

THE *April 15, 2008* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

- ◆ *Given All Things for Life and Godliness* 314
- ◆ *Pornography: Balak Redivivus* 316
- ◆ *The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (11)* 318
- ◆ *Grace* 321
- ◆ *Working Towards an Indigenous Church (2)* 322
- ◆ *Dispensational Eschatology (3)* 325
- ◆ *Cycles—Pictures of the Vanity of Life* 329
- ◆ *All Around Us* 332
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* 334

Volume 84 ◆ Number 14

Given All Things for Life and Godliness

And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

II Peter 1: 5-9

The new Christians to whom Peter wrote this letter were troubled by false prophets. As a result their faith was shaken and they began to doubt God's promises. So Peter begins his letter by assuring them

that they possess the very same "precious faith" that he and the other apostles have (1). Then he reminds them that nothing less than God's power has given them all that they need for life and godliness (3). Also, the knowledge of God's great and precious promises ought to assure them that they have not only "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," but also are made "partakers of the divine nature" (4).



God has given them much. For this reason (another way to translate "and besides this") they are to add to their faith. A declaration of God's gracious work is followed by a command. In giving faith, God graciously makes the recipients spiritually alive. Something that is alive is active. An inactive faith is barren and unfruitful, blind, and forgetful. Faith's certain knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is evidenced in spiritual activity and growth!

The idea of "add to your

faith" is that the life of believing is to be adorned or furnished. It is to bear fruit, and not be barren or unfruitful. When God begins a work, He continues it by working in us to will and to do His good pleasure. This does not imply that we work in our own strength or that we work independently of God. For as God works in us by His Spirit, that Spirit moves us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

You see, faith is a living bond. Faith puts one in connection with Jesus, who is Life (John 11:25). Those saved in Jesus Christ are not made to be like rocks (dead and inanimate), but they are made alive, as branches in the vine. They are alive because they are put into union with Life itself. Our precious faith is not just a bond, but a living bond. Faith is exercised; and when it is exercised, then it is of the nature that it produces fruit. Faith without fruit is dead.

The fruit-bearing of our faith is to be done with "all diligence." Diligence is an earnestness to ac-

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfpa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerK
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cprfaudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$21.00 per year in the U.S., US\$25.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to the editorial office: SB Announcements, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Grandville, MI 49418 (e-mail: doezema@prca.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prc.org

comply something. It is a holy zeal and fervor that arise from awe at the wonder of being a recipient of God's love. It is an intensity that strives to fill every moment with continual effort. Diligence sees time as a precious treasure that despises procrastination. Diligence realizes that the night is far spent and that the day is at hand.

Godly diligence is not just haste and activity; it is wise and well-ordered. Godly diligence maintains the motive of obedience to God's command to work out our own salvation. Also it is motivated by a love that desires to please Him who loves us so much. And it is motivated by a knowledge that it has been purged or cleansed from all old sins.

Faith may be genuine but without diligence. Then it will produce only few and shriveled fruit. But faith accompanied "with all diligence" knows that it possesses, by God's grace and power, all it needs for life and godliness. Therefore it will be diligent to bear fruit.



The furnishings that are to be added to faith are seven. Peter lists seven virtuous characteristics that are to grow out of the exercise of our precious faith. These seven all proceed from faith; they do not proceed one from the other in a sequence. It is also worthy of note that these fruits are invisible to the eye—they are inner characteristics that begin where they are invisible.

Genuine faith bears the fruit of "virtue." Virtue is a moral excellence, a spiritual sensitivity to God's goodness. It is a way of thinking that manifests itself in a walk or behavior that characterizes an honest, well-ordered, good life. The faith that unites each one of the elect to the risen, living Savior seeks to keep God's

commandments in every area of life because it knows God and His goodness.

Faith also wants to grow in its "knowledge" of God and of the Lord Jesus (cf. 3:18). Faith is a love that wants to know more and more about the Father and the Savior, so it seeks to know more and more of God's revelation of Himself and of His Son in the Scriptures. This is a knowledge of what God has given and promised. It is a knowledge that remains unshaken by the false prophets, for knowledge of God's Word removes confusion and fear, providing solid comfort.

Precious faith bears the fruit of "temperance" (self-control), which flows from a close relationship with Jesus. This temperance is not merely legalistic prohibition nor an abstinence (as celibacy). Rather, it is a control of our ever-present desires and lusts by exercising faith. Our knowledge (love for God) gives us the power that refuses to give free rein to our self-centered desires. Self-control keeps our desires under control because we are concerned about the honor of our God and Christ.

Faith always leads to "patience," that is, an enduring grasp of the Savior and knowing His attitude (along with that of His Father) toward me. It is an inward spiritual ability to continue even in the face of much opposition and great frustration. It is a perseverance to love my Savior and Lord and then to obey Him out of that love.

Faith also bears the fruit of "godliness." Godliness is a reverent, worshipful attitude and conduct because of a pervasive awareness of God. It is living as before His face. This is not fear in the sense of terror, but it is like the awe of a humble servant who is attentive to the wishes of his master. Godliness is a sincere devotion to God, over against being spiritually lethargic and indifferent.

Genuine faith also bears the fruit of "brotherly kindness." Arising out of faith's relationship with God and Christ is a relationship with others who have the same relationship. A right relationship with Jesus leads to a sincere desire to be useful and beneficial to our spiritual siblings. He who does not love his brother (whom he sees) cannot love his Father whom he cannot see. One with faith genuinely cares for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

And faith is adorned by "love." Faith eagerly seeks to render grateful returns of ardent love to Him who manifested so great love toward us. One with faith is not only in awe of God, but also dearly loves his Father and his Savior and Lord. And love for others is a reflection of God's love for us and of our love for Him.



We are commanded to add to (adorn) our faith. But we are also given incentive to do so. He who does not seek to exercise a faith that bears fruit is "blind" spiritually (9). He has "forgotten" that salvation means that he has been "purged from his old sins." We have been changed by justification. We were dead in sin, but "ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:11). As believers we ought not be so blind, so spiritually lethargic or lazy.

Rather, may these fruits "be in you and abound" (8). May our unending confession be that we are sorry for not serving our Father with the zeal we ought. Let us pray continually that the "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" not be "barren and unfruitful," but that we will always want to furnish or adorn our faith with every good work. 

Pornography: Balak Redivivus

Our world is awash in sexual filth. It covers our land like the oil from the Exxon Valdez covered the Alaskan coastline. It fills homes like sewage fills basements when the city drains back up in a flood.

The world is covered with the muck of sexual sin. And it's influencing God's church.

New York state's governor resigned recently for gross sexual offences. The accompanying stories of prostitution and those who participate are staggering. Detroit's mayor is being prosecuted for, among other things, lying about a sexual relationship with an aide. And the memory is fresh of the perversions of a former President of the United States. These are no peccadilloes.

Involved is, almost always, pornography.

The secular world notices, but either justifies it or changes the subject, quickly. But the churches are beginning to recognize the problem among Christians. The recent lead article in *Christianity Today* (March 2008) reveals a dark reality: throngs of men in churches have become ensnared in the ruinous sin of pornography. Specialized ministries are set up to assist those who finally admit their dark secrets and seek to be freed of them. But Christians are falling, and the numbers are staggering. Women as well as men ruin themselves. Young people are falling earlier on account of pornography's availability on the Internet. Church leaders are among them. Everyone is under attack.

The offensive is an all-out assault on the church.

Balak, King of Moab

That the devil uses this tactic to wreak havoc among God's people is nothing new.

Balak was the Moabite king whose first attempts to wound and destroy Israel failed. His hiring of the mercenary prophet Balaam to curse Israel backfired. As Israel journeyed to the land of promise, prophet Balaam could only bless—with some of the most beautiful blessings recorded in Scripture. Although King Balak was frustrated with Balaam ("I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times"!) he was not deterred. His alternate plan, though less sophisticated, was very effective. Numbers 25 shows Israel falling headlong into gross and public fornication with the women of Moab. Balak knew what would bring them to ruin. That this was a subtle but calculated scheme to damage God's Israel is plain from the end of the chapter: "They vex you with their wives" and "have beguiled you," God judged. The presence of the Moabite prostitutes was Moab's deception of Israel to bring her into idolatry and then under the judgment of God.

The spirit of Balak is revived.

Thus: *redivivus*. The Latin means: "given new life." The strategy and wiles of Balak.

If the church's adversary cannot damage her in one way, he will try another. If she is resistant

to the curse of false doctrine, a different spell may succeed. If modern false worship does not attract her, formalism may. If the modern ecumenical movement repels her, she may be susceptible to the sin of isolationism. The devil adjusts his offense in response to each church's and each age's defense. He uses many lures.

Perhaps, pornography.

Pornography. The portrayal of sexual sin, fornication. By words. By pictures. Moving or still.

But Balak's efforts today are intensified, and more crafty, than they ever have been. Balak is rejuvenated with magnified strength. Terrifying strength.

The Church's Hope

There is hope for the church and the people of God. The wife who, just imagining the possibility of a problem, feels nauseous may take courage. The man, too ashamed ever to think of seeking help, may. The officebearer may. There is power against the sin. There is deliverance for men (and women). There is safety for our sons (and daughters).

The safety and deliverance is the gospel of Jesus Christ—preached and applied and embraced by faith. The gospel given in the good graces of God.

But the goodness of God includes descriptions of and warnings about sin—particularly this sin. And no believer may be unaware of the nature and power of this sin against the seventh commandment.

Scripture warns repeatedly against the attraction of sexual wickedness.

The book of Proverbs majors on this folly. Too practical and probably not theological enough for some, Proverbs nevertheless addresses us all, and expounds God's wisdom in Jesus Christ regarding sexual ethics.

Proverbs is blunt. Chapter 3 gives a "heads-up" as it were: "Adult content ahead." Chapter 5 dives right in, and goes on all the way through chapter 7: The whore's lips are like honey. Her mouth is smooth. Her words flatter. Her beauty is captivating. Her perfumes are intoxicating. Her eyes are alluring. The man is tempted to embrace her bosom and be ravished with her love. As a wise father, Solomon gives good doctrine (4:2) to his sons.

Young Samson did not listen to the exhortations and warnings of his father taken from the book of Proverbs: "My son, attend unto my wisdom.... Hear me now...depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her..." Or else, Samson's father failed to impress upon the young man from early years the massive evil and devastating consequences of this sin. Are we fathers listening? Young fathers. Older fathers. Grandfathers at family dinners. Read the book of Proverbs with your children with some urgency. When they become teens, don't stop, but become more passionate in your love for them and fear for their safety.

And talk consequences.

Proverbs emphasizes *consequences*. Preachers and parents must not underestimate the importance of consequences in warning her members away from certain sins. They must not appeal only to the commandments of God and the calling to live antithetically. These are indeed essential. But also important are consequences of sin. And Prov-

erbs speaks of the consequences of sexual sin more than of the sin itself, and uses consequences as powerful incentives not to come near the strange woman or be tempted by her invitations.

Her *end* is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. "Can a man take fire into his bosom, and not be burned?" Scripture's wisdom asks. Toward the end, the foolish (now older) young man mourns with the pathetic lament: "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me..." (5:12,13). "Had I only listened to my parents!"

In the very end, if impenitent, he goes to hell.

Before that, it's a hellish life. A believer is hesitant to read the descriptions of the downward spiral and the hellish misery of the man (or woman) who does not repent early of his (or her) sexual sins. But he must. It is sad. It is sickening. But it's necessary to see.

His personal life falls apart. Those who commit this sin are stripped of all their honor (5:9; 6:33). One does not need to be a *public* servant to know this. Soon, their wealth is gone, too (5:10; 6:26). More money is spent on the Internet for pornography, we are told, than for everything else put together.

Sooner rather than later marriages suffer incalculable and, at times, irreparable damage. Pastors and elders have seen enough marriage problems these days not to be naïve about the part pornography plays.

Because a Christian's personal life is so closely related to the church, his ability to serve the church—whether in special office or not—is rendered useless. This is a grave concern. Who can say enough about this?

The warning of this ancient book even includes that the

person who falls into this sin eventually loses his health. His flesh and his body are consumed (5:11).

Addiction

But the consequence that has sometimes been overlooked is addiction. The article in *Christianity Today* highlights this. It does not quote Proverbs. It should. The man (or woman) who commits this sin eventually "is holden with the cords of his sins." The world calls that "addiction." Sometimes "mental illness." Or "disorder." Scripture calls it slavery to sin.

If the church has known this, she has not talked about it very much. Sin ensnares. Every sin can entrap a person. This is why the public health professionals' list of "Mental Disorders" grows in our generation. The believer recognizes the "disorders" as the enslaving power of sin. From Scripture's unique treatment of *sexual* sin, it appears that sexual sin has a power to enslave greater than most sins.

The mental image is pathetic: the man (or woman) who so hates the sin, but has no power to overcome it. So powerful is the addiction, men risk losing everything for the sake of the sin. So strongly does it hold them, that the thought of losing their marriage, their occupation, their children and grandchildren, cannot make them resist. So Proverbs warned when it said: "Many strong men have been slain by her." Strong men have no ability to resist. Having given themselves to the sin, it "has dominion" over them (Rom. 6:12).

In the end, if he is impenitent, the enslaved sinner goes to hell. "...as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

That's why it's so important

to see the evil of this sin. And, that's why it is so important to show the ensnared believer that there is hope. And what that hope is. But that waits for next issue, God willing.

An Editorial

This is an editorial.

The editorial calls elders to

take up these matters, if they have not already, and educate themselves for this battle their flock wages. It would not be inappropriate to put this on the consistory agenda, to ask the minister to preach the sharp warnings, to raise it as a subject at family visitation. The elders must be frank. The minister must be open: how many marriage

problems is he dealing with that involve pornography?

It will not do for anyone—especially the officebearers, but also wives and parents—to be naïve. I'll have some counsel for wives in an upcoming editorial. God deliver us from the “strange woman,” that we may devote ourselves to Him. 

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (11) or The Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Lillback's Logic

There are two other considerations that refute Presbyterian theologian Peter A. Lillback's learned “liberation” of the covenant from election in the theology of John Calvin, in his book *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Baker, 2001). There is, first, the implication that Lillback himself draws from Calvin's supposed doctrine of a covenant of universal, but conditional, grace. The implication is that Calvin, unlike Luther, taught justification by faith and works.

Lillback's logic, in contrast

to his theology, is sound. If the covenant, divorced from election, is conditional, justification—the outstanding benefit of the covenant—is partly by works, namely, the conditions that the sinner performs. If Calvin taught a conditional covenant, that is, a covenant divorced from election, he taught justification by faith and works. This logic is ironclad.

But the force of this ironclad logic also works the other way. If Calvin, like Luther, in fact taught justification by faith alone, Calvin did *not* teach a conditional covenant, but a covenant governed by election.

Thus, Lillback's own logic demolishes his thesis that Calvin taught a conditional covenant. For it is incontrovertible that Calvin was one with Luther—*perfectly* one with Luther—in teaching

justification by faith alone. Hear Calvin on justification in the final, authoritative, 1559 edition of his *Institutes*, where the exact subject in view is the issue whether justification is by faith and the good works faith performs, or by faith alone, altogether apart from any and all works of the justified sinner.

But a great part of mankind imagine that righteousness is composed of faith and works. Let us also, to begin with, show that faith righteousness so differs from works righteousness that when one is established the other has to be overthrown.... Farewell, then, to the dream of those who think up a righteousness flowing together out of faith and works. The Sophists [Roman Catholic theologians], who make game and sport in their corrupting of Scripture and their

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2007, p. 83.

empty caviling, think they have a subtle evasion. For they explain “works” as meaning those which men not yet reborn do only according to the letter by the effort of their own free will, apart from Christ’s grace. But they deny that these refer to spiritual works. For, according to them, man is justified by both faith and works provided they are not his own works but the gifts of Christ and the fruits of regeneration. For they say that Paul so spoke for no other reason than to convince the Jews, who were relying upon their own strength, that they were foolish to arrogate righteousness to themselves, since the Spirit of Christ alone bestows it upon us not through any effort arising from our own nature. Still they do not observe that in the contrast between the righteousness of the law and of the gospel, which Paul elsewhere introduces, all works are excluded, whatever title may grace them [Gal. 3:11-12].... Moreover, we shall see afterward, in its proper place, that the benefits of Christ—sanctification and righteousness—are different. From this it follows that not even spiritual works come into account when the power of justifying is ascribed to faith (John Calvin, *Institutes*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, Westminster Press, 1960, 3.11.13, 14).

Calvin taught justification by faith alone, apart from any and all works of the sinner. Therefore, by Lillback’s own logic, Calvin must have taught a covenant that is unconditional, because governed by gracious election.

Lillback is hoist with his own petard.

Westminster against the Preposterous Proposal

The second consideration that weighs against President Lillback’s presentation of Calvin as having taught a covenant of universal, conditional grace and, therefore, as having taught justification by faith and the works of faith is that there is not a hint of

this teaching in the Reformation creeds. So heavy and pervasive was the influence of Calvin on the writing of the Reformation creeds that, if Calvin did indeed teach what Lillback asserts he taught, the creeds would certainly contain this doctrine.

However, nothing of this supposed teaching of Calvin, concerning a covenant of universal, conditional grace, implying justification by faith and works in the covenant, is found in the Reformation creeds.

Rather, the creeds teach the very opposite.

I limit myself to the Westminster Standards, which are the official confessions of Presbyterian Lillback.

Why, if for Calvin the covenant is not governed (or, in Lillback’s term, “hampered”) by election, does the Westminster Larger Catechism answer the question, “With whom was the covenant of grace made?” as it does: “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed”? (Q.&A. 31)

Why, if Calvin in accordance with his supposed doctrine of a conditional covenant taught justification by faith and works, does the Westminster Confession of Faith define justification as it does?

Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God (WCF, 11.1).

And why, if Calvin was so determined not to allow election to “hamper” the work of salvation in the covenant, does the Westminster Confession of Faith deliberately locate the source of covenantal justification (I remind the reader that Westminster grounds the blessings of salvation, specifically justification, in the covenant of grace, which Westminster has treated in chapter 7) in God’s eternal election? “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect” (WCF, 11.4).

In view of the influence of Calvin on the Westminster Standards, the answer is plain: Calvin did not teach the doctrines Lillback ascribes to him; Calvin taught the opposite.

“Dung...[and] Rubbish”

What accounts then for the many quotations Lillback has diligently compiled especially from Calvin’s commentaries that seemingly teach a conditional, breakable covenant with all the children alike of godly parents, that is, a covenant that is not governed by election?

It must freely be acknowledged that Lillback has found such statements in Calvin’s voluminous writings.

About some, even many, of these statements of Calvin seemingly teaching a conditional covenant, two observations blunt the force that Lillback ascribes to them. First, the fact that Calvin taught a “mutual” covenant does not imply that he taught the “conditional” covenant of Dr. Lillback, the men of the federal vision, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”).

The covenant of grace is mutual in the sense that it is a bond of fellowship between God in Christ and the elect church.

The covenant is also emphatically mutual in the sense that there are two parts in the covenant, God’s part, which is His redemption and renewal of

us, and our part, which is our solemn calling, or duty, to love, reverence, trust, and obey God. Our part in the covenant is the demand of the covenant upon us (which God also graciously works in us).

This truth of mutuality differs radically from the notion of conditionality that holds that the realization of the covenant promise supposedly made to all alike, the continuation of the covenant supposedly made with all alike, and the perfection of covenant salvation supposedly begun with all alike depend upon the faith and obedience of the children.

The second observation that renders Lillback's use of many of Calvin's statements suspect is that the word "condition" did not always have the same meaning for Calvin that it does in the covenant theology of Dr. Lillback and the men of the federal vision. For Lillback and the federal vision, "condition" means a work of the member of the covenant upon which the covenant depends. Often, Calvin used the word "condition" to express that a certain act is the necessary way in which God would realize His covenant, or that a certain activity is the necessary way in which the member of the covenant, by the grace of God, abides in and enjoys the covenant.

This being said, there remain quotations of Calvin that Lillback can point to as supporting the doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant. These statements contradict other statements of Calvin affirming that the covenant is unconditional and unbreakable. More importantly, these statements contradict the massive, overwhelming testimony of Calvin's theology as a whole. But Lillback has found statements in Calvin's writings that support the doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant. This cannot be denied.

About these statements, two

further observations are in order. Both were the observations of the Reformers Luther and Calvin regarding similar efforts of enemies of the gospel of grace to find support for their heresies in the writings of the church fathers. When Pighius appealed to statements in the early church fathers contradicting Calvin's teaching on predestination, Calvin responded as follows:

Since the authority of the ancient Church is, with much hatred, cast in my teeth, it will perhaps be worth our while to consider at the commencement how unjustly the truth of Christ is smothered under this enmity, the ground of which is, in one sense, false, and in another frivolous. This accusation, however, such as it is, I would rather wipe off with the words of Augustine than with my own; for the Pelagians of old annoyed him with the same accusation, saying, that he had all other writers of the Church against him. In his reply he remarks that before the heresy of Pelagius, the fathers of the primitive Church did not deliver their opinions so deeply and accurately upon predestination, which reply, indeed, is the truth. And he adds: "What need is there for us to search the works of those writers, who, before the heresy of Pelagius arose, found no necessity for devoting themselves to this question, so difficult of solution? Had such necessity arisen, and had they been compelled to reply to the enemies of predestination, they would doubtless have done so." This remark of Augustine is a prudent one, and a wise one. For if the enemies of the grace of God had not worried Augustine himself, he never would have devoted so much labour (as he himself confesses) to the discussion of God's election (John Calvin, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," in *Calvin's Calvinism*, tr. Henry Cole, Eerdmans, 1956, pp. 36, 37).

What Augustine said to the

Pelagians, and Calvin to Pighius, applies to Lillback's quotations from Calvin supporting a conditional, breakable covenant. Calvin did not confront the erroneous doctrine of a covenant of universal, conditional, resistible (saving) grace. The doctrine of the "liberated" Reformed, of the men of the federal vision, and of Peter Lillback simply was not an issue in Calvin's day. Men were not employing the doctrine of the covenant to destroy and bury predestination. The fact is that Calvin did not concentrate on, develop, or systematize the doctrine of the covenant. This would be the task of a later age. To "cast in the teeth" of contemporary defenders of the gospel of sovereign grace in the covenant statements by Calvin to the contrary is, as Calvin put it, "frivolous."

The other observation about Lillback's quotations of Calvin in support of a conditional, breakable covenant is that made by Luther concerning Erasmus' collection of statements by various biblical scholars in favor of free will. "They have defiled the gold with dung," charged Luther. And then he turned on Erasmus: "But the gold should not be equated with the dung and thrown away with it, as you are doing. The gold must be reclaimed from their hands, the pure Scripture must be separated from their own rotten rubbish" (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, James Clarke, 1957, p. 85).

Lillback must learn to distinguish the dung and rubbish in Calvin from the gold and "pure Scripture." Then, he must "reclaim" and deliver to the Reformed community the gold and pure Scripture in Calvin, discarding the dung and rubbish.

... to be continued. 

Grace

Simply amazing, grace is. More glorious than the sun (Ps. 36:9), but few can see it (John 9:39). Exceedingly precious, but free (Eph. 2:7; Rom. 5:15). A gift; you cannot buy it (Rom. 5:15; Acts 8:20). More valuable than gold, but unwanted until received (Prov. 22:1; John 4:10). If you work for grace, you cannot have it; but without grace, you cannot work (Rom. 11:6; II Cor. 9:8). Most abundant, yet uncommon (II Cor. 4:15; Ex. 33:19). Gentle, yet irresistible (Acts. 4:33). It makes the dead alive, the weak strong, the blind see, the ugly beautiful, and the humble glorious.

How fitting the final Word from God in Scripture is, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen." Grace is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). For everyone? –elect and reprobate, them that are saved and them that perish? God forbid! Show one Word from God that says so –it can't be done. He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious (Ex. 33: 19). And He is gracious to His elect (I Pet. 1:2). He bestows grace upon His church (II Cor. 8:1). He gives it to the least, the lowly and humble (Eph. 3:8; Prov. 3:34; Jam. 4:6), to all them that love Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:24). It was Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, Gideon, and Mary who found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Grace is not in things – it is an attitude of God toward someone in His covenant. Grace is God's covenantal kindness (Eph. 2:7). It is to have His face shine upon you, full of compassion, slow to anger, of great mercy, ever mindful of His covenant (Num. 6:25; Ps. 145:8; 111:4-5). It is to be the friend of the king (Prov. 22:11). God is gracious to His friends, because of His covenant promise (II Kings 13:23). Grace makes sure the covenant promise that He will be their God and they shall be His people (Rom. 4:16; Jer. 31:1-2). Thus, by grace are we saved, and a remnant left to escape – the remnant according to the election of grace (Eph. 2:8; II Kings 13:23; Rom. 11:5). By grace we are accepted in the beloved, have redemption through His blood and forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:6-7). By grace we are called, justified freely, and made heirs of eternal life (Gal. 1:15; Rom. 3:24; Tit. 3:7). Grace gives everlasting consolation and good hope (II Thes. 2:16). And grace makes us abound to every good work (II Cor. 9:8). By grace

we speak, live in the world, labor abundantly, and serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Rom. 12:3; II Cor. 1:12; I Cor. 15:10; Heb. 12:28). By the grace of God, I am what I am (I Cor. 15:10)!

How could grace be for everyone? Grace comes not by rain and sunshine, but by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). It is His grace (Rom. 16:20). He is the God of all grace and the man through whom this gift abounds to many (I Pet. 5:10; Rom. 5:15). He is full of grace (John 1:14). It is poured into His lips so He is blessed forever (Ps. 45:2). And this grace proceeds from His mouth (Luke 4:22). This fullness we receive – grace for grace (John 1:16), even before the world began (II Tim. 1:9), and now to each of us according to the measure of Christ (Eph. 4:7).

The great blessing is, "Grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:2). No real need to add "by the operation of the Holy Spirit," for to receive grace is to receive the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of grace, who proceeds from both Father and Son (Heb. 10:29; Zec. 12:10). Thus, when the Spirit was poured out upon the church, great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33). No wonder the church defends so vigorously the character of grace! It contends not about mere words – common or particular, hopelessly weak or comfortingly powerful – but the very nature of God the Spirit. No wonder grace is what it is! Irresistible – the sufficient strength of Christ and effectual working of His power (II Cor. 12:9; Eph. 3:7); God's blessing – multiplied by knowledge of Jesus through means of the gospel of grace (II Pet. 1:2; II Cor. 8:19), and by coming boldly before His throne to ask for this Holy Spirit (Heb. 4:16; L.D. 45). No wonder it is so glorious, precious, beautiful, amazing, the gift of God – the unspeakable gift (II Cor. 9:15)! It really can only be experienced. What is grace? This – that God became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14); that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, and that through His poverty we became rich (II Cor. 8:9); that being found in fashion as a man, He became obedient unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). Grace, that saved a wretch like me (Rom. 7:24). 

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Working Towards an Indigenous Church (2)

A Self-governing Church

According to John Nevius, an indigenous church includes the three self-helps he made famous: self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. In this article we will consider the first of these, self-governing.

Admittedly, these three self-helps are integrated, and it is very difficult to isolate them from each other and treat them separately. Also, the subjects are comprehensive and basic to all mission work, yet we must be pointed and brief. With respect to self-governing we will try to relate Paul's method to our own today.

Self-government concerns itself with the relationship between the sending church and the mission church that is eventually formed. The goal of the sending church is that the mission church in a foreign land assume its own leadership and decision making, whether in its own local congregation or in a federation that may be formed under the Lord's blessing. To achieve this requires the commitment of the sending church to train the mission church to do this and then to withdraw when it is accomplished.

This is easier said than done.

It will help us to grapple with some of the issues involved if

we take a brief look at the way the great missionary, the apostle Paul, did his work among the early Christian churches. We get help for this from Roland Allen's book, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (p. 84).

The facts are these: St Paul preached in a place for five or six months and then left behind him a church, not indeed free from the need of guidance, but capable of growth and expansion. For example, according to Ramsay [W.M. Ramsay, *New Testament scholar in Scotland—1851-1939*], St Paul preached in Lystra for about six months on his first missionary journey, then he ordained elders and left for about eighteen months. After that he visited the church for the second time, but only spent a few months in the province. Then for the last time, after an interval of three years, he visited them again, but again he was only a month or two in the province. From this it is clear that the churches of Galatia were really founded and established in the first visit. The same fact is also clear from the language used in the Acts concerning St Paul's second visit. When he was about to set forth, St Luke says that he proposed to Barnabas to "go and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do," and he is described as passing through Galatia delivering the decrees of the Jerusalem Council with the result that "the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily." This is not language which could be used of a missionary visiting congregations

which could not stand without his presence, or which lacked any of the fundamentals of settled Christian life: it is language which speaks of organized and established communities. Similarly in Macedonia, Professor Ramsay calculates that St Paul did not stay in Thessalonica more than five months, and he did not visit the place again for over five years, yet he writes to "the church of the Thessalonians" (I Thess 1:1) and speaks of it as being on the same footing as "the churches of God in Judea" (I Thess 2:14). At Corinth St Paul spent a year and a half at his first visit and then did not go there again for three or four years, but he wrote letters as to a fully equipped and well-established church.

Now these are typical examples of his work. The question before us is, how he could so train his converts as to be able to leave them after so short a time with any security that they would be able to stand and grow. It seems at first sight almost incredible. In the space of time which amongst us is generally passed in the class of hearers, men were prepared by St Paul for the ministry. How could he prepare men for Holy Orders in so brief a time? How could he even prepare them for holy baptism? What could he have taught them in five or six months? If any one today were to propose to ordain men within six months of their conversion from idolatry, he would be deemed rash to the verge of madness. Yet no one denies that St Paul did it. The sense of stupefaction and amazement that comes over us when we think of it is the measure of

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

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2007, p. 131.

the distance which we have travelled from the apostolic method. [Note: Roland Allen writes from his perspective as an Anglican. Above, the designation "hearers" refers to heathen who are open to the gospel, and Holy Orders is a reference to officebearers in the church.]

When Allen first wrote these words in 1912, the ideas were pretty much ignored or discarded. By 1927, when he published his second edition, a more significant discussion was under way. He mentions this in the introduction and points out that no one criticized the statement of facts. The summary above is accepted as factual. The critics focused on two points: (1) the gulf between missionaries and heathen today is greater than between Paul and his hearers. (2) Paul could rely on, for the building up of his churches, converts from the synagogue, which are not present in foreign missions today. His answer to number (1) is that "the greater the gulf [between missionary and people], the greater was the value of the apostolic method." To number (2) he states.

(1) That the dangers which we anticipate, the dangers of lowering a standard of morals or of a confusion of Christian doctrine by the introduction of ideas borrowed from heathen philosophy or superstition, were not less in his day than in ours; (2) that the breach between the Synagogue and the Christian church arose so early and was so wide that as a matter of fact churches were soon being established which certainly were not "off-shoots of the local synagogue," and yet the apostolic practice was maintained; (3) that at Corinth, and in Galatia, and in Ephesus, the presence of Jews or proselytes in the church did not prevent the dangers from arising; if St Paul relied upon them, they failed him; (4) that the argument demands that we should admit that Mosaic teaching is a better

foundation for Christian morality and theology than the teaching of Christ and of the Holy Spirit; (5) that St Paul's faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit would have forced him to act as he did, under any circumstances. He could not have relied on any power either in heathen philosophic, or in Mosaic, teaching to establish his converts, under any circumstances whatsoever. (6) that if we went to China or to India and told those people that in morality and intelligence they were so far beneath the provincial Jews and proselytes of St Paul's day that he could not have dealt with them as he did with the provincials of Galatia, they would be insulted, and we should be saying what we should find it hard to prove. And if anyone answers me that when we use such speech we are thinking only of people in Africa and other uncivilized lands, I must reply that we are plainly thinking of all men, everywhere, because we everywhere employ the same method, and everywhere alike shrink from establishing the church on the apostolic plan.

It is helpful to hear from John Nevius, who concurs with Allen as Nevius writes in *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, page 28:

We should with faith and confidence commit young converts "to the Lord on whom they believed." This was the course unhesitatingly adopted by the apostle Paul and I know of no reason why we should not follow his example. Our Savior has promised to be always with His people unto the end of the world, and to send the blessed Spirit of all grace to abide with them forever. He will give them by conferring special graces of His Spirit, prophets, teachers, exhorters, helps, and governments, as they are required. Paul on his departure from places where he had made converts often left Timothy or Silas or others to spend days or weeks in instructing, exhorting, and comforting

them, and also send special messengers to individual churches to correct abuses and furnish help as occasion required; but we read in the Acts of the Apostles of no case in which he left any one to stay with them as their resident minister. I believe that in failing to follow this apostolic example, we have often checked the development of individual gifts, and self-reliance, and aggressive power in our Churches, making them weak, inefficient, and dependent from the first.

J. H. Bavinck adds to this discussion some worthwhile ideas. In his book, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, he writes a chapter on "The Role of the Mother Church":

The problem felt on every missionary field is to find a solution to two alternatives. Ought the mother church to keep its hands off and leave a young congregation with its own ministers and consistory to itself? Or, initially at least, ought the mother church retain a certain authority, support, and guidance?

From the preceding it is clear how difficult it is to draw parallels between the missionary work in the church of the apostles and that in our own day. And it is still more difficult to draw any conclusions on the basis of these parallels with respect to the line of actions which we ought to follow (p. 191).

In the subsequent discussion he makes a point that contradicts Allen, by insisting that Paul worked within his own world and with people who had attained a certain level of civilization, people with whom he held certain cultural values in common. He contrasts modern missionaries as those who face a world that is so foreign to them. In the process of establishing a church, a huge gap exists between the missionary and the church to be established, and it will take a longer time for the missionary to be useful and also to

help them mature. One example of this is language, Paul did not have the barrier of foreign tongues. He could speak the gospel within the context of the Roman Empire, which in the places Paul visited practiced Greek culture.

What do we learn from this exchange (and it could be multiplied many pages) for self-government? We must keep in mind that Roland Allen was Anglican, and the government of his church was one of hierarchy, which contributed to the problems he faced in the mission field. It more than likely contributed to his extreme insistence on radical change. Nevius was Presbyterian, and because in his labors in China and Korea he had the freedom to develop his methods, he saw the benefit of Paul's New Testament methods. Bavinck came from a more structured church connection and therefore was more balanced in applying Paul's principles to present mission work.

First, we must have as our goal from the very beginning that the church-in-forming, as well as the church-established, must be composed of true believers who bear the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in them. The heart of missions is to bring the message of the gospel that is faithful to the Scriptures, and thus a suitable avenue by which the Spirit works. We have to sort out how the gospel impacts the life of the hearers in a foreign culture. All too often we begin with the proud notion of our superiority over heathen. We mix our notions of cultural superiority with the gospel. Rather than accepting them on their level, we think we have to bring them to our cultural practices if they are going to become Christians. A better approach is that we view the Bible as a sieve through which we pass all cultural practices. That which contradicts the Bible must be rejected, and that which does not contradict is allowed.

Example: what are proper musical instruments for worship? We use organs and pianos, and they use guitars or keyboards. If we apply the principle of self-governing, nothing is forced on them. They accept both the teaching and practice of the Bible because they understand, and we do not fret when they practice something different from us. This can never be accomplished by our laying down the law and insisting that we have it right regardless of their struggles. Within the context of the culture of the people, the converts determine with the missionary what is acceptable as Christians and what must be abandoned. At every level the missionary brings the gospel to bear on the heart and life of the people and they are trained to understand.

Second, it is not wise to draw from the timing of the apostle the standard for all foreign mission work. We must not enter into a country and expect that within six months to a year or so a well-founded church will be established. Rather, we ought to conclude from the example of Paul's labors that we must think and work much faster than we are doing. Paul, too, was under the guidance of the Spirit in all his labors. It is the Holy Spirit's pleasure to accomplish His will through the preaching of the gospel in the mission setting. We must not put a time clock on the Spirit's work in any country. That certainly varies, and history confirms this.

Third, we ought to give priority to training local men for the work. One incontrovertible conclusion we draw from Paul's labors was his effort to train others to help him. Many of these brothers were from the field itself. Some of them became pastors in

the newly established congregations. Others traveled with Paul or beyond Paul to assist in the work. We do well to focus on this. When we begin a work in a foreign field, we must seek out men who can be trained. This will obviously take time, but in the service of a self-governing church the missionary must take leadership as little as possible. We must communicate to them that this is

...in the service of a self-governing church the missionary must take leadership as little as possible.

not our work, and it is not a foreign church establishing their church. We are there to assist them to have their own church. The quickest way to do this effectively is to

train local men.

Fourth, this training must not be viewed as setting up a seminary in their country. Rather, it ought to be one-on-one in the very early stages of the work. What the western church has to contribute to missions is not so much going out into the jungle (something that may still be needed, but is done with great difficulty due to issues of health and culture), but teaching. We have the knowledge, books, and learning that the mission church lacks and desperately needs. The quickest way to train one or more local men is to sit down with them on a daily basis and teach them the gospel and its implication for converts in that country. In this way, rapport is built between the missionary and the local natives, and they can help the missionary tremendously in understanding their culture and how the gospel can be applied.

Again, self-governing is on the foreground here. The locals are included, and bridges are built for a future church. I learned that this sort of training can be done quite quickly. I always marveled how soon one could forsake the Chinese religion and become a well-grounded

Christian by regular study. The same is true when God provides a local man who has some basic gifts. Through intensive daily training, he can be prepared in a matter of months. This man may serve in office and be received as a gift of the Spirit.

Fifth, Paul's role in missions in his day makes clear that he did not stay very long in one place but saw his field as broad. We make a mistake when a missionary settles down for years in one place. Rather, we ought to see a country or district as our field of labor. This does not mean that he abandons his work in an area where there is good evidence of the beginning of a church. No, he leaves temporarily so that he can extend the work of the gospel in other places, some nearby and

others distant. This is important for the self-government of the mission church. The members of the mission are forced to maintain themselves, and even to grow, without depending on the missionary. A great hindrance to self-government is the smothering presence of a foreign missionary. It is not good for the missionary or for the mission church.

Sixth, we must understand weakness in a mission church and not allow our desire for perfection to hinder us from allowing the church to make mistakes and grow through failure. Certainly this is clear from Paul's best work. Even Paul did not produce by the Spirit church-

es free from problems. He had Corinth and Galatia to contend with. In fact he tells us that the biggest burden for him was "his care of all the churches" (II Cor. 11:28). This must not discourage us from doing the work, nor must we needlessly be critical of work done, if it is inherent in mission work. We must recognize that the Spirit does not produce a perfect church at home, or on the mission field. This keeps us humble and dependent upon Him. Rather than being our discouragement or occasion for harsh judgment, it forces us to our knees to seek the Spirit's help in organizing mission churches.

A great hindrance to self-government is the smothering presence of a foreign missionary.



Dispensational Eschatology (3) The Folly to Which Dispensationalism Leads

The seriousness of an error is manifested by the folly to which it leads. By considering where some dispensationalists are today, we begin to see more clearly how serious are the errors that underlie the movement. Therefore, before going through the dispensational system one aspect at a time, I thought it would be good to have one more overview article—this one looking specifically at the folly into which dispensational-

ists have been plunged by their erroneous views on the interpretation of Scripture.

The Folly of Unholy Alliances

Especially after the Six-Day War in 1967, dispensationalists and Israelis began working together to promote tourism to the country of Israel. In this way both groups could make big money, while building support for the idea that God has willed the land of Palestine to the Israelis. The biggest tourist event of the year is the week-long Feast of Tabernacles Celebration held in Jerusalem. This event is viewed to be so important that the Israeli

prime minister himself has appeared virtually every year to thank the pilgrims and send them back to promote the Israeli cause. In 1998, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave a typical speech:

I came here to thank you for your support in our great endeavor.... The state of Israel is stronger because of your support and it needs this strength to resist undue pressure and threats. You know, and we know, that this is a support for a just and good cause. I said we have come back to our ancient homeland. Our claim to this land is based on the greatest and most incontrovert-

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2008, p. 276.

ible document in creation—the Holy Bible. It’s the Bible that has given us the deed to this land. It is on the basis of the Bible that the Christian world and so much of the international community have recognized our right to it.¹

A number of organizations have arisen that channel funds from various churches to the Israelis. One such organization, known as Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, pairs congregations with Israeli settlements, with each church being responsible to support its own Israeli settlement financially and politically. On their website (www.cfoic.com), one finds the following mission statement:

The focus of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC Heartland) is to link settlements in Israel with Christian churches and individuals throughout the world. These communities are located in Judea and Samaria.

Fellowship between the churches and the Israelis is encouraged, with pen pals and email exchanges being established.²

Cornerstone Church, a huge independent congregation in San Antonio, Texas, is a well-known supporter of the Israeli cause. Dispensationalist John Hagee, the founder and senior pastor of this enormous congregation, is also the president and CEO of Global Evangelism Television, which broadcasts his church services on more than 120 television and 110 radio stations worldwide.³ The magnitude of his influence is illustrated by the fact that he is scheduled to appear with Senator Joseph Lieberman

¹ Quoted in Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 217.

² Weber, pp. 225-226.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

at the Third Annual Washington-Israel Summit in Washington, an event scheduled to take place this summer under the auspices of an organization known as Christians United for Israel. The following quote taken from their website (www.cufi.org) shows their agenda.

We’re going back to Washington for Christians United for Israel’s third annual DC Summit on July 21 to July 24. You need to be there with us!

We’re bringing together some of the most influential leaders and thinkers in Washington to update you on recent developments in the Middle East and in Washington. We’re holding a Night to Honor Israel down the street from the Capitol with Senator Joseph Lieberman and Pastor John Hagee. And we’re going to Congress so that each of you can share your support for Israel directly with your elected officials. You won’t want to miss our largest and most important Summit yet!

Israel’s critics are speaking out and making gains. Our intelligence community is ignoring the threat of a nuclear Iran. More voices in Congress are calling for an end to aid to Israel. And the Administration may soon pressure Israel to divide Jerusalem. With all of these threats emerging, it is more important than ever that pro-Israel Christians make their voices heard! CUFI’s Washington Summit is your chance to make a difference. Join us in Washington!

Many are the examples that could be cited to show how large numbers of professing Christians have fallen into the sin of promoting the cause of unbelieving Israelis, rather than the cause of Christ.

And there is more evidence that this is indeed the nonsense into which the dispensational movement has fallen. It should be obvious that there is an inherent contradiction between supporting the Israelis as God’s

people and trying to convert them to Christ. As a general rule, unbelieving Jews do not cooperate with those who are striving to persuade them to abandon Judaism for Christianity. This being the case, it is not surprising that some dispensational organizations (not all of them) have made a point of not attempting to convert Jews. Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, for example, states this explicitly on their website:

CFOIC is not an evangelizing ministry, but rather aims to build bridges of love and mutual respect between Christians and Jews. CFOIC brings unconditional support to the Jewish communities and partners with the dedicated pioneers of Biblical Israel to fulfill Biblical prophecy.

Do you think dispensationalists can build “bridges of love” between themselves and those who despise and reject Christ, even to the point of providing them “unconditional support,” and not be affected by such an unholy alliance? Do you think they can bring God’s name into this absurdity, claiming they are forming this union in an effort “to fulfill Biblical prophecy,” and that the God who inspired Scripture will do nothing? The wise God is on His throne, and our righteous Lord is always executing His judgment, taking those who delight in folly and giving them over to even greater folly.

The Folly of Rebuilding the Temple

Dispensationalists not only predict future events, but also strive to bring them about. “Be a part of the fulfillment of prophecy” is an oft-repeated slogan used by many dispensationalists to encourage support for their cause. One is said to be helping the fulfillment of biblical prophecy by helping the Israelis

expand their borders and take complete control of Jerusalem, or by providing poor Jewish families (especially those from the former Soviet Union) the financial support they need to move to Palestine. This slogan has been found to be very effective in stirring up people to action and has become quite common in recent years.

Another event that dispensationalists not only predict but also strive to bring about is the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In their mind, this is something that is going to take place "because God wills it." They claim to find proof for this in passages that speak of the Antichrist desecrating the temple and putting an end to sacrificial worship.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (II Thess. 2:3, 4).

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease... (Dan. 9:27a).

Dispensationalists argue that the temple in Jerusalem must be reconstructed, and that sacrificial worship must resume, before these prophecies can be fulfilled.

They encounter one large problem, however, when they set out to rebuild the temple on the hill in Jerusalem where it once stood. The Mosque of Omar, considered by the Moslems to be one of their most sacred sites, has been sitting on the Temple Mount since the seventh century. Now it is true that there is some doubt as to which hill in Jerusalem is the precise location where Solomon's

temple once stood. But it is commonly agreed that the hill upon which this mosque presently sits is indeed the most likely location.

One can well imagine what would happen if the Jews destroyed this mosque and built a temple in its place. Many are those who fear that such an act would trigger a third world war. Yet this has not deterred dispensationalists, who argue that it must take place "because God wills it."

In fact, lives have already been lost over this issue:

The intense emotions surrounding this issue boiled over in October 1990 when the Temple Mount Faithful [a group devoted to rebuilding the temple] announced plans to lay a cornerstone for the Temple, on Temple Mount, during the Jewish holiday week of Succoth [a name for the Feast of Tabernacles]. On the appointed day, crowds of Palestinian Arabs gathered protectively around Haram al-Sharif [the Moslem name for this mount]. Some pitched rocks at Jews praying at the Western Wall (the only remaining sections of the earlier Temple, and Judaism's most sacred spot). Israeli police, at first driven back, returned some time later (when the rock throwing had stopped) and raked the crowd with automatic weapons fire, leaving 125 wounded and 21 dead...¹

The fact that the ones who put an end to this were the Israeli police serves to point out that not all Israelis desire the temple to be rebuilt. In fact, the majority of Israelis reportedly do not. Phrases such as "bunch of nuts" and "dangerous lunatics" have been frequently used by the Israeli press to describe radical right-wing groups such as the Temple Mount Faithful.²

¹ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 199.

² Ibid.

There are, however, those who fear that dispensationalists may spark a conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors—a conflict that would lead to a world war centered in that vital region. When one considers the very large number of people who speak of Israel as God's people and the land of Palestine as the holy land given by God to the Israelis, and the fact that many of these dispensationalists see little point in trying to promote peace in the Middle East, it is not surprising that some are beginning to view the dispensationalists as a threat to human civilization. This explains why someone like Grace Halsell, a woman who served as President Lyndon Johnson's speech writer for three years, would write a book that would become very popular entitled, *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture – And Destruction of Planet Earth*. Many are taking note of this movement, and a growing number of people are quite concerned about its agenda.

Although people of the world may agree with us that rebuilding the temple is a foolish endeavor, they will not be able to see the heart of the matter. The central error is the rejection of Christ's words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The real temple, the body of Christ, has already been raised. And God's people, the church, constitute the real temple of God on this earth, as our Lord has told us in II Corinthians 6:16:

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Great is the wickedness of rejecting the resurrection of our Lord and the true temple of the living God. And great is the

evil of joining with those who build a temple to idols, and then claiming that such an activity amounts to performing the work of the Lord zealously. Can one be engaged in building both the temple of the living God and the temple of the unbelieving Jews? Undoubtedly one must abandon the former to engage in the latter. Such is the folly into which dispensationalists have fallen. How much farther can they fall? What further folly can they come up with?

The Folly of Seeking a Completely Red Heifer

One way some dispensationalists have tried to be “a part of the fulfillment of prophecy” is by helping to bring forth a heifer that is completely and perfectly red. According to some Orthodox rabbis, the sacrifice of such a red heifer is necessary before the third temple can be built. It is said that before temple activities can begin, the ashes of a red heifer have to be mixed with water and sprinkled by the priests on the defiled, so that they can resume the temple activities of the past.

The ceremony of the red heifer is mentioned in the following verses from Numbers 19:

2 This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:

13 Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.

Some Jews and dispensationalists take this to mean that a perfectly red heifer must be found and sacrificed, to cleanse the people in-

involved in the work of the temple.¹

This presents a problem, however, because a blemish-free, perfectly-red heifer is extremely rare. Moses Maimonides, a famous rabbi of the twelfth century, once declared that only nine such heifers had been born during the entire history of Israel. The tenth heifer, said Maimonides, would be found shortly before the coming of the Messiah and the building of the third temple.²

In recent years a number of Jews and dispensationalists have been zealously attempting to use genetic engineering to produce an all-red heifer. So far a few such heifers have been born, but before the heifers reached the required age of three years, so that they could be sacrificed, they were disqualified for one reason or another. Although most would find such efforts rather amusing, there are those who fear that if such a heifer is found and sacrificed, it may spark a small movement that gradually gains in strength, with supporters arguing that such a rare event is irrefutable proof that God is making known that the time has come to clear the Temple Mount and start constructing the third temple.³

The Folly of Trusting in Folly

Frequently quoted by dispensationalists is God’s promise

¹ There is an ancient argument that the phrase in Num. 19:2 translated in the KJV as “a red heifer without spot” means “a heifer completely red.” But the phrase is similar to the phrase “a male without blemish” found in Lev. 22:18, which certainly does not mean “completely a male.” The term means “sound” or “healthy” and is further defined by the phrase that follows it, which could be translated, “without a defect.” The thought that God would require the sacrifice of an animal that is completely and perfectly red, an animal that supposedly appears only every few hundred years, is obviously ludicrous.

² Weber, p. 262.

³ Ibid., pp. 263-266.

to Abraham that He would bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse Abraham (Gen. 12:3). With great effect they misuse this promise to persuade people that God will certainly bless all those who give their financial and political support to Jews who desire to move to Palestine, or to the Israelis who are busy fighting “terrorism.”

They misuse not only the promise, but also the curse. Leading dispensationalists attempt to strike fear into all who oppose them by threatening them with the curse of God that comes upon all those who curse Abraham and his seed. Their message is clear—to support the Israelis is to be blessed, and to oppose them is to be cursed. It is that simple. They apply this not only to individuals but also to countries. The United States, they say, will be blessed by God only if they support the Israelis. Should we as a nation take any stand that displeases the Israelis, and especially if we should support the idea of a Palestinian state, then God’s curse will come upon our country. With such an argument they justify their political lobbying designed to persuade our political leaders to side with Israel.

Twisting the promise of God in this way, they then proceed to tell people that helping the Israelis is one of the clearest proofs that one is a child of God who is going to go to heaven. Thus they teach people to rest the assurance of their salvation on an act of consummate folly.

Oh the folly of trusting in folly. And yet such marks the end to which the road of dispensationalism leads. Seeing this, let us warn people against it, pointing people away from the Jerusalem that is below to the Jerusalem that is above, from the Jerusalem that is in bondage, to the Jerusalem that by God’s grace is forever free. 

Cycles—Pictures of the Vanity of Life

Springtime is here again. Another winter has come and gone. The changing of the seasons affords us great opportunity to examine some of the spiritual truths illustrated by the creation's cycles. The cycles mentioned in Scripture demonstrate both the blessed life lived in communion with Christ and the cursed life lived apart from Him. On the one hand, we notice how the cycles demonstrate the glory of God, displaying His attributes and His loving care for His people. As we noticed in a previous article [April 1 issue], cycles show us God's faithfulness, both in His provision to His people and other creatures, and in the keeping of His word.

On the other hand, we can also see how the cycles illustrate the effects of sin and the curse of God that comes upon the wicked and even upon the creation. They clearly testify of the vanity of life apart from God. Having already examined how cycles show God's blessed attributes and faithful provision to His people, we now turn our attention to how the cycles illustrate the vanity of life apart from God.

Cycles—Endless Repetition

One of the obvious characteristics of cycles is their repetitious nature. In the human body there are a number of such cycles. The circulatory system—the flowing of blood throughout the body—is one example. Its very name shows its circular and repetitious nature.

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

The circulatory system is a classic example of the repetitious cycles that are found everywhere in the creation. The movement of the blood throughout the body can be examined if we look from the vantage point of a single red blood cell. Red blood cells are the vitally important component of blood that delivers the all-important oxygen to the cells and removes the "toxic" carbon dioxide. They form in the bone marrow and are transported in the blood that is pumped throughout the body. A red blood cell is pumped from the heart to the lungs, where it drops off waste carbon dioxide and picks up fresh oxygen. Each red blood cell consists of 250 hemoglobin molecules, and each hemoglobin molecule carries up to four oxygen molecules. Thus, after leaving the lungs, the red blood cell carries a payload of up to 1000 oxygen molecules. It then journeys back to the heart, by which it is pumped through a long and vast network of blood vessels in order to deliver the oxygen to various cells of the body. As it gives its oxygen molecules to the cells, it also picks up the cells' waste gases—carbon dioxide.

Carried along in the flow of blood, the red blood cell eventually returns to the heart and is pumped back to the lungs once again to exchange gases—dropping off the waste carbon dioxide and picking up the life-giving oxygen. The red blood cell repeats this journey, which it accomplishes in less than a minute's time, some half a million times before it retires after about a four-month tour of duty. The red blood cell is then dismembered and reusable parts are recycled in other parts of the body. It has been discarded and another takes up

its work, caught up in the same endless cycle.¹

This repetitious cycle, like all other cycles, illustrates an aspect of the vanity of life apart from God. When the Preacher in Ecclesiastes considers the toil of man and all the riches he acquires in this life, he asks in what does it profit? "In all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?" (Eccl. 5:16). Because of the Fall, all creation has become subject to vanity. Without the God of all the earth as a focal point and Christ at its center, the cycles of life—the coming and going of each generation, the rising and the setting of the sun, the movement of the wind around the globe, and the cycling of the waters back into the seas—seem to be futile. They work, they rise, they whirl, they run—only to have to go through it all again (Eccl. 1). They demonstrate that a life under the curse of God brings no satisfaction. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full" (Eccl. 1:7). The cycles, therefore, clearly demonstrate the hopeless and insatiable pursuits of a life apart from the one true God.

This vanity of life apart from God is observed in the life of the wicked. As the blood flows throughout the body, only to begin its tour again minutes later, so the life of the world is a continual cycle of vanity. Apart from God, life has no profit, and nothing seems to satisfy. The world seeks to escape this reality, ironically, by pursuing that which is itself

¹ Brand, Paul and Philip Yancey. *In His Image*. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1987, pp. 54-59.

empty, futile, and non-satisfying. Millions of dollars are spent each year in the hope of winning the lottery (wealth gotten by vanity—Prov. 13:11) to attain a life of ease free from wearisome toil. Many lives and marriages are destroyed by drug and alcohol abuse—the goal of which was to bring happiness. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). Man endlessly toils to acquire material things, and yet satisfaction and happiness in such are never reached. “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase” (Eccl. 5:10). All that the world pursues is merely for the moment and in an attempt to escape the reality of the curse of God that is the lot of fallen man. They try to find satisfaction in the things of this life, but it cannot be found.

In sorrow we recognize that we, by nature, are prone to this same folly. We too are tempted to place our trust in earthly riches and busy ourselves with worthless activities. All too often we waste so much precious time and energy in pursuits that have no enduring positive effect on our spiritual lives. We are tempted to find satisfaction in the fleeting things of this life. Our life, however, is from above and ought to be differentiated from the life of the ungodly, whose life consists only in present earthly realities.

Thanks be to God that we are ultimately delivered from such vanity! By the work of His Spirit, we begin to hate that which is vain and begin to pursue the “meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (John 6:27). In our day-to-day cyclical routines of sleeping and rising, eating and drinking, working and resting, we find joy, not in seeking the vain things of this life but in striving for that which endures. For whatever work the Lord gives us, whether that be at our

daily workplace, or in raising our children, or in the church, or in journeying on in life without the closeness of a loved one, or even in lying upon a bed of affliction—whatever work it may be, we do it heartily, as unto the Lord, for it is not empty, wearisome toil but the God-ordained way—the only way—to bring us to our place in glory.

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). We are told in Ecclesiastes to fear God and keep His commandments. That is our duty and delight. With that foremost in our minds we can serve Him rightly in our labors and in the use of the many good gifts He gives to us.

Cycles—Certain Death

Another aspect of the vanity of this life apart from God is found in the fact that since the Fall, death is inevitable in the life of all creatures. All creatures, man and beast alike, must die. The cycles of the earth clearly illustrate this aspect of vanity as well.

The human life cycle is used often in Scripture to show the vanity of life apart from God. The consequences of sin are such that from the moment we are born we are dying, until ultimately we leave this earthly life and a new generation takes up our place. This cycle of life and death is readily seen within our bodies. Consider the nature of our bones alone. Every day our bones are changing, as bone cells constantly are destroyed and then replaced anew. In our youth, the bone cells replace themselves at a tremendous rate, so that each year one fifth of our skeleton is demolished and then replaced or rebuilt. However, by our mid-thirties this bone replacement rate begins to slow. As we age, the rate at which bone cells are destroyed is greater than that at

which they are replaced. Hence we begin to lose bone density. This is particularly true for women, who tend to lose bone at a faster rate than men (8% per decade compared with 3% per decade) and will more often suffer from osteoporosis. The obvious result is that older people generally have weaker bones than children. Elderly people begin to stoop over as the skeleton can no longer hold up under the weight of the body. Their bones break in relatively simple falls that would not have fazed them in their youth. Even the jawbone and teeth are affected, so that teeth begin to crack or fall out.¹ Thus it is very evident that man weakens and dies. “All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Eccl. 3:20). One generation is born and another dies.

Every cycle demonstrates that things exist in a particular state for a time, but then change or die off. They all illustrate the simple truth that, from the perspective of life without God, there is a futility to life. Life begins, and after a short time, ends. All the results of man’s labor seem to be for nought, for it all perishes—man included. “As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand” (Eccl. 5:15).

The ungodly recognize this tension and vanity of life. Apart from God, not only is their labor vain, but their life will end. The world seeks to cover up the effects of death in an attempt to hide from the very truth that all must die and face the Judge of all the earth. Men try desperately to eradicate disease, pain, and sickness, for this life and this life only is all there is to them. What

¹ Martini, Frederic H. *Fundamentals of Anatomy and Physiology*—Third Edition. Prentice Hall: New Jersey, 1995, pp. 187-193.

modern medicine cannot cure, drugs, alcohol, or a mad pursuit of pleasure and lasciviousness can alleviate. Or perhaps exercise and diet can at least prevent or put off for a time. Man finds the need to attach his name to a building or to cover the effects of aging in a futile attempt to assure himself that all is not lost.

This vanity is ultimately shown in man's pursuit of a god other than Jehovah. In a hatred for God, man worships the creature rather than the Creator. Throughout history, man has worshiped the cycles and the objects in them, such as the sun, the god of fertility, the rivers, and the like. It is no different today. It has been stated that nearly twenty-five percent of Europeans believe in reincarnation, "a rebirth within the eternal cycle of nature."¹ Rather than worship the Almighty God, who alone is over and above these cycles, man tries to escape the vanity of these cycles and of death by joining himself to them in the attempt to make himself live on and on as well. Ironically, man serves and worships the very cycles that demonstrate the vanity of life and the folly of his ways. In God's just judgment He turns them over to their ungodliness so that they delve further into such wickedness.

In sorrow, we recognize the same tendencies within ourselves, due to our own sinful natures. Like the wicked, we too at times want to escape the reality of death and recognize within ourselves the tendency to place our trust in our health or in modern medicine. We see this when we are so easily disturbed by the events in our lives and in the lives of others. Regularly we are

¹ Klautke, Jürgen-Burkhard. "The State of the Reformed Faith in Germany, and What Our Church (the Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church) Stands For." *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. November 2007, volume 41, no. 1, p. 50.

laid low with pain and sickness. We come down with prolonged illnesses and diseases—polio and small pox of yesteryear and cancer of today. Young and old alike are taken from this life—all must die. God teaches us through these personal circumstances, as well as through the pictures in creation (grass that withers and dies), that this life passes away and our only hope is in Him. Although we are earthly, and have many ties to this earthly life, we know that this is not our ultimate home. We care for our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and use and enjoy the gifts God gives to us in this life *as citizens of the kingdom of heaven* in service to the King.

For God's people, whose home is in heaven, there is an aspect of joy in knowing that life is brief—that by the means of death we enter into the joys of eternal glory. The shortness and frailty of our lives, illustrated in the earthly cycles, stir within us a desire to walk in all holiness during the time God gives us in this life and to set our hope and trust on Him and His kingdom. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

Hope in Christ

Thanks be to God, who delivers us from vanity! What a wonder is the work of grace within us to deliver us from such wretchedness. We can hardly imagine a life that tries to find its "salvation" from the ills and sorrows of this life in the earthly things of this life. What endless futility. Christ alone delivers us. By the work of Christ in our hearts we cry with the psalmist, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way" (Ps. 119:37).

Christ, by His sacrifice on the cross; by conquering sin, death, and the grave; by His perfect obedience, reconciles us to God. This

destroys the hopelessness of this life and gives blessed meaning to everything in this life and the life to come. He alone delivers us from the bondage of sin and frees us from the vanity of this life by taking us to be His own.

Knowing that we belong to Christ, recreated and called to perform good works, we are called to be "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). Life has purpose and meaning for we labor in the kingdom of God for the glory of God and the benefit of other saints. Life has a goal and an end as we look to that eternal life in heaven dwelling with God and all the saints in perfect blessed fellowship. Thanks be to God for Christ and His work.

We give thanks to God for the earthly cycles. They illustrate to us the vanity of life in this world apart from Christ and humbly remind us from what we have been delivered. The cycles also give testimony as they run their course, that the end of all things will come. We know that this life shall end, only to usher in a new, better, heavenly life. The cycles are reminders that, although they seem to repeat endlessly, they will one day complete the work that God has for them. When Christ comes again, the cycles as we know them will no longer be needed. "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Is. 60:20). Heaven will be different. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). All we need, Christ will supply us. Therefore, for us, co-heirs with

Christ, cycles are not hopeless and empty but, rather, they are constant reminders that Christ comes.

Yes, this earthly life will end,

but it is not the end. For us, an eternity of perfect fellowship with God awaits. Then, then we shall be satisfied.¹ Till then we

¹ Psalter 32, stanza 4. The *Psal-*

labor faithfully in joy, praying in our hearts each day, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly!" 

ter. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, revised edition (PRC), 1998.

■ CRC Subscription Revision

The Formula of Subscription serves a very vital purpose in Reformed Churches. At least it should. From the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Reformed churches had great concern to maintain unity and doctrinal purity. They often required ministers to sign the two existing creeds (the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession), indicating their wholehearted agreement with these creeds. The Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19) drew up a formula of subscription and required (in the Church Order) that it be signed by ministers, professors of theology, and school masters. In practice the elders often signed as well.

Early in her history the Christian Reformed Church officially decided that "the formulas are to be unconditionally subscribed by ministers, elders, deacons, and teachers." This is the form adopted and still in use in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This form remained virtually unchanged in the CRC as well until 1988, when the CRC Synod adopted some changes to make the wording more contemporary.

Signing the Formula of Subscription ought to be a very solemn thing. Serious promises are made by the officebearers who

sign the Form. Signing the Form is a declaration of agreement with our Reformed confessions and with the doctrines contained in them. In addition, a promise is made to teach and defend these doctrines actively. Negatively, it contains a promise to combat all errors contrary to these confessions in order to keep the church free from them. Finally, it expresses a promise to be honest in the churches in all matters of doctrine. If one has a change of mind or has doubts on any doctrines, he promises not to promote these differences. He will bring them to the attention of his consistory and submit to the judgment of the consistory, classis, and synod.

In spite of the changes made in 1988 to the Form of Subscription in the CRC to make it more contemporary, opposition continued. An overture to CRC Synod 2004 asked Synod to study the efficacy of the Form of Subscription on the ground that many churches in that classis no longer used it because many individuals had difficulty signing it.

Dan Postma reports on the current situation in the CRC in the February 15, 2008 issue of the *Banner*, in an article entitled "Form of Subscription: Time for a New Covenant?"

Today almost everyone agrees that the form needs at least a contemporary revision, or at most an overhaul of its scope and purpose. "I can remember, in my classical examination, being asked if I could sign the Form of Subscription," said Rev. Gordon Pols of West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta. "I said, 'Well,

yes, but I have some difficulty with the Canons (of Dort).' The response was, 'Well, so do we all,' and then we moved on. I've never forgotten that."

Synod 2005 asked for a committee to examine the form and propose a revision, clarifying its meaning and giving it more contemporary expression. But how much revision is a bone of contention for some.

In a preliminary report distributed to the churches, the committee proposed renaming the form the Covenant of Ordination. The committee suggested a new way of understanding the confessions: as "true snapshots in time of the church's self-understanding," reminding us "to pay attention to what has been deemed vital in the past."

The new wording asks officebearers to accept that the confessions are "faithful expressions of the church's understanding of the gospel for its time and place," which still shape leaders even as they continually review them in the light of Scripture.

"The many years of conflicted discussion about the form in the CRC reveal the need for a doctrinal covenant more in harmony with current realities," the report argues. "We cannot afford to be more concerned about historical integrity than current expression."

Rev. William Veenstra of Ancaster (Ont.) CRC likes the proposed covenant. "When the old form was originally rendered, there weren't issues of technology or abortion or racial reconciliation," he said. "This is a healthy step toward enriched dialogue."

But the proposal faces opposition as well. Rev. Michael Borgert of First CRC, Muskegon,

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

Mich., suggests the new language may have gone too far. "We're hesitant to have the Reformed confessions relegated to little more than historical documents that once shaped our identity," he said.

Rev. Raymond Blacketer of Neerlandia (Alta.) CRC offers even sharper criticism. "The adoption of such a watered-down and toothless form," he argues, "would mean the end of the CRC as a confessional church."

Committee chair John Van Schepen, pastor of Bethel CRC in Lynden, Wash., said well over 100 responses to the preliminary report have been received, most from church councils and some from individuals. The committee will meet again to review the feedback it has received and prepare a final submission to the CRC's Board of Trustees in advance of synod 2008. "As a Reformed church in today's world," Van Schepen said, "we have to keep on speaking from the Scriptures in ways that can be understood by our current society."

Obviously in the CRC, for some time already, the Formula of Subscription has fallen on hard times. It has been totally unused by some churches; it has been signed with obvious reservations by others. Why? Because the Reformed confessions, the Three Forms of Unity, as they are often called, are no longer that—no longer forms of unity in that denomination. There is no unity in the truths set forth in the confessions. The doctrines they contain are not considered by some to be the timeless, unchanging truths of the Holy Scriptures. The false teachings that the confessions reject are not recognized as being such in our day.

Should the CRC Synod this year adopt the proposed "Covenant of Ordination," I would concur with the evaluation of CRC pastor Rev. Blacketer mentioned above, "The adoption of such a watered-down and toothless form

would mean the end of the CRC as a confessional church."

■ "Muzzling Christians"

In Canada, Human Rights Commissions were established in the 1960s and 1970s. They were intended to adjudicate cases of housing and employment discrimination. But in recent years they have gone far beyond their original, intended purpose. Human rights commissions have proven to be a remedy that is worse than the problem they were created to solve.

They increasingly have become a threat to religious freedom in Canada. There is a long and growing list of mainly Christian and/or socially conservative Canadians that have been hauled before these, as many are called, "kangaroo courts."

Many of these cases coming before the Commissions concern criticism of the homosexual agenda. In spite of their numerous political and legal victories, including the right in Canada to marry and adopt children, it seems that the homosexual community will tolerate little if any dissent. They move to silence any group or individual that disagrees.

One case, yet to be decided, has hit rather "close to home." Rob Wells, a member of the Pride Centre in Edmonton, Alberta, has launched a federal complaint against the Christian Heritage Party and its leader, Ron Gray. A good number of conservative Christians here in mid-western Ontario are acquainted with Ron Gray and many support the Christian Heritage Party.

Mr. Gray and his political party face this complaint after reprinting on the party web site an article critical of homosexual activism that appeared in the U.S.-based news site WorldNetDaily—a positive review of a series of legal essays published on the topic by the Regent Uni-

versity (Virginia) Law Review in 2002. Mr. Gray insists, "I believe it's very important for such information to be available to the Canadian public; and since most media in Canada are pro-'gay' and will not report such information, I believe the CHP must make it accessible. Speaking the truth is part of our mandate as a federal political party; speaking the truth in love is part of our mandate as Christians."

Recently there also have been cases that have come before the Human Rights Commissions dealing with Islamic groups who claim to have been "offended." One case in particular has been receiving publicity even in the United States.

Pete Vere reports in the January 9, 2008 *Washington Times* in an article entitled, "Canada goosed":

An attempt to have a Canadian panel stifle Mark Steyn poses a threat to American freedom of speech, the conservative columnist says.

The Canadian author told *The Washington Times* in a telephone interview that the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) agreeing to investigate a Muslim complaint against him opens a new front on threats to Canadians' press and religious freedom: speech that originates in the United States.

"There are attempts to circumscribe the First Amendment, and certain groups have become very adept at using legal and quasi-legal methods to restrict discussion and what's discussed," said Mr. Steyn, who spends half the year living in New Hampshire and writes for several U.S.-based publications.

Under Canadian law, the CHRC investigates purported incidents of hate speech and discrimination and refers some to the quasi-judicial Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, which can impose fines or issue restraint orders.

Mr. Steyn became subject to

a CHRC investigation last month when the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) complained about an excerpt Mr. Steyn had reprinted from "America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It," Mr. Steyn's best-seller published by U.S.-based Regnery Publishing.

Mr. Steyn contrasted Islamic values with Western values and spoke of the growing Muslim demographic in the West and the declining birthrate among other Western populations.

"The Muslim world has youth, numbers and global ambitions," stated Mr. Steyn in an opening summary of what was to follow. "The West is growing old and enfeebled, and lacks the will to rebuff those who would supplant it. It's the end of the world as we've known it."

The excerpt appeared in the Oct. 23, 2006, edition of *Maclean's*, Canada's most-widely circulated newsweekly, under the title "The Future Belongs to Islam..."

Mr. Steyn told *The Times* that the complaint endangers freedom of the press on both sides of the border, and that both he and *Maclean's* are prepared to fight this case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada if necessary.

"Basically, everything is fair game if it was to become accepted that the commission has the

right to weigh the merits of individual articles and the media," Mr. Steyn said. "The (Canadian and provincial) commissions are a threat to free speech, which is why people on various parts of the spectrum have identified them as the easiest way to shut down an opponent's speech that one does not like."

Left unchecked, Mr. Steyn said, the CHRC could bring about a relationship between the state and the press similar to that of the former Soviet Union, in which "basically the state regulates the bounds of public expression."

One can only hope that bringing Mark Steyn and *Maclean's* magazine before the Canadian Human Rights Commission will be a positive development. Certainly this case is bringing much needed attention to a serious Canadian problem with these commissions.

The threat that the Human Rights Commissions pose to churches, religious organizations, and faithful Christian individuals is very real. *Ottawa Citizen* columnist David Warren has noted that the process is the punishment. For those who use legal counsel, there are enormous costs in defending oneself in a sys-

tem that many consider rigged. Meanwhile the complainant's legal bills are fully paid by the government.

Mr. Steyn has noted that no accused has ever won a case once the Canadian HRC referred it to the Tribunal. "A court where rules only go one way," writes Steyn, "is the very definition of a show trial." And while facts, quotes, and statistics may be accurately cited by the author, what the Commission bases its judgment upon is whether the person reading it is "offended." As Mr. Steyn has pointed out, "Offense is in the eye of the beholder. A fact can be accurate but offensive to some people. The commissions aren't weighing facts but hurt feelings."

This gets at the real crux of the issue as far as the Christian faith is concerned. For the gospel of Christ is offensive to many. The Christian religion is not a religion of tolerance and accommodation. Christ Himself is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word..." (I Pet. 2:8). Yes, we must be ready to suffer for Christ's sake, but let us be assured, "whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."



News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together the weekend of March 7 and 8 for their annual Church Conference. This year's conference was held at the Prince Center on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. In addition to games and various activities over the two days, Georgetown enjoyed

discussions on the subject of how to maintain a daily schedule and still have time for the Lord in your life, based on the video and book *Margins*, by Dr. Richard Swenson.

That same weekend, March 7 and 8, the ladies of the Byron Center, MI PRC held their second Women's Retreat at the First Byron Center Christian Reformed Church. This year almost three hundred women from our churches throughout the United States and Canada gathered together for a blessed two days of Christian fellowship,

sectionals, and speeches. This year's Retreat took an in-depth look at Ephesians 4:1 under the theme "Women Walking Worthy." Friday night Rev. Garrett Eriks opened the retreat by speaking on "Our Calling," followed Saturday by Rev. Jason Kortering speaking on "Our Conduct," and Rev. Carl Haak speaking on "Our Community." Between those three speeches the ladies had the daunting task of choosing which two sectionals out of a total of fourteen available they wanted to attend. Some of those choices were: Teach Us to Pray, Spiritual

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

Mentoring, Family in Crisis, and Caring for Elderly Parents. From all accounts, it was truly a blessed weekend. We could also add that the speeches are available online at byronprc.org. Recent bulletins in our churches have included a thank-you from the ladies of Byron Center for the overwhelming response to their Women Walking Worthy Retreat, but the "News" wants to turn that around and extend a special thank you to the ladies of Byron Center for all their efforts in hosting a much appreciated retreat.

The Activities Committee for this year's Young People's Convention, hosted by the Byron Center, MI PRC, asked for the help of their congregation in trying out some of the games planned for this summer's convention. The committee and "volunteers" met at Adams Christian School on March 15 from mid-afternoon to around 8:00 P.M. for a go-through for the various activities. The committee guaranteed a time of fun and laughs, plus an opportunity to help Byron Center prepare for a fun and successful convention.

The Adult Bible Study of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a special meeting for their members and anyone else in their congregation interested on March 18. Prof. David Engelsma spoke on the topic, "The Authentic Greek Text of the New Testament and Modern Bible Versions."

Evangelism Activities

In an effort to have a direct outreach to the neighborhood

surrounding their church, the Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI planned to hand out postcards to their neighbors inviting them to First's Good Friday and Easter worship services and to follow that postcard up with regular contact over the course of the next year. First's Evangelism Committee asked for volunteers from their congregation who were willing to join them on March 15 for an hour or two to go door-to-door and hand out invitation postcards.

The Evangelism Committee of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL printed 750 flyers for their special services on Good Friday and Easter. Around 500 of those were mailed to the various contacts on their mailing list, which left 250 for congregational distribution and for display at neighborhood businesses. Those at Bethel who also have e-mail addresses received this flyer via e-mail so that the announcement could be simply forwarded to as many people as possible.

Mission Activities

The weekend of March 15 and 16 a delegation from our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee visited the mission outreach in Pittsburgh, PA. This was a regularly scheduled visit and included, in part, the delegation meeting with Pittsburgh's Steering Committee, as well as a visit with Missionary Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma and his family. As part of that delegation, Rev. James Slopsema was also able to

preach for the mission on Sunday evening.

Also, Rev. Carl Haak left his congregation in Hudsonville, MI on March 14 to preach on March 16 for the Trinity OPC in Franklin, PA. This congregation has asked Rev. Bruinsma to preach for them on a periodic basis. Georgetown's consistory agreed to allow Rev. Haak to preach for Trinity OPC once in March and once in November of this year.

Denomination Activities

On March 16 and March 23, at Fellowship Reformed Church in Jenison, MI and First CRC in Byron Center, respectively, the 175-voice 2008 PR Mass Choir presented two wonderful concerts of praise to our heavenly Father. Six different choirs from various PR churches in the Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo area practiced individually in the fall of 2007, and in January 2008 the entire group began combined practices, leading up to these two concerts. Collections taken went to defray expenses and to support the upcoming Young People's Convention.

Minister Activities

The Lord blessed Rev. Clay and Allison Spronk, of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, with the birth of a baby girl, Christina Rena, on March 6.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn declined the call he was considering from the Doon, IA PRC to serve as our denomination's next foreign missionary to the Philippines and the Berean PRC in Manila. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!

Hudsonville PRC will be hosting a marriage conference: "God and Marriage" at 7:30 P.M. on the following dates:

Friday, May 9, "God's Design for Marriage," by Prof. B. Gritters.

Friday, May 16, "God's Calling of Husbands and Wives in Marriage," by Rev. R. VanOverloop.

Thursday, May 23, "God's Way of Building and Strengthening Your Marriage," by Rev. G. Eriks.

Invite a neighbor or take a friend. Nursery will be provided and refreshments afterward.

NOTICE!!

A new *Standard Bearer* index Volume 1-83 will be made available in the near future. If you are interested, place your order by calling 616.457.5970 or email mail@rfpa.org. Tim Pipe, Reformed Free Publishing, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428, www.rfpa.org, email: mail@rfpa.org.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

RICHARD and SHARON TOLSMA, who celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on March 30, 2008. We are thankful for the years that the Lord has given them, and for all their wisdom and guidance in instructing us in a covenant home. We are grateful for their dedication to our family. We pray that the Lord may continue to guide, strengthen, and bless them and that all their needs may be supplied.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- ✿ Evan and Kimberly Bleyenbergh
Ben
- ✿ Joe and Jennifer Schimmel
Mason and Sydney
- ✿ Everett and Michelle Langerak
Myron
- ✿ Matt and Stephanie Dykstra
Loveland, Colorado

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville PRC extends its Christian sympathy to the Rod Kooiman family in the recent death of Rod's sister,

MRS. GLENDA BEIDLEMAN.

May they receive comfort in the words of Jesus found in John 11:25, 26 "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die"

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Herman DeVries, Asst. Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 14, 2008 at the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 14, 2008.

Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanksgiving to God we celebrate 40 years of marriage of our parents and grandparents,

**ROBERT and GERALDINE
BLANKESPOOR,**

on May 1, 2008.

How thankful we are to our heavenly Father for the godly home and covenantal instruction they, by His grace, provided for us as they brought us up in the fear of His name. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them and preserve them in the years to come.

"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ✿ Paul and Cheryl De Roon
Dolan, Dayna, Sarah, Blake,
Shayna
- ✿ Dave and Brenda Vaandrager
Charlie
- ✿ Jon and Rachel Mooy
Allison, Jocelyn
- ✿ Kevin and Sharla Fykstra
Dejay, Samantha, Madison
- ✿ Jon and Kathie Regnerus
Jaeden, Kasia, Carter
- ✿ Timothy Blankespoor
- ✿ Daniel and Sheila Blankespoor
George, Iowa

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to two of our members: Mr. Bernie Bruining in the loss of his brother,

JACK BRUINING,

at the age of 71 years on February 11, 2008, and Mr. Tom Spriensma in the loss of his brother,

OEBELE SPRIENSMA,

at the age of 95 on March 15, 2008.

May the brothers and their families find comfort in Revelation 21:3-4: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Henry Boer, President
Erv Korterling, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We are thankful that the Lord has blessed our parents,

**EDWARD and JEANNE
KARSEMEYER,**

with 35 years of marriage on February 8, 2008. Through their faithful and godly instruction, they have raised us in the fear and knowledge of His name. We are very grateful for their love and guidance throughout the years, and we pray that God may continue to bless them in the years to come. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ✿ Shaun and Lorianne Karsemeyer
Megan, Anna, Joseph
- ✿ Clinton and Renae VanderKolk
Benjamin, Austin
- ✿ Todd Karsemeyer
- ✿ Ryan Karsemeyer
- ✿ Kyle Karsemeyer

Mentone, California