

THE *September 15, 2006*  
STANDARD  
BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*2006 Biennial Family Conference*

of the British Reformed Fellowship,  
Cloverly Hall Conference Centre



(See "BRF Family Conference," p. 488)

Volume 82 ♦ Number 21

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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.

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Jenison, MI 49428-7137

**SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:** \$17.00 per year  
in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

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Meditation

Rev. Martin VanderWal

# Happy Is He!

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

Psalm 146:5

**D**isappointed! Ashamed! Deep, bitter disappointment must be the lot of those who put their "trust in princes, in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (v. 3).

There are those who put their trust in princes, in the son of man. The child of God is surrounded by them wherever he goes. He hears them boast of men, the words and

*Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.*

deeds of men. The wonders of technology! The feats of engineering! The marvels of modern medicine! Our age is an age of progress. This time is a time of human accomplishment. All of man. All for man. All by man.

Such is the gospel of man you hear: Consider my knowledge! Behold my accomplishments! Trust in me! Put your confidence in me!

How utterly vain. Vain boasting. Vain trust.

Hear the judgment of Scripture upon such who put their trust in princes, and in the son of man, in whom there is no help. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (v. 4).

One man is just as weak and vain as another. Man's own weakness is the very reason why he seeks help and confidence from another. But why seek help from princes? Why from the son of man, in whom there is no help? Why should any man think that other men are different? Why should he think that the same weakness and helplessness that is in him does not lie also in other men? Yet vain men continue to put their trust in princes, in the sons of man, in whom there is no help.

Man perishes. Man returns to the earth.

Deep, bitter disappointment must be the lot of those who put their trust in themselves. They

boast of their works and their righteousness. They are positive that they shall be justified on the last day because of the good that they have done.

All those works of men are vain. They partake of corruption. The very best of them merits nothing from God. Men and all their works are only evil without God.

Because man and all his works are altogether corrupt, "his breath goeth forth, he returneth to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

Deep, bitter disappointment, that ends in hell!

Of his trust he shall be wholly ashamed.



There is another man. He is far from those who place their trust in man. Happy is he.

This man is altogether different from those others. Unlike them, he has repudiated all trust in men. He knows that with them there is no help. He knows that when man's breath goeth forth, he returns to the earth, and his thoughts perish.

Happy is that man!

This man is happy because he has placed his trust in God. He has the God of Jacob for his help. Therefore, happy is he!

His help is the God of Jacob! This God is the God of Jacob's grandfather Abraham. Abraham passed away a happy man. Happy because Jehovah was his God. Of Jehovah's power the first patriarch was confident, "fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21).

This same God is the God of the generations of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. This is the God of Israel, according to the promise, in their generations. This is the God of all the children of Abraham according to the promise, though they be not children according to the flesh. This God is the God of Jacob, the God of His people in every generation. He endures forevermore.

How far above men is Jehovah, the God of Jacob! The breath of man goes forth, and he returns to the earth. God's breath, the Holy Spirit, goes forth and works with almighty power to accomplish the Lord's counsel. The thoughts of men perish. Jehovah's thoughts are eternal. Man is made of dust and perishes. God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, enduring forever. His throne continues. He is the great I AM.

Happy is the man that hath this God for his help, whose hope is in Him!

This is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, who remembered His Word to them. He promised to redeem them. That promise the eternal God remembered ... and performed.

God performed that promise without the help or aid of man! Without the help of man whose thoughts perish in the very day of his death.

That promise God performed by Himself through the wonderful incarnation of His only begotten Son. He performed it by the accursed death of the cross, giving His only begotten Son to that death as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. By that wonder the promise is realized. Redemption is accomplished. The stain of guilt is wholly removed. Heaven is now secured, not by promise alone, but now by the very blood of the Lamb. The gates of heaven are now opened for all His redeemed to enter therein.

Happy is the man that hath this God of Jacob for his help.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had the God of Jacob for their help. Their hope was in the Lord their God. They were not put to shame. With wondrous might, God realized the promises He made to them. He gave Abraham seed, not in Isaac, nor in Jacob, but in *the* seed, our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the seed of Abraham in whom Abraham became a blessing to all nations! He gave to Abraham and his promised seed a home, not in earthly Canaan,

but the eternal, heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, the city that cannot be moved forever and ever!

In God alone is help, mighty help. In Him is all help to bring eternal happiness.

That happy man, who has the God of Jacob for his help, knows his need of help. He has well learned and well applied what the world ignores. Turning away from weak man and man's vain boasting, he turns to Jehovah, the God of Jacob. To God *alone* he looks for help. In Jehovah he finds a sovereign friend, a mighty ally, worthy of all confidence.

Therein lies his happiness. In Jehovah his God he finds all the help and all the aid that he needs. No uncertainty shadows his paths. He will never be put to shame.

The word of Scripture goes yet further here. It brings us into the future. This man is also happy because his hope is in Jehovah his God. It refers to a man exploring his way. He stretches out with his mind to the future. He knows precious little of what lies in store for him, but as he explores, and as he contemplates his own future, he knows that Jehovah his God will forever be near to him. Near to him as his help.

The happy man knows that his path will sometimes lead through times of prosperity, perhaps great prosperity. There may be times of wealth and peace, times of health and strength. The happy man also knows that his path will sometimes lead through times of adversity, perhaps heavy adversity. His way may lead through a fierce inferno, or through deep waters. So many possibilities attend his way! Yet there is one thing that makes him happy: his hope is in the Lord his God.

The happy man knows other things that are certain. He knows well his own mortality. He knows the weakness of his body and the frailty of his mind. He knows that he shall die, if Jehovah tarry. Yet

he is happy even in the face of death, the last enemy. His hope is in the Lord his God. All his future is firmly in the hand of his sovereign friend.

There is one more thing to make this man happy. Yes, he has the God of Jacob for his help. Yes, his hope is in the Lord. The additional reason for happiness is found in the very last words: the Lord his God.

His God! The Lord, Jehovah, the great I AM, is his. God is this man's help. His hope is in God. God has given Himself to this man, to be his God. Friend gives Himself to His friend. Friend-sovereign to friend-servant.

Thus this man is able to say, "This God of Jacob is mine." He speaks of God, "My help, my hope, my God!"

Happy is this man. He has help from God. He has hope from God. Most precious to him is the knowledge that he has the mighty God of Jacob for his God. Jehovah

is his sovereign friend.

What happiness!

This happiness is not as we often think of it, a temporary display on the face. It is not some vague, fleeting emotion. This happiness is not found merely in a smile. It is not merely heard in the lilt in one's voice, or seen in his general bearing or appearance.

This man who has Jehovah as his trust may have deep sorrow. His voice may break and his eyes may be filled with tears. But this man's happiness is rooted deep in his heart. In his heart this happiness is firm and unshakable. This treasure will continue to be his, sustaining him through every sorrow and grief.

Enduring happiness is easy to understand when we consider that the word translated here as "happy" is the same word found at the beginning of Psalm 1, translated there as "blessed." This man's true happiness begins with

the blessing that God gives to him. But that blessing is also received, known, and enjoyed by a living faith. The hand of faith lays hold upon God. The mouth of faith drinks deeply of God. The man who so drinks by faith, putting his hope in the Lord his God, is satisfied and filled with the enjoyment of the abundance of God. He tastes and sees that the Lord is good. He is happy in the Lord his God. Having the God of Jacob for his help, and having his hope in the Lord his God, he has everything.

Happy is he!

Happy are you, to have this God for your help. Happy are you, to have your hope in this God. Happy are you, to have the Lord for your God!

Thus we testify with this Scripture and with all the children of the promise: Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.



*Editorial*

*Rev. Kenneth Koole*

## *Reflections on Hyper-Calvinism and the Free Offer (concl.)*

**I**n our controversy with those who would promote the free or well-meant offer of the gospel (WMO), we turn now to a few texts that clearly indicate that while God calls believers to express one attitude towards their neighbors (one of love), God's attitude towards those same neighbors may be quite the opposite. We have in mind passages such as Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21, 22; and Proverbs 24:17, 18 (to be quoted later).

We do this in response to the

assertion of the WMO men that, since Scripture clearly calls us to love all with whom we have contact, even our enemies, thereby showing ourselves to be children of our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43ff.), we must therefore conclude that God also has a love for all men. Our love for all and sundry is but a reflection of His love for all and sundry. And this, say the promoters of the WMO, must be preached; for this is what belongs to the very "marrow of divinity" (that is, to the core of gospel preaching in its deepest emotional appeals and "beseachings" to the unsaved – "God loves you. Christ has died

for you"). And this from Reformed and Calvinistic pulpits.

In opposition to this rank Arminianism foisted upon the gospel, we respond that, while it is true that God calls us to love all with whom we have contact, seeking even their salvation, this in no way proves that God loves all with whom we have contact, seeking their salvation. The simple fact is, God calls us to love many for whom He has no love at all. Why? As we pointed out last time, for His own sovereign and predestinating purpose, some to bring to salvation and others to work out their condemnation according to His eternal will

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*Previous article in this series: September 1, 2006, p. 460.*

and righteous judgment.

That God calls us to do good and show love as a Christian neighbor even to those for whom He may have no love at all is demonstrated in a passage such as Romans 12:20: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

It must be noted that Paul is here quoting (in summary form) an Old Testament passage: Proverbs 25:21, 22.

What is of interest is how those of the free offer and Arminian flavor of things attempt to explain that troubling phrase, "...for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." What the promoters of the WMO want no part of is explaining the phrase in terms of God's wrath, as if the apostle were suggesting that those whom God calls us as believers to love in the most neighborly and merciful way may very well be those for whom He has no love at all, but are numbered amongst those for whom He intends wrath and burning destruction; and in fact, it is to that destructive end that God intends to use our very deeds of mercy and love.

Such an idea is foreign to contemporary Christianity, no matter what one's denominational affiliation these days. And yet such is the text.

To get around this plain and simplest explanation of the text, some rather fanciful explanations have been offered. At one time, the most common attempt to remove the offending explanation was to speak of the coals of fire in terms of the Christian's love, his returning good for evil, a burning love causing the unbeliever pain, the pain of remorse and shame. And so through the believer's loving deeds the ungodly enemy feels pain of conscience, as if coals of fire had been applied to him. And so a purification occurs.

Today, along the same lines, the popular explanation suggests

that this heaping of coals of fire on the heads of one's enemies is a reference to an ancient Arabian method of attempting to heal various diseases, namely, by the application of hot coals to one's head and body. So likewise, by kind and merciful deeds the believer addresses the disease of hatred in the heart and mind of the ungodly man, and thereby the ungodly is cured of his hatred and cruelty.

The simple fact is that these are strained explanations to get around the simple and plain meaning of the text. They are the result of coming at the text with certain theological presuppositions that are imposed on the text, resulting in strained exegesis that grasps for an explanation that will harmonize somehow with one's system of doctrine, in this instance the free offer (God desires the salvation of everyone) mentality.

In response to this notion that the text could have some ancient Arabian method of healing in mind, we point out that the text does not refer to a mere *applying* coals of fire to someone, but to *heaping* coals of fire on someone – and that is a figure of judgment.

This is confirmed by the Proverbs 25 passage, which adds the phrase, "...and the LORD shall reward thee," immediately following the phrase, "For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head...." In other words, the phrase "heaping coals of fire on his head" stands in contrast with how God treats the believer for his deeds of mercy upon his enemies. For deeds of kindness towards one's enemy, the Lord rewards the believer; in contrast to that is how the Lord will deal with the believer's enemy, namely, by a judgment of burning ignited by these coals of fire.

Old Charles Hodge certainly had it right in his brief commentary on the Romans 12 passage when he wrote, "The most common and natural meaning of the expression, *to heap coals of fire upon any one*, is to inflict the greatest pain

upon him, to punish him most severely.... To rain fire upon any one, is to visit him with the severest and surest destruction."

The phrase is found elsewhere in Scripture, and all without exception use it in the above described manner. Psalm 140 (an imprecatory Psalm) reads, "Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire" (v. 10). And again Psalm 11:6, "Upon the wicked he shall rain coals, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest."

The question is not whether we relish such a notion; the question is, is it scriptural? Plainly it is.

But having referred to this text, perhaps we need to say a bit more about its explanation. We of the New Testament may blanch at the notion that in Romans 12:20 the apostle could be suggesting to Christians something so pragmatic as – if you desire that your enemy be punished in the severest manner, then treat him kindly. In fact Hodge labels this a "revolting ... interpretation" and opts for an interpretation that for all intents and purposes makes the "coals of fire" refer to the potential saving value of the believer's love after all.

Hodge is mistaken, and our blanching misplaced.

What must be kept in mind are two things – first, the apostle is quoting (in summary form) an Old Testament passage – Proverbs 25:21, 22 (as already pointed out); and second, he quotes this passage in the context of calling believers to refrain from taking vengeance into their own hands. The simple fact is that Old Testament believers had no reservations about wanting vengeance upon their enemies and calling God's wrath down upon them. What they had to learn as believing children of God was to refrain from taking matters into their own hands. Leave such to the Lord. And certainly the Gentile Christians to whom Paul wrote, living in a culture where taking revenge was considered a matter of personal honor,

were not so far removed from this spirit either.

What the apostle and the writer of the Proverbs before him are dealing with is the practical reality of human nature and life, the believer's included. The practical reality is that there are times when wrongs suffered move one to righteous anger and to a desire for justice and vengeance. Let one slander the name of your beloved spouse, or have a trusted business associate cheat you and manipulate law in such a way that results in his evicting you from your own property and taking over the business you founded and developed, and you will know what the texts are talking about. One's very nature cries against such injustice and wrong. It happened in Old Testament Israel, do not think it did not. It happens today. When it does, what pastoral counsel does one give?

This – You are a Christian. You may not take vengeance into your own hands. Vengeance is the prerogative of the Lord. Leave it with Him! And consider this – if indeed what you as a believer are looking for is justice and judgment upon those who have so abused you and your family, the surest way to accomplish it is *not* by taking matters into your own hands and giving as 'good' as you got. Do that, says God's Word, and you will bring judgment on yourself. Rather it will be by returning good for the evil, and leaving the vengeance to the Lord.

This simply is a solid, common sense, shrewd, wise (in the 'Proverbial' sense) approach to human nature as we find it even in ourselves as believers. It is the apostle's way of saying, in his pastoral shrewdness, if indeed the one who has done you these grave wrongs is as wicked and incorrigible as you at the moment are convinced he is, then leave it with the Lord; and it will be your doing good to this enemy of yours in return for his evil that will bring just condemnation upon him, not your behaving in like manner to him.

What the apostle is pointing out

by implication is that the Lord alone knows who is truly incorrigible as an enemy and who is not. Let Him be God, working it out, bringing to repentance those whom He may be pleased by your good deeds yet to save, and hardening others whom He has fitted to destruction – in the words of Romans 2:8, numbering them amongst those who treasure up unto themselves "indignation and wrath."

There is one other passage that merits mentioning in this connection – Proverbs 24:17, 18. It reads "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him."

The passage is significant. First of all, because it is another one of those texts that clearly imply that those unto whom the Lord Himself calls us to do good in self-denying love may very well be those for whom the Lord Himself has no love at all; after all, those to whom the believer is called to do good are, the text informs us, the very ones for whom the Lord has been intending judgment and wrath.

Secondly, the text is significant because it confronts us with another reason why we are to love and do good to those whom the Lord may view only as vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction. The first we have already considered, we must leave it to the Lord to use our deeds of kindness as He will, to salvation or to His own just end of judgment and wrath. He is God, determining the destiny of men's souls. We must not imagine we can usurp this right.

The second reason for this call to show love to ungodly men is that God will never have us forget who we are, namely, in ourselves absolutely no different from that ungodly enemy of ours, no matter

what his sin. Woe be unto us if we think for one moment we have made ourselves to differ – as if that

is why we are saved. After all, we are the elect! And the reason we are the elect is that we somehow have more to offer to God as His dear children than these others.

This is the spirit that would be displayed should we be found glorying over our enemy's fall and stumbling. One of pride. He fell and failed – I am glad; he stumbled – what a fool. He comes under God's judgment. Of course. It is no more than he deserves.

But we do not? We do not deserve the same judgment, being left to stumble in our ways, heaping to ourselves wrath? What! We think we have made ourselves to differ?

That God will not abide – not in one of His children. No more than we would if one of our healthy children should laugh at the deaf and the blind stumbling in confusion, or at the mentally handicapped child. "Look how stupid and slow they are. How superior I am to that. You never see me making such mistakes." How sorely grieved by such an attitude we would be. And the child would come to know it in no uncertain terms. "If I ever hear you talk that way again...! But as for now, this is your punishment for the next few weeks...."

So with God and us His children when it comes to those who are lost in sin, perhaps even numbered with those who are never to know God, according to His own determination. What do we think, such could not possibly have been true of us or one of ours?

As those saved out of the mass of fallen mankind, we must never forget our natural identity with all the rest. And our attitude must reflect that – that true knowledge of self and of the grace shown to us beyond words. Our enemy falls

...we must leave it to the Lord to use our deeds of kindness as He will, to salvation or to His own just end of judgment and wrath. He is God...

and stumbles, suffering perhaps a punishment of God upon his foolishness and sin? We had better not rejoice. We had better grieve, and say, "There but for a sovereign grace stronger than my natural spiritual stupidity go I."

This Proverbs 24:17,18 makes plain. Let the wise pay heed.

No, we want nothing to do with the 'Free Offer.' It fails to do justice to passage after passage of Scripture, and it misrepresents to sinners the truth of God's love and promises in Christ. But at the same time, our taking issue with the free offer does not mean we are there-

fore devoid of love for the lost, uninterested in seeking the salvation of those living in enmity against God. Say what men will, the truly Calvinist and Reformed view that we maintain and propagate is not hyper-Calvinism. It is consistently biblical and confessionally Reformed. This the WMO of the gospel has compromised.

As we have stated more than once, when it comes to the free offer's gospel call to sinners and the lost, the hearer is hard pressed to distinguish anything different in what is said about the character of God and His Christ and grace from what is spouted from a thousand Arminian

pulpits across the land. And this, according to the WMO men, is the 'Marrow of Divinity.' How sad.

And this is why the Fathers of Dordt took such issue with Arminianism and wrote a definitive creed in defense of the gospel and its doctrines of particular grace? We think not. By God's good grace, we intend to continue to take issue with the WMO presentation of things, and to preach and promote God's gospel truth to all and sundry in one consistent line.

Enough of these 'It's all a great paradox!' when it comes to gospel preaching. 

## Feature Articles

# Organization of the CPRC NI

*Mr. Martyn McGeown*

"I have a tingle of happiness in my own soul" were the words of Prof. Hanco as he welcomed the congregation on Wednesday, 2nd August, 2006 to Ballymena Leisure Centre, which had been rented as the venue for the official organisation of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland. That tingle of happiness echoed in our souls. Organisation as a church with officebearers (Titus 1:5) is the goal of mission work and is something for which the Fellowship had been praying and working for four years.

Those in attendance had come from near and far, especially the UK, Ireland, and America, reflecting the catholicity of the church and the close bond between the CPRF and the PRC. Many others who were not able to attend sent greetings.

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*Mr. McGeown is a member of the CPRC and currently a student at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

Prof. Hanco took as his text II Timothy 2:19: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The context is plain. Heretics had infiltrated the church, and Timothy had witnessed the faith of some being overthrown. There was the possibility that Timothy would be discouraged by this. Timothy needed to hear this tremendous word: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure." A foundation implies a building, and the building implied here (and made explicit in other texts: Eph. 2:20, Matt. 16:18) is the church, the church in two senses: the church organic, the sum total of the elect, called, gathered, and preserved by the sovereign, irresistible grace of God, and the church institute, which manifests itself in

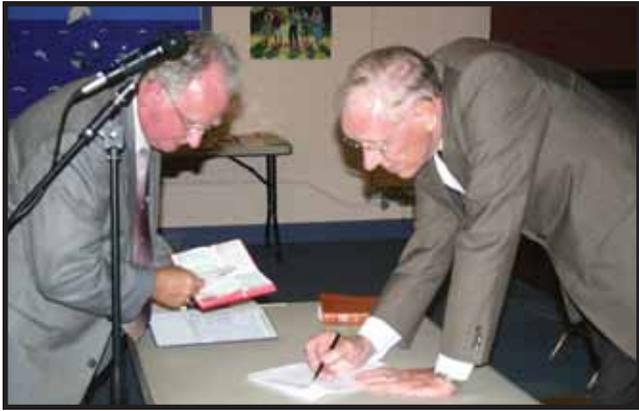
the world. The church, we were reminded, is the strangest institution in the world, having her origins in heaven, not on earth. She does not really belong in the world. The church is hated because she preaches that the world's deeds are evil. The church has many powerful enemies, and is like a small flock of sheep huddled together on a mountain, seemingly defenceless, surrounded by howling wolves.

"Nevertheless!"

Because the church is built on Jesus Christ Himself, she has an indestructible foundation and is safe.



*Mr. and Mrs. Desmond Callender*



*Mr. Ivan Reid and Prof. Hanko*

Notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, the foundation of God standeth sure! We are weak, so God gives a seal, a guarantee, a mark of authenticity. Because of our weak faith we need seals, and God graciously gives them. The seal, "God knoweth them that are his," speaks of election, the doctrine that is widely ignored or denied today. Election is the seal. The church must preach it. The church must confess it. The true church always fights the battle for sovereign, particular, irresistible grace, rooted in election.

This is the battle that the CPRF has been fighting over against the false and departing churches and the ungodly world, and by God's grace will continue to fight.

The calling of the text is therefore to believe and be comforted by the fact that God's work will never fail, that the elect will surely be saved, and because of that hope we must "depart from iniquity," especially the iniquity of false doctrine

and of ungodly conduct that causes the enemies of God to blaspheme.

After that stirring message from God's Word, the officebearers were approved, ordained by the laying on of hands, and installed, the formula of installation being read and oaths taken. The

formula of subscription was then signed by the three men (Brian Crossett and Philip Rainey [elders] and Ivan Reid [deacon]), and they were committed to God in prayer. Several remarked how impressed they were at the decency and order (I Cor. 14:40) of Reformed church polity.

Mr. Henry Boer, elder of Hudsonville PRC, brought greetings from the consistory of the calling church, and Mr. Gary Kaptein from the DMC brought greetings from Synod. It was fitting that Synod repeated in part the form of words that had been used when the CPRC had originally organised in 1996.

Mr. Ivan Reid, newly appointed deacon, thanked Prof. Hanko for his ceaseless devotion to the work in the British Isles, recounting how he had first met Profs. Hanko and Engelsma when in 1984 a small group of Reformed believers had asked the PRC to "come over and help [them]" (Acts 16:9). He then presented Prof. Hanko with a handmade book containing photographs

of Northern Ireland and the saints here, which was received with observable delight.

The Leisure Centre closed at 10 P.M., but the discussions and fellowship continued in the car park outside until reluctantly the congregation dispersed.

It is with great gratitude to God that a discouraged group of just over seven families (Acts of Synod, 2002) has been preserved and increased to the point where we can organise again as a church, larger, more unified, and better grounded in the faith than before. God is building the walls of Zion in our



*David Crossett, Philip Hall*

midst. We are encouraged, the enemies of the truth are dismayed, and God is glorified. Our prayer is that God will build the walls higher, stronger, and thicker through the means of faithful preaching, the two sacraments, and the admonition of elders, and that the Reformed faith will prosper in Ballymena, in the UK, in Ireland, and all around the world. Finally, we earnestly desire, are thankful for, and are assured of, the continued prayerful support of our friends and brethren in the Protestant Reformed Churches. ■

## *British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference*

*Mr. Rainey is an elder in the CPRC NI.*

488/Standard Bearer/September 15, 2006

The 9<sup>th</sup> Biennial BRF Family Conference was held from August 5 to August 12. The venue this year was Cloverley Hall Confer-

*Mr. Philip Rainey*

ence Centre, located between Whitchurch and Market Drayton in the heart of the Shropshire countryside in western England. The



*The VanDeRiets: a Dutch family from Cambridge, England*

Victorian building had originally been the servants' quarters for the lord and lady of the manor, before becoming a Boarding School and now a conference centre.

Almost one hundred people attended the conference, and, like previous BRF conferences, this year's was truly international. There were representatives from all parts of the UK, from the Netherlands, France, and the USA. The speakers were once again Prof. Herman C. Hanko, Professor Emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America, and Prof. David J. Engelsma, Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The subject of the conference was "The Five Points of Calvinism," and the scene was set on the Lord's Day with a fine sermon by Prof. Hanko on Ephesians 2: 8, 9. This text is what the Five Points are all about, and in that sense it was a good theme text for our conference. Also, by way of introduction, a special lecture on "The History of the Synod of Dordt" was given by Dr. Aza Goudriaan. Dr. Goudriaan, a student of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, is researching the use of classical philosophy by the Arminians at and before the time of Dordt. We learned from this the Synod's importance for the Reformed churches, not only in providing us with the Canons, but

also in that it confirmed the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

The conference proper began on Tuesday morning with Prof. Hanko addressing us on "The History of Calvinism." In a grand sweep of the history of the New Testament church from Augustine to the present day, we saw how the doctrines of sovereign grace have only briefly held sway in the church. These doctrines have always been under attack, and the attack has come in various guises: the semi-pelagianism of Rome; the heresy of Bolsec in Calvin's day; Arminianism; Amyrauldianism and the Marrowmen; and more recently common grace and the well-meant offer. The great issue for the church is always the sovereignty of God in salvation, and it's on that front that we must do battle today!

The Five Points are usually set out in the familiar acrostic TULIP. However, our speakers dealt with them in line with the order of the Synod of Dordt. This meant we began with sovereign predestination. Prof. Engelsma stated the fundamental importance of the Five Points to the gospel. They are not incidental to salvation. They set out the only way men can be saved. Therefore, they *must* be preached, and not to preach them is not to preach the gospel. We then saw how the doctrine of sovereign predestination was fundamental to Calvin's theology and that Reformed and Presbyterian churches have made it creedal. Predestination is not, however, only Calvin's and the confessions' teaching, it is also the teaching of Jesus. In John 6: 37 Jesus taught that a certain number of individuals were given to Him in eternity. In love the Father gave these people to His Son with the

purpose that they wouldn't be cast out for their sins. A necessary implication of this text is that God rejects some men – they are not given to Jesus in eternity. This is the doctrine of reprobation, and to deny it is to deny also election. Prof. Engelsma also pointed out, crucially, that all Jesus' work has its ground in election. Especially our coming to Him is due to election. We believe because we are elect: faith flows from election.

In subsequent addresses we saw how the Five Points depend on each other and that to deny one is to deny them all. A consistent theme throughout the speeches was how these doctrines comfort us. This theme was especially clear in the last speech – "Preservation of the Saints." Roman Catholics and Arminians live all their lives in the fear they may finally perish and be lost forever. This terrible fear is God's judgment upon their false gospel. In contrast, God blesses the true gospel of sovereign grace with the glorious truth of preservation. Prof. Engelsma explained how grace is the basis of our perseverance. It is because God preserves us that we by faith actively persevere. We may and *must* have assurance of our perseverance. After all, Christ prayed for this in John 17: 11. What a wonderful comfort to know that in spite of all our enemies, including our enemy within – our old nature – God keeps us to the end!



*The Hamill family*

In keeping with the relaxed nature of the conference, we enjoyed several coach tours. On Monday one party went to Caernarfon Castle in North Wales. This is one of the most splendid castles in Britain and figures large in the history of Britain's kings and queens. The other party went to Snowdonia (also in Wales), and the more energetic (and not necessarily younger!) hiked a good part of the way to the summit of Mount Snowdon. On Wednesday we enjoyed a day tour to the very old historic town of Chester. Chester



*On Mount Snowdon*

started out as a Roman fort, and we were able to witness the continuing excavation of the ancient amphitheatre, the largest in Britain. Chester also provided another attraction of perennial fascination (for the females at least!), in that it boasts a wide variety of attractive shops.

Alongside the conference speeches, there were what might be called the "follow-ups." These, typically, were hosted by the younger people and continued well into the small hours! One of these sessions – due to the stimulus of Prof. Engelsma – discussed all seventeen articles of the Canons, Heads 3 and 4. It is very encouraging and refreshing to see Reformed youth giving themselves to such a study.

Alas, Saturday morning came all too soon. Many saints, especially from the



*Informal discussion*

British Isles, expressed their sorrow about having to return to their "wilderness wanderings" once again – many of them do not have sound Reformed churches to attend. Those of us who do learned to appreciate more deeply our blessings. Tentative proposals were made by the BRF Council to hold the next conference in Ireland.

Was it a success? Yes, of course! How could a week devoted to the truth of Jehovah God be anything else? 

## All Around Us

*Rev. Michael DeVries*

### A "Rights" Fiasco

We are presently witnessing an appalling display of who or what shall be granted "rights." On the one hand, the lack of regard for human life today is sickening. It could be considered from many perspectives – from the efforts in many places to legalize euthanasia, to the terrorist bombings that kill and maim scores of innocent bystanders. Apparently some would go so far as to question the right of most of the human race to exist. The May 2006 issue of *The Interim*, Canada's Life and Family Newspaper, included the headline, "Scientist advocates elimination of 90 per cent of the human race." Eli Schuster reports:

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It's hardly a stretch to say that the near-extinction of humankind isn't a popular idea among the public. If any politician ever dared to dismiss humanity as "fat, human biomass" and advocated the destruction of 90 per cent of the world's population from the dreaded Ebola virus (an 80-90 per cent lethal disease, which inflicts horrible suffering upon its victims, whose internal organs eventually liquefy), he or she would immediately be hounded out of public life. Today, the only fans of such an apocalyptic future are on the margins of society: a few neo-Nazis, the followers of Osama bin Laden, and – it would seem – the Texas Academy of Science.

Speaking at the 109<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Academy at Lamar University in Beaumont TX on March 3 – 5 of this year, biologist and lizard expert Dr. Eric Pianka delivered a frightening lecture in

which he claimed that humans are "no better than bacteria" and that the Earth's ecosystem would not survive without the near-extinction of humanity to just 10 per cent of its present number.

According to computer expert Forrest Mims III, who attended the lecture and took copious notes, Pianka claimed the AIDS virus was too slow for such a job and stated a preference for airborne Ebola, although he added: "You know, the bird flu's good, too."

In an online article titled, "Meeting Doctor Doom," at *The Citizen Scientist*, Mims writes that Pianka made his points with a slide show that included an image of "human skulls towering on the screen behind him" and told his audience, "We've got airborne 90 per cent mortality in humans. Killing humans. Think about that."

Pianka also praised Communist China's one-child policy, on the grounds that "smarter people have fewer kids" than the ignorant masses and suggested that "we need to sterilize everybody on the Earth."

But far from being dismissed as a nutty professor, Mims added that Pianka actually received "loud, vigorous and enthusiastic applause" from the assembled scientists at the end of his speech and later took a plaque that recognized his being named the Academy's 2006 Distinguished Texas Scientist....

The horror of abortion continues to make the news. With today's technology, screening for various diseases or birth defects is possible, which is in many cases leading to the aborting of all but the perfect baby. Similarly shocking are sex-selection abortions. Increasingly, unborn baby girls are being denied their "rights." *Today's Family News*, May 30, 2006, reports in an article entitled, "Canada's Missing Daughters":

Abortion clinics in Canada are accommodating women seeking to terminate pregnancies for no apparent reason other than gender preference.

Documents obtained by Calgary's *Western Standard* magazine reportedly confirm anecdotal evidence that communities around Toronto and in B.C.'s Lower Mainland with a high proportion of immigrants from China and India have significantly more baby boys than girls. Sons are said to be favoured because they continue the family name and are presumably better able to support their parents.

"Compared to other areas of Canada," reporter Andrea Mrozek stated, "the deviation is as obvious as it is sobering. To put all of it into perspective, since the communities mentioned above have seen hundreds of thousands of live births in the last decade, the number of missing daughters may be somewhere in

the thousands."

One internal document from the B.C. Women's Hospital in Vancouver dated earlier this year, said Mrozek, deals with a presentation to health care workers on how to respond to "implicit or even express requests" for sex-selection abortions. Perhaps most notably, it reveals the moral ambiguity many abortion providers feel over sex selection. On the one hand, it acknowledges that these procedures, among other things, "violate the principle of equality between males and females." And yet it rationalizes the need to provide them by claiming that "not allowing sex selection causes increased harm to women who must endure repeated pregnancies in efforts to have a son." Nor was it clear "if banning sex selection will benefit women."

"If people want it, we'll do it," a woman identified only as a "front-line clinic worker" told the *Western Standard*. A position paper by the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada goes even further in its defense of sex-selection abortions.

"Being pro-choice means supporting a woman's right to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy for whatever reason, even if one personally does not agree with her reason," it states.

Rather than deny women an abortion solely because their unborn child happens to be of the "wrong" gender, the coalition suggests that the "root issue is the value and respect – or lack of value and respect – that society and certain cultures give to girls and women" and that the "answer lies in education ... not in restricting abortion."

The irony of such reasoning has not escaped pro-lifers.

"The (feminist) National Action Committee on the Status of Women must have a heck of a time with this one," said Joanne McGarry, executive director of the Catholic Civil Rights League. "All that successful lobbying on the slogan 'the issue is choice,' only to discover that for some, the choice is to eliminate the girls."

On the other hand, if you are a harp seal, you have a multitude of passionate supporters. Tony Gosgnach writes in *The Interim*, May 2006, under the headline, "Big Media Fret Over Seal Hunt":

It's being called an issue that has few rivals in terms of controversy in Canada and around the world. It's dominated by bloody images, heated rhetoric and impassioned defences on both sides. Few facts go unchallenged. Language becomes a tool, as words become weapons of outrage or instruments of reassurance.

Abortion? Nope. The annual Canadian seal hunt.

The description above comes from an "In Depth" feature about the seal hunt on CBC New's website. This feature includes a photo of a harp seal, a series of questions and answers, quick facts and links to related articles and other websites. Perhaps no other situation better illustrates the irrelevancy and bias of contemporary news media, particularly in Canada, than this one – in which the seal hunt is regularly given lengthy, consistent and prominent coverage in all forms of media, while death and tragedy involving human beings is relegated to secondary importance.

Note that in comparison, CBC New's "In Depth" feature on abortion is dominated by a photo of Henry Morgentaler and a timeline of his efforts to overturn Canadian abortion regulations, as if he is the one and only face of the abortion issue in Canada and his story is all that matters. Other crucial, relevant facts are carefully omitted, such as the toll of abortion on the financial state of the Canadian health system, the psychological and physiological damage done to women and the deleterious effects abortion has had on this country's birthrate and consequently, our social safety net and labour pool....

Unfortunately, matters aren't any better with respect to news media outside Canada, which have spotlighted the involvement in the seal hunt of celebrities such as Paul McCartney and Brigitte

Bardot. Our seal hunt situation has garnered significant coverage from such international media outlets as CNN, which terms it "much-criticized" and a "slaughter," and the BBC, ("Images of hunters clubbing infant seals horrified TV viewers across the world").

A summation of the overall situation must point out that mainstream media clearly place the lives of harp seals above those of human beings – an unconscionable state of affairs, to be sure, but also a very real one....

You've likely heard the expression, "Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle!" If that is true, you are also in a very favorable position in the world today. Monkeys (more specifically, gorillas, chimpanzees, and orangutans) are being given rights. Spain is reportedly considering support for the right to "freedom and life" for great apes, which would make it the first world legislature to grant rights to non-human entities. *Today's Family News*, June 21, 2006 reports on this monkey business:

Spanish parliamentarians are seriously considering a motion aimed at extending "human-like rights" to great apes such as gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans, *BBC News* reported. If passed, it would make Spain the first nation in the world to give its moral backing to the Seattle-based Great Ape Project. It vows "to end the unconscionable treatment of our nearest living relatives by obtaining for non-human great apes the fundamental moral and legal protections of the right to life, the freedom from arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and protection from torture."

Green MP Francisco Garrido, who sits with Spain's governing Socialist coalition, proposed the motion. He claimed that because apes are genetically "so close to humans," they deserve to be treated as more than "mere objects or play things." "The great

apes have been tortured, mistreated, enslaved and murdered," he said. "The habitats where (they) live have been wiped out and, according to the UN, they are in serious danger of extinction."

London's *Daily Telegraph* reported that Garrido's motion will be debated by the parliament's environment committee at the end of the month, where he expects it to pass. If that happens, it appears that the next step will be a proposed law that would place great apes under the "moral guardianship" of the state. According to Garrido, it would be in much the same way that the state presently looks after children in care, the severely handicapped and people in comas. The law would also declare that great apes currently in Spanish zoos be moved to government-built "sanctuaries," unless to do so would harm their emotional welfare. Mistreating or killing a great ape – except in cases of self-defence or euthanasia – would become a crime.

But the whole notion of granting human-like rights to apes is not without its critics. "As most people know," British geneticist Steve Jones told the *Daily Telegraph*, "chimpanzees share about 98 percent of our DNA, but bananas share about 50 percent of our DNA and we are not 98 percent chimpanzee or 50 percent banana. We are entirely human and unique in that respect." "It is simply a mistake," he added, "to use an entirely human construct, which is rights, and apply it to an animal, which is not human. Rights come with responsibility and I've never seen a chimp being fined for stealing a plate of bananas." Only a society that is "ridiculous or distorted" could propose such a law, Fernando Sebastian, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Pamplona and Tudela, told the BBC. "We don't give rights to some people – such as unborn children, human embryos – and we are going to give them to apes."

Such is the fiasco in a world

largely given over to evolutionism and steeped in corruption. On the one hand, in the perilous times of these last days we see that men are without natural affection (II Tim. 3:1-3). There is a sickening rejection of even their own offspring in rampant abortion and child neglect and abuse.

On the other hand, there is today the disgusting exaltation of the animal world to a position equal to or above man. You are undoubtedly acquainted with the outrageous campaigns and protests of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Animals are deemed pure and innocent. The *New York Times* has reported that the behaviour and enormous brains of dolphins "suggest an intelligence approaching that of human beings or even, some might argue, surpassing it."

Do not misunderstand; I'm not a heartless animal hater. On the contrary, with my roots on the farm, I have a genuine affection and concern for animals. I am the at-times-reluctant owner (not guardian) of a cat and a dog. But "animal rights" is, I believe, a deliberately deceiving and misleading notion.

The whole idea of "rights" is a humanistic concept that becomes more and more perverted as time goes on, even with regard to humans. Fallen, depraved humanity doesn't have "inalienable rights," not even a "right to life" before the holy God of heaven and earth. We deserve only death and damnation. Much less do animals have or deserve "rights." They ought to be given proper care and protection from abuse or maltreatment, but not "rights." "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). 

## Baptism: Sign of God's Unconditional Covenant (1)

**B**aptism is the sign of God's covenant. So those who have a wrong view of God's covenant will have a wrong view of the sign of the covenant. For example, those who baptize infants while viewing the covenant to be conditional will view baptism to be a sign of a *resistible* grace that is given to every child that is baptized. On the other hand, those who rightly maintain that the covenant is an unconditional bond of friendship will teach that baptism is a sign of *irresistible* grace, which is given only to the elect.

Not all who hold to a conditional covenant, however, teach the same thing. For example, some speak of conditions *to enter* the covenant, and some speak of conditions *to remain in* the covenant. Some maintain that children of believers are really in the covenant, while others say that they are not. So while speaking of the error of a conditional covenant and its effect on the doctrine of baptism, we will need to keep these distinctions in mind.

### A Conditional Covenant:

#### A Covenant of Resistible Grace

For quite some time there have been many who have maintained that God's covenant is a conditional agreement between God and man. God, they say, gives a gracious covenant promise to everyone who hears the preaching, telling them all, head for head, that He wants to save them, and that He promises to give them all the blessings of the covenant, provided that they first fulfill the condition and believe on Him.

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This grace, then, is resistible grace. In other words, a conditional covenant is a covenant of resistible grace. This is an extremely important point that must be clearly understood.

The error of a conditional covenant is really nothing other than the same old Arminian error that was condemned by the Synod of Dordt (1618-19). But to get the old error of Arminianism into Reformed and Presbyterian churches it needed to be camouflaged. And, over the years, there have been many who have used the doctrine of a conditional covenant for this very purpose.

A conditional covenant is essentially Arminianism, and the error of Arminianism is essentially the same as that of Roman Catholicism. Last time we considered the error of the Roman Catholics and of the Lutherans, who teach that grace is inseparably connected with the sacrament, so that everyone who receives the sacrament receives also the grace signified by it. It is really this same false teaching that is today being maintained by many others who hold to a conditional covenant. A conditional covenant with all baptized children means that grace is inseparably connected with the sacrament, so that all who receive the sign receive also this grace.

But the grace spoken of here is *resistible* grace – not *irresistible* saving grace. Resistible grace is said to be inseparably joined to baptism, so that one who receives the sign receives a dose of resistible grace.

### The Romish View of Resistible Grace

As has just been said, resistible grace is the false teaching not only of the Arminians, but also of the Ro-

man Catholics before them. For some fifteen hundred years the Romish church has been teaching resistible grace. And the view of grace to which they have held is much the same as that held today by others who hold to a conditional covenant.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Jeremiah 32:39, 40, summarizes the Romish view of grace. Calvin, when commenting on this text, showed how this text teaches that God's covenant promise is a promise of efficacious, irresistible grace. Then he took the opportunity to show how this was directly contrary to the view of grace held by the papists (i.e., the followers of the pope).

But when God claims entirely for Himself whatever good there is in us, the Papists concede to Him only the half, and imagine a two-fold grace of God, a grace going before and a grace following. What do the Papists mean, or what do they understand by this grace going before? Even that God inspires us with good and pious feelings, so that if we wish we may be free to follow what is right; for, as I have said, the Papists confess that we are under the tyranny of the devil, and slaves to him, and that there is no right will in men, except through the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit. But, as I have already said, they talk vainly of the grace of the Spirit, and say that it is an influence by which God enables us to follow that which is right, if we have a will to do so. Thus, then, the grace of God, according to them, leaves men in suspense, so that they are free either to receive or to reject the grace of God. Afterwards, they join the subsequent grace, which, in their view, is a reward; for if I assent to God, that is, if I suffer myself to be ruled by His Spirit, and embrace the grace

offered to me, God will then reward me with another grace to confirm me in my right purpose. And thus they confess that perseverance is in part the gift of God; but they always imagine it a cooperating grace.<sup>1</sup>

Let us take note of this Romish view of a twofold, resistible grace. First, they speak of a grace of God given to a man before he fulfills a condition, and another grace of God given to him after he does so. The first grace enables the man to fulfill the condition. This grace is resistible. If the person resists it, he will perish. If, however, he makes good use of this grace and repents and believes, then he will obtain the right to receive from God another gift of grace. Yet this second gift of grace is also resistible. It is, as Calvin says, a cooperating grace, which man must not resist.

So the result is that man's initial fulfillment of the condition and his perseverance in fulfilling the condition are only *in part* the gift of God, and thus these gifts are resistible. Partial gifts are resistible; complete gifts are irresistible.

Now there are many conditional covenant advocates, who say they are Reformed, who speak of a similar twofold grace of God. The first grace enables the person to fulfill the condition of the covenant. Some say this condition is faith and nothing else, while others say this condition is faith plus the good works that proceed from faith. In either case, the grace that is given is not grace that actually produces the act of believing and obeying. This a man must produce himself. The grace simply enables him to do so. He, then, must not resist this grace. If he does, then he perishes. If he does not, then God gives him a second gift of grace.

This second gift of grace is then also said by many to be resistible.<sup>2</sup> If a man fulfills the initial condition, then God, they say, will give him the grace to persevere in obedience. But, they go on to say, man must not resist this grace. If he does, then

he perishes. If he does not, then he will eventually go to heaven.

Resistible grace — that is the grace that goes with a conditional covenant.

### **Powerful Proof that the Grace of God's Covenant is Irresistible (Jeremiah 32:39, 40)**

The passage in Jeremiah, on which Calvin's comments above are found, is a very strong one on God's unconditional covenant, and clearly shows that the grace of God's covenant is irresistible. It is perhaps not quoted by us nearly as often as some other passages on God's covenant. But it should be one of which we are all well aware, seeing as it manifests clearly the irresistible grace of God's everlasting covenant. It reads as follows:

And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.

When God establishes His covenant with someone, He does not give him merely some power to enable him to perform some activity. Rather, He gives him a new heart.<sup>3</sup> That is what he needs. That is what he has to have if he is going to turn from his sin and return to God. For the problem the unbeliever has is not merely that he commits sinful deeds. His problem is that his very nature is sinful, his very heart is dead. He is completely unable to do what God requires of him. He cannot perform a good work any more than a corpse could that is lying in the grave. What he needs is not merely a little strength. He needs to be resurrected. And that is what God does when He makes His covenant with him. He raises him from the dead.

This gracious gift of a new heart, this spiritual resurrection from the dead, is unmistakably ir-

resistible. A dead man cannot accept or reject any gift. It is only when God gives a person a new heart, placing His fear within that heart, that the person comes to life, fears God, and turns to Him, longing to commune with Him. This is what we find in the text when it says, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." One who does not have this new heart does not have God's fear in his heart, and if he does not have God's fear in his heart, he will never obey Him. He will always depart from him. Yet God irresistibly gives His people a new heart and thus causes them to walk in His statutes and do them.

The text also clearly proves that to be in God's covenant today is to be in that covenant forever. One in the covenant is not a recipient of resistible grace. If he were, then it would be possible for him to resist it and to fall out of the covenant. But this passage clearly states that those in God's covenant will never depart from Him. Take note of this. God promises His people not only that He will never depart from them, but also that He will make sure that they never depart from Him.

Irresistible grace — that is the promise of God's everlasting covenant. But resistible grace is taught by the papists, the Arminians, and many others who hold to a conditional covenant. And when this view of God's grace is then taken by them and applied to the sacrament of holy baptism, the sacrament becomes a sign of *resistible* grace. It is to this subject, Lord willing, that I will turn next time. 

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1. Calvin's Commentary on Jeremiah 32:39, translated from the Latin and edited by Rev. John Owen.

2. Some will say it is irresistible, but many others will hold it to be resistible.

3. The passage actually speaks of God's people receiving "one heart." But the one heart spoken of here is the same as the new heart spoken of in the parallel passage of Ezekiel 36:26. All God's people receive one new heart. The Word of God and the fear of God are said to be irresistibly placed by God in this heart.

## The Prophecy of Malachi

# Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (10)

### The Third Disputation: Chapter 2:10-16 (continued)

12. *The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.*

**I**n Israel the sin of marrying heathen wives made the sinner worthy of being cut off, that is, of death or banishment. In the New Testament it makes one worthy of excommunication. Nor ought the elders of the church hesitate to censure, and if necessary put out of the church those who are guilty of these sins. The principle set out in I Corinthians 5:6 applies here also: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Excommunication in such cases is simply a recognition of the fact that a person, by such sins, has shown himself to be one who despises God's covenant and friendship. To this covenant and friendship with God the "tabernacles of Jacob" refer here in verse 12 (cf. Rev. 21:1, 2).

God speaks here of master and scholar because it was not only the common people who were guilty of this sin, but the leaders also. Perhaps He even means to point out that those who held such positions in Israel used their influence and study (in the case of scholars)

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*Previous article in this series: August 2006, p. 440.*

to justify their actions by misinterpreting and misapplying the Word of God, as is usually the case. God speaks also of those who offered an offering, because these Jews were doubly guilty, not only of forsaking God's covenant in intermingling with the heathen, but of maintaining a hypocritical pretense of loving God and fearing Him by continuing to bring their offerings to the temple. None of them, however prominent, would escape God's judgment.

13. *And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.*

With these words the prophet begins to deal with the other sin of which the Jews were guilty, the sin of divorcing. "This ye have done" refers not to what has just been said, but to what follows.

There are those who take this verse as referring to heathen and idolatrous worship and who take the verses that follow as a reference not to actual divorcing and a condemnation of that sin, but as a reference to pagan worship. In other words, the Jews committed the sin of divorce only by forsaking God and worshiping idols. Now it is true that idolatry and intermarriage with the heathen are a kind of spiritual fornication (Ezek. 16), but there is no reason at all to take this passage in any other way

than as being a literal and explicit condemnation of divorce. Those who take it otherwise usually have a hidden agenda, not accepting the teaching of the Word of God about divorce and remarriage.

The tears referred to, therefore, are the tears and weeping of the Jewish wives who had been injured by this sin, tears that are as often shed today as then, not only by wives who have been forsaken, but also by husbands and children who have suffered as a result of this sin and whose tears are a testimony against those who continue to commit the sin of divorcing.

The warning is especially forceful since God refuses to receive the worship of those who commit this sin or to show them any good will or favor in their attempts to placate Him. How many there must be today whose worship is unacceptable to God on account of this unrepented sin!

14. *Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*

As always the Jews refused to see their sins and to hear the Word of God through Malachi, and so God elaborates on their sins and speaks of the *treachery* of the Jews against their wives. Each of these mistreated wives is referred to as "the wife of thy youth," not only because the Jews married young, but as a re-

minder of the fact that they were divorcing the wives to whom they had been married for many years, who had born their children and whom they were now forsaking. No less common and no less treacherous are such deeds today.

God emphasizes the seriousness of this sin also by describing each of these wives as “thy companion” and “the wife of thy covenant.” He is referring by the first to the intimacy, fellowship, and love that ought to characterize a marriage and usually does in the beginning, but that often, through sin, wanes and disappears. By describing her as “the wife of thy covenant,” He not only reminds the people that marriage is a covenant, but that it is part of God’s covenant. The intimacies of marriage picture the intimacies of God’s relationship to us, and the bond of marriage is part of the bond between God and His people.

This is an important reminder. When we are dealing with marriage, we are not just dealing with a temporary and human relationship that is of no real spiritual significance, but are dealing with God’s covenant and an aspect of that covenant. To put it differently, it is gross hypocrisy for anyone to say that he or she loves God and is a friend of God and not do all that can be done to preserve and protect and live in marriage as an institution of God.

God describes Himself as a witness between the Jews and their divorced wives because He alone was able to see and know the real motives behind their actions. There can be no doubt that the Jews excused themselves by saying that they had married young when they did not really know what they were doing and therefore could not be responsible for their actions and could not be expected to live anymore with their wives; that they no longer loved their wives and that they were sure that God wanted them to be happy; that circumstances had changed, and though they had done

all they could to maintain their marriages, there was nothing left but to divorce – the same vapid excuses that are heard today.

God knew better. He knew, as the One who searches the heart, that their real motives were selfish and wicked – that they were moved only by lust – and that all their excuses were just that and nothing more. He had seen not only their actions, but their hearts, and was witness against them, a witness who would make sure that they suffered just punishment for their crimes.

*15. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.*

Verse 15 is by all accounts the most difficult verse in the whole prophecy. One commentator even gives up and says that “the worst thing that could be done would be to assume that it *can* be understood.”<sup>1</sup> The questions are many: What does it mean that He made one? What is the residue of the spirit and who had it? Who was seeking a godly seed and how? These questions show that the verse is indeed difficult. But it is not impossible. In fact, the questions must be answered and the verse interpreted, for it lies at the heart of what God is saying in this part of the prophecy.

Perhaps the most common interpretation is that God is holding up to the Jews the negative example of Abraham, their first father, who was married to Sarah, one flesh with her, but took Hagar as his concubine, seeking a godly seed in doing so. The problem with this interpretation is first that Abraham did not divorce Sarah or deal treacherously with her. In fact, it was Sarah’s idea that Abraham marry Hagar. That example would have had no force with the Jews therefore.

Another common interpreta-

tion, that of Calvin and others, refers the verse to the creation of Adam and Eve and to the fact that God made them, man and woman, one flesh in marriage. The example would then be positive and an implicit condemnation of the Jews who were acting against God’s original marriage ordinance in divorcing and remarrying, and separating what God had joined together. That interpretation has little against it exegetically and would parallel what Jesus says in Matthew 19:1-9.

Better, though, is the interpretation that understands the verse in the context of what God has just said about His own relationship to the Jews. The making one, then, is God’s establishing His covenant with the Jews and taking them as His own peculiar people – the seeking of a godly seed being His reason for doing so, that is, that they from among all the heathen nations might be His dear children.

The reference to the residue of the spirit, then, is to the fact that God by His Holy Spirit dwelt among the Jews, but that the riches of His Spirit had not been poured out even on them. The passage means something like this:

Did not God make us one? Did he not separate us from other nations into an isolated unity? Yet this was not done because the blessing was too narrow to be spread over the other nations, or because infinite fulness was exhausted; for the residue of the Spirit was with him. There remained an inexhaustible fulness of spiritual blessing that might have been given to other nations. Why then did he choose but one? It was in order that he might make a seed of God, a nation which he should train to be the repository of his covenant and the stock of his Messiah, a people in which the true doctrine of the unity of God should be cherished amid surrounding polytheism and idolatry, until the fulness of time should come.<sup>2</sup>

The verse, therefore, picks up on some of the themes already introduced and develops them.

There is good application of the verse to the church and to believers today. The verse reminds us, as New Testament Christians, that God has separated us in marriage from the wicked world in which we live in order that we might be holy to Him, and that any violation of what God has commanded for marriage is a contradiction of what God has done for us in Christ. It would be a reminder also of the fact that God has made us separate in order to fulfill His own

promise to be our God and the God of our children – has separated us, in other words, in order that the seed of the covenant might be brought forth and preserved among us and that in that way God's promise might not fail, His purpose be accomplished, and His name glorified and honored.

All this leads to the conclusion: "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth." The warning is a warning not only of treachery toward other persons but toward God. That is also the reason why God speaks of taking heed

to our "spirits." The spirit of man is that aspect of man's creation that enables him to know God and to live in fellowship with God. It is not only a man's relationship to others that is damaged by marital treachery, but also his relationship to God. May we hear and heed that warning! 

1. Douglas Stuart, *Malachi*, in Thomas Edward McComiskey, *An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, vol. 3, p. 1340.

2. T.V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, p. 137.

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

On Wednesday evening, August 2, a new congregation was organized in Northern Ireland, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena. Eight families and several individuals were received as charter members. Prof. H. Hanko preached from II Timothy 2:15, and two elders and one deacon were elected and installed. Also present that evening were Mr. Henry Boer, representing the Hudsonville, MI PRC, the calling church for the mission work done there these past years, and Mr. Gary Kaptein, representing our churches' Domestic Mission Committee. On August 13, the newly instituted Covenant PRC called our denomination's missionary to Northern Ireland to be their pastor, with his installation following the next evening, August 14, with former missionary to Northern Ireland, Rev. R. Hanko, conducting that special service. We praise the Lord for His tender mercies shown towards the congregation there. They have come through many struggles, and the Lord has truly blessed them with the strength of

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

faith. Let us continue to pray that the saints there remain a faithful witness to the truth that we all hold so dear.

In news from the Pittsburgh Mission, we read recently that partly due to the fact that the lease at their present facility is up, they are investigating the possibility of a different place for their meetings. This may mean moving to a different location in Pittsburgh. The Bruinsma family is settling down in their new home, community, and in the fellowship of the mission group. A major effort is being put forth by our missionary, Rev. Bruinsma, to organize Bible study groups in various parts of the city. Plans are also being worked on for a series of public meetings near Reformation Day.

From Missionary Rev. T. Miersma and the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship of Spokane, WA, we learned that Elders Robert Brands and Leon Griess were scheduled to visit there as representatives from the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for the mission work there, Sunday, August 20, and the following week, when these men planned on visiting each of the families in the Fellowship as part of the supervisory work of the consistory.

### Young Adult Activities

The young adults of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada have begun planning a Young Adults' Retreat for June 25-29, 2007. It will be held, the Lord willing, at the Goldeye Retreat Centre in Nordegg, Alberta under the theme "The Voice of God in Creation," based on Psalm 29. The speakers will be Rev. Richard Smit, pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, and Rev. John Marcus, pastor of neighboring First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta. To see pictures of the facilities and activities, go to [www.goldeye.org](http://www.goldeye.org).

We should also add that bulletins from Immanuel indicate that their young adults are busy with various fund-raisers for next year's retreat. One that caught our eye, and one that maybe could only work in northern climates, is the selling of cut and split firewood.

### Evangelism Activities

Once again this past August, the Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI hosted a Summer Seminar. This year's seminar dealt with the topic, "A Biblical Defense of the Reformed Amillennial View of the Return of the Lord." These lectures were held on August 1, 8, 15, and

22 at the Southwest PRC. Rev. William Langerak, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI began the series on August 1 speaking on the theme, "An Introduction to Amillennialism with Comparisons to Other Views," followed by Prof. Ronald Cammenga on August 8, speaking on "Jesus' Olivet Discourse and the Signs of the Lord's Return"; Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, on August 15 speaking on the subject of "Old Testament Prophecy and the New Testament Church"; and Rev. Arie denHartog, pastor at Southwest, speaking August 22 on "The Return of Christ and the Coming of His Glorious Kingdom." There was a time for questions and answers after each lecture, and a time for fellowship and refreshments concluded the evening.

The Evangelism Committee of

the Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a booth at the Alto Fair for two days in early August. This gave Randolph an opportunity to present a godly witness of our Reformed heritage.

Members of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to stay for a summer singspiration entitled "With a Voice of Singing," Sunday evening, August 6, sponsored by their Evangelism Society. The Majestic Brass joined with organ and piano to accompany some of the singing. An offering was taken to help with the projects that have been undertaken by their Evangelism Society in the past few months.

#### Congregation Activities

**S**unday evening, August 13, members of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to stay for a brief program of sa-

cred music presented by a cello, flute, and piano trio. No word on who played the instruments, but it certainly sounds like a good combination.

In a follow-up to our last "News," we find that the council of the Hull, Iowa PRC reviewed the sign-up sheet for those interested in establishing a daughter congregation. There were 32 signatures of families or individuals at this time. Hull's council decided to make the sign-up sheet available for additional signatures until their October meeting.

#### Minister Activities

**W**e rejoice with Rev. Richard and Tricia Smit of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada on the birth of a son, Carl David, born on Monday, July 24. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord" (Ps. 127:3a). 

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## Announcements

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With joy and thanksgiving to God, on September 14, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

**ROGER and MARLENE  
GROENENDYK,**

celebrated 50 years of marriage.

We rejoice with them and give thanks to God for the many years with which He has blessed them. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless and keep them in the years to come.

"For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

✿ Randy and Betsy Groendyk

David, Sara, Kristin

✿ Steve Groenendyk

✿ Ron and Cheri Smit

Nick, Cody, Eric

✿ Todd and Lisa Groenendyk

Ethan, Meghan, Madalyn, Lily

Wyoming, Michigan

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

**JOHN and BEVERLY FEENSTRA,** as they celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on August 24, 2006. We thank God for the many years He has given them together. We thank them for the godly example they have been in their daily walk in life and pray that God will continue to bless them in the years to come. "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:3, 4).

✿ Ken and Gleny Feenstra

Paul and Tena Hoekstra,  
Stacy, John, Anna, Abigail

✿ Peter and Linda Smit

William, David, Lanae, Lorraine,  
Suzanna, Dirk

✿ Cindy Feenstra

✿ Doug and Lori Bekkering

Morgan

Redlands, California

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness and gratitude to God, on September 14, 2006, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

**JOHN and JEANETTE DE VRIES,** celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We are thankful to God for His covenant faithfulness shown in the many years He has given them together. May He continue to bless and keep them in the years to come.

The lines are fallen unto me  
In places large and fair;  
A goodly heritage is mine,  
Marked out with gracious care.

Psalter 27:5

✿ Herman and Lorraine DeVries

John and Rebecca DeVries

Matthew, Michael

Sarah DeVries

Brayden

Amy, Laura, Timothy

✿ Donald and Shelly DeVries

Kari (in glory), Daniel, Abigail

✿ Bryant and Ruth Cox

Eric, Scott, Kyle, Anna

✿ Thomas and Brenda DeVries

Jeffrey, Jared, Stephan

✿ Michael and Amy DeVries

Kiley, Casey, Christian

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Rev. and Jennifer Eriks and family, for the Lord in His infinite wisdom and love has called his mother,

**MRS. JOAN ERIKS,**

unto her eternal home. We pray that they may receive strength and comfort in the words from Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid."

Erv Kortering, Vice President  
Ralph VanderVeen, Clerk

### ◆ ◆ REMINDER ◆ ◆

This is the last issue of the volume year. If you desire to have your own copies bound, please bring the entire set (October 1, 2005 — September 15, 2006) to the RFPA business office (1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI) by October 15. The cost of having your own SBs bound is still \$13.00.

### NOTICE

The RFPA Annual Meeting will be held on September 21 in Faith PRC at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Dykstra will speak on the topic: "Spreading the Reformed Truth Around the World."

### Do You Know...

The *Standard Bearer* archives are available through the RFPA website ([www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org))?

### Lecture

Loveland PRC  
Evangelism Committee

October 31, 2006

7:30 P.M.

at Loveland PRC

Speaker:

**Prof David Engelsma**  
"Justification and Good Works"

Copies available on tape or CD  
upon request.