acceptance of Amsterdam's call. At this time van Velzen was the minister in Friesland, and what should have happened is that he leave there as soon as possible and move to Amsterdam. But he either did not want to leave Friesland yet or was not able to do so at that time. In any case, he did not make the move to Amsterdam. From a certain point of view the church in Amsterdam was no longer vacant, yet they continued to be without a pastor in residence.

The members of the church in Amsterdam were understandably confused. Van Velzen met with the consistory on February 15, and informed them that he was unable to move, but then he preached for them two days later and announced to the congregation that he had in

81 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 116.
82 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 118-20.
83 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 42.

fact accepted their call.[84] Two elders and two deacons quickly lodged protests with the full consistory.[85]

Things became really messy when Scholte unwisely involved himself in the matter. On April 5, Scholte sent a letter to Amsterdam's consistory inquiring as to how they were dealing with van Velzen's call.[86] At this time Scholte was still the minister in Utrecht, but eventually he became so upset by how the affair was handled that he began holding separate worship services in Amsterdam with certain members of that congregation.[87] In the meantime, van Velzen was installed as Amsterdam's pastor on June 16, 1839, by Hendrik de Cock and immediately began leading services with the rest of the congregation.[88]

The affair escalated when, on December 20, Scholte and his consistory in Utrecht charged van Velzen with preaching dry doctrines rather than the gospel. The letter they drafted said, "[Van Velzen] preaches a conglomeration of theoretical truths without the living Christ, without a regenerating Spirit, and without the living and active faith."[89] One of the elders opposed to van Velzen said that he

> does not rightly divide the Word, hides the intention of the Word, and instead of calling and attracting sinners to Christ, which is the calling of a minister of the Gospel, he buries them under a pile of doctrines which are in themselves orthodox and thus lets them go. By this the God-opposing practice is fed, to blame the lack of actual faith and the exercise of faith to a lack of grace, instead of placing the guilt upon man.[90]

These were very serious accusations. Van Velzen certainly thought so, for he responded quickly by charging Scholte with slander. The

84 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 42-3.

85 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 120. The elders were Wormser and Budde, and the deacons were Lijsen and Höveker.

86 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 44.

87 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 46.

88 Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834*, 3:132.

89 Quoted in Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 122.

90 Quoted in Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 123.

fissure between the two parties in Amsterdam and between the two fathers of the *Afscheiding* was deepening.

Van Velzen's and Scholte's colleagues were not oblivious to the seriousness of the situation. Their old friend Brummelkamp stepped in to try to resolve the affair. He called an unofficial meeting of ministers and elders in Amsterdam on March 6-7, 1840. At the meeting Scholte was unable satisfactorily to prove his assertion that van Velzen's preaching was void of the gospel. Therefore, Brummelkamp and the others demanded of Scholte: "(1) Recognition of unlawful interference in the calling at Amsterdam, (2) Retraction of unfounded accusations against van Velzen's preaching, and (3) Recognition of causing a schism by holding separate services at Amsterdam." Scholte refused to do as they asked.[91]

Eventually the whole matter came to the Synod of 1840. The delegates met in Amsterdam from November 17 to December 3, with Brummelkamp serving as president. Scholte refused to appear at synod, despite his involvement in the whole affair. Because of his refusal, synod delegated Hendrik de Cock to speak with him. De Cock did so, calling Scholte to repent of his wrongdoing in the matter with van Velzen as well as to submit himself to the Church Order of Dordt, which synod had accepted. Scholte refused, and synod took the sad step of deposing him from office.[92] With this deposition, the affair was finally resolved, but it was a sad event in the history of the *Afscheiding*.

From the time of the resolution of this affair until 1854, van Velzen labored as dominee of the church in Amsterdam. Besides his regular preaching and pastoral labors there, he also played an active role in the denomination as a whole. He was a delegate to every meeting of synod and was chosen to serve as president on three occasions.[93] Wormser wrote, "The influence of a man such as van Velzen on the [broader] gatherings which he attended was naturally always great and

91 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 124.

92 Oostendorp, *Scholte,* 125-6. This is not the place to debate the legality (or illegality) of a synod deposing a minister.

93 The three occasions were the Synods of 1837, 1843, and 1851.

not seldom overbearing."[94] Van Velzen was also placed on several committees that were called upon to carry out important work on behalf of the churches. In 1840, for example, van Velzen and three others were sent to meet with the new king, William II. Together these men convinced the king to end the persecution of the seceders and grant them freedom of religion.[95]

It was during this time that van Velzen also remarried. On September 1, 1841, he was married for the third (and final) time to Zwaantje Stratingh. The Lord blessed their marriage with eight children, although two of them died when they were very young. The six surviving children were Johanna Neeltje, Margaretha, Jacobus, Joannes, Geertruida Maria, and Jurrien Hendrik. Zwaantje died in 1872, when her husband was sixty-three years old. He lived the last twenty-four years of his life as a widower.[96]

Kampen (1854-1889)

A major milestone in the history of the *Afscheiding* churches as well as in the life of van Velzen was the establishment of the seminary in Kampen in 1854.

The matter of the preparation of prospective ministers weighed heavily on the churches from the beginning. All the fathers of the *Afscheiding* received their theological training in liberal seminaries—de Cock at Groningen and van Velzen and the others at Leiden—but this was clearly not desirable for the churches going forward. Due to the shortage of ministers in the early years, the *Afscheiding* congregations were forced to rely on lay preachers (*oefenaars*). But this was not satisfactory either, because many of these men were uneducated and untrained.[97] Van Velzen in particular was opposed to the use of these lay preachers:

94 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 55.

95 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 64. The three other men were Hendrik de Cock, Anthony Brummelkamp, and P. M. Dijksterhuis.

96 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 32.

97 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 54. Sheeres relates that one lay preacher, Pieter Kornelis Radema of Burum, Friesland, could not even write (n. 6).

> The situation worsened to such an extent that in 1838 Simon van Velzen, in an article in the *De Reformatie*, strongly urged that no untrained pastors be allowed to shepherd a congregation. Or, in the event they were chosen, to refrain from preaching themselves, but instead to read a sermon prepared by an ordained minister.[98]

The first synod of the *Afscheiding* churches in 1836 dealt with this question of *oefenaars* and decided not to ordain them, despite the great need for preachers.[99]

Leery of lay preachers, van Velzen and his colleagues made it their practice in the early years of the reformation to take young men under their wing. Aspirants to the ministry would receive their training under the private tutelage of one of these fathers rather than in the liberal universities. This instruction basically consisted of a thorough study of Aegidius Francken's *Kern der Christelijke Leer* [*Kernel of Christian Doctrine*].[100] Hendrik de Cock assumed responsibility for the students in Groningen until his death in 1842, at which time Tamme Foppens de Haan assumed this role. Another training center was located in Hoogeveen, where Wolter A. Kok gave instruction to students. These two schools in Groningen and Hoogeveen trained about seventy-five percent of students prior to 1854. Scholte taught some students in Utrecht, and Brummelkamp and van Raalte collaborated to train students in Arnhem.[101] While this situation kept the churches free from the errors espoused at Leiden and its ilk, the arrangement was not ideal. Busy pastors were burdened with the additional work of training these aspirants, and there was no uniformity in theological instruction.

Early synods of the *Afscheiding* took steps to address this problem. The Synod of 1846 in Groningen called T. F. de Haan to take over all

98 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 55, n. 7. The reference is to van Velzen's article *"Brief van eenen leeraar aan de Christelijke Gereformeerde Gemeente in Nederland," De Reformatie*, 3:336-58.

99 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 55-6.

100 Lammert J. Hulst, *Drie en zestig jaren prediker: Gedenkschriften van Ds. Lammert J. Hulst* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Sevensma, 1913), 22.

101 Te Velde, "The Dutch Background," in *Breaches and Bridges*, 86-7.

theological instruction in Groningen and Friesland.[102] In 1849, the issue came up again at synod and three men were chosen as professors: George F. Gezelle Meerburg, T. F. de Haan, and Simon van Velzen. When it received word of this decision, the consistory of the church in Amsterdam objected to van Velzen's nomination, claiming that he was too important to their congregation for him to leave and teach in the seminary.[103]

Despite these early efforts, no concrete solution materialized. The issue was finally resolved by the Synod of 1854 in Zwolle. On July 15, synod voted to establish their own seminary in the small town of Kampen. Out of a gross list of thirteen ministers,[104] four were to be chosen as the first professors. Van Velzen was chosen unanimously, along with Anthony Brummelkamp and T. F. de Haan. The fourth man chosen by synod was Jan Bavinck, father of Herman Bavinck, noted Dutch theologian and future professor at Kampen and the Free University in Amsterdam. Jan Bavinck declined the position, and in his place was chosen Helenius de Cock, son of Hendrik de Cock.[105]

Van Velzen bade farewell to the congregation in Amsterdam on November 26, 1854. He preached two farewell sermons that day: one on Rev. 22:10b and the other on Eph. 3:14-21.[106] He had been

102 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 85. Wormser informs us that de Haan was especially gifted in Hebrew and Aramaic (*Karakter en genade*, 85).

103 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 96-7.

104 The men were J. Bavinck, A. Brummelkamp, H. de Cock, P. Dijksterhuis, T. F. de Haan, G. W. van Houten, F. A. Kok, W. A. Kok, G. F. Gezelle Meerburg, P. J. Oggel, H. G. Poelman, D. Postma, and S. van Velzen. Cf. Achttiende Sessie, Art. 5 of *Handelingen van de Synode, 1854* in *Handelingen en verslagen van de Algemene Synoden van de Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk (1836-1869)* (Houten/Utrecht: Den Hertog, 1984), 613.

105 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 114-6; Negentiende Sessie, Art. 3 of *Handelingen van de Synode, 1854* in *Handelingen en verslagen*, 614. Ron Gleason mistakenly says that Helenius de Cock was unanimously chosen on the first ballot by Synod and that T. F. de Haan was not elected (*Herman Bavinck*, 22-4). In actuality, de Haan was voted in on the first ballot whereas de Cock was chosen later, after Jan Bavinck declined the position.

106 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 118.

their pastor for over fourteen years, but now left to take up his work in Kampen.

The doors of the seminary at Kampen finally opened on December 6, 1854, with four professors and thirty-seven enrolled students.[107] Van Velzen was chosen to teach French, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in the literary department of the seminary. In the theological department, he was the professor of Ethics, Natural Theology, and Church History, a position he held until 1882. Van Velzen also was the professor of preaching until 1891—two years *after* he officially retired—and the librarian and archivist for the churches and the theological school.[108]

During his tenure at Kampen, van Velzen did not escape the controversies that plagued the churches of the *Afscheiding*. On a number of occasions he was thrust onto the foreground to explain and defend the truths of Scripture and the confessions.

After the beginning of the reformation, the *Afscheiding* churches slowly began to separate into two parties or wings: the northern party (called the *Groninger richting*) led by de Cock and van Velzen, and the southern party (called the *Gelderse richting*) led by Brummelkamp and van Raalte. Robert Swierenga argues that van Velzen and the northern party "defended the doctrine, liturgy, and polity of Dort as biblically grounded; they were strongly traditional Calvinists who stressed the need for Christian schools and catechetical instruction of the youth, given the 'Godless influence' in the public schools." On the other hand, the southern wing, heavily influenced by Brummelkamp, was "more broad-minded, inclusive, and even-tempered; it stressed experiential piety and evangelism to the point that some charged them with Arminian leanings." "The northern faction had

107 Hulst, *Drie en zestig jaren prediker*, 23; Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 85.

108 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 34; W. de Graaf, *Een monument der Afscheiding: De Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1854-1954* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955), 56. Lammert Hulst claims that van Velzen was first chosen to teach dogmatics, but certain issues caused the curatorium to give this department to Helenius de Cock a few years after the start of the school (Hulst, *Drie en zestig jaren prediker*, 23).

steel in their bones," Swierenga concludes, "while the southern party had rubber."[109]

One of the issues that divided these two parties was the so-called "well-meant offer of the gospel."[110] One outspoken defender of the well-meant offer was Rev. Jan R. Kreulen. Kreulen (and others) claimed that in the preaching there is "a well-meant offer of the grace of God in Christ to all who live under the gospel, with the purpose that they all would accept and obtain possession of that salvation, only on the ground of that offer which comes to them as sinners."[111] He went on to say that this well-meant offer is "a declaration made by the truthful and holy God and that he earnestly, truthfully, and well-meaningly goes out offering his grace in Christ to all who live under the preaching of the gospel, without deceit, insincerity, and dissembling."[112]

The introduction of this well-meant offer of the gospel into the churches of the *Afscheiding* was due primarily to Anthony Brummelkamp. Beginning already in 1846, Brummelkamp and many others in the southern party essentially separated from the core group of the *Afscheiding*. It was understood by all that two different groups existed: the "Van Velzian" or "strict-Reformed" party and the "Brummelkampian" or "Semi-Arminian" party.[113] Brummelkamp remained outside the core group of the *Afscheiding* until the Synod of 1854 mended ties with him. This relationship was cemented by the formation of the theological school at Kampen

109 Swierenga and Bruins, *Family Quarrels*, 33-4.

110 Cf. Herman Hanko, "The *Afscheiding* and the Well-Meant Gospel Offer," in *Always Reforming*, 74-8.

111 C. Veenhof, *Prediking en uitverkiezing: Kort overzicht van de strijd, gevoerd in de Christelijk Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk tusschen 1850 en 1870, over de plaats van de leer der uitverkiezing in de prediking* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1959), 46. Quoted in David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the "Well-Meant Offer" of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994), 105-6.

112 Veenhof, *Prediking en uitverkiezing*, 47. Quoted in Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 106.

113 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 90.

and the request for Brummelkamp to be one of the first professors there.[114]

But problems sprang up at Kampen almost immediately because of the teachings of Brummelkamp. A protest was lodged with the Synod of Leiden in 1857 against his preaching of the well-meant offer. Although synod took no action against Brummelkamp, it did feel the need to declare that the Reformed confessions "rejected universal atonement," an idea implied in Brummelkamp's teaching.[115]

Van Velzen opposed this position of his friend and colleague. Writing in *De Bazuin* in 1858, van Velzen noted, "It is the great question upon which everything here depends, 'What does one understand by the general offer?'"[116] He then explained how the term "offer" ought to be properly understood,

> Does the word "offer" then mean that God promises to bestow grace and salvation upon all who come under the preaching of the gospel? Absolutely not! We learned that God promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe, not to all who come under the preaching of the gospel…. [The offer of Christ in the gospel means] that Christ is proclaimed in the gospel as the only, all-sufficient Savior, and thus as the only object of faith in order to be able rightly to know Him, and in order to take refuge in Him unto salvation. This proclamation must go out to all men.[117]

Van Velzen went on to say,

> But if one adds to this, "and that He promises to all to whom the gospel's doctrine of salvation is preached, to bestow (on them) grace and salvation," then surely no one who has some little esteem for the

114 Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 109-13.

115 Art. 69 of *Handelingen van de Synode, 1857* in *Handelingen en verslagen*, 684. Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 106.

116 Veenhof, *Prediking en uitverkiezing*, 54. Quoted in Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 106.

117 Veenhof, *Prediking en uitverkiezing*, 55-6. Quoted in Nelson D. Kloosterman, "The Doctrinal Significance of the Secession of 1834," in *The Reformation of 1834*, 40.

> Word of God can agree with such an opinion even in the slightest. What? God promises to all to whom the gospel's doctrine of salvation is preached, that He shall bestow (on them) grace and salvation? He would thus promise and not fulfill His promise, as we see the evidence in numberless persons who remain unconverted under the preaching. This opinion is denial of God's truth. Nothing more about this needs to be said.[118]

Van Velzen was involved in another serious doctrinal dispute during his years at Kampen. This time the controversy focused on the doctrine of the covenant of grace.[119] In 1861, two ministers in the denomination—Jan R. Kreulen and Klaas J. Pieters—wrote a work entitled *De kinderdoop* [*Infant Baptism*],[120] in which they introduced into the churches the doctrine of a conditional covenant. They defended a covenant that is cut loose from election: "Let us then regarding Baptism forget about eternal election and establish that the promise of the covenant is bestowed and offered as the revealed counsel of God and refers to every baptized [child] in the visible church without any exception."[121] In keeping with this view, they also defended the notion of conditions in the covenant:

> The cause why this is the case [namely, that the covenant promises go unfulfilled most of the time] must absolutely not be sought in this, as if on God's part the promises were given to the one and not to the other. But the cause is found in this, that the divine promises are not given, signified, and sealed unconditionally in Baptism.[122]

118 Veenhof, *Prediking en uitverkiezing*, 54-5. Quoted in Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 107.

119 For a more in-depth treatment of this controversy, cf. Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 100-36; and Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*, 9-14.

120 The full title is *De kinderkoop volgens de beginselen der Gereformeerde Kerk in hare gronden, toedieningen en praktijk* (Franeker: T. Telenga, 1861).

121 Pieters and Kreulen, *De kinderdoop*, 48. Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 109.

122 Pieters and Kreulen, *De kinderdoop*, 48. Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 112.

The view of the covenant defended by Pieters and Kreulen was never officially rejected by the churches of the *Afscheiding*. A protest against their teaching was lodged with the Synod of Franeker in 1863. Synod made clear that it did not think the covenant conception of the two ministers was "in all respects the most correct expression of the sentiments of the Reformed Church." Despite its misgivings, synod nevertheless rejected the protest on the table and declared that it was "not able to condemn the brothers [Pieters and Kreulen] as being in conflict with the confessions of the Church."[123]

Van Velzen was present at that meeting of synod in an advisory role. He disapproved of the decision and made sure that his objection to it was recorded in the minutes.[124] This is not surprising, because van Velzen had already made his view on this matter clear several years before. At the Synod of Leiden in 1857, besides dealing with the issue of the well-meant offer in the preaching of Brummelkamp, van Velzen also had to answer his brother-in-law's position on the covenant.

E. Smilde summarizes van Velzen's position in 1857 on covenant and election thus: "…Van Velzen, on the basis of Rom. 9, held to the close connection between the covenant of grace and *election*.…The two are not to be separated in his opinion. This is not surprising to us. It is well-known that he held firmly to the truth of election." Van Velzen also "strongly denied—with appeal to Rom. 9—that in the much-discussed expression of the first question for baptism ['sanctified in Christ'—JDE] it is certain that all children *head for head* will inherit salvation. Rather, the form speaks in the first question not of some child in particular but of our children generally." Smilde adds, "After an appeal to *the judgment of charity* with respect to adult believers, [Van Velzen] writes: So also do we hold the children of believers as sanctified in Christ, until the contrary is seen from their conduct."[125]

123 Art. 26 of *Handelingen van de Synode, 1863* in *Handelingen en verslagen*, 829-30. Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 128.

124 Art. 26 of *Handelingen van de Synode, 1863* in *Handelingen en verslagen*, 829-30; Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 128.

125 Smilde, *Eeuw van strijd*, 31-2. Emphasis is Smilde's. Smilde refers to two articles written by van Velzen in *De Bazuin* on August 7 and 14, 1857.

In response to Pieters and Kreulen, van Velzen again conveyed his objections in writing on the pages of *De Bazuin*. He condemned the covenant conception of his two colleagues, and in its place he taught an unconditional covenant with the children of believers, a covenant governed by God's sovereign decree of election.

> The covenant of grace and our covenant relation with God in Christ have their origin and their ground in this covenant of redemption between God and Christ. From this proceeds the beginning, continuance, and end of the salvation of men. Before one existed, before the gospel was preached to him, it was already decreed and arranged in this covenant when he would be born, when and by what means he would be delivered [from sin], how much grace, comfort, and holiness, how much and what kind of strife and cross he would have in this life—all of this was decreed and comes to each one from this covenant. The elect have then, on the one hand, to do nothing and let the Lord work…. By the power of this covenant, the Lord Jesus is the one who carried out the salvation of the elect.[126]

> Here a matchless love reveals itself, which surpasses all understanding. In this covenant [of redemption in eternity], to be known and thought of; to be given by the Father to the Son; to be written by the Son in His book; to be an object of the eternal, mutual delight between the Father and Christ to save you—that is blessedness! that is a wonder! Here was no foreseen faith, no good works, by which the parties were moved to think of certain persons in this covenant. Here was no necessity, no constraint, but only eternal love and sovereignty. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).[127]

In a subsequent issue of *De Bazuin*, van Velzen concluded with these words:

> It is easy to perceive that this opinion [of a conditional covenant—JDE] must have great influence on the preaching and that by necessary

126 Simon van Velzen, *"Het verbond der verlossing," De Bazuin* (January 20, 1865). Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 117.

127 Van Velzen, *"Het verbond der verlossing."* Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 118.

> logical consequence the idea of the covenant of redemption, election and reprobation, limited atonement, and such truths [the doctrines of grace as confessed in the Canons of Dordt] must undergo enormous change.[128]

In addition to his work at the theological school and the efforts he expended in the defense of sound doctrine, van Velzen was also involved in the work of the churches more broadly. He wrote frequently in *De Bazuin*, attended all the meetings of synod as an advisor, and was frequently placed on committees to carry out significant work on behalf of the denomination. He was involved, for example, in extended discussions with the *Kruisgezinden* about reunion. It was partly due to his work that this group returned to the *Afscheiding* churches at the Synod of Middelburg in 1869.[129]

Van Velzen continued to teach full-time at Kampen until 1882. In that year there was a significant reorganization of the theological school by the Synod of Zwolle. There was, in a certain sense, a changing of the guard, as the old "fathers" (van Velzen, Brummelkamp, and de Cock) made way for a new, younger group of professors. This new group consisted of Herman Bavinck, D. K. Wielenga, and Lucas Lindeboom, all of whom were born several years after the start of the *Afscheiding*. At this time van Velzen handed over the department of church history to Wielenga but continued in his role as professor of preaching until 1891.[130] It is worth noting as well that de Cock was forced out of the dogmatics chair in favor of Bavinck who was much younger but quite brilliant.[131]

128 Van Velzen, editorial comments on K. J. Pieters, *"Eenige opmerkingen over de 69e vr. en antw. van den Katechismus," De Bazuin* (May 19, 1865). Quoted in Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," 121.

129 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 52.

130 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 34.

131 Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 109-110. Originally T. F. de Haan was chosen to teach dogmatics, but he was forced into retirement on September 1, 1860, by the Synod of Hoogeveen because he was unable to work peacefully with the other three professors. De Cock was then made the professor of dogmatics, a position he held until the arrival of Bavinck. Cf. Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 127-30.

From the opening of Kampen in 1854 until the day he received emeritation in 1889—a span of some thirty-five years—van Velzen served the churches of the *Afscheiding* by preparing young men to be faithful pastors and teachers. It is hard to overestimate the effect that he had on these churches by his instruction of aspirants to the gospel ministry. One recent historian has come to the same conclusion: "His [van Velzen's] chief work lay in the classroom where he tried to form good preachers."[132] A similar statement is found in a commemorative book on Kampen: "Especially in the last capacity [professor of preaching—JDE] was he in his strength. He was himself an excellent preacher. 'As an orator he has inspired enthusiasm, awakened a warm spirit in many hearts, and poured soothing oil on stinging wounds.'"[133]

The Last Years (1889-1896)

After he became emeritus in 1889, van Velzen did not stop working; he labored as much as an eighty-year-old man is able.

He was especially involved in the efforts to bring about a union between the churches of the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie*.[134] While the *Afscheiding* had separated from the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1834 and had existed independently for a number of years, the *Doleantie* consisted of those who had remained in the mother church. But, led by Abraham Kuyper, these "aggrieved ones" (*doleerende*) finally saw the apostasy in the *Hervormde Kerk* and left in 1886. However, they did not join with the *Afscheiding* churches but instead formed their own denomination. Nevertheless, both groups quickly came to realize that they had much in common and meetings were held to discuss unification.

In these initial discussions "Father" van Velzen (as he was called) played an important role. The first meeting to be held between the two groups was on October 6, 1887, in the city of Utrecht. Representing the *Doleantie* group were F. L. Rutgers, W. van den Bergh, and Abraham

132 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 61.

133 De Graaf, *Een monument*, 56. De Graaf does not indicate the source of his quotation.

134 For a complete treatment of this union, cf. Bouma, *Union*.

Kuyper. Present for the *Afscheiding* churches were Helenius de Cock, D. K. Wielenga, and Simon van Velzen. Because he was the oldest man in attendance at seventy-seven years of age and because of the tremendous respect that the other deputies had for him, van Velzen was chosen as chairman. The fruit of this first meeting was a set of twelve theses concerning the union that would serve as a springboard for future discussion.[135]

The two parties met for a second time in Kampen on November 17, 1887, and again on February 17, 1888, in Amsterdam, with van Velzen chairing both meetings.[136] One issue that was raised at these meetings was the basis for union. Kuyper had proposed a set of thirty-one theses for union that was very speculative. In response, van Velzen and Lucas Lindeboom proposed an alternative set of theses which "proceeded from the assumption that the discussions must take place only on the basis of the Reformed Confessional documents and by way of the clear statements within them." The two were convinced that "if there is to be any hope of blessing over the union, we must first return to Scripture and the Confession and from there seek the point and best manner for finding a true organic unity."[137] Van Velzen appealed to Kuyper and said, with tears in his eyes, "Beloved brother, we have our glorious, clear, tested Confession, and we must stick to it. Only on that basis may union be sought." Van Velzen's appeal was successful; Kuyper withdrew his proposed plan of union and agreed to seek union on the basis of the confessions.[138]

After these initial meetings, van Velzen did not participate directly in any further discussions. Due to his advanced age and increasing health problems, he was forced to watch from the sidelines.[139]

Despite many hurdles—not least of which was the unresolved issue of whether seminary instruction should take place at Kampen or the Free University—union between the two groups was finally realized on June 17, 1892. Not wanting to miss this historic event, the

135 Bouma, *Union*, 41-2.
136 Bouma, *Union*, 44, 54.
137 Quoted in Bouma, *Union*, 55-6.
138 Bouma, *Union*, 57-8.
139 Cf. Bouma, *Union*, 62.

aged van Velzen arranged to have himself carried into the meeting in his chair. After receiving respectful welcomes from W. H. Gispen[140] and Abraham Kuyper, the two presidents of the meeting, van Velzen spoke through his son of his thankfulness to God for this "fulfillment of the great wish of his heart." The united group—the *Gereformeerde Kerken*—then sang "Father" van Velzen's favorite psalm, stanza two of Psalm 40:[141]

> A new and joyful song of praise
> He taught my thankful heart to raise;
> And many, seeing me restored,
> Shall fear the Lord and trust;
> And blest are they that trust the Lord,
> The humble and the just.[142]

Four years later van Velzen lay on his deathbed. Prior to his death, while speaking to his children, van Velzen expressed a desire only to be "with my books," a sentiment that warms the heart of any minister/theologian. But he spoke to his children of something more precious than his books; "*Wonderbare genade*! *Wonderbare genade*! [Wonderful grace! Wonderful grace!]," was all that he could say.[143]

On April 3, 1896, Good Friday, God called Simon van Velzen to

140 Interestingly, the Rev. Gispen received his catechetical instruction as a young boy from van Velzen while the latter was minister of the church in Amsterdam (Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 35).

141 Bouma, *Union*, 209-11.

142 Psalter # 111, stanza 2, from *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*, rev. ed. [PRC] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 94. The Dutch original is: *"Hij geeft m'opnieuw een danklied tot Zijn eer, Een lofzang. Velen zullen 't zien, En God eerbiedig hulde bien, Hem vreezen, en vertrouwen op den Heer. Wel hem, die 't Opperwezen Dus kinderlijk mag vreezen, Op Hem vertrouwen stelt, En, in gevaar, geen kracht Van ijd'le trotschaards wacht, Van leugen, of geweld."* (Cf. *Het boek der Psalmen bevens eenige gezangen* [Leeuwarden: A. Jongbloed, n.d.], 68.)

143 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 55; Wormser, *Karakter en genade*, 173.

his eternal home at the age of eighty-six. His body was laid to rest five days later, on April 8.[144]

Significance

"Father" van Velzen was one of the most important figures in the history of the *Afscheiding*. He was convicted of the necessity for church reform and committed to purity of doctrine, but was also ecumenical in the good sense of the term. It is a mistake, therefore, to portray van Velzen as a narrow-minded, obstinate, and domineering figure who had, as a result, very little influence. The analysis of W. de Graaf is correct:

> He was a man who desired to maintain, defend, and develop the old Reformed theology. He held fast the line of the Reformation without deviating an inch. He succeeded after more than ten years of struggle [to start a seminary—JDE] to make this mark upon the churches of the Afscheiding…. A man like van Velzen was indispensable at that time…. Thus he served as a rich blessing for the School and the Churches. Not incorrectly have some called him the Calvin-figure of the School.

Interestingly, de Graaf notes also that one of van Velzen's students found him to have "an easy, humorous personality."[145] It is not too much to say then, as one man has, that

> Van Velzen was the soundest, firmest, and most fiery of the ministers of the Secession. It is this kind of advocacy of the Reformed faith, particularly the sovereignty of grace, and this kind of Reformed minister that make the agony of a Secession or a *Doleantie* every 50 or 100 years unnecessary.[146]

144 Van Gelderen, *van Velzen*, 56. Wormser mistakenly gives the day of his death as April 8, but April 8 was a Wednesday, not a Friday, and was actually the day of his burial (*Karakter en genade*, 174).

145 De Graaf, *Een monument*, 57.

146 David J. Engelsma, review of *Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834-1892* by Hendrik Bouma, *Standard Bearer* 72, no. 9 (February 1, 1996): 214. Engelsma's statement is a response to P. Y. de Jong's comments that

This is not to say that van Velzen was blameless in his dealings with others or that he was always an easy person to get along with. It does affirm, however, the significant position he held in the *Afscheiding* churches.

The significance of this man lies, in the first place, in the fact that he was a reformer of the church of Jesus Christ.[147]

Beginning already in his days as a student at Leiden and continuing during his first months in the ministry, van Velzen came to recognize that the *Hervormde Kerk* had long before turned down the road of apostasy. He was convinced that the mother church manifested not the marks of the true church but rather the marks of the false church as set forth in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. His conscience would not allow him to remain in such a church, but he desired to reform the church according to the standard of Scripture and the historic Reformed confessions.

As a true reformer of the church, van Velzen did not immediately leave the *Hervormde Kerk* when he saw the rank apostasy. Instead, he initially tried to bring about reform from within the corrupt mother church. This is evident from the striking fact that van Velzen did not immediately join the ranks of the *Afscheiding*. He was ordained into the ministry *after* de Cock and Scholte had already separated themselves from the church, and he continued to serve in the *Hervormde Kerk* for over a year after his ordination. During that time he brought proposals to classis and synod demanding a return to the foundations of the confessions. Albertus van Raalte, the brother-in-law of van Velzen, once said, "[F]or myself and the ministers Brummelkamp and van Velzen, with whom I was closely acquainted, I could testify that all of us would ever so gladly have continued working quietly in the Hervormde Kerk."[148]

Only when the mother church refused to allow reform and uncer-

appear in Bouma's book.

147 For van Velzen's defense of the reformation, cf. Simon van Velzen, "The Apology of the Ecclesiastical Secession in the Netherlands, or A Letter to Mr. G. Groen van Prinsterer regarding His Opinions Concerning the Secession and the Secessionists," trans. Marvin Kamps, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (April 2012): 30-67.

148 Quoted in Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 40.

emoniously cast him out did van Velzen join the *Afscheiding*. Only then did he throw himself into the work of re-forming the church by forming a new institute. In this work of reformation, van Velzen strove to build the church upon the foundation of God's Word as summarized in the Reformed creeds. And as this denomination grew, he strove just as mightily to keep the churches on this foundation.

In this light we can better understand the character of the man. He was undoubtedly a very fiery personality and firm in his convictions. He often directed these qualities toward the reformation and preservation of the church, but there were certainly times as a young man, especially in the Amsterdam affair, where he exercised his zeal in a sinful way. However, despite his flaws, van Velzen was driven by an earnest love for Christ's church and a desire for the glory of God. Besides, it seems as if reformers are not always the most pleasant of people. Although he writes concerning Franciscus Gomarus, what one church historian says is true of van Velzen as well:

> We need not always approve of the way in which they [stubborn defenders of the faith such as Gottschalk, Augustine, Athanasius, Calvin, Gomarus—and van Velzen!—JDE] did things (although we must take a long and hard look at ourselves in this respect), but we ought to thank God for them, for they were men of courage and conviction who fought for truth and right against all odds. To concentrate on their weaknesses and foibles, so as to condemn their defense of the faith, is to be unfaithful to the truth. To look beyond personalities and weigh all in the light of Scripture is to be faithful. To fight is the courage of faith. May God grant men like these to the church today, even if they sometimes have difficult personalities. The church needs more than nice men.[149]

In the second place, van Velzen is significant because he was a true churchman.

He was not an ivory-tower theologian but a man who loved and labored on behalf of the church of Jesus Christ. Although he supported the Church Order of Utrecht in 1837, he quickly changed his mind and was the driving force behind the adoption of the Church Order

149 Hanko, *Portraits*, 321.

of Dordt in 1840. He applied the historic Church Order not only to the individual congregations that he served but also to the broader assemblies. He maintained the real, binding authority of the classis and synod. And he was repeatedly delegated to these assemblies or invited to attend as a seminary advisor. During his lifetime he missed only one synod, the Synod of Leeuwarden in 1891, and that because of old age and sickness. He was chosen as President of Synod three times (1837, 1843, and 1851) and served on a number of committees that carried out the work of the churches in common.

Van Velzen also had a concern for the church of Christ beyond the walls of his own denomination. In his biography of H. P. Scholte, Lubbertus Oostendorp said that Scholte's background "lent a broad, international, interdenominational touch so obviously missing in de Cock and van Velzen."[150] Such a statement does not harmonize with the facts, however. Van Velzen was interested in other churches and denominations. He desired official ties with the fledgling Christian Reformed Church, even when his colleagues refused.[151] He was influential in bringing back the *Kruisgezinden* in 1869. He favored visits to the assemblies of Reformed and Presbyterian churches in other lands. He called for union with the *Doleantie* and labored to make this a reality. John Kromminga was correct, therefore, when he wrote, "Furthermore, he [van Velzen] emerges as a consistent and fervent proponent of a sort of ecumenicity."[152] Van Velzen was not the narrow-minded man he is so often portrayed to be.

Third, van Velzen is significant as a Reformed theologian.

He is generally regarded as the outstanding theologian of the fathers of the *Afscheiding*. He was thoroughly orthodox, a staunch Calvinist, and the epitome of the northern party characterized as having "steel in their bones."[153] He was an ardent defender of

150 Oostendorp, *Scholte*, 21.

151 Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America: Its History, Schools, Missions, Creed and Liturgy, Distinctive Principles and Practices and Its Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Eastern Ave. Book Store, 1923), 66.

152 Kromminga, "'De Afscheiding'— Review and Evaluation," 48.

153 Swierenga and Bruins, *Family Quarrels*, 34.

the truths of sovereign grace as they are found in the Canons of Dordt.

The fact that he was such a significant theologian was especially evident from two controversies in which he was involved. The first was the debate with Brummelkamp over the well-meant offer of the gospel. Van Velzen saw this teaching as an attack on the truth of the atonement and felt compelled to warn against it. Although Brummelkamp was his brother-in-law and close friend, van Velzen's primary concern was for the truth and defense of sound doctrine for the sake of the church.

The other important controversy was with his colleagues K. J. Pieters and J. R. Kreulen over the place of the children of believers in the covenant of grace. Here too van Velzen saw it necessary to speak out against his fellow ministers because of the threat that their teaching posed to the livelihood of the churches whom he loved. He opposed the teaching of a conditional covenant as being unscriptural and unconfessional and upheld the truth of the unconditional covenant. Some might criticize van Velzen for speaking so vehemently against his colleagues, but he saw the magnitude of the issues. He knew that the confessional orthodoxy of the churches was at stake. He was willing to speak out, not because he took delight in combating his brothers, but because he had a love for the church and a desire to see her remain faithful to God's Word.

On this point van Velzen can speak to Reformed churches today. The conditional covenant theology of Pieters and Kreulen has been taken up and developed by the proponents of the Federal Vision. Van Velzen's fear that this covenant conception would result in the rejection of such fundamental doctrines of grace as election and limited atonement has been realized in this movement. The remedy is a strong dose of van Velzen's theology—the biblical, confessional doctrine of the unconditional covenant governed by election.[154]

Finally, the significance of van Velzen lies in the fact that he exerted as much influence as (or more than) any of the other fathers of the *Afscheiding*.

154 Cf. Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine," and Engelsma, *Covenant and Election*.

In the ways listed above—as reformer, churchman, and theologian—van Velzen had a tremendous impact on the churches in the Netherlands and in America. The influence of most of the other fathers of the *Afscheiding*, however, was more limited. Hendrik de Cock was the unquestioned leader in the beginning, but he died at a young age in 1842. George F. Gezelle Meerburg did not exert much influence, and he too died young in 1855. More influential was H. P. Scholte, but he fell out of favor with the churches, grew more radical in his thinking, and finally left the Netherlands in 1847 to establish an independent church in Pella, IA. The influence of Albertus van Raalte was limited as well because in 1846 he too emigrated to America and founded the small colony of Holland, MI. The only other father to have a significant impact on the churches was van Velzen's close friend Anthony Brummelkamp. Like van Velzen, he was involved in all the major events in the history of the Afscheiding, dying at an old age in 1888. But the influence of Brummelkamp was not always positive. For one thing, he separated himself from the fellowship of the churches for a number of years, and, when he finally returned, his influence was felt negatively on account of his promotion of the well-meant offer of the gospel. Although not truly a father of the *Afscheiding*, mention can also be made of Helenius de Cock. He too exerted an influence upon the churches, but not in an altogether positive way. He promoted the idea of the well-meant offer of the gospel and stood in line with Pieters and Kreulen in the debate over the covenant.

Compared with all these men, van Velzen had a significant and positive influence on the churches of the *Afscheiding*. His life is essentially a history of this reformation—from the beginning in 1834, the struggles in the early years, the joy of starting Kampen in 1854, and the union with the *Doleantie* in 1892. In all these events van Velzen played a significant role and left his mark on these churches. Although in the end the influence of Brummelkamp and Helenius de Cock won out, van Velzen kept the denomination on the path of orthodoxy for many years.

Van Velzen also had an impact overseas, particularly amongst the Dutch Reformed immigrants in Holland. When van Raalte led his group of churches into the Reformed Church in America in 1850, not

all were satisfied. A group finally split off in 1857 and formed what would later become the Christian Reformed Church. The leaders of this new denomination, particularly Rev. Koene Vanden Bosch and Elder Gysbert Haan, were influenced by van Velzen prior to their coming to the United States. They were from van Velzen's "conservative wing" and were "stern Calvinists" just as he was.[155] Both the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches trace their spiritual heritage to van Velzen.

Simon van Velzen was a tireless and fearless defender of the faith, a true father of the *Afscheiding*. He was powerfully used by God to bring about reformation to the churches in the Netherlands, to preserve this reformation in the years that followed, and to pass on a rich doctrinal heritage to churches in his native land and in America.

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155 Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church*, 46, 62.

De Waarde van Symbolische Schriften

Simon van Velzen, Jr.
published at Kampen in 1866

(English translation)

The Value of Symbolic[1] Documents

Translator: Marvin Kamps, 2012

The Translator's Introduction to van Velzen's Speech

Simon van Velzen's speech that follows was presented on December 6, 1866 at the occasion of the transfer of the duties of the Rector of the Theological School in Kampen of the Secession Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. These churches had their beginning in the1834 Reformation of the Reformed Church by Hendrik de Cock. The Theological School in Kampen was established in 1854 with four professors appointed by their Synod: T. F. de Haan, Helenius de Cock, Anthony Brummelkamp, and Simon van Velzen. All four had served as ministers of the word in the Secession churches.

1 Van Velzen applies the technical term "Symbolische," or Symbolic, to all of our creeds. We do not use this term very often today, and thus it is not well understood. Rev. H. Hoeksema gives the following explanation: "A symbol is a statement by a church or group of churches containing a declaration of what such a church or group of churches believes to be the truth of the Word of God. This definition may be said to be composed of the meaning of the three words that usually are employed to express this idea. We refer to the words: *symbol*, *confession*, and *creed*. A symbol is really a sign. So we can speak, for example, of a flag or a banner being the sign by which one nation is everywhere distinguished from all other countries. In this way also we can say that a symbol is a sign representing the faith of a church in general over against all the world, or of a particular church over against all other churches" (*Reformed Symbols*, p. 1, mimeographed notes, Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968).

The first rector of the school was T. F. de Haan. Every subsequent year a new rector was appointed from the faculty of the school. This was officially celebrated each year, if possible, on December 6. Van Velzen, in 1866, chose to speak on the subject: "The Value of Symbolic Documents." The term "symbolic" is a reference to the Reformed creeds.

This subject was particularly appropriate for the occasion, because the Theological School was committed to the training of young men for the ministry of the Word of God as interpreted and confessed by the Secession churches in the symbols of the church. The Secession churches came into being in 1834, because the state Reformed (*Hervormde*) Church had officially denied that the creeds had any *binding authority* over the preaching of the Word. Throughout the 32 years of their existence to that point, the Secession churches were ridiculed for their commitment to the creeds and for their confidence that through the truth of God's Word as expressed in the creeds they had fellowship with God in Christ and received God's blessing as churches. In 2012 the Protestant Reformed Churches and other true churches of Jesus Christ are ridiculed for the same confidence of faith. Therefore this speech by van Velzen in 1866 is instructive and comforting to the saints today. We can learn from our fathers!

There are two matters in particular in this speech by van Velzen that require our careful evaluation: 1. Van Velzen states the *only* ground for the Reformed believer's and our churches' commitment to the creeds. I trust that you will find it. 2. Van Velzen uses the term "believer" in an exclusive sense. Is his use extreme, radical, and unwarranted? On the basis of Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which describes true faith, his understanding of that term is undoubtedly proper. Perhaps you will disagree. Without judging the hearts of others, which no mere man may or can do, do we in regard to our own membership govern our churches by the same *exclusive* understanding of the term "believer"? In that regard, Reformed churches must be mindful of the questions asked at the occasion of public confession of faith, which is the means for entering into full membership and communion in the local church.

Finally, van Velzen refers to the claim of those who opposed the

Reformed creeds and explains that, in their judgment, their disagreement was only about "insignificant matters." This characterization of the disagreement with the creedal doctrines "as being only about insignificant matters" was the attempt to justify toleration of the false doctrines of free will and universal atonement. Van Velzen, it seems, understood what very few recognize in our day, that by these false doctrines the church door is set ajar for the entrance of the gross errors of the denial of the divinity of Christ Jesus and the certainty of justification through faith in Him. Many, many people are offended and even angered by the gross unfaithfulness that consists of the denial of the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sufficiency of the Lord's atonement, and all the miracles recorded in sacred Scripture; but these same people fail, or refuse, to see that it is the so-called insignificant truths that keep the door of the church closed tightly against the gross heresies. Then these so-called "insignificant" doctrines prove to be not so insignificant after all.

In this speech by Mr. van Velzen, our translation of which follows, we have again the witness of one of our "fathers." Please read it prayerfully and thoughtfully.

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Introduction:

If this address is read outside of the circle of the supporters of our Theological School, many who read what is here declared will discover ideas expressed that do not agree with their line of thinking. This disagreement is not a legitimate reason to refuse to publish it. For me it is a reason to send out this message to the reading public. Since I have the conviction that no subject is here defended simply because at one time some chose to adhere to it, but because I consider the grounds on which we build to be incontrovertible; and since I hold the opinion that the subject discussed on these pages merits universal attention, although it too seldom captures it; and since I have the hope that, the more frequently the thoughts set forth here are expressed, the more likely they will be to gain acceptance and in this way the true interests of many will be promoted, I have eagerly fulfilled the unanimous wish of fellow officebearers and students, and present this

address to the public. May the Lord's indispensable blessing attend it.

A hearty welcome to you all!

As often as we celebrate the anniversary of our school, we are reminded of an event that not only is joyful for us, but merits general interest at the same time.

Twelve years have gone by since this institution of spiritual birthing was established. We always acknowledge, in the awareness of our very limited resources, that we cannot compete in many respects with other institutions for the instruction of aspiring pastors. Nevertheless, we may point with thanksgiving to the Lord to many good fruits that have been continuously produced here. And we are ever convinced that a nursery, as we have here, is not only authoritatively required in the interests of the congregations, but its absence would be a serious detriment to for the service of God.

Is there then no opportunity in our country outside of this school to acquire what the aspiring pastor of the church needs? We will surely be on our guard to answer that question with a negative response; but no other church fellowship that has such an institution gives any guarantee that the instruction takes place in the recognition of the truth, concerning which we testify in agreement with the church of earlier generations that these truths must be believed with the heart and confessed with the mouth. At other institutions there is no positive and specific bond required or a declaration of complete agreement with the entire doctrine of the creeds of the faith or the symbolic documents of the Reformed churches. In our fellowship, on the contrary, not only have all the pastors made such a declaration, but the overseers insist on faithful adherence to their expression of agreement with this truth.

But is such commitment to symbolic [creedal] documents something to be desired? This question merits an earnest investigation. And since it is the prevailing attitude today to view contemptuously absolute commitment to the forms of unity or our symbolic documents; and since on the contrary our church and the school to which we belong so very highly regard them, it will be of interest to us to consider "The Value of Symbolic Documents." I wish now to fulfill

this task. And you who are aspiring ministers of the Word and who will be called upon sooner or later to sign the forms of unity of our church federation will, I trust, eagerly follow as I present, first, the history of the origin of the symbolic documents as a witness to their value; and, second, the great need of the church for symbolic documents, as proof of their perpetual value.

I. At many other assemblies, as I now see them before my mind's eye, it would be considered rash for someone to begin to speak about the value of symbolic documents. If the listeners to such a speech could reveal their feelings, many would perhaps immediately express dissent. "Shackles for the freed spirit," men would say, "we should not allow to be forged; the Christian must stand in freedom, having been liberated; no human writings may be set in the place of God's Word; each person, by the use of his own eyes, must see for himself in order to accept through investigation whatever appears to be the truth to him. Instead of raising up walls through these documents, it is to be maintained that these documents impede mutual fellowship in the service of God, and that, rather, all men should greet one another as children of one Father."

Immediately, we should remind ourselves in the face of such contradiction that we are not speaking of shackles or any limitation to liberty when we affirm emphatically the binding authority of symbolic documents. The name symbol, insignia, memorials, or identification marks expresses exactly the same idea as the name forms of unity, or prescription for the maintaining of unanimity among the members of a church fellowship. We understand in like manner by symbols that we adopt no rules by which our faith must be governed, but these are documents through which we confess our faith. These creedal documents perform the very same service for the unity of believers in the presence of the entire world as the tongue grants to each one who communicates his conviction concerning the truth to others. These symbols are not bands that bind us in subordination to the beliefs or convictions of men, or of assemblies no matter how worthy they may have been, but they are documents that identify and clearly express what we find in God's Word, that delineate the grounds for our opin-

ions, and that indicate the mutual agreement of believers. These are documents through which we distinguish ourselves from adversaries, documents through which we declare the truth in opposition to erroneous opinions, and documents in harmony with which we wish instruction to be given. These are documents by which we fulfill the Lord's command to give a reason for the hope that is in us and to depart from those who create dissension and offense contrary to the doctrine that we have learned from God's Word. They are documents, finally, by which we publicly testify that we belong to the Lord, and through which we demonstrate that we carry the identification mark of His church.

By this description of symbols, I, far from considering it rashness, would almost account it a task too easily accomplished, that one should take it upon himself to contend for the value of these documents, since the proof of their value has been clearly supplied by the history of their adoption.

It will not be necessary to speak in this connection of all symbols. I remind you exclusively of the documents that, after the Reformation, have received creedal authority respecting the church in our country.

The oldest of these documents, the *Confession of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,* was drafted in the Flemish language in the year 1559 by Guido de Brés, with the concurrence of some other ministers of the Word. In 1562, when this *Confession* was approved by the Emden preachers, it was published and presented by Reformed believers to Philip II, King of Spain, who at that time was lord over these regions. A letter was added to it in which it was declared that there were more than a hundred thousand men in the Netherlands who held and followed the worship of God that was in agreement with the *Confession* that had now been delivered to him, and that they saw themselves as prepared and ready, should it become necessary, to seal this *Confession* with their blood.[2] Four years later, in an ecclesiastical assembly of the "churches under the cross" at

2 An English translation of this letter to Philip II by de Brés can be found in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal,* vol. 42, p. 77.

Antwerpen, where both Marnix van Aldegonde and Franciscus Junius were present, it was examined, here and there shortened, and adopted. At the instruction of this assembly, the last named individual sent it to the church of Geneva for examination. In the following year, at an imperial Diet, it was presented to emperor Maximillian II. It was at that time signed by Prince Louis of Nassau, the brother of Prince William of Orange, by the princes of Kuilenburg and van den Berg, the lord of Breederoode, and other nobles who in the history of that day had become renowned on account of the courage they displayed for the faith. At that time it was not yet established that preachers must acknowledge the binding authority of the *Confession*; but in 1571, that is, before the Netherlands Reformed churches had any official state recognition in the fatherland,[3] it was decided at a Synod in Emden that all the preachers of the church should sign this *Confession* as scriptural, or as agreeing with God's Word. This decision was renewed at every following synod and finally at Dordrecht in 1618 and 1619.

Guido de Brés had already died the death of martyrdom when this decision was adopted. In 1567 he was cast into prison at Valenciennes for the preaching of the truth, and later was transferred to Doornik. Here, on the 31st of May of that year, he was told by the prison warden that the sentence of death would be executed upon him in that very day. Then de Brés turned to his fellow prisoners: "My brothers," he said to them, "today I have been condemned to death because of the doctrine of the Son of God. Praised, therefore, be his name! I had never imagined that God would have bestowed such an honor upon me. From moment to moment I am being strengthened, and my heart leaps within me for joy. My experience it is, as if my spirit has wings to be able to fly to heaven; since I have been invited today to the wedding feast of my Lord, the Son of my God."

When he reached the top of the scaffold, where his temporal life would end through the means of the hangman's noose, he kneeled to

3 In 1571 the Lowlands were still governed by Philip II of Spain. The Netherlands, as a separate, self-governing nation, had not yet come into existence. Thus the Reformed churches had no official recommendation (van Velzen's term) in the fatherland. Their synod had to meet in Germany, in the village of Emden, because of persecution.

pray, but was soon stopped. Already when he had climbed the ladder, he admonished the people to reverence the authorities. Thereupon he urged the believers present among the witnesses to persevere in the doctrine that he had preached to them, and he testified that he had preached God's pure truth, the gospel of eternal salvation, and that for this gospel he was being put to death. Men did not let him continue to speak. The administrator of civil justice signaled the hangman to hurry. This man cast de Brés off the ladder and the spirit of the faithful witness was freed from his earthly troubles. Surely, his faith was changed into sight.

Besides the *Confession*, which de Brés prepared, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, as the second symbol, was later adopted. Fredrick III, the Elector of the Palatinate, who historically is called devout, had left the Lutheran to join the Reformed church. In the interest of good and harmonious instruction in Christian doctrine, he desired that preachers and teachers would have a definite guideline in the churches and schools. He commissioned two theologians, Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, to prepare a draft. When they in 1562 were finished, their work was examined by the leading theologians of the Palatinate, it was adopted after some changes, and in the following year was published. In the same year Peter Datheen carefully prepared a Dutch translation of this *Catechism*, and it was added to the publication of his Psalm versification. By this means this instruction became well known throughout our country. Quickly it received so much acclaim that the synod of Wezel in 1568 made a stipulation through which the use of the *Catechism* in the churches of the Lowlands was prescribed. This stipulation was endorsed by following synods. Yet, however, the Synod of 1586 did not require subscription to this instruction. There they only stipulated that the school masters should subscribe to the *Confession,* or, in place thereof, to the *Catechism.* But by the end of the sixteenth century this subscription was already introduced as obligatory for the ministers of the Word in the majority of the localities; and at the Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619 the *Confession* and the *Catechism* were recognized as symbols of the church.

The above-named synod had stipulated that its doctrinal state-

ments should be subscribed to. They were viewed, however, not so much as new symbols but as an appendix and a careful explanation of some points of doctrine. Such an explanation had become absolutely necessary. There arose some in the church who turned against the church's symbols, and who disseminated opinions that were in conflict with adopted church doctrine. Vehement uproar was the consequence. Finally the Synod of Dordrecht was held, where not only the delegates of the church from different regions of the country and some professors were present but also many foreign theologians. The opinions of the Remonstrants were then examined over a long period of time and with the greatest care. Unanimously those opinions were condemned in five articles. Afterwards, the *Confession* and the *Catechism* were examined and approved by the assembly; and consequently it was, with the greatest carefulness, prescribed that all ministers of the Word and instructors in higher and lower schools should subscribe as well to the *Canons* as to the *Confession* and the *Catechism*.

From that time forward the church in our fatherland for many years enjoyed the desired peace. For two centuries she was provided the most excellent preachers. Men like Voetius, Witsius, Vitringa, Marck, Brakel, Lodenstein, and others, among them many who had earned European renown, had demonstrated complete agreement with the symbols, and had distinguished themselves not less by their godliness as by their erudition. And through the spiritual blossoming of the church, the fatherland reached the pinnacle of prosperity and power as well.

What should we think, therefore, of the symbolic documents as evidenced by the history of their introduction? Were they imposed on the congregations by some foreign power? No. With them the churches originated. Should the introduction of them be attributed perhaps to narrow-mindedness, ignorance, or zealotry? No. It is attributable to the faith that is rooted in Scripture and that was found orthodox, tested, and purified. Under the eyes of threatening tyrants, they were established. The creeds were raised up boldly in the face of death before the burning stakes and the hangman's scaffolds. In the inner chambers and in the speech of ecclesiastical assemblies that excelled equally as much through godliness as knowledge, the

creeds were weighed and adopted. Princes and subordinates, rich and poor, skilled warriors and peaceful civilians, men of science and the uneducated have championed them with zeal. Were perhaps these documents a hindrance to development and progress? No. Although it is a bold declaration that I will make, I add to the above, with an eye on the history, that without the symbolic documents the churches in our country would not have expanded and would not have survived after the Reformation!

It was a dreadful guilt that was produced when zeal for the symbolic documents began to weaken and when at last their precise binding authority was cancelled. Church of the Lord, when you abandoned your symbols, you denied your history. You denied your martyrs and the long line of your excellent preachers when, in inexcusable foolishness, you rejected the greatest benefits!

II. Benefits, many say, the symbols were in earlier times; presently we can do without them; and if we would champion them, it would only occasion narrow-mindedness. That understanding rests on the supposition that people in our lifetime have been equipped with better intellectual gifts than people had who lived two hundred years ago; or that knowledge is in fact today not the mother's milk that one is drinking; or that instruction in religion and education has reached such a high point in our time that there exists no need for creedal documents.

Nothing is to be approved of all that. We know that it is forever true that no one can give anything clean from the unclean; that is, we know that man has by nature a darkened mind, being estranged from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him. And we are of the opinion that people in our time more than ever before are in danger of walking in error. Are not the most dangerous opinions propagated by many with great cleverness, with a display of knowledge, and with appeal to science and whatever gratifies self-esteem? Is it not of great importance, then, to use the means that the Lord has given to His church for fending off errors and for the promotion of the purity of faith? The symbols should be numbered among this means. If any one doubts this, let him contemplate what has been made public

by the most famous pastors, as well as what is common among the majority of Christians. It has been proven that even many of the leading pastors of the church often expressed themselves unbiblically and disseminated foolish opinions concerning one or another article of faith that at that time was not yet contained in any symbol.

I do not need to mention at this time Papias, although he, according to the testimony of Irenaeus, was a friend of the apostle John and of Polycarp, and whose depiction concerning a thousand-year reign would be today rejected as absurd on the basis of Holy Scripture by children who have been in a measure instructed. But note what has been claimed by a church father from the first half of the third century, who because of his amazing erudition was admired by all and who because of his extraordinary zeal was called a man of diamonds and steel,[4] and who because his confession of the truth was so perverted that his death was the consequence of it. Origen has, to name no more, claimed that the Son is subordinated to the Father and that the Son is less than the Father! Did not Chrysostom, a name that causes our hearts to trill with joy, in one of his church speeches let slip out that in Christ both persons, as he expressed it, essentially, or according to their substance, are separate! And even Augustine, the outstanding man among the most excellent [of the church fathers], says somewhere that perhaps some believers, by means of certain purifying fire, sooner or later will be saved, according as they more or less loved transitory, earthly things! If such richly gifted, learned, and godly men have expressed themselves so improperly about one or another truth, yes, it should be said, in such unbiblical, evil, and foolish ways, is it then any wonder that others are thrown into confusion and that not only the whole church had been subjected to turmoil through the controversies of Arius, Eutyches, Pelagius, and such like, but that even many sincere souls were carried away by error for a long time?

Nevertheless, people had the Bible then as well as we do. This Bible was zealously investigated then no less than in our day. The exegetical works of those days demonstrate the truth of that fact. Men

4 Van Velzen used a Latin expression here: This man was called a *"vir adamanteus et chalkenteros,"* which van Velzen has translated as "a man of diamonds and steel." *"De man van diamante en metalen ingewanden."*

to a high degree were experienced in the language in which the New Testament was originally written, in history, archaeology, and other auxiliary sciences. But only after the truth was set forth in symbols did controversies in the church come to an end. Steadfastness replaced the earlier instability, clarity replaced darkness, and purity replaced error. It is true that from time to time some rose up, just as one sees in the days of the apostles already, who have departed from the faith. Surely such people have cherished the previously condemned opinions and disseminated them.

Admittedly, some in the church in our country, after the adoption of the symbols, again resisted and contradicted the truth. But this should not surprise us. Faith is no one's inborn possession by nature, nor is it imposed upon us against our will. But it has been given to us in our hearts through grace and by the working of the Holy Spirit. Whoever, therefore, had believing parents but nevertheless maintained a cunning, hostile heart, instead of publicly acknowledging that he belongs to the enemies of the church, will readily reveal himself in opposition to the truth and therefore also in opposition to the creeds. With such persons it was never an involuntary, thoughtless mistake, but the deliberate purposeful rejection of known doctrine. They appeal perhaps to this or that expression of the fathers of the church, but at the same time they show clearly that in such an appeal they were completely averse to all the rest of the pervasive doctrine of these fathers, which doctrine these fathers had taught and maintained as the heart of the issue.

It should not astonish us, however, that sometimes in earlier days the church's most excellent preachers have made improper declarations. All the truths of faith are set forth in Scripture. Therefore, it is our motto: Nothing but Scripture, and the whole of Scripture! What we confess must be taken from Scripture and believed with the heart. But in order to express this truth verbally it is necessary not only that the mind clearly and faithfully present it, but also that we know how precisely and carefully to declare our viewpoint. How often does not the believer struggle, as it were, with the language to express his inner conviction! How often does not the preacher leave the pulpit disappointed and ashamed, because he feels that he did not express

himself as the matters that he presented required him to do! Profound struggle, broad experience, and deep perception were required time and again, in order to present the truths of faith in the creeds.

But have not those documents often served repeatedly for the encouragement and strengthening of believers? Who will be able to tell us how many believers, in the midst of the storms of life, have confessed as their only comfort: "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!"[5] Who will be able to inform us how many saints were filled with reverence, submissiveness, humility, trust, and thanksgiving by the confession: "Because God hath so revealed himself in His Word, that these three distinct persons are the one only true and eternal God"[6]; or by the declaration: "That God's eternal Son, who is and continueth true and eternal God, took upon Him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted."[7] And who is able to delineate what many a heart has discovered when in response to the question: "What believest thou concerning the 'forgiveness of sins'?" the answer is given: "That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God."[8] No, we say therefore, the symbolic documents are not an obstruction to knowledge and faith, but are for development, for progress, for the advancement of faith. The Lord

5 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day I.
6 Lord's Day 8.
7 Lord's Day 14.
8 Lord's Day 21.

has given many proofs that He, as our risen Lord, dwells with His own throughout every day until the end of the world. The symbols are gifts by which the Lord shows that He who has sat down on the right hand of His Father, gathers, protects, and preserves His church by His Spirit and Word in the unity of true faith!

Just as faith is advanced by the symbolic documents, so too do those documents serve for the revelation of the unity of the church. We are not thinking here, however, about a forced, mechanical, lifeless, or merely external unity. We have in mind the fellowship of believers by virtue of the new nature that they share. This unity exists already among all who truly bear the name believer. "There is one body," Scripture says, "and one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4). And again: "So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). And in another place we read: "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This fellowship can be advanced. The more it is manifest in our conduct, the more the King of the church is glorified, and that much more we receive the greater benefits. Therefore the Saviour prayed: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Wherever believers may be found, there the Lord provides His blessings; there He grants their prayers; there the presence of the Holy Spirit is experienced; and there the members serve one another. All the guidance, insights, experiences, struggles, and assistance received by one come for the benefit of all mutually. In solidarity they bear the burden that has been laid on any one of them. They work for the kingdom of the Lord with their strength as one mutually-shared power, and have already in this fellowship a foretaste of heaven.

But would not the creeds [symbols] be a hindrance to this fellowship? The contrary is the truth. The world builds its walls of division and maintains them as much as they possibly can. Regrettably, they also slip stealthily into the church, where, after garnering esteem to themselves by externals, they gain for themselves places of influence and privilege. Or they work to cause estrangement between those who are members of that one body. But it is the nature of God's kingdom to unite those who were alienated from one another; and the symbols

that are in agreement with God's Word never cause alienation among believers. Is it not one faith that the Lord works? Would, then, the confession of that faith ever be an obstruction to that fellowship; would the sincere unity and the public promise, or the subscription to the confession by means of which the adoption of symbols exists, ever occasion division among believers or be the occasion for their scattering? Impossible! If the symbols, and this is certain and absolutely demanded, are in complete agreement with sacred Scripture, then they unite those who are submissive to Scripture.

We would unwillingly charge anyone with deceit: but they who strive against the binding authority of the creeds, or deprecate them, and yet notwithstanding claim that they submit to Holy Scripture, act in conflict with their own declaration as long as they do not demonstrate that the content of the symbols of the church should be condemned as unscriptural. Show us! We must confront such people with the duty to show us what in the symbols of the church is in conflict with God's Word, so that at least we would not be required to consider these people as grossly ignorant. Are you not able to do that, or if you are not going to do it, then acknowledge as well that you may not present yourself as a preacher in the church, which by means of its confessions must be acknowledged as the Lord's church!

But how is it to be harmonized with the oneness of the church that, after the Reformation, Reformed believers adopted separate documents of confession, with the result that in Switzerland, France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, and elsewhere each had their own symbols or creeds?

That difference was coupled with agreement. In the separate symbols, the same truths are confessed. Since, however, the situations in the different countries were not the same, the churches really had to express themselves according to the measure of their specific concerns and particular circumstances; so that here this, elsewhere that, truth was more developed or emphasized. This difference and agreement is now even more a proof of the free and yet inherent oneness of the faith, in that the one symbol can be illuminated and confirmed by the other.[9]

9 Van Velzen adds in a footnote: "Here applies what Basil says and which was quoted by Augustine: *'Utile est multas habere orthodoxas exposi-*

There is, besides, people can object here, not only distinction but at the same time difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran churches. This should be acknowledged, although we, with Calvin, notwithstanding this dissimilarity, gladly acknowledge the genuine adherents of the *Augsburg Confession* as our brothers. But this dissimilarity, notwithstanding how regrettable it is, may not be attributed to the symbols. It is to be blamed on the fact that, from the side of the Lutheran church, some matters, although only a few, are put forward as true, and we disagree because they are contrary to God's Word. Would it not be better that our creeds kept silent about such differences? Surely not! By silence we would not satisfy the desires of those who, like Luther, asked for approval of the specified issues. And what is more, we may never purposely continue to hide what our Lord has revealed in His Word. Paul made himself acceptable in the consciences of men not by silence but by revealing the truth in the presence of God (2 Cor. 4:2). We have been appointed to be servants of and not to be masters over the Word.[10] Estrangement among brothers will not be replaced by a genuine oneness if men keep silent about what God's Word reveals. It is only on the faithful and kindhearted confession of the truth, that we can expect the Lord to command His blessing. And we may believe that truth and peace will be advanced only when, like the pious elector of the Palatinate and others, we reject error.

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tiones, atque Sacrae Scripturae interpretationes et commentationes, diversis verbis traditas, dum non diversa fide. Illa diversitas plus adjuvat, quam impedit intelligentiam, si modo legentes non sint negligentes; obscuriores etiam sententias plurium codicum saepe manifestavit inspectio (*Aug. de doctr. Christ. lib. II*). Translated it reads: "It is profitable to have an abundance of orthodox expositions, and also of interpretations and commentaries of Holy Scripture that have been set down in different words, provided they be not set down according to a different faith. Such diversity would aid more than it would hinder understanding, if only those who were reading were not careless. For an examination of many passages often makes clear even the more obscure passages (Aug. *On Christian Doctrine. Book II).*"

10 How often do we not act sinfully as masters over the Word of God by withholding our witness to the truth in order not to offend the brother who opposes our convictions! M. K.

Even the preservation of the church stands in the closest connection with the symbols that are derived from God's Word. Or is it possible that a union can continue to exist if the agreement is broken? The bond that unites the true church is faith, which is expressed in the symbols. If, therefore, the commitment is taken away by which the body is joined together, soon the individual members will fall out of the body. And if men loosen the commitment that has the faith [creedal doctrine—M.K.] for its foundation, then there is no more unity. We are of the opinion, therefore, that nothing of these symbols may be abandoned. Toleration or negligence would be in this context dishonesty. Or would people consider it proper for someone to enter into some bond of agreement, and then, without proper notification, remove something from the bond that is necessary for the bond, however insignificant it may appear to be? After the first step of departure has been taken, the second and third can likewise follow. Where will it end? Would people need again another symbol, in order to know what is valid in the adopted symbols? And as the one symbol prunes the other repeatedly, nothing at last would endure.

But do we not make the symbols in this way to be equal to God's Word? Absolutely not! The Word has been inspired by God, written by infallible men, and nothing may be added to it any more than anything may be taken from it. But the symbols have value, because they agree with God's Word. They have been written by fallible men, and if it be necessary, they can be changed or enlarged. Continually they must be tested and investigated by God's Word, and, because they agree with God's Word, we may not relinquish anything in them. What has to be the consequence, if a part of the truth is forsaken? It would be that more truth is continually lost, because, by the denial of a portion of the truth, reverence diminishes for Him who has revealed the entire truth. It is not necessary to prove this further. *Quid opus est verbis, ubi rerum testimonia adsunt!*[11] Note carefully, how that a large portion of the truth has been lost. It did not happen suddenly or all at once. First this or that was rejected, which people regarded as

11 Van Velzen in a footnote translates the Latin for his reader: "What is the need for more words, where the evidences of the matter are already present."

of little importance; consequently many transgressions are committed from which the first rejecters would recoil; finally men have denied the greatest facts of Christianity, or fight against them; and many showed no fear anymore to deny the authority of God's Word, the miracles, the resurrection of the Saviour, the immortality of the soul, the deliverance from death and sin, and even God as Lord of creation.

Should not everything be employed to resist that apostasy, to guard others, and be profoundly concerned, as much as lies in us, for the coming generations and the future of the church? But then the symbols will have to be used. In opposition to the dry, comfortless opinions of adversaries, the symbols present the most glorious truths; they provide weapons against attacks; they provide warnings against errors; and they have already been a blessing for thousands and thousands of individuals.

We do not need to apologize for being very pleased with the symbols of the church. On the contrary, in the conviction that they agree with God's Word, we should recommend them to one and all. This will particularly be your task, young men and brothers who desire to fulfill the ministry in the congregations that have sincerely and fully adopted the symbols of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Not only, therefore, is it necessary to promote knowledge of the content of these documents and to advise each one to examine them by God's Word; we must also take care that the following erroneous understandings are not tolerated when the value of those documents is commended. We do not substitute them for God's Word; we do not explain Holy Scripture by means of the symbols; and we do not hold to the truth on the basis of their authority; we do not base their value on their form; and we do not expect from these documents themselves the life and flourishing of the church. But with the content of our symbols we could not be sufficiently captivated, and we regard their authority as beneficial and necessary. If then others reject this commitment and boast in their freedom, we not only defend the legacy of our fathers but declare as well the advantage that is obtained from these documents for the Kingdom of the Lord. If others are satisfied with an indefinable declaration of endorsement, then we call to mind the warning: "Make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:2). And if others boast of

new, fresh creeds of faith, but at the same time abandon the creeds that have endured the fiery trials, then we call out to one another: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

Loudly we confess that we anticipate the salvation of the church from the Spirit of the Lord exclusively; therefore, we must not abandon what the Lord earlier has bestowed through the great charity of the Spirit. We even expect, according as the Lord continues to work, that accordingly more satisfaction with the symbols will appear. When in the first centuries of Christendom the most severe persecutions were endured, the blood of the martyrs spilled forth like broad streams, and after the church had hid itself many times from the rage of tyrants, finally it came out of the catacombs,[12] took possession of the throne of Caesars, and boldly lifted up its Symbol, the *Confession of Nicene*, before the face of the entire world. In later centuries error and superstition seized the upper hand; but the Lord gave new life and strength. Believers were again persecuted and martyred. They demonstrated agreement with the earlier confession. Soon in many countries symbols were raised up around which many were gathered and a great victory over the world was repeated. We think that the raging of the world will once more burn fiercely against the Lord's inheritance. The prophets and the signs of the times indicate to us the approaching conflict. Then the word will be fulfilled: "…he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers…" (Mal. 4:6). Again the symbols will be boldly raised up. Blessed are those who from the heart will agree. The Lord's promise holds true for them: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

Amen. ●

12 The subterranean burial chambers of the early Christians in and near Rome.

Review Article

Yet Again Shepherd and the Federal Vision: "The Issue [is] Contingency"

by David J. Engelsma

Obedient Faith: A Festschrift for Norman Shepherd, ed. P. Andrew Sandlin and John Barach. Mount Hermon, California: Kerygma Press, 2012. 312 pages. $21.95 (paper).

Comes another defense of Norman Shepherd and his theology. In fact, the book is a vigorous promotion of the theology of Shepherd, of the Federal Vision, and of a conditional covenant, severed from election.

This defense of Shepherd's theology is in the form of a "festschrift for Norman Shepherd." Inasmuch as festschrifts are books honoring theologians who have distinguished themselves as defenders and developers of the faith, it is evident that the men of the Federal Vision become bolder and that the movement becomes increasingly aggressive. Instead of defending Shepherd against the charge that he is a heretic whose heresy is the grave false doctrine denying the gospel-truth that was the heart of the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church and that is the fundamental difference of Protestantism from the false church of Rome—justification by faith alone—the men of the Federal Vision now extol Shepherd as a notable, praiseworthy Christian and Reformed theologian. The theology of Norman Shepherd opens up to Reformed and Presbyterian churches new, splendid, necessary, "lasting" insights into the truth of divine revelation.

The end of this development will be that Shepherd will be reinstated with honor in the Orthodox Presbyterian, Presbyterian Church in America, and United Reformed Churches denominations, his theology

will be declared the standard of orthodoxy, and all those who oppose it will either be disciplined or marginalized.

No doubt, this boldness of Shepherd's disciples and allies is due to the inability of Reformed theologians and churches to issue a damning verdict upon Shepherd's theology, beginning with the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (see part three of the book, by Ian Alastair Hewitson, "A Theological Summary of the Shepherd Controversy"). In addition, prominent, influential Presbyterian and Reformed theologians publicly defend Shepherd's theology, including Richard Gaffin, John Frame, Ian Hewitson, and Ralph Boersema.

Nor is it lost on Shepherd's supporters that none except the Protestant Reformed Churches take hold of the root of the heresy of the Federal Vision—the doctrine of a gracious, but conditional, covenant with all baptized infants alike, if not with all humans, a covenant with its salvation that is divorced from election.

Thus, the heresy goes from strength to strength. The end will be the loss in the Reformed churches of the gospel of grace in all its particulars, especially justification by faith alone and the five doctrines of grace confessed by the Canons of Dordt, and eventually a return to Rome, which has taught justification by faith and works and conditional salvation since the Reformation.

The contributors to the festschrift are John Barach, formerly minister in the United Reformed Churches; Ralph F. Boersema, Canadian Reformed theologian; Don Garlington, a Baptist professor of theology; Ian A. Hewitson, a Presbyterian Church in America minister; James B. Jordan; Peter J. Leithart; Rich Lusk; and P. Andrew Sandlin. The last four are leading figures in the movement known as Christian Reconstruction.

Chiming in with praise for Shepherd and his theology, in a section of the book headed "Tributes," are John H. Armstrong; John M. Frame; Charles A. McIlhenny; Michael D. Pasarilla; Steve M. Schlissel; Jeffery J. Ventrella; and Roger Wagner. These tributes involve the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Reformed Theological Seminary in Florida, among other denominations and religious organizations, in support of Shepherd and the theology of the Federal Vision.

Shepherd on Shepherd

In a revelatory opening chapter ("Growing in Covenant Consciousness"), Shepherd himself outlines his career, sketches the controversy at Westminster Seminary over his teaching, and indicates the main elements of his theology of covenant.

He suggests that his rejection of eternal election as the source of the covenant, covenant salvation, and covenant life was due to the disregard, if not fear, of election in his Presbyterian circles.

> It is helpful to reflect on how the doctrine of election, and more broadly the doctrine of the decrees, functions in the life of the congregation. We can bring these doctrines out of the closet from time to time to examine and admire them and to reaffirm our acceptance of them as Scriptural truth. But then we put them back in the closet because they don't seem to have any practical application. We are afraid that they might actually have a paralyzing effect on the people of God (47).

The fountain and cause of all salvation may have a "paralyzing effect on the people of God"! In churches that claim to be Presbyterian and Reformed!

Where election is not preached, but kept in the "closet," because it is not loved, but feared, it will be denied. This is at the root of the heresy of the theology of Norman Shepherd and of the Federal Vision.

Evidently, Shepherd shares this disinterest in, and suspicion of, election. The result is a doctrine of the covenant that ignores, dismisses, and, in reality, denies election.

Which raises the questions: How does such a theologian get appointment to teach systematic theology in a creedal, Presbyterian seminary? Why do Reformed people allow themselves to be influenced by such an election-disparaging theologian? And why does every book promoting the theology of Norman Shepherd carry the recommendations of theologians and professors of theology who claim to be, and are widely regarded as being, outstanding Reformed teachers and churchmen?

Speaking for myself, no theologian who has little use for election will ever get my ear, much less my heart. Scripture is too clear, the

Canons of Dordt are too loud, and the glory of God is too demanding.

Shepherd states that, in James 2, justification does not have a "demonstrative sense," but has the "ordinary soteric sense… the sense that predominates in the teaching of Paul" (50). This commits Shepherd to teaching that justification, in the forensic sense—the forgiving of sins and the verdict declaring the sinner righteous before God the judge—is by the good works of the sinner. This has Shepherd necessarily overthrowing the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church; contradicting Questions and Answers 60-64 of the Heidelberg Catechism; and expressing agreement with the fundamental doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Evidently, none of this troubles the contributors to the festschrift, or those who pay tribute to Shepherd in the book, in the slightest.

In explanation of his heresy, Shepherd is bold to affirm that "our ultimate destiny [is] contingent upon what we do in this life" (51). This is the God-dishonoring, comfort-robbing implication of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. The Reformed confession is radically different. Our ultimate destiny is dependent on God's election and the death of Christ. For persevering in salvation is "a fruit of election [and] a gift of God gained by the death of Christ." Persevering in salvation, thus obtaining heaven as our "ultimate destiny," is not "a condition of the new covenant" (Canons of Dordt, 5, Rejection of Errors/1).

Shepherd is at pains to inform the reader of the book, which will certainly circulate widely throughout all the reputedly conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America, that he and his theology were approved by the faculty of Westminster Seminary, by the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary, by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and by Classis Hackensack of the Christian Reformed Church, when Shepherd left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the Christian Reformed Church. "None of these bodies ever found my views to be contrary to either Scripture or Confession. I left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the front door as a minister in good and regular standing, and I entered

the Christian Reformed Church by the front door as a minister in good and regular standing" (56).

Shepherd is clear and emphatic that his theology is covenant theology. He titles his chapter in the book "A Theological Autobiography: Growing in Covenant Consciousness" (25-63). He characterizes his "theological development…as a growing covenant consciousness and a consciousness that I wanted to share with my students and with anyone willing to listen…. I had come to the conclusion that what is distinctive about the Reformed faith is its understanding and appropriation of the Biblical teaching on the covenants that the Lord God has made with his people, with believers and their children" (37, 38). Specifically, his doctrine of justification, on which his purported critics concentrate, is, in Shepherd's mind, a "covenant perspective on justification" (50).

No one can doubt that what motivates Shepherd as a theologian is the conviction "that the church today stands in desperate need of discovering what it means to live in covenant with the Lord" (63). Accordingly, no one can doubt that a critique of Shepherd's theology that ignores his doctrine of the covenant is an exercise in futility.

The distinctive doctrine of the covenant, however, that Shepherd propounds and develops is that of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) and of their daughter in North America, the Canadian Reformed Churches. Hewitson notes Shepherd's indebtedness to Dutch theologian S. G. de Graaf (104). Cornelis Vonk supported Shepherd during the controversy at Westminster, expressly praising Shepherd's doctrine of justification (142, 143).

"The Issue [is] Contingency"

Ian Hewitson, ardent supporter of Shepherd, is correct, therefore, when he writes concerning the controversy over the theology of Shepherd and of the Federal Vision, that "the outstanding issue was, and remains to this day, the issue of contingency" (110). Contingency is conditionality, that is, the dependence of God for the salvation of the sinner upon the sinner himself. And the covenant doctrine of the Liberated Reformed makes the covenant promise, the covenant, and covenant salvation contingent on the works of the baptized, sinful baby,

rather than dependent on the sovereign work of the faithful covenant God.

It comes as no surprise that one of the chapters extolling Shepherd is written by Canadian Reformed theologian Ralph F. Boersema. Boersema has written an entire book defending the theology of Shepherd (see the review of Boersema's *Not of Works: Norman Shepherd and His Critics* in the Fall, 2012 issue of this journal). In his encomium to Shepherd, in *Obedient Faith*, Boersema defends Shepherd's heresy regarding justification. The works that Paul excludes from justification are "works that seek to establish self-righteousness," not all works, absolutely. And James 2 teaches justification as a forensic act of God taking place "by works and not by faith alone…. This is true because, as human functions, faith and works exist together as surely as do body and soul" (161).

The doctrine of a conditional covenant implies a conditional justification, as it also implies a conditional election, a conditional atonement, and a conditional perseverance. That is, the doctrine of a conditional covenant is the overthrow, not only of the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church, but also of the seventeenth-century confession of the gospel of grace by the Synod of Dordt.

Justification by Good Works

Much of the defense of Shepherd, throughout the book, on the part of all the contributors, consists of justifying Shepherd's doctrine of justification. Thus continues the error on the part of Shepherd's defenders, as well as his would-be critics, of concentrating on the fruit of Shepherd's theology—justification contingent on works—while ignoring the root—his theology of a conditional covenant.

This is not to suggest that the treatment of justification is not significant. The writers are bold in repudiating the Reformation's (and the Reformed creeds') doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from any and all good works of the justified sinner, and in making the good works of the justified sinner part of his righteousness in his justification, especially in the final judgment.

At the same time, their treatment of justification is either seriously confused or deliberately misleading.

Rich Lusk intends to prove that Romans 2:13 ("For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified") teaches an actual, in distinction from hypothetical, justification of sinners. For Lusk, "justifying works are…a necessary condition of final justification" (251). He quotes with approval Simon Gathercole affirming that "the final vindication of God's people [is] *on the basis*… of their obedience (emphasis added)." Gathercole adds that Romans 2:13 teaches "justification as for the *doers*. It will not do to write this off as a hypothetical reference" (292).

P. Andrew Sandlin shows which way the winds of doctrine are blowing in the churches that will not condemn the theology of Shepherd and the Federal Vision. Sandlin is open to the charge of the New Perspective on Paul that Luther misrepresented Paul (244). Sandlin goes further. He proposes that the message of the Protestant Reformation, specifically "*sola fide*" [by faith alone], was culturally conditioned and that its time has passed. The Reformation's message is no longer relevant. "In this cultural ambiance [of AD 2012] *justificatio sola fide* [justification by faith alone] is not 'the article by which the church stands and falls' or 'the principal hinge of religion'" (248).

Justification by faith alone and, therefore, the gospel of salvation by grace alone, of which justification by faith alone is an essential element, are not today *the* message of the gospel of Scripture. If they are not the message of the gospel today, they never were, for the message of the gospel of Scripture is unchanging. Thus is undone the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church. Thus is the way paved back to the Roman Catholic Church.

Can Reformed theologians and churches, indifferent though they are to sound doctrine, tolerate this attack on both the Reformation and the gospel?

But serious confusion runs through the book's defense of Shepherd, blurring the real issues in the controversy of creedal Reformed orthodoxy with Shepherd and the theology of the Federal Vision.

This confusion characterizes much of the defense of Shepherd's doctrine of justification. For one thing, the Bible's teaching that the final judgment of the elect believer will be a judgment "*according* to works" is not the same as a teaching that the final judgment will be

"*on the basis of* works." The public justification of the elect believer in the final judgment will be based solely on the obedience of Jesus Christ, especially His lifelong suffering and His death, imputed to the account of the elect, believing sinner. This judgment will accord with the elect sinner's life of good works, which are themselves the fruit of election and the gift of God.

To argue from the biblical teaching that the final judgment will be *according to* good works to the unbiblical and anti-biblical conclusion that the final judgment will be *based on* the believer's good works, as do the contributors to *Obedient Faith*, is confused, and fallacious. "In accordance with" is not the same as "on the basis of." My love for my wife is in accordance with her behavior of love towards me, but it is not based on her love for me. It is based on Christ's command to me as a Christian husband to love my wife. Basis is one thing; "in accordance with" is another.

In addition, with regard to the inheritance that will be the outcome of the final judgment for the elect believer, that salvation will not be based on the good works of the believer, although it will be in harmony with his life of good works, indeed a reward of his life of good works. The inheritance of salvation will come to the believer as a gift of God, originating in His (unconditional) decree of election and earned by the obedience of Jesus Christ. It will be a reward of the believer's life of good works, but the reward will be "of grace," that is, not based on our works, not what our works have coming as a debt God owes to them (Heid. Cat., Q. and A. 63).

Rich Lusk's understanding of his many quotations of Calvin is similarly confused. Lusk quotes Calvin to prove that Calvin taught justification by faith and by good works (253-259). This project is doomed from the start by the clear, forceful doctrine of Calvin in every place in his writings where he directly treats justification. Lusk might as well attempt to collect quotations proving that Calvin denied double predestination.

The point of all the quotations of Calvin on pages 253-259 of *Obedient Faith* is not that justification is by faith and works, which is what Lusk is trying to prove, but, in Calvin's own words in one of the

quotations, that "by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified" (259).

Calvin's comment demolishes Lusk's (and the book's) project. So far is it from being the case that the believer's good works justify the believer, or enter into the divine verdict upon him, that our good works themselves need to be justified. As tainted with sin, our good works need to be forgiven and declared righteous, not by virtue of any inherent righteousness, but on the ground of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. If my good works need to be justified, they cannot justify me. To look to them for justification is as foolish as it would be for a beggar to seek monetary help from a fellow pauper. This is the foolish theology of Norman Shepherd, and the contributors to *Obedient Faith*, except that this theology is wicked besides, since "going about to establish their own righteousness, [they] have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:3, 4).

Lusk's summation of Calvin's doctrine of justification is proved false, therefore, by the very quotation that Lusk thinks to summarize. Lusk's summation is: "For Calvin, justification by faith paves the way for justification by works" (259).

In truth, Calvin's doctrine of justification was: "by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified."

In support of Shepherd's and his own doctrine of justification by works, Lusk appeals also to the decision on justification of the Regensberg Colloquy of 1541. This was an ecumenical conference of Protestants, headed by Martin Bucer, and Roman Catholic theologians. Calvin was present but had nothing to do with the statement on justification that resulted from the conference.

The Regensberg declaration on justification was a compromise. Like all compromises regarding doctrine, it favored the lie, in this case the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as infused righteousness.

Regensberg identified justification with regeneration; allowed for a "justification of works"; spoke of one's being "increasingly justified"; acknowledged that justification is "always enlarged and promoted by good works"; confessed that "the regenerate are…justified through this

kind of works of faith and love"; and failed outrightly to condemn the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as a denial of the gospel of grace.

Luther, who was not a participant at the conference (he and his kind are always excluded from such conferences, which, though it may be understandable, puts the church and the truth at risk), damned the Regensberg statement on justification, indeed the entire compromising document, heartily. "We hate the book [containing the compromise of justification and other doctrines] worse than a dog or a snake…that utterly wretched book."

Luther was irate with Bucer, the one chiefly responsible for the Regensberg debacle. "Bucer, the rascal, has absolutely lost all my confidence. I shall never trust him again, he has betrayed me too often" (see my article, "Martin Bucer: 'Fanatic of Unity,'" in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 4, no. 1 [Spring, 1988]: 32-53).

Lusk must not appeal to Regensberg in defense of Shepherd's doctrine of justification. Rather, the opposite is the case. He must view Regensberg as a warning to Protestants not to compromise the truth of justification by faith alone.

Don Garlington does not so much confuse the issue as misrepresent it, whether wittingly or unwittingly. The issue in the controversy of Reformed orthodoxy with Norman Shepherd is not that the royal Jesus Christ commands, works, and receives willing obedience from and in His conquered, saved people. This is not the issue whatever. I cannot imagine that anyone could emphasize too strongly for Reformed orthodoxy the lordship of Christ over and in the lives of His people or the calling of Christ's people to lead holy lives. Genuine Calvinists love the truth of sanctification as a grand, necessary work of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, always following the divine act of jusification.

But the issue is whether King Jesus' saving work of justification, which is basic to His people's obedience, is by their own good works. The issue is whether their own good works enter into the verdict of God acquitting them of their sins and reckoning them righteous before Him.

To defend Shepherd by contending that the Bible teaches that the gospel "entails not simply belief…but unconditional submission to his

[Jesus Christ's] lordship" is both beside the point and deceiving (203, 204). It leaves the impression that opposition to Shepherd arises from some form of antinomianism.

Utterly confused is Gathercole in regarding the Gentiles of Romans 2:14, 15 as justified. "Paul goes on directly afterward [that is, after his statement in verse 13 that not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law are justified, *if justification were by the law*, which it is not] to provide instances of these doers of the law who will be justified: the Gentiles who have the law written on their hearts" (292).

First, the apostle did not write that the Gentiles have the *law* written on their hearts. He wrote that they have the *work* of the law written on their hearts, that is, the law's work of distinguishing right from wrong. And, second, the passage does not teach that the Gentiles are justified by thus having the work of the law written on their hearts. On the contrary, his doctrine is that this work of the law *condemns* them: "their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (v. 15b).

Postmillennialism

Of no little importance in the defense of Shepherd is the contention that Shepherd's theology promotes the postmillennial conception of the last things. When Sandlin dismisses the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and by implication the entire gospel of salvation by sovereign grace as confessed in the Canons of Dordt, as outdated, he proposes instead, as the message of the gospel demanded by our age, the gospel of the Christianizing of the world. Indeed, according to P. Andrew Sandlin the main message of the gospel of Scripture has always been that the church must "'set things straight' in God's world, not merely to save sinners" (244).

Significantly, Sandlin immediately appeals to Abraham Kuyper as the Reformed theologian who saw the cultural mandate as the central message of the Bible.

> Over a century ago…Abraham Kuyper argued that the glorification of God in the world and the extension of his kingdom, not personal salvation or justification by faith, is the goal of God's redemptive

> work in the world. God redeems sinners in his scope of redeeming all of creation…. This cultural mandate is woven into the fabric of humanity…. For too long the evangelical church has limited the goal of the gospel to the individual and the church (243-247).

Sandlin urges the calling of the church to redeem and reconstruct culture as the article by which the church stands and falls in our day (248).

James B. Jordan takes leave of his allegorizing interpretation of Scripture long enough to (mis)inform the reader that the Reformed reformers of the sixteenth century were "postmillennial" (167).

This eschatological aspect of Shepherd's theology is commonly overlooked. Shepherd himself is an avowed postmillennialist. His universalistic theology of covenant, a theology of covenant divorced from election, has God desirous of establishing His covenant with all humans; Christ dying for all humans; and evangelists graciously offering Jesus Christ in the name of God to all humans. Involved is at least the hope that a majority of mankind will in the end be converted and saved.

Then, the good works that justify will also redeem and reconstruct the world into the earthly kingdom of Christ, prior to the second coming of the Lord. The running of the saints, in the language of Romans 9:16, saves both the sinner himself and the world.

This postmillennial element in Shepherd's theology explains, in part, Shepherd's attraction to the Christian Reconstructionists—Jordan, Sandlin, Wilson, and others.

Against the Root of Shepherd's Theology, the Protestant Reformed Churches

Although Sandlin certainly does not intend it so, he honors the Protestant Reformed Churches by observing that these churches teach "'unconditional salvation,' including even the condition (*sic*) of faith" (240, 241).

The undiscerning Reformed and Presbyterian public will undoubtedly take the statement, as Sandlin meant it, *in malem partem*.

But there may be the stray thinker who reflects on the fact that, regarding a heresy fundamental to which, according to its proponents,

is the "contingency of salvation," there is a denomination of Reformed churches confessing that salvation is unconditional. That is, salvation is gracious. Or, in the language of heaven, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10).

And even in this apostate age, there may yet be the Reformed or Presbyterian Christian who remembers, and takes seriously, the condemnation by the Canons of Dordt of the teaching that "faith…[is] a condition of salvation" (Canons of Dordt, 1, Rejection of Errors/3).

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Herman Hoeksema's Inauguration
Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church
February 29, 1920

Agatha Lubbers

It was on Tuesday, February 24, 1920 that the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema, one of the "founders" and theological leaders of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, was installed as minister of the gospel in the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church (at that time generally called the Eastern Avenue *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk*). Rev. Herman Hoeksema, a young, vigorous, and industrious 34-year-old man, who had been ordained in the 14th Street Christian Reformed Church of Holland in 1915, received and accepted the call to be the pastor of Eastern Avenue.

Rev. Hoeksema reports in one of his writings that he had been very busy in Holland. In Holland he had established himself as a minister who loved the gospel and who was an exciting preacher. It is perhaps worthy of note that during those years he served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Calvin College (Curatorium) and was the main speaker at the dedication in 1915 of the new Calvin College Building on Franklin Street campus. He was also a regular contributor to the *Banner*.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema was installed in Eastern Avenue CRC to take the place of Rev. J. Groen. The building is still standing today on the same site, though with some changes. The congregation is reported to have consisted of approximately 450 families. Rev. Hoeksema, in his first Sunday morning service, called upon the Lord and the Consistory "to help him in the work of this large congregation." It was reported that the work of catechism instruction and the leading of Bible study societies had been largely neglected.

Recently I discovered the two inaugural sermons preached on Sunday, February 29 by Rev. Hoeksema. The morning sermon was in the Dutch language that was familiar to most of the members of the congregation, and the evening sermon was preached in English. The sermon in the Dutch was based on Colossians 2:1-3 and was given the

general title or theme, "I Want You to Know" (*Ik Wil dat Gij Weet*). The English sermon was based on Isaiah 40:1-8 and had the theme, "I'll Cry!"

These printed sermons are historic documents. I was very pleased and excited to have them come into my possession. I determined immediately that I would attempt to translate the sermon preached in Dutch into English and in some way make both of them available to others.

This month is memorable as well because it is the month during which Rev. Herman Hoeksema began to serve as the minister of the First Protestant Reformed Church. How did this happen? During the period of 1924-1925 the deposition (dismissal) of the Consistory and of Rev. Hoeksema occurred by decision of the Synod and a Classis of the CRC. The First Protestant Reformed Church then came into existence. Rev. Hoeksema was not reinstalled in the continued church, temporarily named a Protesting Christian Reformed Church, and he did not preach an installation sermon. The work of the ministry in the congregation that had been meeting on Eastern Avenue simply continued in several meeting places, till the congregation finally settled into their new building on Franklin Street. For more than forty years Rev. Hoeksema was pastor of the congregation that he began to serve in 1920—a congregation that grew to more than 500 families, perhaps the largest Reformed church in America at the time.

The sermons preached on February 29, 1920 were an introduction for the congregation to the preaching of Rev. Hoeksema. They were introduced to what would be the message that he would preach during his tenure in the church, a tenure that did not cease until he became emeritus in 1964.

These sermons are historic in the sense that they set the tone for Herman Hoeksema's preaching, in Eastern Avenue CRC and thereafter. Always he preached the truth of the sovereignty of God, that God is God, and that salvation is alone in Jesus Christ. The morning sermon (Dutch) indicated that his preaching would be a discovery of the great Mystery of God—Jesus Christ, as this is taught by Paul in Colossians 2:1-3. In this first sermon Rev. Hoeksema said that his desire was the same as that of the apostle Paul for the Colossian Christians, in that

he wanted the congregation to know the Mystery of Godliness that is spiritual and that is not of this world. Because this knowledge is deeply spiritual, it will take spiritual understanding and belief. In the second sermon (English) he told the congregation that he would do as the prophet Isaiah was told to do. He would cry, using the unchanging Word of God as it is so different and so opposed to all the things of this world, which are passing away. The preached Word is the only thing that abides.

This is the truth, and these are the messages that must be preached to every Bible-believing and confession-based congregation by every preacher of the gospel, especially in those years and still in these days of departure from the faith in Christ alone.

The first sermon, based on Colossians 2:1-3, is entitled "I Want You to Know." These words are the first five words of Colossians 2:1, which is Paul's message to the church in Colosse and Laodicea. Paul expressed his great concern for the churches and for those who had not seen his face in the flesh. Paul, writing from Rome after having heard of the needs of the churches, is admonishing them to avoid false teachings. He emphasizes that false teachers lead many away from the truth they had been taught. This truth—the full counsel of God and doctrine of Christ—he calls the great Mystery that they must understand, instead of the mysteries of false doctrine toward which many were tending. Rev. Hoeksema used this warning for the church at Eastern Avenue.

Rev. Hoeksema states the following at the conclusion of his introduction:

> I consider it my calling, beloved, to prepare that bread of life, to preach to you the full counsel of God. It is the longing of my soul to see you grow up in true spiritual knowledge as a congregation [Eastern Avenue CRC]. And I feel something in this moment of that which the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, as stated in our text: "I would ye knew what great conflict I have for you, etc." It is then by means of these words that I begin my labor among you this morning in the name of the Lord, and address you concerning: The Apostle's Conflict on Behalf of the Church of Christ. We will see that this conflict arises from the desire of the apostle that the church attain maturity….

Following this conclusion of the introduction we find his sermon entitled "I Want You to Know." Rev. Hoeksema developed his sermon using the following ideas or aspects: 1) The Knowledge of the Mystery of God; 2) The Full Assurance of Understanding; 3) The Bond of Mutual Love.

In the conclusion of his sermon there is this:

> We feel very much this longing of the apostle, beloved. We too love the children of our people, the saints in Christ Jesus. To us as well the calling came to preach the full counsel of God in the Lord's church. We too rejoice when Zion prospers and when the saints are built up in the knowledge of the mystery and are knit together in love. With that desire of soul, we begin our work in your midst. Still more. In our day too there is every wind of doctrine. Wisdom and knowledge is sought in all manner of ways outside of Christ. Therefore we feel all the more pressured to point you sharply and fully to Him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You may therefore expect from me that I will speak about this mystery, will speak loudly, and will speak without hesitation. Do not expect from me that I should want to know anything other than the full counsel of God. We will speak of that full counsel from the pulpit, in the catechism room, in your homes, at the sickbed, and at your deathbed. Woe to him who, under the preaching of that full counsel of God, resists, and rebels against the full, rich Christ of God. It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he were cast in the sea, before that he should ever hear mention made of that full Christ.

He strikingly and correctly says concerning the unbeliever (and I think most emphatically and sympathetically) that it would be better for him to have a millstone about his neck and be thrown into the sea than to rebel against the full counsel of God.

He concludes: "We count on your help and support in this work, brethren who are the officebearers in this very large congregation. Above all, in this work we await the help of the Almighty God, who has created the heavens and the earth. Amen."

To our knowledge, the sermon in the Dutch on Colossians 2:1-3 has never been previously translated. Marvin Kamps and I have translated the sermon so that it may be available to others. The sermons, as I

believe you will observe, are beautiful, evangelical, and polemical in the right sense of the word, that is, a polemic for the truth of the Word of God and the full counsel of God. The sermon preached in the Eastern Avenue CRC capsulizes the entire faithful preaching of the gospel. It summarizes the entirety of his theology in his many other writings and published sermons.

In this sermon Hoeksema teaches that the believer, chosen in Christ, must come by faith through the true knowledge of the Mystery to the understanding of the awesome and magnificent truth that is in Christ Jesus. What a difference that will make in our believing minds, and how simple to understand for those who have been blessed with the mind of Christ. ●

Herman Hoeksema
1925

Ik Wil Dat Gij Weet

Intree Predicate
Uitgesproken door
Ds. Herman Hoeksema
De Zondag, 29 Februar, 1920
in de
Eastern Avenue Christ. Geref. Kerk
Grand Rapids, Michigan

(English translation)

"I Want You to Know"

Inaugural sermon
Preached by
Rev. Herman Hoeksema
on Sunday, February 29, 1920
in the
Eastern Avenue Chr. Ref. Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Translated 2013
by Marvin Kamps

I Want You to Know

> "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
>
> Colossians 2:1–3.

Beloved, it is of utmost significance that the congregation become mature in and is enriched by all the treasures of the true spiritual knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is with a definite purpose that we speak of a spiritual knowledge. Having only a purely natural knowledge, the church does not have enough. Naked intellectual conceptions, a capacity to set forth the truth in all its fullness, to discuss it, and to expose the error of the lie in all its minutest particulars, causes, without anything more, presumption; is not the knowledge of love; and is not the knowledge that the church needs. She must grow in spiritual knowledge. And that spiritual knowledge is not, of course, this, that it is grasped by a kind of third or fourth human faculty. After all, translation from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light does not consist in this, that God creates a new capacity in us next to and above the powers of mind and will. But the unique character of that spiritual knowledge consists in this, that this knowledge is appropriated by the mind that has been illuminated by divine light. The Christian is a man transformed in principle in mind and heart and in all his powers. In principle he walks again in the light of God's face by means of his understanding; he sees again in God's light, the light and he is able again, therefore, to discern spiritually. Therefore, we lay special emphasis on the fact that it is that spiritual knowledge into which the church of God must grow.

Everywhere Holy Scripture lays heavy emphasis on this growth in knowledge. Really, there is no better proof of the intent of God as regards His relation to His people, than the existence of sacred Scripture itself. Indeed, Scripture does not merely offer a limited, very narrow revelation of the God of our salvation. It does not inform

us only of the fact that there is in the blood of Christ reconciliation with God for our souls. It does not present, that which men in our day regard as sufficient, a gospel on a postage-stamp-sized sticker. But Scripture reveals to us the full counsel of God, it gives us insight into the full redemptive plan of deliverance, and it presents to us all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. And there can be no two ways about it, that God the Lord absolutely has not bestowed in His wisdom this Bible so that we should let it lie ignored, or so that we can choose to take from it what pleases us and at the same time leave be what does not suit our taste; but God gave it to us so that we should submit to the whole of the Bible, so that we should appropriate the whole of the revelation of God, and so that in this way we should mature in the knowledge of God, who is life.

Time and again Scripture lays emphasis on that fact. In the Old Testament the complaint is made that the Lord's people perish for a lack of knowledge. In the new dispensation the apostles proclaimed the full, rich Christ, and Paul preaches the whole counsel of God. The church is admonished not to loiter in the first principles but go on to perfection. She must know what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God. She must grow up into the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. For, of course, this is eternal life, that they may know thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

I consider it my calling, beloved, to prepare that bread of life, to preach to you the full counsel of God. It is the longing of my soul to see you grow up in true spiritual knowledge as a congregation. And I feel something in this moment of that which the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, as stated in our text: "I would ye knew what great conflict I have for you, etc." It is then by means of these words that I begin my labor among you this morning in the name of the Lord, and address you concerning: The Apostle's Conflict on Behalf of the Church of Christ. We will see that this conflict arises from the desire of the apostle that the church attain maturity and is strengthened in:

I. The Knowledge of the Mystery of God
II. The Full Assurance of Understanding
III. The Bond of Mutual Love

The Knowledge of the Mystery of God

Allow me, in the first place and in general, to focus your attention on the meaning of the words of our text. At the first reading, of course, as is often the case with the testimony of Scripture, the text seems complicated and difficult to understand. The apostle speaks of a conflict that he has for the congregation, the purpose of which is that she may be comforted or strengthened in love, more and more united in love, becoming one, knit tightly together, with the purpose that they may become partakers of the full riches of the certainty of understanding; and so that they may appropriate all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Those are, therefore, the three matters that the apostle points to. The apostle desires that the congregation mature in the knowledge of the mystery of understanding and that they be knit together in love. He obviously unites these three ideas in such a way that growth in spiritual knowledge of the mystery will lead the congregation to the full assurance of understanding. The one stands in the closest possible connection with the other. The way to this certainty, to this full assurance of understanding, lies in the appropriation of the knowledge of the mystery. Further, the apostle finds the inward motivation for the appropriation of this knowledge of the mystery in the love by which the congregation lies tightly knit together in Christ. In this way the text becomes clear. The congregation must be strengthened in love. By the motivation provided by this love, the congregation will continue ever to increase in the knowledge of the mystery; and by this knowledge it will come to the full assurance of understanding.

The apostle speaks of a mystery of God the Father, namely Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. There is, therefore, a mystery of God, a secret, something that the human eye of itself is incapable of seeing, something the human mind of itself is not capable of knowing, something that God alone knows and that we can learn to know through revelation. That first of all. In the second place, the apostle says literally, according to the original language, that this mystery, this wonder that God alone knows, is Christ, and in Christ is fully realized and revealed. Christ is the sum of the mystery, its content, but also its full revelation. He is, then, as well the com-

plete sum of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If you have Christ, if you have the full Christ, then you have all the treasures of knowledge. If you know Christ in all His fullness, then there is nothing more apart from Him or above Him to know or understand. Therefore the congregation must know that Christ! For by knowing that Christ she knows the mystery of God, which is revealed and summed up in Him.

Well, then, in a concrete sense, what is the content of that mystery that is revealed in Christ? In the letter to the Ephesians the apostle speaks of this mystery. There, Ephesians 1:10, he describes it as the mystery of God's will, which He had known in Himself from before the foundation of the world, to gather in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on the earth. The apostle reminds us in that text, therefore, when he speaks of this mystery, that the creation as it issued forth from the hand of God formed a beautiful oneness. Not a oneness that existed in a monotony of form and sound, not a oneness in the sense that God had created a great number of precisely the same creatures, but a oneness in the rich diversity of creatures, in which at last the oneness of conception gloriously glistened. There was no separation, there was no conflict, there was no lack, there was no dissonance in God's whole creation; but, instead, every creature had his place, had his specific function to fulfill, and the whole was beautiful harmony. And this oneness, this harmony of creation, reached its high point in man. Man was the point of coupling between heaven and earth, between the material and the spiritual. Man was the apex of creation, and at the same time he was, having been created in the image of God, the nearest link that united creation to God. In this way, therefore, heaven and earth were one, and at the same time united to God, and the whole of the harmony gave in the end expression to the glory of the Word, and in this way expressed God's glory.

Second, the apostle reminds us also of the fact that sin came, causing disruption in this beautiful harmony of God's creation. It could be no other way. Sin can never produce something positive; it can only disrupt, destroy, and divide what exists. Sin causes division between creature and Creator, between angel and angel, between heaven and earth, between man and animal, between plant and plant, and between

element and element. Everywhere now there is division through sin, strife is observed, and the beautiful song of creation is disrupted; it is replete with discordant notes. Indeed, in some parts of the creation there is seen even now something of the original splendor, nevertheless the whole displays fragmentation; the oneness, the harmony, and the happiness is no more.

Paul now came to speak of a great mystery. And that mystery of God's will consists indeed in this, that God from all eternity had decreed something other, something greater. He had decreed to make the oneness of creation and the bond between creature and Creator even tighter and stronger than it could ever exist in mere man, with the result that the glory of God would sparkle more beautifully in the creation than ever before. He had decreed that the whole would be gathered together and united in Christ. Christ, the Word become flesh, God in man, Creator in creature, in whom, therefore, the creature lies close to the heart of God—that Christ was foreordained to be the head of the creation of God. The entire splendor of creation, as it were in a focal point, concentrated in Him, in order then to radiate outward for the revelation of the glory of God. That God had resolved to accomplish from all eternity. Note well, not in this way, that the Lord earlier had another purpose. Not in this manner, that He first did not reckon with the entrance of sin, yet was forced by sin to change His plan. No, we should not think of our God in such a manner of reasoning. The matter was this way, that God from eternity never thought and willed anything other than that whatever developed in history must finally cooperate to attain the one, all encompassing, purpose!

And that plan of salvation Paul now identifies as a mystery. By that Paul means, as is evident from other texts, that this entire wisdom of God was historically hidden in the old dispensation. Not only is it true that Satan knew or understood nothing of it. Surely that is true as well. The Devil understood, of course, nothing of God's plan. He wanted to take control, in order to ruin everything God had ever conceived or willed. That was his purpose with his own rebellion; that was also his purpose in his tempting of the king of God's creation. That in the final analysis he did nothing else than execute God's counsel, and that the entrance of sin specifically would lead to the coming of the Christ,

to the revelation of the glory of the grace of God, and to the union of the whole of creation in Christ—of all that, the Devil knew nothing. God had determined this in Himself; it was something hidden from Satan.

However, this was a mystery also for the people of God in the old dispensation. Before the flood, the administration of grace was of such a kind that it appeared as if God's plan of salvation could snatch only a few individuals as firebrands out of the fire. Abel and Enoch and Noah and other sons of God were rescued, yet the human race and, even more significantly, God's creation appeared to be abandoned to destruction. With Abraham's calling, there came the revelation of a certain bond, yet it still seemed as though salvation would be limited to one family. There was no evidence to be found of any uniting of the entire race and of the preservation of creation. God blessed in Israel, after all, but one nation out of many. In God's love toward Israel it did not appear to be any different. Indeed, it is true that the light of prophecy descended in ever more brilliant rays and the seer in Israel already spoke of a new heavens and a new earth. However, in the first place, it did not go beyond prophetic words. As far as historic acts were concerned, the plan of salvation remained hidden—hidden, at least, for the nations of the world. And in the second place, prophecy was wrongly understood at that time as well, and men expected a Messiah who would save Israel in the national sense of the word.

But now it is different. In the new dispensation the veil of mystery is lifted. Christ came. Christ entered into death, but He also gloriously came forth from death to appear once again. This Christ was exalted, not as a national king on Jerusalem's throne, but as the King of all races and nations and peoples and tongues, as the head of God's creation in the Jerusalem that is above. This Christ fulfilled God's counsel and, in the dispensation of the fullness of time, He gathered as one under Him everything that is in heaven and that is on earth to the glory of the God of our fathers.

Well then, this mystery, this Christ, the apostle says, must be known by the Lord's church. That Christ, beloved congregation, you must know, and you must continue to learn to know more of all His fullness and riches. Most definitely know Christ, even as He delivers

your soul from death and translates you out of the kingdom of darkness into God's marvelous light. That above all is important. On that truth we, too, lay emphasis. If you do not know Christ as the Savior of your sin-imprisoned soul, then all further spiritual knowledge of that Christ is impossible. Therefore, that is all important first of all.

Yet not exclusively that! You must learn to know that Christ in all the fullness of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Him. You must know Him as the one who delivers both your body and soul from destruction. You must know Him as the one who delivers not only a few, but the entire organism of the human race in God's elect, with all the wealth of thoughts and treasures bestowed on the human race. You must know Him as He presently will gather under Him the whole creation of heaven and earth, causing thereby His essence clearly to radiate forth as the eternal Word and in this way glorifies the Father. That Christ you must know. The apostle in the original language emphasizes that this knowledge is to be intimate, broad, and deep. You have been given, by God's grace, a spiritual knowledge to understand the mystery of God. Well then, that entire rich, glorious plan of God's wisdom you must track in all its particulars, it must be investigated and known by you in its mutual connections, so that you may know what is the breadth and length, the depth and the height, and so that you in worship may kneel before Him who sits upon the throne and lives throughout all eternity!

In Full Assurance of Understanding

You see, beloved, in this way you come also to the full assurance of understanding, that rich treasure of faith that gives rest to our souls in God for time and eternity. In opposition to this glorious mystery that in the dispensation of the fullness of time was revealed in Christ, you can adopt various attitudes. There is, in the first place, the attitude of unbelief. If that is your attitude, perhaps you indeed know the truth and perhaps you have knowledge, intellectual knowledge, of the mystery of God, but you rebel with all that is in you and rise in opposition to God's truth. Then you tread the Christ under your feet and desire to destroy God's plan. It is the attitude of the unilluminated mind. And you can count on it, the more the darkened mind comes in

contact with the Christ, the more also will unbelief's rebellion reveal itself against Him.

There is also the attitude of doubt that resists this mystery of God. Then there is poured forth into your heart the love of God, and you sometimes even delight in the glorious mystery of God in Christ, yes, you also sometimes shout with joy in the blessedness of redemption. But there is no rest. You are still cast to and fro. You experience times of terror, times when the principle of unbelief wages a bitter battle against the presence of faith in your soul. You are still so easily carried along by every wind of doctrine. You are yet inclined to seek, apart from Christ, treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In this way you have no rest for your mind, no rest for your soul, and no rest for your heart.

But, finally, there is also the attitude of the full assurance of understanding, which is the rich treasure of faith. And do not say now, beloved, that this full assurance of understanding cannot be attained; for that is not true. Against that notion the whole of Scripture testifies. The message of our text testifies against it as well. Assurance of understanding is that attitude of the mind that finds rest in God. Rest in the firm, unflinching faith that God indeed had from eternity His plan of salvation, that according to that plan of salvation He willed nothing other than to unite all things in Christ, and that He executes that plan throughout all of history. Rest is the assurance of knowing that in Christ you have a place as well in that plan of salvation through God's incomprehensible love, that you will soon be glorified in eternity with Christ in the new creation, and that you will praise God for His eternal love and grace!

Beloved, there is a great necessity for the assurance of faith. Especially is this assurance necessary for the positive comfort of the church. As long as this assurance of understanding is lacking, there is no happiness of soul; there is no rejoicing in the God of salvation; there is no courage and strength for the calling unto which we have been called; there is no thankfulness and no love, no hope and no expectation. We do not then strive bravely in the good fight of faith, and God does not receive the honor due Him! It is necessary as well in opposition to the power of the lie that is in the world and that, especially in our

day, so overwhelmingly rises up against us. It was that way already in Colosse. There were in the congregation, and undoubtedly in the neighboring congregations, those who had spread a false doctrine. Which doctrine it was makes no difference. The worship of angels, a notion of touch not and taste not and handle not—all these belong to the philosophy of the world. In any case, the congregation was deceived to seek the treasures of wisdom and knowledge apart from Christ. Many were deceived. They were obviously flung to and fro. There was no rest, no assurance of understanding.

It is that way as well in our world, a world with which we come into increasingly closer contact according to the measure that we outgrow our mother tongue and begin to move in the language of this country. In all manner of ways we come into contact with the lies of the world. By means of books and documents, in scientific argument, but also in story and novels, yes, not to forget, in newspaper and discussion, we are confronted directly by the spirit of our age, which is not from God. If we are to stand resolutely in opposition to that spirit of the world, and if we would seek our wisdom and knowledge alone in Christ, then it is necessary that we come to the full assurance of understanding. Then we will also stand strong in opposition to the world. We will also be able to fight the good fight of faith. And we will live to the honor of our great God in the midst of the world.

We come to this restful, strong, firm assurance of understanding through the knowledge of the mystery in Christ. No, I know very well, if the principle of this assurance is not in our hearts, this knowledge also is of no benefit to us. If the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ has not touched our hearts, knowledge will only cause us to rebel all the more against the Christ of God. And dreadfully miserable is he who does not convert under the preaching of this mystery. Yet Paul presupposes this work of the Spirit in the heart. Indeed, he is not speaking to a people who do not understand the language of the heavenly Canaan, but to the congregation of Jesus Christ. In this church dwells the Spirit of Christ and He illuminates the mind, activating faith. Therefore that is assumed. But this being conceded, there is still no doubt about it that the congregation of Christ arrives at greater assurance of understanding according to the measure that she matures in the knowledge of Christ

and of the mystery of God. The more we learn to know the mystery of God, which is the glorious plan of salvation in all its beauty and oneness and harmony and wisdom, the more we will acknowledge that God has revealed that wisdom alone in Christ. The more knowledge we have with which to answer the enemy in the evil day, that much more will we be protected against the attacks of the Prince of Darkness. Therefore, the congregation must know the full, rich, glorious plan of redemption, so that she comes to the wondrous riches of the full assurance of understanding.

The Bond of Mutual Love

It is clear from the words of our text that the apostle sees a certain bond, a reciprocal relationship, between this knowledge of the mystery and the full assurance of understanding on the one hand, and the bond of Christian love on the other. Indeed, he says that it is his desire that the hearts of the believers may be comforted and strengthened, and that they may be united in love, and that for the purpose of attaining all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. The love of the congregation, the same love whereby the congregation is mutually knit together, compels, and thus discovers in a natural way its goal in the full assurance of faith and the knowledge of the mystery.

In order to understand how this is possible, we must for a moment pay attention to the character of love in the church of the Lord. And then I want to emphasize the fact of love itself. That the congregation is tightly bound together in the bond of love is, in the first place, a simple fact. People speak in our day very much about love and brotherhood. Pastors preach often that we must love one another. But all such preaching is of no benefit, beloved, as long as love is not a fact. Therefore I do not say in the first place: "Congregation, love one another," but I say to you: "You do love one another." Love in the church is simply a fact. It is not a fact because you have this love as arising out of yourselves. This love is present even less so because you have produced it in your own heart. But this love is present, simply because He who first loved you has united you inseparably to Christ Jesus. The church is no society that came into existence through the members' action of voluntarily joining. The congregation is the body

of Christ having come into existence through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. In that body is a life, a faith, a hope, a spirit that dwells and works in Christ Jesus as the head, but also in them as the members of His body. The members of that body are therefore mutually bound together. They know one another, in such a way that no one else in the world knows them. They understand one another. They trust one another. They love each other. The bond of love in Christ binds them tightly together.

Well then, if this is clearly understood, it will not be difficult to see that there exists a reciprocal relationship between the assurance of understanding, the knowledge of the mystery, and this impulse of love in the congregation of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, this impulse of love will reveal itself in the congregation as an enduring impulse for more knowledge of the Christ in all His riches. Naturally! Love in the congregation is the bond that unites us together in Christ. There is no bond of love among the believers apart from Christ. There is no bond that unites them together without Christ. No, the one bond of love binds them to Christ as the head, in order to bind them to each other as the members of His body. The very same bond that knits believers together is also the bond that binds them to Christ. Now it should be clear that love delights in penetrating into its object. Love desires to know its object. Love will gladly listen to everything that is communicated to it of the riches of its object. Love hungers and thirsts for the knowledge of the mystery. So too love in the church thirsts for the knowledge of the full, rich Christ, and it is the impulse within to penetrate into the mystery of God. But on the other hand, the increase in the knowledge of the mystery will also have this consequence, that the longer and the more closely we are knit together, the more we will know ourselves to be the members of the same body. Love thirsts for knowledge, and knowledge causes an increase in love.

In this way, what the apostle wants is clear. He desires that the congregation be knit together in love; that they from the impulse of this love may direct their attention to the object of this love, namely Christ; that they thereby make an investigation of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Him; and that in this way they do arrive at the full assurance of understanding. That is the longing of

the apostle, his passionate desire. Where and when he hears that the congregation is flung to and fro and that many try to tempt her to seek the treasures of wisdom and knowledge elsewhere, there and then he has conflict. And he wants the congregation to know that. He wants the congregation to know that he loves her. They are, after all, the children of his people. He too is knit together with the congregation in the very same bond of love, and besides, he is the apostle upon whom weighs all the care of the congregation. Therefore he has conflict, and he exerts himself in this letter to lead the congregation again to the knowledge of the full, rich Christ, so that they may mature in Him.

We feel very much this longing of the apostle, beloved. We too love the children of our people, the saints in Christ Jesus. To us as well the calling comes to preach the full counsel of God in the Lord's church. We too rejoice when Zion prospers and when the saints are built up in the knowledge of the mystery and are knit together in love. With that desire of soul, we begin our work in your midst. Still more, in our day too there is every wind of doctrine blowing. Wisdom and knowledge is sought in all manner of ways outside of Christ. Therefore we feel all the more pressed to point you clearly and fully to Him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You may therefore expect from me that I will speak about this mystery, will speak loudly, and will speak without hesitation. Do not expect from me that I should want to know anything other than the full counsel of God. We will speak of that full counsel from the pulpit, in the catechism room, in your homes, at the sickbed, and at your deathbed. Woe to him who, under the preaching of that full counsel of God, resists, and rebels against the full, rich Christ of God. It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he were cast in the sea, than that he should ever hear mention made of that full Christ.

We count on your help and support in this work, brethren who are the officebearers in this very large congregation.

Above all, in this work we await the help of the Almighty God, who has created the heavens and the earth. Amen. ●

I'll Cry

(Sunday evening inaugural sermon of Herman Hoeksema in Eastern Ave. CRC on February 29, 1920)

> The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:
>
> The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.
>
> The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever.
>
> Isaiah 40:6-8

It is undeniable that the modern pulpit has, especially in recent years, been degraded into a platform for the propagation of purely humanistic philosophy. So-called ministers of the gospel have become preachers of man's word, and the servants of Christ in His church have allowed themselves on more than one occasion to be employed as servants of men. I know, usually the saying is that they serve humanity and that they labor for the deliverance, for the upbuilding, of mankind and the world. But fact is, that under this beautiful slogan the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures is frequently set aside, fails to be heard from the modern pulpit, and instead all sorts of messages are delivered on a variety of topics that have little or no connection with the gospel of the kingdom.

If complete statistics were available of all the subjects discussed before the congregated church of Christ by ministers of the gospel during the last half decade, the result would be little short of astounding to whoever entertains a generally conservative conception of things. The flock of Jesus Christ came to the house of God on a Sabbath to be fed on a lecture on liberty bonds; or their spiritual life was supposed to be built up by a speech on thrift stamps. Again, one Sunday the most holy faith of God's covenant people was established by an elaborate discussion of the necessity of good roads,

chiefly perhaps for the purpose of making joyriding on the Sabbath more joyful; and another Sunday it was the topic of hygiene that was thoroughly discussed for the enlightenment of the children of the kingdom.

On these and numerous other subjects the church of God was frequently enlightened, with such nourishment the flock of Jesus Christ was often fed, and by it she was expected to live and to flourish. Sometimes a portion of the Word of God was still selected, but it was so distorted as to serve as a hanger for the lecture to be delivered. Often, however, even this was no longer deemed necessary, and the shepherd of Christ's flock bluntly offered the sheep stones for bread.

Of course, this is no strange, no isolated, phenomenon in the modern world. It is not a phenomenon that finds no connection with the modern view of the church and the world. If we are at all acquainted with the modern trend of development of thought, we will be little surprised to find that in many a church the truth was preached no more, and the pure Word of God was set aside. Some of the most fundamental truths of Scripture, such as that of vicarious atonement and the necessity of regeneration, were denied; truths like that of total depravity and original sin were laughed to scorn and termed mockingly as obsolete sixteenth-century theology. And the church itself was considered more and more to be a mere human society among others, existing for no other purpose in the world than the uplift of society and the betterment of humanity in the evolutionary sense of the word. If she was to have any right of existence at all, she surely must be the servant of Man. Small wonder that also its ministers, laboring under that false notion of the church, became literally servants of men and delivered man's word instead of God's.

We emphatically refuse to be carried along by the drift of this modern development. And what must be emphasized in our age is that the Word of God and nothing but that Word, as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, must be brought to the church of Christ in the world. The minister has no other business. He is merely an ambassador. He does not receive his message from men; he does not have the right to speak on his own authority. He is sent by the King of the church and, therefore, from that King he must receive His message. Nothing else.

And that message of the King, as He has revealed it in the infallible Word of God, he must deliver with boldness and distinctiveness. More boldly and more distinctly he must preach it according as the church in general and the world departs from it or discards it. And since we are about to assume our labors in your midst, we decided to speak to you this evening, on the basis of the text we chose, on: The Word of God and Its Proclamation. Let us consider: 1) The Contents of That Word, 2) The Imperishable Nature of That Word, and 3) The Mode of Its Proclamation.

The Contents of That Word

To understand the words of our text, we must remember that in this latter half of his prophecy the divine seer is placed on the standpoint of the latter half of the period of the captivity of the Israelitish nation. God's covenant-people had filled the measure of their iniquity. They had repeatedly transgressed the covenant of Jehovah. They had cast to the wind the repeated call to repentance and conversion. And finally, in the prophetic vision they had already been carried away into the land of their exile, there in Babylon to bear the punishment of their transgression. But in captivity they repented. The measure of their punishment became full. The faithful covenant God remembered the remnant of His people. And in that same prophetic state the seer is called to preach deliverance and salvation to the captive people.

Our chapter relates how the prophet is called to deliver that message of joy and salvation. The voice of God comes to the prophet and to the prophets of God in general. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God!"—so we read in the first verse of the chapter. They must, therefore, approach the people of Jehovah with a word of comfort. And the brief content of their message of comfort is that the warfare of God's people is accomplished, their iniquity is pardoned, and full atonement has been made for all their sins. And, therefore, the end of their punishment has arrived. They shall be delivered. Already a voice is heard proclaiming that the way through the desert must be prepared, for as in the glorious days of old, Jehovah shall deliver His people and shall safely lead them through the desert back to the land of their inheritance.

Hark!

> The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness! Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (vv. 3-5).

But hark! The prophet presently hears two more voices. The first is the voice of Jehovah. It saith: "Cry!" The other represents the voice of the prophets who are to go and bring the comforting message of joy and deliverance to the people of God. It asks: "What shall I cry?" And the answer of Jehovah comes: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand forever."

The message, therefore, that the prophet must deliver, that he is enjoined to cry out, is twofold. He must preach that all flesh is grass, that all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field, and that like the grass it flourisheth today and withereth tomorrow. And in the second place, he must cry out that the Word of our God shall stand forever. This twofold message may after all be comprised in one statement: While all else fails of fulfillment, the Word of our God shall surely be realized.

What is, then, the Word of our God that is referred to in the text? It is nothing short of the entire counsel of salvation. It is in the first place the message of salvation as it must be delivered to the people of the captivity, the message of redemption as it is contained in the first verse of this chapter. It is the Word that speaks to the heart of Jerusalem. Her sins are atoned for. Her iniquity is pardoned. And, therefore, she may look forward to a speedy deliverance. Her warfare is accomplished. That Word of God the prophet must now deliver. That Word of God shall stand and surely be realized. But although this is true, although this Word of our God refers first of all to the message that must be delivered to the people of the captivity at that

time, yet in the wider sense, as we will see presently, it implies the entire counsel of God's salvation. In the wider sense the Lord here enjoins the prophet to cry: "Though the enemy may rise up against my counsel, and though there are periods in history in which it seems that my eternal counsel of salvation, the counsel I revealed from the beginning, shall not be realized, yet My Word shall stand forever!"

That this is true will be evident if we take into consideration the historical circumstances of that time. It seemed at that time as if Jehovah had cast off His covenant people, as if they were irrevocably lost. That covenant people of God at the time was Israel. Outside of Israel God had no people. The Word was through the nation of Israel only. There was the holy seed. There was the line of the seed of the woman. Nowhere else. But apparently that people had been cast away. They had sinned. They had filled the measure of their iniquity. It seemed at this time as if Jehovah was about to lose the people of His covenant and as if the line of the holy seed was to be discontinued. But if this were so, the entire counsel of salvation would fail. For what was the case? Israel bore in its loins the Holy Seed par excellence. Israel was to bring forth the Great Son of David who was to sit upon his throne forever. The line of the holy seed, historically present in Israel only, was to culminate in the Messiah, in Jesus Christ. If, therefore, Israel is to be cast away, is not to be accepted again, is to die in its iniquity, the Seed of the woman shall not be born. And the counsel of salvation as it had been announced in Paradise would fail of realization. There the Lord had spoken: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." But that Word of God could never be realized if Israel were not delivered.

For years it seemed as if the covenant-people were lost. For decades it seemed as if that Word of God would fail, and as if Jehovah would have no people. But now the prophet must bring the message of deliverance to that people. He must preach salvation to them again. He must bring the message of grace. He must comfort the people of God and tell them that their warfare is accomplished and their iniquity pardoned and atoned. And, therefore, the line of God's covenant is to be continued. The Word of the Lord shall not fail. A word of joy

and redemption may be preached to the people of God, and through the ages it shall resound: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Her warfare is accomplished. Her iniquity is pardoned. Her deliverance is near.

The Imperishable Nature of That Word

That this Word of our God, this message of salvation, this counsel of redemption is imperishable, cannot fail, shall surely be realized, is emphasized strongly in the text. Not only is this positively expressed, but it is stressed by means of a contrast employed. The eternal, ever enduring, powerful Word of God is contrasted to flesh and its goodliness. The latter is as the grass and as the beauty of the flower. It flourisheth, it standeth in the splendor of its beauty, for a moment. But it perisheth and fades away.

What does the prophet mean when he refers to the passing nature of flesh? Does he merely wish to draw a contrast between the eternal nature of God, standing above the changing times and seasons, and the fleeting character of all that is called creature? Thus it appears sometimes in Holy Writ. The author of Psalm 90 draws this contrast beautifully. God is from everlasting to everlasting. He was before the mountains were born. A thousand years are to Him as a watch in the night when it is past. But the people, and the generations of the children of men, are like the grass, their days are as a tale that is told. Soon the days of man are cut off and he flies away. In that psalm, therefore, the contrast is drawn between the ever-abiding Jehovah and the fleeting creature.

But in our text, as it seems to us, there is more implied. The message the prophet must deliver implies that all human attempts for the salvation of man and of the world are vain and futile. And, moreover, that all the attempts of flesh to counteract and oppose the counsel of God are vain. This is plain from the contrast. Flesh and its goodliness are here employed in contrast with the Word of our God. That Word of God aims at salvation. It promises deliverance. From the days of old it claimed that the works of darkness would be destroyed; the head of the serpent crushed; God's people saved, redeemed to glory; and all the works of God's hands would ultimately praise Him. But over

against this Word stands flesh—human power, human might, keenness of insight, wisdom and reason, philosophy and science, human counsel and device as it stands alone, separate from God and over against Him. All that is purely human, nothing but human, solely human is implied in this word flesh. Man in his own strength pretends to save the people and the world. Man in his own wisdom, apart from the Wisdom of God, claims to solve the world's problems. Still more. This human power and might, this human wisdom and insight, ventures to oppose the counsel of God, to set aside God's way of salvation, and pretends to know a better, a more efficient way than the way of grace.

And now the voice cries: All these human attempts at salvation shall fail! They may appear beautiful for a while. They may seem as if flesh will be victorious and the Word of our God shall fail. The contrary is true. All these humanistic attempts shall terminate in complete failure. They are like grass and like the flower of the field. Their beauty shall fade, their strength shall perish. Surely, the people is grass.

Understood in this light the words of our text are of great significance for our own age. It is doubtful whether there ever was a period in history so dominated by the spirit of humanism as our own. The last few years have manifested that spirit in all its boldness. It is through human counsel and human effort that the world is to be saved and the kingdom is to be established. The gospel of Golgotha and of Joseph's garden has been replaced by that of a humanistic, evolutionistic philosophy. Man is not inherently sinful. He is not naturally corrupt. He is not in himself guilty and condemned. On the contrary, he is inherently good. He admittedly has not as yet reached the highest stage of evolution. He must be improved. But great opportunities he offers in his very nature. What we must have is not the old blood theology that makes man totally depraved, presses him down to a condition whence he cannot save himself, and casts him upon the blood of the cross for his only salvation. What must be preached is that man is capable of great things, that his case and that of the world is not hopeless, that he must follow the example of the Man of Galilee. What we must do is combine all the forces of mankind in state, church, and society. With united effort we must labor for the uplifting of society, for the bet-

terment of the world, for the welfare of mankind. Jesus simply gave us a program to be worked out. That program must, at least in part, be realized. And a glorious future is awaiting us and all the world. The glorious millennium of peace and righteousness will presently be ushered in!

My text warns: "All flesh is as grass!" All these purely humanistic attempts shall fail. All these human counsels that aim at the salvation of the world apart from the Word of God and the blood of Golgotha shall prove vain and futile. And today we may witness the truth of these words. If it is true that there never was an age in which human power did so assert itself for the salvation of the world as our own, it is also true that there never was a time in which things did look so dark. Even the most persistent optimists are today wavering in their hopes. The war has not brought the glorious age of freedom and democracy that was promised. Peace, though formally concluded because of the exhaustion of the nations, is more remote than ever. Hatred and jealousy, greed and envy are being nourished in the heart of humanity. The millennium is not in sight. The social problems become more involved as the days go by. Dissatisfaction, restlessness, unrighteousness, and avarice come to manifestation day by day. Never have things looked more hopeless from a purely humanistic point of view than in our own time. And although there still are prophets that are persistent in their predictions of a better age to come, nowhere is the man who shows us clearly the way to this glorious future. Surely, our time preaches the realization of this message: All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field!

Over against this passing word of man stands the Word of our God, enduring and imperishable. The Word of God shall stand! The original may very appropriately be translated: The Word of our God shall rise forever! The counsel of God's salvation, revealed in the Word of redemption, shall rise again and again in history till it shall find eternal rest in the glorious Kingdom of our Lord! Sometimes it may seem as if that Word has been defeated. Fears may rise up in our bosom that the Word of God shall rise no more. Fact is, again and again it rises, rises in ever greater splendor of strength, till all opposition shall have been crushed and it shall stand without being disputed

and opposed. Ultimately, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, it shall be fully accomplished and shall stand unchallenged.

And why shall it stand and rise ever again? Because it is the Word of God. That God is eternal, and so is His Word. From all eternity He planned His counsel for the redemption of all things, for the gathering of all things in Christ Jesus our Lord. As the eternal counsel of God, that Word stands back of all the attempts of Satan and hell to frustrate it. Nothing is excluded from that counsel. Nothing takes that eternal Word by surprise. It may seem often as if the devil, sin, and death successfully oppose it. And, in fact, it is the intention of the Evil One to frustrate that Word of God. This constitutes his terrible guilt. But fact is, also the counsel of the Wicked One, the attempts of the devil and all that stand on his side, will ultimately prove to have contributed to the realization of that eternal Word. That Word shall stand, because it is the counsel of the Almighty God. He is never separated from His Word. He does not leave the realization of that Word of redemption to another. He Himself is in His Word. He Himself realizes it, accomplishes it to its ultimate perfection. Against Him nothing can prevail.

And, therefore, that Word shall stand forever! What a beautiful word of comfort! A word of comfort and joy it is, if by faith we appropriate this Word of our text and say: "This God, whose Word shall stand, is our God." For then, and then alone, do we take courage in the midst of the world. And though times may be dark and conditions seem hopeless, we know that the Word of our God, the counsel of redemption in which also we have a place by grace, shall rise again and again and ultimately appear in glory everlasting!

Also this truth has often been illustrated in the history of the world. How often was the firmness of that Word of our God tested! How often did flesh rise up against it! It rose up against it when Cain killed Abel. It rose up against it in the period before the Flood, when finally the Word of God was represented only in the family of Noah. It rose up against it when that wicked instrument of the devil, Pharaoh, made the deliberate attempt to destroy the holy seed in the land of Egypt. All through the history of the people of Israel in the land of promise did flesh rise up against the Word of God. Nations combined against

it. Babylon gained renown in this respect. And dark it looked for the Word of God at the time when the prophet was called to preach comfort and deliverance to the remnant of God's people. And, last but not least, flesh rose up against the Word of God and His counsel of redemption when the powers of hell and the powers of the world combined against God and the holy child Jesus. Then especially the battle raged fiercely between flesh and the Word of God. And the end seemed victory for flesh. The Word of God is downed, killed, stored away in the grave of Joseph's garden!

But the Word of God always arose again. It appeared again and again and proved unconquerable. It appeared in Seth after Abel. It continued in Shem after the flood. It arose in Abraham and Israel. It appeared in the remnant that were delivered from the land of their captivity, to whom it was preached that their warfare was accomplished and their sins atoned for. It reached its realization in Bethlehem, the Word become flesh, Immanuel, God with us, the culmination of the holy line. It arose and stood in glory, victorious over flesh on the morning of the resurrection. In principle that Word of our God has overcome already. And though also in the new dispensation the powers of earth and hell may rage to prevent the full realization of that Word of God, nevertheless, we have the sure promise that this Word shall stand forever! The day is coming when all shall have been accomplished and the counsel of God, the Word of Jehovah, shall have rest and shall stand unchallenged in the eternal kingdom! Surely, vain is flesh and vain are they that put their trust in human power and counsel. But safe and secure are they whose trust is in the Word of our God. They shall not perish, but like that Word they shall stand forever.

The Mode of Its Proclamation

That, then, is the message the prophet must bring, and that is also the message the ambassador of Christ in the new dispensation must bring to the church of God in the midst of the world. He must preach the Word of God. He must bring a word of comfort and salvation, of grace and deliverance to Jerusalem, speaking to the heart of Zion. And concerning that Word of the Lord he must say that it shall stand forever, and that all flesh shall fail and prove futile.

He must speak. It is not left to his own choice whether he will bring that Word of our God. On the contrary, the voice comes with the command: Cry! There is no choice left. The prophet of the Lord cannot at will choose another vocation. It is not thus that he himself decides to deliver that Word. He is called by the Lord God, and therefore he must bring that Word. He is constrained to comfort God's people, to bring the message of salvation, to cry out that all flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field, perishable and passing, but that the Word of our God abideth forever. He therefore does not derive the contents of his message from any other source. It is not man that calls him. It is not his own mind that teaches him. It is the Most High that calls him, and no other business he has than to proclaim what the Lord enjoins him to preach. He must condemn the attempts of flesh and uphold the certainty of the Word of our God.

He must cry! It is by no means indifferent to our God how His Word is delivered. The prophet must not merely learn it by heart and dryly, unconcernedly, repeat it. He must not whisper it timidly. He must not sing it pleasantly. The command as to the mode of its proclamation is definitely: Cry! This suggests three ideas. In the first place, it informs us that the ambassador of God both in the old and in the new dispensation must bring the message of God to Zion clearly and distinctly. Whatever is cried out is clear and distinct to all. And thus the Word of God must be cried out. It must be preached clearly. There must be nothing ambiguous, nothing hesitant, nothing uncertain about its contents. The audience must understand clearly what the preacher means. In the second place, it suggests that the message must be delivered with bold emphasis. The preacher must insist upon a hearing, like one who cries. He must not allow himself to be silenced. He must not fear public opinion. Hesitation is not characteristic of one who cries out. He must be bold. Neither the world, nor all the powers of the world combined, not yet the disobedient among God's own people may intimidate him. Persistently he must cry: "All flesh is grass, but the Word of our God abideth forever!"

And finally, it suggests that the ambassador of Christ must be a living witness. A cry rises from the heart, it is living testimony. One who mechanically repeats a message does not cry. He that cries out

is enthusiastic about the message he brings. Thus it is with regard to the preacher of the Word. Christ did not order a million phonographs to propagate the gospel. He did not invent the printing press to print and scatter dead tracts. He commanded living witnesses to go out into the world and cry out: "All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. But the Word of our God abideth forever. It shall rise and rise. It shall prove victorious again and again. It shall ultimately stand realized in glory!"

Thus, beloved, I conceive of my task in your midst. To this task I pledged myself when I entered first upon the ministry of the Word. To this task I pledged myself anew when last Tuesday evening I was connected with the Eastern Avenue congregation. I am aware of my own weakness. The task incumbent upon me, which I am constrained to perform, is a difficult one, in my own strength quite impossible of execution. But our help is in the name of the Lord. Weak in our own strength, we are strong in the Lord. Timid by nature, we are bold in Him.

And, therefore, in His name we assume the task of delivering this twofold message. We will proclaim that all flesh is grass. We will witness against the attempts of human strength. And we will maintain that the Word of our God, and it only, stands forevermore! To young and old, at all occasions, we shall deliver that message alone. Do not ask anything else. And the more persistently the world intrudes upon us with its arm of flesh, the more loudly and clearly, the more distinctly and boldly, we shall in the name of the Lord of Hosts cry out: "Only the Word of the Lord standeth forever. In it alone is all our salvation!"

Amen. ●

Book Reviews

Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic, Francis J. Beckwith. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009. Pp. 144. $15 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The blurb on the front cover explains this book: "Why the President of the Evangelical Theological Society Left His Post and Returned to the Catholic Church."

Beckwith was a prominent theologian in evangelical circles in North America. In 2007, he and his wife joined the Roman Catholic Church. At the time, he held the prestigious position of president of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). The ETS is an organization devoted to the study and promotion of evangelical theology. Some 4,500 of the most prominent, influential theologians, scholars, professors of theology, and churchmen in many Protestant churches and seminaries are members of ETS.

Since "evangelical" refers roughly to non-Roman Catholic, Protestant proclamation and defense of the gospel of salvation by grace alone, Beckwith's defection to Rome caused no small stir in the ETS, as also more widely in Protestant circles.

The book is Beckwith's defense of his apostasy. It is, at the same time, encouragement to other evangelicals to follow Beckwith's lead.

The book by Beckwith is, therefore, not groundbreaking. It is only the most recent of the genre. The earliest, and best known, was John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* [English translation: *An Apology for His Own Life]: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (originally published in 1865). Newman's book was his account of his leaving the Church of England, in the nineteenth century, for Rome. More recently, the erstwhile Presbyterian Scott Hahn has written *Rome, Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

Noteworthy Aspects of the Defection

Several aspects of Beckwith's defense of his abandoning evangelicalism for the Roman

Catholic Church are worthy of note. First, none of the various evangelical churches that Beckwith bounced around in prior to his joining Rome had a strong, solid ecclesiology. None took itself seriously as a genuine manifestation of the elect body of Jesus Christ, as determined by the infallible marks of the true church listed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Accordingly, Beckwith felt himself committed to none of them. Whenever it was convenient for him, he would leave a supposedly evangelical church and join another. In such a church environment, Rome's claim to be the historic, mother church is irresistible.

For example, one of the churches that Beckwith attended regularly, if he was not a member of it, was a "Foursquare Church" (41). This is the church founded by the rebel against the prohibition of the apostle that a female not be a preacher, the charlatan and the adulteress Aimee Semple McPherson. If I were confronted with the choice between the woman-made church of McPherson and the man-made Church of Rome, I would choose Rome, also in view of the fact that there is no essential difference between the Arminian gospel of the Foursquare Church and the semi-Pelagian theology of Rome.

Second, Beckwith is superstitious. Circumstances in his life speak to him more powerfully regarding church membership than do the truths of Holy Scripture. Direction from God to join the Roman Catholic Church came in the form of a request from Beckwith's nephew that Beckwith sponsor the nephew at the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation (19). Beckwith received an important message from God by means of the unusual, accidental switching of stations on his radio (41). Beckwith was confirmed in his decision to join the Roman Catholic Church by the coincidence that Edith Schaeffer, wife of the well-known Francis A. Schaeffer, signed his book on the same day that Beckwith was publicly received back into the Roman Church (55, 56). Assurance of the salvation of Beckwith's father-in-law, who died outside the Roman Catholic Church, is based on two visions God supposedly gave to Beckwith's wife (70, 71).

Rome is the appropriate home of the superstitious.

Third, Beckwith's admission

into the Roman Catholic Church consisted of his involvement in the Roman sacrament of penance. To enter the Church of Rome, Beckwith had to confess his sins to a priest in the confessional. The climax of the spurious sacrament was Beckwith's performance of penance. He performed a work that paid for his sins. Thus, necessarily and appropriately, entrance into the communion of Rome consisted of denying the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sins on the cross.

For Francis J. Beckwith, membership in the Roman Catholic Church took place by way of a public denial of Jesus Christ and His cross.

And the nature of the penance was significant: one public recitation of the Lord's Prayer and one public recitation of the "Hail, Mary." "The priest then heard my confession and granted me absolution. I found my way to the main sanctuary, where I did my penance, which consisted of one "Our Father" and one "Hail Mary" (18).

In the Roman Catholic Church, the grace of pardon is cheap—not free, but cheap. The sinner can purchase this grace, and the purchase price is ridiculously cheap: rattle off one Lord's Prayer and one paean to mediatrix Mary.

But the price of forgiveness and of admission to Rome includes adoration of Mary, that is, idolatry. Rome insists on being Rome, even in the case of the joining by a president of the ETS, who knows full well what the "Hail, Mary" means in Roman Catholic theology and liturgy.

Denying the cross of Jesus Christ as the sole and entire payment of the debt of sin and practicing the idolatry of the worship of and reliance upon Mary, Francis J. Beckwith is a lost soul. He has plunged himself under the curse of God, and, if he does not repent, will perish forever.

The response of the ETS to the apostasy of its former president did not include any such warning. This lack betrays the weakness of the ETS. An evangelicalism that cannot condemn the Roman Catholic Church as a false church is not worthy of the name. The evangel is the gospel of Scripture, and the gospel of Scripture condemns the theology and church that posit another mediator between God and men in addition to Jesus Christ; that judge the cross of Christ insuf-

ficient for redemption; and that attribute salvation to the will and works of the sinner, rather than only to the grace of God, to say nothing of the rejection of the lordship of the risen Christ over the church by the invention of the papacy.

The Urgent Concern: Justification

If these aspects of Beckwith's defense of his falling away to Rome catch the attention of every Reformed reader, there is one element of the defense that ought to be of utmost concern to Reformed and Presbyterian believers today, especially Reformed and Presbyterian officebearers.

This element is Beckwith's defense of his return to Rome in terms of the doctrine of justification.

Showing a theologian's awareness of the significance of justification regarding the division between Rome and Protestantism, Beckwith put the doctrine of justification at the head of the list of issues that had to be resolved in his mind, if he were to join the Roman Catholic Church.

> Our questions focused on several theological issues that prevented us from becoming Catholic and seemed insurmountable: the doctrine of justification, the Real Presence in the Eucharist, the teaching authority of the Church (including apostolic succession and the primacy of the Pope), and Penance (79).

It is Beckwith's resolution of the issue of justification that ought to concern Presbyterians and Reformed today. He resolved the issue by adopting Rome's doctrine of justification and rejecting the doctrine of the Reformation.

What is significant is Beckwith's presentation and defense of the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification to his evangelical critics. It is exactly the explanation of justification that is given by Norman Shepherd and the theology of the Federal Vision in Reformed circles. If one did not know that the explanation of justification in *Return to Rome* is that of Romanizing and Romanist Beckwith, he would attribute it to Shepherd, the men of the Federal Vision, and those who carry water for the Federal Vision.

Justification, Beckwith came to be convinced, is not exclusively legal and forensic. It is also, and chiefly, "transformation" of the

sinner into a holy and good person by his "sharing in the divine life of Christ" (86).

Justification is not the *imputation* of the righteousness of Christ to the guilty sinner, but the *infusing* of Christ's righteousness into a wicked person so that he becomes increasingly inherently righteous (101, 102).

Justification is not the definitive verdict of God rendering the justified sinner perfectly righteous through faith, but a progressive activity of God beginning with the infusion of grace at baptism, continuing throughout one's life, and concluding at the final judgment (101, 102).

In justification, "works done in faith by God's grace contribute to our…eventual justification" (102). Beckwith explains Romans 4:1-8 as repudiating only "the works of the Mosaic law" for justification (100). Genuinely good works, that is, good works that proceed from true faith, are taken into account by God when He justifies a sinner.

Justification at the final judgment will take place on the basis of every man's own good works: "Works serve in some way as the *basis on which* his [Jesus'] judgment of their eternal fate is made" (97; the emphasis is Beckwith's).

Justification is a cooperative effort of God and the sinner. God's grace enables the sinner to accomplish his own justification, but the sinner must cooperate with grace by his own free will (112).

Such is the reality of this cooperation that it is a possibility that one in whom God has begun the process of justification may fail to cooperate and, therefore, lose his justification and go lost eternally. In support of this terrifying, God-dishonoring view of justification, Beckwith appeals to John 15:1-5, Jesus' teaching of the vine and the branches (95).

And, of course, James 2 is the decisive passage on justification, teaching "God's justification of the Christian" and teaching that "justification is *not* by faith alone" (104, 105).

A Forewarning

In every respect, Beckwith's doctrine of justification, justifying his journey to Rome, is that of Norman Shepherd and the men of the Federal Vision.

The only difference between Beckwith and the men of the Federal Vision is that Beckwith honestly and openly states, and

has acted upon, the conclusion of his Roman Catholic doctrine of justification: renunciation of the Protestant Reformation and return to Rome.

It does not suit the Federal Vision theologians as yet to declare to their Presbyterian and Reformed audiences that their doctrine of justification, and their doctrine of a conditional covenant, whence the heretical doctrine of justification springs, imply membership in the Roman Catholic Church.

Shepherd has hinted at the implication of his theology: "Is there any hope for a common understanding between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism regarding the way of salvation [that is, especially justification]? May I suggest that there is at least a glimmer of hope if both sides are willing to embrace a covenantal understanding of the way of salvation [that is, the doctrine of a conditional covenant]" (Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2000, 59).

The bold declaration of a return to Rome is coming.

In the meanwhile, Francis J. Beckwith, formerly president of the ETS, forewarns the members of Reformed and Presbyterian churches where the doctrine of justification of the Federal Vision will take them and, if not them themselves, their children and grandchildren: *Return to Rome*. ●

Calvin, Theologian and Reformer, Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Garry J. Williams. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010. Pp. 170. $16.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

In 2009, the John Owen Centre in London held a conference to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth, with the speeches being published a year later in this helpful little paperback. The seven papers are grouped under three main heads: "Life and Work," "Doctrine and Experience," and "Christian Living and Ministry."

Sinclair B. Ferguson's brief

biography of Calvin tells the familiar story of the great Reformer with style and insight (ch. 1). Ian Hamilton's thematic analysis of the motivations that drove Calvin neatly supplements Ferguson's more chronological approach (ch. 2).

For me, the most helpful chapter was Sinclair B. Ferguson's other chapter, that on "Calvin and Christian Experience: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian" (ch. 5). Subsections of this masterful article cover "Illumination," "Regeneration," "Adoption," and "Communion."

I especially profited from Ferguson's explanation of Calvin's statement in *Institutes* 3.1.3 that "the first title" of the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of adoption," even though the phrase itself is found only once in the Bible (Rom. 8:15):

> This is the single most important description of the Spirit because, in Calvin's view, sonship is the most basic and comprehensive rubric for understanding the nature of the Christian life. This is all of a piece with the fact that Calvin places strong emphasis on the gospel as the means by which we come to know the fatherhood of God, in which He brings us into His family and makes us His children (102).

From this, Ferguson addresses Calvin's teaching on assurance:

> It is therefore something of a paradox that in some strands of the Reformed tradition believers have been discouraged from enjoying any assurance of their sonship. What good father in this world would want to bring his children up without the assurance that they are his children? Would the Father of lights (James 1:17) do that? The model for all true fatherhood is rooted in the fatherhood of God. Calvin considers this truth to be a glorious liberation, in some senses his own parallel to Luther's appreciation of justification. The God of all glory not only becomes our Father, but wishes to assure His children that this is so. That is why Calvin says in *Institutes* 3.2.7 that we possess a right definition of faith only when we think of it as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us" (102-103).

In fact, the vital theme of as-

surance recurs at several parts in *Calvin, Theologian and Reformer*. Paul Wells, in his chapter on Calvin's teaching on union with Christ (ch. 4), not only sets forth "the double grace of justification and sanctification" in Christ by the Spirit (65), but he also stresses the "assurance of faith" in Calvin's teaching, quoting his commentary on Romans 8:15: "Our confidence in this respect is made certain by the Spirit of adoption who could not inspire us with trust in prayer without sealing in us the gratuitous forgiveness God has granted us" (84).

Anthony Lane's chapter helpfully discusses some of the distinctive doctrines in the *Institutes*: "Predestination," "The Internal Witness of the Spirit," "The Christian Life," "Justification by Faith," and "The Lord's Supper," as well as "Faith and Assurance" (ch. 3). The last listed section's opening lines are worth quoting at length:

> There are strands of the Reformed, Calvinist tradition for which assurance has become a problem. This is especially acute among some circles that claim assurance of salvation is almost seen as presumptuous. An illustration is used that a sheep has a mark of ownership on its ear that can be seen by all—except by the sheep itself. The message is clear. If you are a Christian, it should be plain to everyone—except yourself. In those circles, there is a tradition of people noted for their great sanctity refraining from actually claiming to be converted. Indeed reluctance to claim this is itself at times seen as evidence of sanctification. Allied to this is the myth that Calvin denied that we can know whether we are elect and that he himself died in despair. Both of these are totally untrue. There is no shortage of evidence about his last days, and he clearly died confident of salvation. Again, so far was he from teaching that it is impossible to have assurance of salvation that he actually held that assurance of salvation is itself part of saving faith. (In doing so, he was following in the steps of Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and other mainstream Reformers.) This followed from his definition of faith, already quoted: "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon

> our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (50-51; cf. 46-47).

In his biographical sketch, Ferguson opines, "Judging by the emphasis Calvin would after place (in various contexts) on certainty in the Christian life, it seems likely that coming to an assured knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins in Christ was a major element in his conversion" (13). He also points out the ecclesiastical origin of doubt: Romanist theology. "Cardinal Robert Bellarmine [1542-1621], perhaps the most formidable Roman Catholic theologian of the sixteenth century, gave striking expression to this when he claimed that assurance is the greatest of all Protestant heresies" (12).

The penultimate chapter, that on Calvin's worldview and piety, is by Joel Beeke and Ray Pennings (ch. 6). It contains the following sound instruction:

> Ecclesiastically, Calvin understood spiritual growth to occur within the context of the church. The church is mother, educator, and nourisher of every believer, Calvin said, for the Holy Spirit acts in her. Believers cultivate piety by the Spirit through the church's teaching, progressing from spiritual infancy to adolescence to full manhood in Christ. They do not graduate from the church until they die…. The notion of an individual existing on his own, free to exercise voluntarism by joining and then leaving the church as desired, would have seemed nonsensical. Union with Christ meant union with the body of Christ (125-126).

In the final chapter, Joel Beeke presents nine reasons from Calvin's writings why faithful preaching is powerful (ch. 7). However, these nine points (summarized as seven reasons on pages 165-166) do not evidently flow from Calvin himself and could probably be made about many preachers.

All in all, this is a useful introductory work on Calvin's life and work, and aspects of his theology. The two chapters by Sinclair B. Ferguson were especially good, but the last two chapters were somewhat different from the rest, and one was not always sure one was getting Calvin himself. ●

A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism: From Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs, by Mark S. Gignilliat. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. Pp. 186. Paperback $16.99; ebook $6.99. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Supplying a felt need for an introduction to the main theories in Old Testament criticism and to the men who developed these theories, Mark Gignilliat (associate professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL) presents us with this volume. This is not a "comprehensive attempt at expounding the very complex history of Old Testament interpretation," but is "a picture gallery tour of sorts," because "people and their ideas are more interesting (at least to me) than abstract discussions of critical theories" (12).

In seven chapters, Gignilliat introduces us to seven men (Benedict Spinoza, Wilhelm de Wette, Julius Wellhausen, Herman Gunke, Gerhard von Rad, William Foxwell Albright, and Brevard S. Childs) and their contributions to Old Testament criticisms. In the conclusion of each chapter, Gignilliat briefly critiques each man's contribution.

Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677; chapter 1) was a Dutch Jew whose ideas earned him a ban (excommunication) from his synagogue. Denying that the Bible was inherently trustworthy, he taught that we need a rational method (man's mind) to discern whether, and to what extent, the Bible is trustworthy. As for the Bible, it does not set forth truth, let alone Truth, but sets forth historical facts (and, according to Spinoza, even some of the Bible's claims are historically inaccurate). The Old Testament prophets were not means by which God revealed Himself; they were men with great imaginations. With a deistic view of nature, Spinoza denied miracles.

All this leads to Spinoza's hermeneutic: Scripture means to say nothing more than the original author meant to say within his own historical context. It is no authority for truth and for doctrine. As Gignilliat summarizes, "The literal sense *is* the historical sense" (35).

With Spinoza, modern biblical criticism began.

Taking Spinoza's views as his starting point, but also influenced by the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder and the

rationalism of Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849; chapter 2) posited that the Scriptures (particularly he had in view the Old Testament) do not relate actual historical events, but do indicate much about the religious viewpoints and sentiments of the Israelites of that period of time. Already his doctoral dissertation indicated his ideas: only sixteen pages long, but revolutionary in its thesis, it was entitled *A Critical-Exegetical Dissertation by which Deuteronomy, Different from the Earlier Books of the Pentateuch, Is Shown to Be the Work of a Later Author* (44).

In his two-volume *magnum opus,* entitled *Contributions to the Introduction of the Old Testament*, de Wette developed his views further. He argued that the Pentateuch was written during the time of Israel's monarchy and that the two books of Chronicles were written after the exile. The Pentateuch and Chronicles therefore give evidence of the religious thought of the monarchical period, and the post-exilic period.

Study of the Bible thus becomes a study of the thoughts and feelings of the people in the day in which the Bible was written.

Although the seeds of literary or source criticism were sown before Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918; chapter 3), it was he who significantly developed that theory of interpretation. Its leading tenet is that the material set forth in the Pentateuch comes from four sources: J (Yawist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P or Q (priestly, or *quattuor*, for "fourth"). But these four sources indicate four different periods in Israel's history—J and E point to the time of the monarchy (1000s and 900s BC); D to the time of Josiah (mid 600s BC); and P/Q to the post-exilic times. By determining which source is used for which part of the Old Testament, one has a clue for determining when that part of the Bible was written, and for discerning what was the religious thought of that day. One term used to refer to this method is *Tendenzkritik*, referring to the "tendency or outlook of the writer" (68).

To illustrate, Wellhausen considered the entire Mosaic law to have been written during the time of Josiah, prior to which the law was passed on by oral tradition. The prophets before Josiah's time did not teach the law, or remind the people of it; rather, their calls

to morality amounted to fresh revelations from God. And the writing of the law had a detrimental effect on Israel: "In summary, Wellhausen's view of Israel's history can be understood as a move away from a free and uninhibited worship of the people to a stilted and lifeless religion based on written legislation" (73).

So influential were Wellhausen's ideas that "much subsequent scholarship in Old Testament studies was either an expansion of his seminal ideas or a reaction against them" (76).

Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932; chapter 4) pioneered the ideas that are today known as *Sitz im Leben*, form criticism, and genre criticism. First intending to focus on New Testament studies and criticism, his attention was soon turned to the Old Testament. Eventually his works on Genesis and the Psalms would become his greatest known. In his study of the Old Testament, his starting point was that the creation *sagas* (Gunkel's term) "were adopted from Israel's ancestral neighbors" (83). Gignilliat argues that "Gunkel's greatest strength was his ability to take the forms and structures of the Bible and make them come alive within the contours of life in Israel's own religious history" (84-85).

Gunkel was blatantly open about his denial of inspiration. Also to Gunkel's thinking, the Bible records the religious condition and thought of the people of its day. The Psalms are a case in point. Gunkel's starting point in understanding the Psalms is that "in Israel, *the pious individual did not sing the first psalms* in order to pour out his most personal thoughts before God. Rather, the *priests composed* these psalms and preserved them at the sanctuary in order to use them at appropriate occasions" (95; Gunkel's words, and I presume his own italics). So the Psalms are not individual expressions of piety, but indicate the religious feeling and worship of Israel. All Psalms fall into one of four worship categories, and so have one of four genres. The key to understanding a particular Psalm was rightly to categorize it and label its genre.

While Gunkel was more interested in the original situation in which the Old Testament passages were written, Gerhard von Rad's (1901-1971; chapter 5) interests were in their final written form. In this direction he developed Gunkel's ideas of form criticism.

Von Rad's special interest was in the Hexateuch (his term for the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua). In these books, Von Rad finds two main traditions—the settlement tradition (those passages that speak of Israel settled in Canaan) and the Sinai tradition (those that speak of Israel's exodus from Egypt and life in the wilderness, with the establishing of the covenant as its focal point). Understanding these various traditions is necessary to understand the Old Testament.

Von Rad is also known for his two-volume work, *Old Testament Theology*. Of course, *theology* is not hermeneutics—yet Von Rad's hermeneutical presuppositions come out in this work. Old Testament theology must reckon with a difference between Israel's actual history on the one hand, and the written account of her history on the other. For Von Rad, the study of Old Testament theology is a study of what Israel believed about her God. In his conclusion to this chapter, Gignilliat points out that his view of the Old Testament in fact divorces it from the New Testament—the Old Testament does not then in fact prophesy of Christ, and find its culmination in the New.

William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971; chapter 6) did not focus on literary, form, or historical criticism, but on archaeological work in Palestine. He advanced the comparative method of studying the Old Testament—demonstrating the historicity of the Bible from archaeological excavations and discoveries. Albright himself made as his goal to "be able to reconstruct successive cultures, to date them within very narrow limits, and to confirm, illustrate, and correct in detail the biblical historical tradition" (133).

Gignilliat argues that while Brevard S. Childs (1923-2007; chapter 7) did not ignore or turn from these modern developments in biblical criticism, his approach to Old Testament studies was a "paradigm shift" because it was a "canonical approach": in distinction from most of the men studied earlier, Childs received the Bible as "the sacred Scriptures of the churches" (155, Childs' own words) and viewed the "Old Testament" as "a divine word that goes beyond the historical situation out of which the material arose" (161, Gignilliat's words). Childs opines that the "final form of the biblical text...alone bears

witness to the full history of revelation" (161).

This does not mean that Childs dismissed the critical approaches of his predecessors entirely. Rather, he used them more cautiously, and pointed out some of their defects.

Noteworthy is Childs' unique view of the canon. The canon is the canon, in Childs' mind, not because at one point the church recognized it as such and declared it to be such; rather, the "individuals and community involved in the writing, shaping, and transmission of the biblical documents recognized their inspired and authoritative status" (159; bear in mind that he is speaking of the Old Testament, not merely of the fact that Peter recognized Paul's writings to be on a par with the other Scriptures, II Peter 3:15f.). Canon, for Childs, is not so much a finished product, as a historical process (a historical process in the *past*, let me add; I found no evidence to say that in Childs' mind the canon is still being written).

In his conclusion (entitled "More a Postscript Than Conclusion") Gignilliat notes that missing from his survey of the contributions of these seven men is "a countervailing conservative voice and reaction" (169) that oppose the developments of modern biblical criticism, including Hengstenberg and Delitzsch in Germany and the Princetonian theologians in the States. Nevertheless, in Gignilliat's mind, these "biblical scholars of the confessional kind always walk a tightrope between their theological commitments and the results of modern biblical criticism" (171).

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This book does the reader a service by providing an introduction to the main ideas of biblical criticism.

The value is not this, that the Reformed believer and preacher are able to use these methods in studying the Bible, and can now understand the Bible better. Most of these methods undermine, if they do not expressly deny, the inspiration of the Scriptures. They question the historical accuracy and reliability of the Scriptures. They throw out fundamental principles that govern our own grammatical/historical/spiritual method of interpreting the Bible, such as Scripture interprets Scripture. They leave little room for the New Testament to be an inspired commentary on the Old.

They leave it up to man, using various methods, to determine what is and what is not genuine in the Bible. And they presuppose that, before these methods were used, the Scriptures were not rightly understood, nor could be rightly understood—implying that the church prior to the 1700s was misled and misdirected and misinformed in its view of Scripture.

Such methods we must reject.

The value of the book is that it introduces the Reformed preacher and biblical scholar to terms, ideas, and presuppositions that we will come across in reading commentaries and other expositions of Scripture.

The value of the book is also that it (inadvertently) reminds us of the beginning point, the fundamental presuppositions that underlie every heresy taught today. Modernism, postmodernism, liberalism, evolutionism, and all the other heretical "-isms" of the day are the result of treating the Bible as a human book, able to be understood by human reason. We are helped in tracing these errors to their root.

So the book reminds us that in our own study of Scripture we must begin at the right starting point: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (II Tim. 3:16). ●

Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy, Paul C. Gutjahr. Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 477. $39.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

If one is interested in and concerned about American Presbyterianism in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, one must read this book. It is intended to be a definitive biography of one of the outstanding Presbyterian theologians in America, and it succeeds admirably. It does not, however, merely record the life of Charles Hodge, but it describes his life in connection with all the major events of his lifetime, especially of the church of which he was a member all his life. And particularly, it opens the door to conservative, mainline Presbyterianism in this country from a

short time after the Revolutionary War to some years after the Civil War.

It was the age of faithful and confessional Presbyterianism, which defended orthodoxy in this land and influenced orthodoxy abroad. It was the age of outstanding Presbyterian theologians: Ashbel Green, John Witherspoon, John Breckinridge, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Caspar Wister Hodge, James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, and Robert Dabney, not to mention the thorns in the flesh of Presbyterians: Charles Finney, Nathanael Taylor, and William Tennant.

The book is written in a very interesting and captivating style. It is a book hard to lay aside. But its value to me was its careful description of what Presbyterianism is at its core, and how, though orthodox, it differed from the Reformed and continental tradition.

The book describes in detail the great struggles in Presbyterianism in the lifetime of Charles Hodge. One such important controversy was the Old School-New School controversy that split Presbyterianism just prior to the Civil War. The controversy was, most basically, a great debate over the question of the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation vs. the Arminian conception that gave enormous credit to man's powers. New School theology was born in New England, which went from Calvinism to Arminianism to Unitarianism in Hodge's lifetime. Hodge favored some aspects of New School thinking in his earlier years. He favored the emphasis on evangelism that gave New Schoolers their unique coloring. But the revivalism that became a part of New School theology under the prodding of Charles Finney was anathema to Charles Hodge. His biting critique of revivalism can be found in his introduction to *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*.

Another such issue was the question of slavery. Hodge was, quite necessarily, involved in the slavery issue of his day, for he lived through the awful years of the Civil War. He was a moderate defender of slavery, and insisted that Scripture did not condemn it. But he also preferred the gradual emancipation of slaves. He was the object of criticism from rabid abolitionists, and a mutual hatred

existed between them and him.

One of the great ecclesiastical debates in the history of the church, of which I would gladly have been a witness, took place between Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell. It went on for eight days on the floor of the General Assembly. Thornwell was insistent that mission work ought to be under the supervision of the church, while Hodge argued for the legitimacy of Boards and Societies, independent from ecclesiastical supervision, and to which could be entrusted the work of theological education and missions.

The Old School-New School split came about just prior to the Civil War because on the floor of the General Assembly, the southern Presbyterians, suspecting the anti-slavery views of the New School, threw its votes with the Old School. The majority need to cast out the New Schoolers was attained, and the General Assembly, rather ruthlessly, purged the church of all New Schoolers. While Hodge did not object too strenuously at the departure of the New Schoolers, whose theology he criticized on numerous occasions, he was quite angry at the way in which it was done. When the breach was healed and the New School was welcomed back into the fold of the Old School, Hodge again opposed the merger, on the grounds of the blatant Arminianism present in the New School theologians. Due to the violent disagreements between the southern and northern branches of the church over the questions of slavery and secession, the southern branch split from the union at the outset of the Civil War.

One very important and striking characteristic of the Princeton theologians, including Charles Hodge, was their commitment to the philosophy of Common Sense Realism. It was a philosophy that came from Scotland, whose chief proponent was Thomas Reid. He defined his philosophy in this way: "If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them—these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd." Common Sense Realism was intended to be the answer to the Scripture-

denying British empiricists. The empiricist philosophies had ended in skepticism, and had denied all the fundamental principles and truths of the Christian religion.

Common Sense Realism spoke of the correctness of everyday experiences and the certain intuitive assurance of basic truths, which all men could know. All men also possessed a sense of morality, that is, of right and wrong. Included in this philosophical system was the idea that, in some limited way, the unsaved were capable of doing good. The author admits that, though committed to confessional Calvinism, the Princeton theologians had some difficulty in balancing this idea, that the unsaved could do good, with their Calvinism (40).

The ideas of Common Sense Realism were carried over to America by the Scottish Presbyterians. John Witherspoon, deeply committed to Common Sense Realism and whose name is to be found on the Declaration of Independence, became president of Princeton College and introduced Common Sense Realism into the college. He himself used it as a basis for his participation in the Revolutionary War. The reasoning of these Common Sense Realists, taken by itself, is beyond reproach. If there is to be some basic good found in ungodly men who are able to discern basic truths and hold to basic moral principles, the door is opened for cooperation with other men even in a war of revolution. Most of the founding fathers, so-called, were Deists and taught a Deism expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

This commitment to Common Sense Realism accounts for a major characteristic of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology.* I well recall that in my seminary days we were required to outline entire loci of Hodge's *magnum opus*. It repeatedly struck me that Hodge would often begin a new subject by examining how the truth to be discussed was to be found almost universally, even in darkest paganism. For example, the immortality of the soul and life after death was universally believed. This characteristic of Hodge's theology could be explained only by his commitment to Thomas Reid's philosophy.

The delicate balance could not of course be maintained between a confessional Calvinism and Common Sense Realism. The author writes:

> One should note here, however, the inherent tensions between Scottish Common Sense Realism's notion of a moral sense and Calvinism's doctrine of the Holy Spirit that Hodge was carefully trying to navigate in *The Way of Life* [a small volume Hodge wrote for the American Sunday School Union, HH]. Scottish Realism put a tremendous emphasis on humanity's moral intuition and its ability to detect and be moved by truth. Calvinism, with its doctrine of total depravity, held a much lower view of human ability. In its eyes, humans had no hope of detecting truth unless first touched and regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit. In his own writings, Hodge vacillated between those two positions depending on the setting and the purpose of his work….
>
> Hodge was more interested in proving [in his *Systematic Theology]* that science and religion were not at odds with one another, so his pietistic tone receded as he pushed forward a strong Baconian belief in the power of the human senses to detect and act on the Realist thought, depending on one line of reasoning to prove a certain point at a certain time and changing his allegiances later when that suited his purpose. For all his famed consistency, Hodge's writing reveals just how fickle he could be in explaining the role of the Holy Spirit versus what one might expect from human moral intuition (203-204).

But this same influence of Common Sense Realism also was the justification for involvement in and preoccupation with social issues. As I mentioned earlier, one of the main issues of the day was the slavery question, a crucial reason for the Civil War. Hodge believed that Scripture does not explicitly condemn slavery, and he even had slaves of his own for a short time, but he did believe slavery would disappear of itself given enough time, and that it was wrong of one man to own another man body and soul to the point where the slave owner even had the right to break up families. It was a matter of "common sense."

However all that may be, Hodge's commitment to Common Sense Realism was a chink in Hodge's armor. Yet, even in this respect, he had considerable influence on his colleagues and on

Princeton College and Princeton Seminary, where hundreds of Presbyterians were trained.

The weakness in Hodge's willingness to adopt Common Sense Realism was, after all, a major departure from the doctrine of total depravity. Hodge did not mean it to be such. He vigorously defended total depravity, for he was a strong defender of confessional orthodoxy. Hodge never wavered from the teachings of the Westminster Confessions. But the author of this biography himself admits that Hodge was inconsistent on the matter.

Hodge's willingness to grasp Common Sense Realism played a role in his view of missions as well. He firmly believed that if the essentials of the truth of Scripture could be clearly stated, the natural man, apart from regeneration, would, by an exercise of his own "common sense," admit the truth of fundamental principles of God's revelation. This intellectual power of the natural man was, of course, a strong basis for presenting the gospel and expecting good results. The natural man, as it were, was halfway there.

The Reformed doctrine of total depravity is opposed to Common Sense Realism. The Reformed and biblical position on total depravity is a condemnation of all the natural man does. This great truth, a key point in the five points of Calvinism, is a strong defense against all Arminianism and Pelagianism. The confessions of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches agree completely that the natural man is incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. He is the enemy of God, and hatred of God motivates everything he does. All his intellectual enterprises are determined by his desire to dethrone God and set man on the throne of the universe.

It is true that God makes Himself known to the unregenerate man through the things that are made (Rom. 1:18ff.). It is true that every man, even the most uneducated heathen, knows God's eternal power and Godhead. But it is also true, as Paul insists, that the unregenerate man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness and changes the glory of the invisible God into an image like unto four-footed beasts and creeping things. Even the word "change" presupposes that the wicked know that God alone must be worshiped and served, but they take what they know and "change" it into idols of their own fashioning.

All that is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). All that man produces in the area of intellectual endeavor is false. He may (and does) have enough intellectual ability to understand in part the creation in which he lives. He is still able to fulfill in his own way the so-called cultural mandate. He can and does subdue the earth and turn science into an aid of man by his mighty inventions. But he puts it all into the service of sin and opposition of God.

He may (and does) know that God is God; that Christ is Lord and King and that He shall come again to judge the living and the dead; that he must render account for all his deeds to God; and that hell awaits him. But these truths too he suppresses in his unrighteousness. The demons in the Gadarene demoniac knew they could do nothing at all without Christ's consent and even feared that Christ had come to punish them before their time at the end of the world. But that did not alter their opposition to the Lord (Mark 5:1-17). Satan knew, when he was cast out of heaven, that Christ was victorious and that the time of his opposition to Christ was short, but that did not alter his hatred of Christ's cause (Rev. 12:13-17). If any individual ought to have had common sense, it is Satan and his demons. But it does not change their minds at all.

Hodge, while holding strongly to confessional orthodoxy, nevertheless opened the door a crack to what was later to become Kuyperian general grace. Heretics and enemies within the church are not impressed with the orthodoxy of a great theologian; they latch on to his errors and shoot their poisonous arrows at the chinks in his armor. So it was later to happen to the ardent and passionate followers of Kuyper's common grace. The Kuyper of particular grace is never so much as mentioned. The Kuyper of common grace is enthroned in conservative colleges, seminaries, and churches.

I do not charge Hodge with unfaithfulness to confessional orthodoxy; I charge Hodge with hedging on what is, after all, a fundamental truth of salvation by sovereign and particular grace alone.

It stands to reason that with his commitment to Common Sense Realism, Hodge was also highly respectful of scientists and the results of their work. He was interested in science (as any child

of God ought to be), but he was willing to accept the discoveries of science as the conclusions of men who were only applying their "common sense" to the discovery of the mysteries of God's creation. The thought occurred to me as I was reading a section in the biography of Gutjahr, that nothing appeals more to our common sense than the biblical doctrine of creation; while nothing violates our common sense more than the foolish theories of evolutionism, especially of natural selection. Yet the evolutionist, with a string of Ph.Ds behind his name, not only clearly opts for evolutionism as an explanation of the origin of creation and all the species, but he so hates creationism that he not only mocks and taunts those who believe in creation in six days of twenty-four hours, but is apparently willing to resort to violence against creationists.

My wife and I, with friends, visited the Creation Museum just across the Ohio River in Kentucky a few years ago. I was quite surprised to see an armed guard in front of the museum with a police dog. I asked the guard why his presence was necessary at something so seemingly innocuous as a Creation Museum. His answer was that the Museum had repeatedly received threats from evolutionists who intended to bomb the museum if they had an opportunity. Where is common sense in such bitter hatred against a small and insignificant percentage of the population? Even if the ideas of creationists are, in the minds of enemies of the truth, "weird," why threaten to destroy them? Even though they are few in number and with little influence? This is a strange common sense. And where is the "common sense" of such blatant nonsense as that promoted by evolutionism?

Hodge was not only interested in science but was also open to the idea of an old earth. Then already the Day-Age Theory (that each day of the creation week is a long period of time, perhaps millions of years) was being proposed. In Chapter 56, entitled "Science and Darwin," the author explains Hodge's position on the questions Darwin raised in his book *The Origin of the Species.*

The basic concession Hodge made to science was to speak of two revelations of God, one in science and one in the Bible. While, from a certain point of view, this distinction is correct (see Article 23 of the Belgic Confession),

Hodge put them on a par. At this point the author quotes Hodge's own words: "Nature is as truly the revelation of God as the Bible, and we can only interpret the Word of God by the Word of God when we interpret the Bible by science…. If the Bible cannot contradict science, neither can science contradict the Bible" (367).

This statement is, of course, true—at least the statement that Creation and Scripture cannot contradict each other. While it is true that the Bible cannot contradict what is revealed in the creation, it is not true that science cannot contradict the Bible. Evolution is, after all "science," because it is man's interpretation of the creation and how it came into existence. Science contradicts Scripture. Science is quite different from creation. Science is *man's interpretation* of creation. And, even worse, science is wicked man's interpretation of creation. And the biblical and confessional doctrine of total depravity teaches that wicked man will always misinterpret creation, for he is an enemy of God and of God's glorious work of creation.

The Bible can and must and does interpret creation, but creation, though in itself in full agreement with the Bible, contradicts the Bible in the hands of wicked men who hate God. This is why Calvin calls the Bible the spectacles that we need in order to read the word of God in creation. Never, never may we make science an interpreter of the Bible. That procedure throws so much filth on the "spectacles" that no one can see anything at all through them. They are worse than no spectacles at all.

Scripture and the confessions teach, first of all, that the word of God's curse is so loud in the creation that it almost drowns out the word of God's revelation of Himself in all His majesty, power, and holiness. Calvin says the writing is so small that we cannot see it without the help of eyeglasses. But second, and worse, is the fact that natural man is blind. Even if the word of God in the creation were in large print, man could still not see it, for he is spiritually blind. Without Scripture, in other words, no one can interpret creation properly. And if these wicked men are enemies of God, as they surely are, they will do everything in their power to rule God out of the picture and smash the eyeglasses. But the

eyeglasses are faith in God's word in Scripture (Heb. 11:3), and faith is the gift of God.

Hodge did not agree with Darwin's book *The Origin of the Species,* but he did reread it towards the end of his life and said that he found the book "remarkable and delightful" (371). It was true, therefore, as the author observes, that "while science could certainly influence Hodge on certain scriptural interpretations, when it came to theories that threatened the core of his Confessional belief, Hodge was absolutely immovable" (371). In the author's words, the conclusion of the matter is that

> Hodge did make a distinction between being a Darwinist and being an evolutionist. Although he could not reconcile himself to evolution, he granted that many Christians of repute had. Hodge allowed for the possibility that Christians could be evolutionists if they believe that it was God who introduced and then guided the process of evolution to accomplish his purpose…. Hodge respected Darwin's commitment to science…but he never made peace with what he saw as Darwin's ateleological [an idea or explanation of the creation that robs the creation of its purpose and goal, HH] theory of natural selection. He did, however, in making a distinction between Darwinism and evolutionism, help open the door to the adoption of the increasingly popular view of theistic evolution, namely that God had used evolution as a means in accomplishing his greater goals in his creation. It was a door that many who came after Hodge at the Seminary walked through (371).

The author could just as well have added "that almost the whole Presbyterian and Reformed church world walked through." Churches that now have adopted a full-blown evolutionism have repeatedly used Hodge's argument that it is legitimate to interpret Scripture in the light of science. This is what can happen when one, whether by adopting Common Sense Realism or using the theory of common grace, applies the heresy to science.

The author makes a couple of points that may be of interest to readers. They include the following.

In his controversy with Bap-

tists and their repudiation of infant baptism, Hodge took the soundly Reformed position that the infants of believers are also included in God's covenant and in the church of Christ (285). In that connection, Hodge made this comment about the Baptist position: "There are but two places in the whole universe of God from which infants are excluded. The one is hell; the other is the Baptist Church" (285). This question of infants included in the covenant was denied by New Side theologians and was one reason for Hodge's criticism of New Side theology.

The question of the recognition of Roman Catholic baptism was also an issue in Hodge's denomination. Although Hodge defended, also on the floor of the Assembly, the position that Roman Catholic baptism in the name of the Trinity ought to be recognized, the vote on the floor of the Assembly went against him.

But the very bottom line in all the history of the decline in eighteenth and nineteenth century Presbyterianism was the failure of the church to exercise Christian discipline. The defenders of New Side theology ought to have been disciplined, an action that would have saved the church endless grief. Open and blatant heretics, against whom Hodge raised his voice, went undisciplined. A striking example is Charles Finney, who publicly repudiated Calvinism, carried New Side theology to its logical conclusions, and not only practiced anti-biblical revivalism, but invented the "anxious seat," a prelude to the more modern altar call. He was never disciplined, and he remained a member of the Presbyterian Church until he himself withdrew from it.

It seems like the church never learns. In its current decisive battle with the heresy of the Federal Vision, although some denominations may make decisions critical of the theology of those who destroy God's covenant, few are interested in discipline. Failure to discipline is the downfall of the church. It is no wonder that Christ Himself has made Christian discipline the third mark of the true church. ●

Thomas Becket: Warrior, Priest, Rebel, by John Guy. New York: Random House, 2012. Pp. 424. $35.00 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

For the laymen, as well as the clergy, who enjoy riveting history told by a first-rate historian in superb prose, John Guy's new biography of Thomas Becket is a delight.

From the original sources and with critical judgment of later, usually hagiographic, accounts, biographer Guy relates the fascinating life and famed death of the twelfth century archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket.

Lifted from lowly origins to the secular and political heights of chancellor of England by King Henry II, near descendant of the renowned William I, Norman conqueror of England in A.D. 1066, Thomas was appointed archbishop of Canterbury, by the king, in 1162. Not all the lower English clergy applauded the appointment. A prominent bishop of the English church grumbled that the king "had wrought a miracle by transforming a warrior and a man of the world into an archbishop" (148).

Prior to the appointment as archbishop, Becket was a thoroughly worldly man—an avid hunter, a skilled horseman, active in physical warfare, and covetous of name and riches here below.

Henry's motivation in the appointment was not his recognition of outstanding spirituality on the part of Thomas. Rather, writes Guy, by combining the position of head of the English church with the office of chancellor in his man—Becket—Henry "could more easily rule the whole of the English Church" (143). Thus, Henry would govern all the life of England, church as well as nation.

The king's mistake was to suppose that Becket would be content to be Henry's man, rather than his own.

Hardly had Becket assumed the office of archbishop, having resigned the office of chancellor, when he asserted himself and all the not inconsiderable powers of primateship in England. Subject only to the pope, Becket was virtually absolute lord of the entire church, all the other clergy, and the souls of all the inhabitants of England. And in those days, whatever else must be said of the

spiritual condition of the members of the church, men and women valued their souls.

Becket's power extended, as well, to much of the land and earthly riches of England, inasmuch as a corrupt church was deeply involved in the mundane matters of amassing property, acquiring wealth, asserting dominion, and basking in glory.

The rest of Becket's short life—and of the story—was a titanic struggle for power between two towering figures and two oversized egos: political King Henry and ostensibly ecclesiastical Archbishop Thomas Becket.

The penultimate end was "murder in the cathedral," in the words of the title of T. S. Eliot's gripping play based on the event. On Tuesday, December 29, 1170, four of King Henry's knights accosted the archbishop in his cathedral, and murdered him—"one of the most infamous events of the Middle Ages" (312). To the dramatic, bloody, gruesome event, John Guy does full, vivid justice.

The ultimate end was the swift canonization of the dead Becket by the pope, whose support for his loyal servant during the struggle with Henry left much to be desired and who used Becket as a pawn in the characteristic papal effort to defend and aggrandize himself and his office—yet another power-hungry player in the drama.

At once, the people, not only of England, but also of all the nations of "Christian" Europe worshiped the dead archbishop, flocking to the cathedral to stand at the exact spot where Becket was killed (the tourist at Canterbury can view the site, to this day) and to beg miracles from his relics, including his blood, which had been preserved. It was on such a pilgrimage to Canterbury that Geoffrey Chaucer's motley crew told their stories in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*:

> And specially, from every shire's end
> In England, down to Canterbury they wend
> To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
> To give his help to them when they were sick.

The popular and papal pressures forced King Henry himself to express repentance and do penance for his part in the murder of Becket. Although Guy has ascertained that the words

commonly attributed to Henry in the presence of his knights as the cause of the murder, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" are "apocryphal" (310), Henry did publicly and angrily make similar statements, which occasioned his knights' murderous mission.

Becket died bravely. He refused the conditions, contrary to his conscience (or to his will), that might have spared his life. Despite the pleas of his servants, he declined to flee and hide, as was possible in the vast, dark cathedral, although he knew his life was threatened.

But Thomas Becket did not die a martyr, as Rome and popular opinion maintain. Guy does not commit himself. Rightly, as Guy quotes from Augustine and Cyprian in the chapter, "Martyr," it was "the validity of the cause for which a victim died, not the violence or sacrifice he or she had suffered along the way, that made a true martyr" (346).

The cause for which Becket gave his life was not the truth and holiness of the gospel. It was not Jesus Christ. Rather, Becket died for contending with an admittedly tyrannical monarch over church properties and income, as well as over the church's sole right to judge the clergy for civil offenses. Thomas Becket died for the carnal power of the apostate papal church and, not improbably, as Eliot suggests, for his own greater and lasting glory. With a view to his impending death, Becket is made by Eliot to say (although Eliot has Becket resisting the temptation):

> The last temptation is the greatest treason:
> To do the right deed for the wrong reason…
> Servant of God has chance of greater sin
> And sorrow, than the man who serves a king.
> For those who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve them.

As he lay dying, the archbishop called on Mary and the saints: "To God and St. Mary and the saints who protect and defend this cathedral, and to the blessed St. Denis and St. Alphege, I commend myself and the church's cause" (321). Trust in Mary and the saints is not the mark of a genuine martyr. How radically different were the dying words of the first, genuine New Testament martyr, Stephen: "calling upon, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive

my spirit," and, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59, 60).

Adding to the book's appeal, and worth, is its careful description of life in England in the twelfth century A.D. and its relating of an important slice of the tightly intertwined political and ecclesiastical histories of Europe at that time. ●

The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict, Alfred Poirier. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI 2006. Pp. 317. $18.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

"Christ is the reason many enter the pastorate. Conflict is the reason many leave" (9). Poirier, chairman of the board for Peacemaker Ministries and senior pastor of Rocky Mountain Community Church in Billings, Montana, addresses the subject of conflict among Christians. He argues that many pastors are not equipped to deal with conflict. In offering a "how-to" guide to conflict resolution, Poirier gives a theology of peacemaking, grounding peacemaking in the character of God, the gospel of reconciliation, the nature of the church and the truth of the covenant.

Conflict is defined as "a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires" (29). All of us deal with conflict in different ways. Poirier identifies three general approaches—peace*faking* (the flight response), peace*breaking* (the fight response), and peace*making* (the right response). Peacefaking can be subdivided into denial, flight, and, in the most extreme cases, suicide; peacebreaking can be subdivided into attack, litigation, and, in the most extreme cases, murder; peacemaking can be subdivided into personal and assisted peacemaking, overlooking an offense, discussion-reconciliation, negotiation, and arbitration. "Members of your congregation will have to deal with issues of real injustice against them. You can be assured that their responses will be less than godly," warns Poirier (41).

The cause of conflict is, as James 4:1-3 teaches, our desires. The problem is that our desires become demands, which quickly

"morph into dictatorial demands with godlike expectations" (53). When such demands encounter the contrary desires of another, the result is war. When a desire becomes a demand and then an idol, we are willing to sacrifice other things: "When I want something and my wife keeps it from me, I get angry and bitter. My anger exposes what I deem most valuable—my idol. In my effort to worship my idol, to appease my demanding desire, *I am ready to sacrifice my spouse on the altar of that idol*" (59; Poirier's italics).

"What," asks Poirier, "can set us free from this vicious dynamic of demanding, distorting and damning desires?" (59). The answer is the gospel. The gospel is not how God meets my "felt needs" —the feel good "gospel" of many—but the gospel of how God reconciled me to Himself by the sacrifice of His Son, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the gospel of gracious justification and adoption. *That* gospel, when believed and lived, is the answer to conflict. That's the thesis of Poirier's book, and the rest of the book is devoted to applying gospel principles to the ugly reality of church conflict. The reason for conflict in the church is the church's failure to apply the truth of who she is to her life—the church is the family of God; when Christians fight they fight against their siblings and displease their Father. Writes Poirier, "peace-making flowers and bears fruit in the rich, theological soul of sonship" (90). When this is forgotten, conflict resolution is difficult: "We turn people into impersonal objects, treating them like tools. Rather than viewing them as people with whom we are 'in relationship,' we see them as instruments to advance our agendas and gratify our desires. Once used, we discard them. When we treat people like objects, it is easier to demean them with our words" (109).

The nuts and bolts of conflict resolution are confession and forgiveness of sins. In this regard, explains Poirier, we need to distinguish true repentance from worldly sorrow or regret. "Regret is a result of fearing man, whereas repentance is the fruit of fearing God" (115); "Whereas regret sorrows over not being as great as one thought, repentance sees oneself as one really is" (116); "regret or worldly sorrow leads either to self-righteousness or self-condemnation...repentance,

on the other hand, leads to Christ's righteousness. We rejoice that we are not condemned. We glory in Christ's perfect obedience and love" (117). Forgiveness is another biblical concept that many misunderstand: it is not the indulging of wickedness or a therapeutic form of self help, but recognizes sin for what it is. "In our rush to forgive," warns Poirier, "we often fail to take note of the seriousness of the sin or offence committed. To that degree, we side more with the offender and neglect the person offended" (145). Forgiveness is a promise of at least four things: "I will not think about this incident. I will not bring it up and use it against you. I will not talk to others about this incident. I will not allow this incident to stand between us and hinder our personal relationship" (154). As God says to us, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

Another skill we need to develop is negotiation—not to get what we want, but to look out for others' interests. Poirier promotes "cooperative negotiation." This approach asks what is just and fair according to God's standard and addresses the motives of the heart in light of Scripture—selfish ambition, vain conceit—and urges parties to look out for the interests of others (163).

The final sections of the book deal with the pastor as mediator or arbiter in conflict and with the subject of church discipline. Poirier addresses misconceptions about discipline and gives practical advice on how to deal with difficult people and how to teach our people about discipline. "People associate discipline with always being harsh, unloving, impersonal and formal" (222), but, explains Poirier, discipline is a way of life in the family of God. We are *all* subject to the Father's discipline and we are *all* called to lead disciplined lives. Therefore, the discipline of the church is fatherly. "Discipline loves a brother enough not to leave him in his sin and consign him to the misery of its bondage" (241).

This book has much useful practical advice. Poirier illustrates many of his points by referencing case studies from his own experience as a pastor. Although we might not agree with him on every point of church polity and doctrine, we can certainly benefit from reading this book. Pastors should find it useful in counseling situations. ●

Hermeneutics As a Theory of Understanding, by Petr Pokorný, translated by Anna Bryson-Gustova. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011. Pp. 224. $30.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

In the author's own words, this book endeavors "to define the philosophical and theological premises of individual projects of understanding—their interrelation, meaning, and function in interpretation, especially interpretation of an ancient text such as the Bible" (xv). After briefly summarizing the contents of the book, I'll return to this statement.

But first, an introduction to the author. The book's back cover identifies Petr Pokorný as the director of the Centre for Biblical Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and Charles University, Prague. In addition to this book, he has written others—including a commentary on the New Testament apocryphal book, *The Gospel of Thomas.* He is well acquainted with James H. Charlesworth, a professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. Charlesworth wrote the foreword to this book, and coauthored another book with Pokorný. This volume is the first in a three-part series, of which only this volume has been translated in English to this point.

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The book consists of five chapters.

The first chapter is entitled "What is Hermeneutics?" The heart of this chapter is a paragraph in which Pokorný gives three meanings of the Greek verb *"hermeneuoo."*

Chapter two is entitled "The World of Language." Following the lead of Ferdinand de Saussure, Pokorný presents language as an encoding system in which we use signs to refer to things and ideas that are common to our experiences. Both vocabulary and grammar play a role in this encoding system. The goal of the one receiving the language—whether by reading a text or listening to a speaker—is both to understand the meaning of the language (to which things and ideas the signs are pointing) and to understand the pragmatics of the author (the

author's practical intention for speaking or writing these things to us). This is interpretation—the science and art of hermeneutics.

Chapter three is entitled "Text." In successive subsections, Pokorný treats the following matters:

- the graphic character of written text.
- the "silence" of the text (unlike one speaking to us, the text cannot answer questions we have regarding it; this also makes hermeneutics necessary).
- the possibility of misusing the text (in which he argues that, while commentaries can be helpful, we must always consider the possibility that they have misunderstood the text).
- the fixed character of the text (unlike speech, the written text does not disappear into memory; we can return to it time and again, in order to interpret it).
- the reduction of redundancy (although both writings and speeches can involve redundancies, writings reduce redundancy because the reader can return to the writing repeatedly, to understand it).
- the successive surface of the written text (requiring the reader to understand the structure of the text).
- the text between tradition and the future (this becomes the basis for historical criticism of a text).
- the effect of the text (what impact it has on the reader).
- genre (to interpret the text, it is necessary to determine its genre).

In chapter four, entitled "Methods of Interpretation," Pokorný surveys various exegetical techniques and hermeneutical approaches, including those of the history of salvation, promise-fulfillment, typology, and allegory. He emphasizes the need to translate the text and understand both its grammar and its rhetoric. And he deals with critical approaches to the text, including historical criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism.

Chapter five is entitled "Interpretation." Remember that the text is "silent" (chapter three). By interpreting the text, we ask questions of the text, and find probable answers to them—answers that the text cannot give us by direct dialogue. This requires us not only to understand the text's author, his times, and his experiences, but also to understand our-

selves as interpreters, our experiences, and the people for whom we are making the interpretation. Pokorný closes with some reflections on historicity and revelation, and on revelation and witness.

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We return to the opening statement of this review, the quote from Pokorný regarding his intent with this book: "to define the philosophical and theological premises of individual projects of understanding—their interrelation, meaning, and function in interpretation, especially interpretation of an ancient text such as the Bible" (xv).

First, this statement indicates that the book is not about how to do hermeneutics. It does not introduce a new method, nor teach the reader how to interpret by use of current methods. Rather, the book explores the *philosophy* of hermeneutics—the rationale behind hermeneutics, and the reason why hermeneutics works as it does. One must look elsewhere for a book that intends to teach the reader hermeneutical principles.

Second, this statement indicates that the book is not limited to the interpretation of the Bible, but that it sets forth a philosophy that underlies the interpretation of any ancient text. It is true that Pokorný understands the methods of Bible interpretation; the book includes many references to Bible passages, and examples are used from the Bible to demonstrate the point Pokorný is making. In his discussion of rhetorical analysis, for example, he devotes ten pages to a rhetorical analysis of Psalm 90:7, John 10:7-18, Romans 7:7-25, and Mark 3:1-6. But he quotes also from other ancient sources, including New Testament apocryphal works, early church fathers, and philosophers such as Aristotle, Homer, Plato, and Virgil. He makes clear that in his second chapter he refers primarily to the Bible because

> (1) the Bible is a classic text (or collection of texts) in the European and American cultural heritage, which leads us to ask questions about it through its cultural authority alone. At the same time we must remember that (2) the long history of biblical exegesis is the largest reservoir of hermeneutical experience, a fact it would be foolish to ignore (7).

Pokorný's goal is not bad; and he certainly achieves it. But

it limits the book's audience to those interested in knowing more about how language works, why it works that way, and how all of this influences interpretation. Partly for this reason, and partly because of Pokorný's style, I found the book ponderous, and I suspect most readers of the *PRTJ* would find it the same. However, I'm sure that anyone interested in a philosophy of hermeneutics would find it stimulating. Anyone who wants to read it may contact me—I'll give you my copy. ●

Programmed by God or Free to Choose? Five-Point Calvinism Under the Searchlight, Dudley Ward. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2008. Pp. 142. $18.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

The Author

Dudley Ward is not a Calvinist. Subjecting five-point Calvinism to the searchlight, he finds fault with Calvinism: "I am writing for very ordinary people who are troubled by TULIP teaching, that they might find release into a warmer and more intimate understanding of the true extent of the love of God in Christ.... My goal is to present a kind, cogent, and concise alternative to Calvin's theological system..." (x, xi).

Dudley Ward claims not to be an Arminian. "I am not an Arminian of any shade. In fact, I have deliberately steered clear of any in-depth study of Jacob Arminius's written works, so that I might claim with integrity not to be directly influenced by his thought" (ix).

Dudley Ward indicates his sympathies for Anabaptism, to the point of arguing that "*Sola Scriptura*...was nowhere taken to heart more seriously than amongst most of the despised Anabaptists" (7).

The Substance

Ward's argument, as indicated above, is that Calvin's theological system was built on a shaky foundation—a wrong understanding of Scripture, in line with Augustine's, rather than a right understanding of Scripture, in line with church fathers before Augustine.

After a preface and intro-

duction—in which he gives an accurate summary of the TULIP doctrines as codified by the Synod of Dordt—Ward devotes the first chapter to a brief introduction to John Calvin and some of his contemporaries. Chapters 2-17 then examine various aspects of the teachings of TULIP. Each chapter's title takes the form of a question, "as Jesus often used this method to stimulate the thinking of his hearers" (xi). Since the title of each chapter gives a sufficient idea of what Ward treats in each chapter, listing the chapter titles will provide an overall summary of the book.

1. Who Were John Calvin and Some of His Contemporaries?
2. Is Predestination a Mystery?
3. Is the Gospel Good News for All or Is It Bad News for Some?
4. Does God Want to Save Only the Elect?
5. Who Are the Called?
6. What Is the Role of the Potter?
7. Is Everybody Able to Repent?
8. Did Jesus Choose Whom He Would Save?
9. Is Grace Ever Irresistible?
10. What Kind of Sovereignty Does God Have?
11. What Is Foreknowledge?
12. What Is Our Main Contention?
13. How Merciful Is God?
14. Does God Really Love His Enemies? Must We Love Ours?
15. Does Everyone Have Faith?
16. What Is the Perseverance of the Saints, according to TULIP?
17. How Then Should We Respond to God's Love?

Throughout the chapters, in statements that are placed in italics and in larger font, Ward summarizes his own positions.

Regarding predestination, his view is this: "Predestination is not about who is destined to become a Christian, but whom a Christian is destined to become" (14); "Predestination refers to the goal, the destination that God fixed in eternity past for believers in Him" (17); "We are numbered among the elect because we have become part of the body of Christ, rather than part of Christ's body because we were among those elected to salvation" (33).

Regarding man's ability to re-

pent, he posits that "Our heavenly Father is infinitely more merciful and generous than any earthly authority. He offers His forgiveness to whoever is willing to receive it" (49).

Regarding God's sovereignty: "Having created all things for Himself, God desired that by His grace all people be reconciled to Him, the only obstacle being the exercise of their freedom to refuse to seek the way of obedience and abundant life" (72). And, "The sovereign desire of the Lord of heaven is to establish a kingdom filled with His love" (75). Again: "Be reassured of this basic fact: there is only one true gospel, which is the message of God's redemptive love for all mankind" (76). Finally, "If we take away genuine human freedom of choice, we empty of sense all the flow of Old Testament history" (80).

At every turn, Ward makes clear that his views are directly contrary to the Reformed doctrines expressed in the acronym TULIP.

The Method

Ward's basic and fundamental method is direct appeal to Scripture: "In an attempt to make it [the book and its argument, DJK] as complete, concise, simple, and direct as possible, I have chosen to stick with the Scriptures themselves as the main focus" (x). And: "This book sets out to determine which of these two views faithfully represents the *good news* presented within the pages of Scripture." Ward means what he says; not one page is without a reference to Scripture, and most have two or more references.

With the use of such a method, the Calvinist is happy. Let it be shown us from the Scriptures that our views are wrong; Scripture is the final authority.

Although direct appeal to Scripture is Ward's main method, it is not his only method. In explaining God's foreknowledge, he turns to Webster's dictionary for a definition, and proceeds on the assumption that the biblical concept of foreknowledge conforms to Webster's definition (81). In arguing that God's sovereignty in salvation does not imply that natural man is not free to choose for or against God, he appeals to "common sense" (84).

But primarily his method is quotation and interpretation of Scripture. Regarding the latter, Ward sees the importance of at

least one fundamental principle: "It is a golden rule of Bible interpretation that we try to refrain from reading into the text what is not in fact there" (85).

Ward's problem is that he ignores another fundamental principle: he does not use Scripture to interpret Scripture. This is a basic flaw in the book.

Some might take exception to this criticism. Ward quotes Scriptures so copiously, and finds the same thought in so many verses—how can one say he does not use Scripture to interpret Scripture?

Because Ward seldom explains a passage of Scripture at any length, or in light of its context. To Ward, the individual verse must simply be taken at its face value—its plain meaning does not need any extended explanation.

This comes out clearly in a number of arguments—two of which I will set forth as instance.

First, referring to Acts 7:51, Ward says: "Resisting the work of God's Holy Spirit is just another manifestation of 'resisting his grace.' Here is a very plain statement that God's grace is not irresistible." Note that the first statement in the quotation contains an assumption on Ward's part. Ward does not ask the question whether "the work of God's Holy Spirit" in Acts 7:51 refers to the work of salvation in the heart of the sinner, the work of the Holy Spirit equipping men for church office, or the work of the Holy Spirit testifying of Christ through the preaching of the gospel. Simply this: to resist the work of the Holy Spirit is to resist God's grace.

Second, this comes out clearly in Ward's treatment of those passages that speak of the objects of God's love and mercy. After citing John 3:17 and 4:42, Ward asks: "How can 'the world' mean anything else but all human beings?" (20). Hmm...does the word "world" in Scripture *always* and *only* mean "all human beings"? Does it mean this in every context? Is this the idea in John 1:9 and 21:25? Perhaps one must first investigate all the possible meanings of the word "world" as used in Scripture, before asserting that it cannot possibly mean anything other than "all human beings" in John 3:17 and 4:42. And what does the Greek word *kosmos* really mean?

Similarly, with the "all" passages. Commenting in II Peter 3:9, Ward says:

> Some Calvinists say that Peter is addressing himself only to Christians, so does this really mean that God is simply saying that He is not willing that any of the elect perish? How could any of the elect perish or fail to come to repentance if, according to Calvin, God alone has pre-programmed them to eternal life and His elective grace never fails? ...However, the text does not say "that all the chosen should come to repentance." If the Holy Spirit meant to say just "some," the "chosen," or the "elect," or just a "remnant," would He not have said that? Nor does it say "that many should come to repentance." It says "all." (85)

Here—and not here only—Ward betrays his misunderstanding of Calvin. Whether he truly misunderstands him, or whether this is merely an opportunity to make Calvin look silly is open to question. But Calvin never suggested that, because the elect will be saved, there is no need to call them to repentance.

But the real point of this quotation is to show how Ward uses Scripture. Simply take the word "all," argue that the Holy Spirit could have used a different word if He wanted to, and run with it. Of course we agree that the Holy Spirit could have used a different word if He wanted to. The question is, what does the Spirit mean by "all"—and does the Spirit Himself make this plain in the first verse of the epistle?

Ward will never convince a Calvinist of error by appealing to isolated texts of Scripture; he must understand the exegesis of the Reformed fathers, and show that their exegesis is wrong. Ward makes no attempt to do this, other than merely assert that the Calvinistic interpretation is silly.

Conclusion

Three final points, in conclusion.

The first is that some men who claim to be Calvinists, but who are not consistent Calvinists, hurt the cause of Calvinism. Ward inadvertently brings this out when he speaks against the Calvinist view of "prevenient grace" (42, 50), and when he asks, "Is it not intriguing that some Christian streams that vigorously oppose infant baptism today should nevertheless call themselves Calvinists?" (5). Here he is right in poking fun (indeed, this is what he does on page 5)

of Calvinism—not because the system of Calvinistic teachings is flawed, but because many take the label "Calvinist" while disagreeing with Calvin on fundamental points of doctrine.

The second is that this book is indeed worthwhile reading. It clearly sets forth both the teachings of Arminianism, as well as a flawed method of support. An extended response to Ward's exegesis would be profitable—but rather than repeating work already done, we can point Ward and his supporters to the writings of Calvin and the other Reformers themselves.

The third is that Ward is an Arminian. He says he did not derive his ideas directly from Arminius. Nevertheless, if Ward were to undertake an in-depth study of Arminius' writings, he would find essential areas of agreement between Arminius and himself. This makes sense, for two reasons: first, if the Remonstrants and the Anabaptists are not historically related, they certainly are theologically related; second, every failure rightly to understand the sovereignty of God in salvation results in Arminian thinking.

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Our Only Comfort:
Celebrating the 450th Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism

Thursday Evening, October 17, 2013

7:00 P.M. ..... Greeting and Introduction

7:15 P.M. ..... Speech #1

The History and Purpose of the Heidelberg Catechism

Dr. Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke

8:15 P.M. ..... Speech #2

The Heidelberg Catechism's Theme of Comfort

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Friday Evening, October 18, 2013

7:00 P.M. ..... Speech #3

Systematic Preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism

Prof. Barrett Gritters

8:00 P.M. ..... Speech #4

The Heidelberg Catechism's View of the Christian Life As Gratitude

Rev. Carl Haak

Saturday Morning, October 19, 2013

9:00 A.M. ..... Speech #5

The Irenic/Polemical Nature of the Heidelberg Catechism

Rev. Angus Stewart

10:30 A.M. ..... Speech #6

The Heidelberg Catechism's Teaching Concerning God's Covenant

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Venue:
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Sponsored by:
Protestant Reformed
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