

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • December 1, 2011

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Christ's Banqueting House

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

Song of Solomon 2:4

Inspired Solomon uses an extended metaphor to speak about a deeper spiritual truth concerning Christ and the church, the bridegroom and His bride. The same metaphor is used in Ephesians 5:31-32: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

In the words we consider, the bride speaks about the actions of her bridegroom. He had just referred to himself as the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys and then praised his bride as a lily among the thorns, lowly yet beautiful (cf. Song 2:1-2). Following that, the bride praises her bridegroom as a most noble apple tree, providing delightful shade and sweet fruit (v. 3). She

goes on to describe the banqueting house into which her bridegroom brought her.

"He brought me into the banqueting house!"

Literally, she says, "He brought me into the house of wine." Wine in those days was a symbol of abundance and joy. A house of wine, then, is not to be understood as a house of drunkenness, where wine is abused, but rather a house where wine is poured out for joyful feasting. It is the place to which the king would take his most important guests and closest friends to enjoy communion with him. The bride knows she is not worthy to be brought into such fellowship. Her words thus express wonderment and awe at the privilege of such fellowship with the king. She wants the daughters of Jerusalem to know about the wonderful love of her bridegroom.

Such is her joy at being brought into such a privileged position, she calls out "stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love" (Song 2:5). Support me with flagons—probably, the bride is referring here to sweet and nourishing raisin cakes that have the power to revive. The same thought applies to the refreshment

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

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Subscription Price

\$21.00 per year in the US, \$25.00 elsewhere

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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: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFP: www.rfpa.org

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she seeks from apples. Why is she so weak? Because she is “sick of love.” She is as it were wounded with love; she is so overwhelmed by the loving advances of the bridegroom that she becomes faint.

The picture itself is glorious. Even more glorious, however, is the reality of Christ bringing the church into His banqueting house. He takes unworthy sinners into His banqueting house, the house of covenant fellowship, in which we enjoy communion with Jesus Christ our King. “And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Is. 25:6). Already in this life Christ causes us to enjoy the beginning of covenant fellowship with Himself.

The banqueting house can be taken as a picture of the covenant of grace established with miserable, undeserving sinners. Jesus Christ is the foundation of this covenant as He offered Himself the perfect sacrifice for His bride, the church. In covenant with God, we have abundant supply of all spiritual blessings and promises.

In the banqueting house, Christ speaks to us through His love letter, the Bible. We learn of His everlasting love towards us, from which love we will never be separated. In the banqueting house, He sets Himself before us as a feast so that by faith we partake of His flesh and blood. In the house of God, the church, a glorious feast is held forth for all the members of the bride.

Think of all the blessings of salvation given to the church and what joy we have in them. The inspired writer of Romans expresses this joy of the bride as he considers the wonderful benefits we have in Christ: “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:30-32). He goes on to ask in wonderment, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” We have truly received abundant blessings in Christ Jesus.



How is it, though, that the bride came to enjoy such glorious benefits with the bridegroom? Did she make herself beautiful so that finally the bridegroom was attracted to her? Did she labor to merit an invitation from the bridegroom? Did she bring herself into the banqueting house?

Not at all. “He brought me...!” It was not her own work that brought her to enjoy the sumptuous banqueting in the king’s house.

So it is with the church in fellowship with Jesus Christ. The church does not make herself beautiful for Jesus Christ. We do not labor to merit fellowship and communion with Christ. We did not bring ourselves into covenant fellowship with God. Christ brought us to His banqueting house!

The church does not bring herself into covenant with God by meeting prerequisites. We cannot say that faith and repentance are prerequisites for entering into the covenant. That’s because faith and repentance are the fruits of Christ’s work in us. They are blessings that come to those who are in the covenant of grace, not prerequisites that must be met before entering into covenant. The bride of Christ confesses, “He brought me into the banqueting house.”

Of course, this fellowship with Christ is more than just outward membership in the church institute. There are all kinds of people who connect themselves with the church institute. But membership in the church institute is not the same thing as membership in the covenant of grace. “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). Simply being a member of Israel as a nation did not make anyone part of the true Israel. There have always been tares mixed with the wheat, goats with the sheep, and fools with the wise in the church institute. Fellowship with Christ means that we are members of the mystical body of Christ.

Bringing someone into the banqueting house is a sovereign act of God’s grace. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In time, He paid the ransom for us, pouring out His precious blood on the cross. From heaven, He sends His Spirit to bring us out of the dungeon of darkness into the marvelous freedom of light, into a life of fellowship with Himself. “Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring

from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79).

Once Jesus brings us into that covenant fellowship, He continues to bless us with all spiritual blessings. He opens our understanding so that we behold wondrous things in His love letter to us. As we hear that love letter expounded to us, we believe His promises and rejoice in them. That can only be because Jesus Christ, by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, leads us into the banqueting house. What a wonder of grace!



How did Christ bring us into His banqueting house? By means of His banner.

“His banner over me was love!”

The bridegroom did not bring the bride into his banqueting house against her will. He did not drag her there kicking and screaming. She came willingly because the bridegroom drew her. She came because his love for her was evident.

That was the function of the bridegroom’s banner. In biblical times, a banner was used for armies to show which man belonged in which camp (cf. Num. 1:52). The bridegroom’s banner, as it were, summoned the bride to come. The banner made it clear to her that

she belonged to him; she was the apple of his eye; she belonged with him in the banqueting house. Thus, the banner of love was a means to draw the bride to himself.

So it is with the church. Jesus Christ uses His banner of love to draw us to Himself. His banner announces His love toward us. He doesn’t gather the church to Himself by coercion and intimidation. Rather, He sweetly draws us to Himself by His love as the Spirit works in our hearts to convince us of that love.

In Scripture times, the banner was hoisted up on a pole so that people could see it for miles around. Jesus Christ was lifted on the cross, thus displaying His infinite love for us. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Knowing Jesus’ love, we gather under His banner. He says to poor sinners, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). He shows us that we belong under His banner because He loves us and bought us with His precious blood.

He brings us to His banqueting house. His banner over the church is love. By God’s grace, the church rejoices in this truth and with awe and wonder declares that message far and wide. 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Harold Camping, Yet Again

“When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, [then you may know] that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22).

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2011, p. 76.

As stated in the last issue, because church membership is one of the great issues facing Christ’s church today we intend to devote one more article to the follies of Camping, responding in particular to his greatest injury to Christ’s church and truth, namely, his claim that the church age has ended.

But first we note that we are

writing this editorial (appearing in the Dec. 1 issue) the week following October 21, meaning that once again there has occurred no rapture, no return of Christ, no final catastrophic judgments on the world.

Harold Camping has once more been exposed as a false prophet and an inept student of Scripture, to say nothing of being a miserable Bible teacher.

The response of a Camping spokesman to the *Christian Science Monitor* requesting an explanation for Camping's failed prophecy was, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but we at Family Radio have been directed to not talk to the media or the press."

As expected, Camping and his "End of the World" prediction has become the object of ridicule (with none but himself to blame). As one newscaster (on a Youtube excerpt) said to another, "I have never seen a man with such big ears. It must be so he can hear God speak." To which the other replied, "Exactly. Words nobody else is able to hear!"

The grief is that by association he brings the whole of biblically-based Christianity that waits for her Lord's return into ridicule with him.

But, for all his failings, Camping is well versed in Scripture (which in itself proves nothing for biblical wisdom or trustworthiness. The Devil also is well-versed. None better. Still, trust him not). This means Camping is familiar with the Deuteronomy 18 passage quoted above. If there is one biblical passage Camping ought to reflect upon, it is this passage, with the realization that if there is any passage that applies to him and his so-called insights into Scripture, it is this passage.

It is noteworthy that two verses previous (v. 20) God told Israel that upon such presumptuous prophets His judgments would fall, judgments working death. And this is not the only passage where God

speaks of such judgments on lying prophets (cf. Jer. 14:15, 16).

Are we suggesting that Camping be put to death?

Not at all.

But these passages ought to put Camping and Family Radio on notice as to the seriousness of Camping's folly and that he has some real repenting to do. Let him now use Family Radio one last time to confess his errors in a public way and seek to undo some of the terrible mischief he has brought into people's lives.

To this point, Camping's only apology has been "I have been told that I had said back in May, that people who did not believe that May 21 should be the Rapture date, probably had not become saved. I should not have said that, and I apologize for that."

One expression of regret, and a weak one at that.

If there is one area Harold Camping and Family Radio could now attempt to undo some of the evils they have brought into people's lives it would be in the area of church membership, acknowledging that as they were wrong in declaring the end of the world, so they are wrong about declaring that the church age has ended. Let them demonstrate their sorrow by instructing their listeners to seek out churches that still manifest the marks of the true church of Christ (per the biblical instruction found in the Belgic Confession, Arts. 27-29), joining themselves and their children to such congregations for the saving of their souls.

For Camping and his followers not to do so will only prove they

have learned nothing from this latest prophetic debacle. The only conclusion one can then reach is that Family Radio still remains committed to Camping's privately contrived, speculative methods of interpreting Scripture (now in the area of the End of the Age as it relates to terminating church membership) and that his pronouncements, unbiblical though they have proved to be, remain as the rule of their message and faith.

Not to renounce Camping's speculation on the end of the church age will mean that their guilt in leading many astray continues.

We mention the Belgic Confession in connection with the necessity of church membership (meaning, in the institute, not simply of the invisible body of elect) because the teaching of this venerable creed (which celebrated its 450th birthday this year) on the vital need of every believer to join himself and his family to Christ's true church is thoroughly apostolic and biblical. Its teaching that "...out of [Christ's church institute] there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it..." (Art. 28) is as biblically true today as when it was written 450 years ago.

The Westminster Confession, in direct reference to the visible church, declares that "out of [her] there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (25.2), and, despite impurities one is sure to find in every church, "Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will" (25.5).

That what these confessions teach concerning church membership is in accordance with Christ's Spirit, while Camping's folly is not, is not that difficult to prove.

First, the irrefutable testimony of the Spirit in the book of Acts is that He Himself sent forth the apostles under the auspices of elders [!] (cf. Acts 13:2). He sent them to preach the gospel and then to organize believers into church institutes under the rule of officebearers/elders. That this was the rule for the apostle Paul is plain from the book of Acts (cf. 14:23).

That the apostle expected preachers who followed him to do likewise is clear from Titus 1:5, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee."

The apostle Paul simply would not have spoken words of approval to believers who *voluntarily* separated themselves from all and every church institute, contenting themselves with gathering in living rooms for Bible study, seeing no need to submit themselves to Christ-ordained officebearers. Paul, Peter, John, and others were not led to institute the church with her officebearers only to have them ignored.

Second, there is Hebrews 13:17. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: *for that is unprofitable for you!*" (admittedly, emphasis mine!—kk).

Can it be any clearer?

And note well, the apostle is not just talking about securing some stated preaching supply. The text speaks of those entrusted with the authority of oversight, and then submitting to their rule for the well-being of one's soul.

To refuse to seek out an assembly of believers where one can submit to such elders is to pretend to be wiser than Christ Himself. How can such a spirit be of Christ's Spirit?

Third, those who willingly do separate themselves from every church and seek membership in no church go contrary to Ephesians 4:1-3 and 11-13.

And striking is the judgment that Paul warns about in verse 14!

Verse 3 calls the saints to "... [endeavor] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It takes no *endeavoring* to keep the unity of the saints merely by claiming to be elect and of the church universal. Belonging to the church invisible is automatically true of every believer at the time of his re-birth. The need to *strive to keep* the unity of the Spirit is required when it comes to membership in the church *institute* (as in the congregation of Ephesus itself). That's where saints dwell together as sinners, and grace and exhortation are needed. It is in that body of Christ that a *striving* is required if unity of fellowship is to be kept. There the lowliness and meekness of which the apostle speaks are so important.

Verses 11-13 make plain that the office of pastor and teacher, like that of the apostleship, is nothing less than one of the great gifts of the ascended Lord for His church.

Mind you, men who are ordained to be pastors who teach are what the saints need—not simply every man studying the Bible on his own and contributing to some group. To separate oneself from the *gifts* of Christ is to separate oneself from the *Christ* of gifts!

And why has Christ ordained the office of gospel preachers for the sake of believers who are to congregate themselves under that office?

Verse 14: Lest they be as "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

And what is it that just happened to thousands worldwide due to their listening to this Harold Camping fellow, to this despiser of Christ's church institute, and their being persuaded to divest themselves of all officebearers?

Talk about people being wide open to deception and as children carried about, tossed to and fro! Could there be a more classic example?

We can only conclude that the apostle knew what he was talking about in Ephesians 4. It ought to be transparent that the need for maintaining church membership where preachers have bound themselves to the church of all ages and to preaching in harmony with those age-old doctrines remains just as vital in the twenty-first century as in the age of the apostles. One can only hope that Harold Camping's latest debacle and cruel deception gives those who think they can get along just fine without the church insti-

tute and escape all spiritual injury reason to pause and to reconsider their ways.

You seek a word concerning Harold Camping and his privately-arrived-at teachings? Let a man named Calvin, no speculative Bible expositor by a long shot, and no despiser of the church fathers who preceded him, put men like Camping in their place. Calvin comments on Ephesians 4:12:

[The apostle] could not exalt more highly the ministry of the Word, than by attributing to it this effect [as declared in this verse]. For what higher work can there be than to build up the church that it may reach its perfection? They therefore are insane [!], who neglecting this means hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit [!]; and the proud, who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture [!], and imagine they *do not need the ministry of the church* (emphasis mine—kk). (Commentary, Eph. 4:12.)

There is no question where Camping and his despising the church institute would have stood in the estimation of the Reformers, namely, in the camp of the fanatics and Anabaptists, whose teachings the Reformers, as represented by the Belgic Confession, declared “We detest.”

The Reformers one and all called believers to separate themselves from *a* church institute, namely, apostate Rome, not from *every* church institute. In fact the very name given them—the *Reform-*

ers—has everything to do with their high esteem for Christ’s church in her institutional form. They were called “reformers” exactly because, having left an apostate church, they took it upon themselves to re-form the church institute anew, only now along biblical and apostolic lines. They could no more think of dispensing with the church institute (and its sacraments and its care for souls) than they could with dispensing with the preaching of the gospel itself.

They took to heart Christ’s promise to His disciples concerning His New Testament church, “[U]pon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Christ’s reference here is not simply to the universal church invisible (elect believers scattered here and there), but to the church in her institutional form. The very next words from Christ’s mouth (v. 19) are, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” which keys have to do with discipline and were entrusted not just to the apostles, but also through them to the New Testament church in her institutional form (cf. Matt. 18:17 “... then tell it to the church”).

It is exactly by a confession of the true identity of Christ Jesus and the effectual power of His atonement and His victory over evil that the church is able to resist what ushers from the gates of hell. In those churches where these truths are preached and confessed, believers are called to take refuge. There believers are preserved—not in isolation from such congregations.

To deny that such churches still

exist, whose congregations believers are “bound to join,” is itself the work of the devil. One has allowed oneself to be deceived.

If any person has such a system of beliefs that he cannot find one confessionally bound church (i.e., not even one denomination tied by confessional adherence and integrity to the church of all ages) in this whole wide world to which he can join himself, then we are compelled to say to such a person flat out, “It is time, sir, for you to look into the mirror and to ask yourself, who is it that is out of step with God’s Word and Spirit? Every last congregation of professing believers because they do not agree in every particular with you? Or is it that fellow looking back at you in the mirror who is out of step with Christ’s truth still found in what remains of His faithful church?”

It is quite a thing for a man to imagine that he, with a handful of followers, is the last bastion of truth, and that when he dies, wisdom shall have perished from the earth.

That was, and evidently still is, Harold Camping’s grievous pride and blindness. His fall should itself be an enduring monument against such pride and individualism.

All this is not to deny that a church may become so apostate that believers are compelled to leave, means of grace or no means of grace for a time. But that is different than leaving and then willingly continuing to live apart from *the body of Christ* as manifested on earth for the rest of one’s days.

And do not imagine that it is improper to identify the church

institute committed to preaching the apostolic truth with the body of Christ here on earth. The apostle Paul does precisely that in I Corinthians 12:27: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” He is addressing not scattered believers, each living in his own splendid isolation, as if there is any virtue in that, but the *congregation* at Corinth—believers living exactly as a congregational entity. Then he calls “the body of Christ.” There believers, each one in his own unique capacity, are to serve the members of Christ’s body, as well as to derive benefit for themselves. No believer in Corinth would have been of service to Christ’s body by living apart from that congregation.

For a believer to think that he can long live apart from this manifestation of the body of Christ on earth is utter folly. It stands in direct violation of what the apostle warns about in verse 27: “That there be no schism in [separations in or from] the body.”

Nor do we deny that at the very end, when the Antichrist does appear, Christ’s church in her institutional form will disappear for a time, believers scattered, fleeing for their lives, hunted as sheep by wolves, hiding who knows where. But this is a scattering that will take place because *ungodly men* in power forbid the assembling of the faithful church, hunting down her members if they dare assemble contrary to their edicts.

This is a far cry from what is taking place around us today—*believers*, unthreatened by ungodly authorities, voluntarily disbanding Christ’s church institute, and this at the urging of their ‘spiritual’ leader.

This was and is the spirit behind Camping’s ‘revelation’ and urging. Such cannot be rebuked strongly enough.

We do well to remember the words of the ascended Christ, who, as He walked in the midst of the golden candlesticks, in the opening

chapters of Revelation, declared, “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the *churches*.” Note well how the ascended Christ addressed believers of the early New Testament age, namely, by speaking to and through “the churches”!

This He still does today.

Your “angel” (minister) is not bringing Christ’s true word? Then like those in Laodicea, hear Christ knocking, and go out—not to live in disbanded fashion, but rather to seek a church where the candle fed by the Spirit still burns and Christ still preaches.

Christ still does, does He not?

Even in these United States.

It is exactly with a man claiming “He no longer does!” that we take issue.

That is a charge of enormous implications—Camping-like.

One best be very sure of himself before uttering such an edict.

Or the words of Deuteronomy 18:22 must be applied. 

LETTERS

On the truth of predestination

The articles on Rob Bell bring out the importance of preaching double predestination. When the truth of election and reprobation are maintained, the church is kept from error. The church is to have a love of the truth. My first question has to do with a statement on page 463. “Is it offensive? It certainly is! It offends me daily!” What is the daily offense of which you speak?

My second question has to do with a statement later in the articles (p. 486) where you are writing about the witness of the PRC and the way the PRC has been

mistreated for its witness. You continue on about God’s judgment on the Reformed churches for their rejection of the truth. And then, “And I do not mean by this that the PRC is the only church that has the truth.” Are there yet other Reformed churches in the Grand Rapids area that have fought the battle for the truth of predestination and against the well-meant offer, that stand with the PRC today?

Neil Meyer
Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESPONSE:

Brother Meyer asks two questions about the editorials dealing with Rob Bell. I am happy for the opportunity to clarify.

The first has to do with the statement found in the following context having to do with the doctrines of sovereign, particular grace. There I wrote:

...Will the preachers listen? Let them turn and seek the old paths of sovereign, particular grace. Let them call the people to worship the true God who is holy, just, and truly sovereign. And let them honor the God who revealed not only that He is love, but that He is also the one who “hath...mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom 9:18).

Is this a hard doctrine? Of course. Is it offensive? It certainly is! It offends me daily!

The offense of which I write is the offense that the truth of God’s absolute sovereignty is to every sinner. The sinner imagines himself to be ruler of his own life and destiny. He can go on in much of his life pretending that he is god. But the doctrines of sovereign grace—especially that God has the right and the power to have mercy on whom He will—those doctrines make us sinners know that God is God, and we are but creature.

The Reformed believer, changed by grace, is not only reconciled to that truth, he glories in God’s sovereignty. God’s sovereignty alone is our sure hope of salvation. At the same time, Reformed believers must know that it is offensive to our sinful natures. That is the offense of which I wrote. It is a sin that I must confess and reject, daily.

The other question deals with the matter of where truth can be found. It concerns a statement from the following passage:

The same emphatically applies to the thousands who follow Rob Bell in Grandville, Michigan, particularly those from a Reformed background. They had true and faithful preachers living in their land. Some of these preachers wrote books that set forth the truth clearly. They published the *Standard Bearer* twenty-one times a year in order to set forth the truth over against the lie. Worship services have been held in this area for the last 85 years in which the solid, biblical (i.e., Reformed) truth has been faithfully expounded. Everyone who drives to Mars Hill Sunday morning will

have to pass such to get there. The radio informed them of the truth Sunday after Sunday.

Yes, I am talking about the Protestant Reformed Churches. And I do not mean by this that the PRC is the only church that has the truth. But I do know that, by God’s grace alone, these churches still proclaim that truth faithfully, boldly, and antithetically....

Specifically, Mr. Meyer asks: “Are there yet other Reformed churches in the Grand Rapids area that have fought the battle for the truth of predestination and against the well-meant offer, that stand with the PRC today?”

My answer is: None of which I am aware.

I feel compelled, however, to say a bit more simply because some may understand this to mean that there are therefore no other true churches in the Grand Rapids area; the Protestant Reformed Churches stand alone; all other churches are false. I do not believe that. That is a position that has been consistently repudiated by the PRC. Two examples will suffice.

About thirty years ago, Prof. H. C. Hoeksema wrote:

For my part, I do not believe that the Belgic Confession means that the true church is and can be represented in only one church denomination or communion of churches; nor does it mean that the false church is and can be represented in only one church denomination or communion of churches. Nor do I believe that the Belgic Confession precludes the idea that there may be various degrees of purity and various manifestations of the true church. Nor does the Belgic Confession compel one to believe that a given church, or communion of churches, in the midst of the world becomes completely and totally false all at once. Also in this respect there are degrees (*SB*, vol. 58, p. 173).

In the same year, (then) Rev. David Engelsma wrote on the Belgic Confession, Article 29:

The “problem” of the article of our Confession of Faith quoted above is its absolute distinction between the true church and the false church. It does not speak of purer and less pure churches, of manifestations of Jesus’ Body that vary in degree of faithfulness and doctrinal purity; but of “two Churches,” the true and the false. Applied to the present situation of many, sepa-

rated churches (denominations), the article might seem to teach that one particular institute is the only true church, while all the others are the false church. Such an interpretation of the article has been given by certain Reformed in the Netherlands; and, now and again, voices have been heard in the Protestant Reformed Churches expressing this position....

It is a mistake to identify one particular institute as the true church in distinction from all others which are then regarded as false (pp. 256, 258).

In his recent book *Bound to Join*, Prof. Engelsma answers various questions put to him about church membership in the twenty-first century. One such question was this: “Do the Protestant Reformed Churches regard those Reformed and Presbyterian churches that maintain the doctrines of a well-meant

offer of the gospel and of a common grace of God as false churches?” His response: “The answer is No. The Protestant Reformed Churches do not regard churches that hold the well-meant gospel offer and common grace as false churches” (p. 10).

In conclusion: All churches that fail to stand for the truth of sovereign grace, including double predestination, and fail to reject the errors of common grace and the well-meant offer are unfaithful to the clear teaching of the Bible. In that respect, such churches are to be rebuked for their errors and admonished to turn. But it does not immediately follow that they have lost all truth. Some hold aspects of the truth inconsistently. Yet the grave warning of Rob Bell to these churches is: Eventually, they will lose the truth of the gospel of Christ, and will hold to universal salvation. 

FEATURE ARTICLE

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAN

The 60th Anniversary of the “Declaration of Principles”:
A Commemoration* (cont.)

An Analysis of Its Contents (1)

General Observation

The Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches, adopted by the synod of 1951, is an eight-page document in the back of the Acts of Synod, 1951 and a twenty-page document (because of bigger print) in the back of the book, *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*.¹

¹ Declaration of Principles, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grand-

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Previous article in this series: November 1, 2011, p. 62.

* Second installment of the text of the address given at the annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) on September 22, 2011 at Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI.

It is a synodically adopted statement of some basic truths—“principles”—about the covenant of grace, as these basic truths were always maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) from their beginning in 1924. Since 1951, these basic truths are the official, declared, “settled and binding” position of the PRC.

The Declaration is not a thorough, systematic presentation of the covenant in all its aspects. Deliberately, synod named it a declaration of *principles*. As Dordt confessed five important truths of the gospel of grace in response to five denials of the gospel by Arminianism, so the Declaration affirms fundamental truths of the covenant in response to particular errors advanced on behalf of a conditional covenant.

The truths concerning the covenant that the
ville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 412-431.

Declaration affirms are fundamental. But there are important truths about the covenant that are not mentioned in the Declaration, for example the headship of Christ of the covenant. There is no definition of the covenant. There are also truths that are only suggested, not expressly stated, much less defended, for example, the truth that election governs the covenant. Nevertheless, the fundamental truths that the Declaration affirms imply the truths that are omitted, or only suggested.

In the preamble, the Declaration states that the PRC have “always” maintained these principles. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, proponents of a conditional covenant within the PRC argued that the PRC had no definite, official doctrine of the covenant. Therefore, they were permitted to introduce the doctrine of a conditional covenant. According to the letter, they were right. According to the spirit, however, they were wrong.

In the early days of the PRC, indeed up to the late 1940s, Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and all the other ministers taught the doctrine of the unconditional covenant. Hoeksema wrote his important book (in Dutch), *Believers and Their Seed*, announcing the unconditional covenant as the distinctive doctrine of the PRC and condemning the doctrine of a conditional covenant as Arminianism, *in the early 1920s*. As Hoeksema painstakingly demonstrated in the controversy over the covenant in the early 1950s, the condemnation by the PRC of common grace, especially the common (resistible) grace of the well-meant offer of salvation, is the condemnation of a conditional covenant. The doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches common, resistible grace in the sphere of the covenant.

The relation between the well-meant offer as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the first of its three points of common grace and the doctrine of a conditional covenant explains the otherwise mystifying opening line of the Declaration, which is a condemnation of the three points of common grace.

By the adoption of the Declaration in 1951, the letter caught up with the spirit. What had been *fact* in the PRC then became *law*. God’s grace is not common *in the sphere of the covenant, with regard to the physi-*

cal children of believers—common both to those who are saved and to those who perish.

A third general observation about the contents of the Declaration is that the Declaration is the application of the Reformed creeds to the great issues concerning the covenant that were contested in the PRC. The Declaration is the “expression” (such was the word used at the synod of 1951 to describe the relation of the Declaration to the creeds) of the Reformed creeds concerning those issues. To say it differently, the Declaration is the appeal to the Reformed creeds in support of the unconditional covenant, and in condemnation of a conditional covenant.

The Declaration is not, and was not intended to be, a fourth creed in the PRC alongside the Three Forms of Unity.

One of the main arguments against it by the foes of the Declaration in 1951, as ever afterwards, was that it is a fourth “form,” or confession. Closely related was the charge against the Declaration by Dr. Klaas Schilder, who understandably watched developments in the PRC with great interest. Schilder complained that the Declaration was “*Bovenschriftuurlijke binding: een nieuw gevaar*” [ET: “Extra-Scriptural Binding: A New Danger”]. This was the title of the series of articles Schilder wrote immediately after the adoption of the Declaration by the PRC.² Recently, Canadian Reformed theologian Jelle Faber renewed Schilder’s attack on the Declaration, referring to it as the “infamous Declaration.”³

Both the charge that the Declaration is a fourth creed and the charge that it represents the binding of Reformed people apart from Scripture are obviously false. The Declaration is almost entirely quotation of the Reformed creeds, including the Reformed baptism form. More than ninety per cent of its contents are quotation of the creeds.

To settle the controversy over the covenant, the PRC tested and decided the issues by the standard of the creeds.

This is proper.

² This series has been translated into English and published as part of the book *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism*, by Jelle Faber (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 55-167.

³ Faber, *ibid.*, 51.

This is necessary.
This is Reformed.

There is no quotation, much less explanation, of Scripture, other than the texts quoted by the creeds themselves. There is hardly any explanation of the *creeds*. There is almost no argumentation.

An illustration is in order. One of the issues in the great covenant controversy in the PRC in the late 1940s and early 1950s (as it is one of the issues in the contemporary controversy of Reformed orthodoxy with the heresy of the federal vision) was the question whether faith is a *condition* that the covenant child must perform, or a *gift* of God to the covenant child. On the basis of the Reformed creeds, the Declaration denies that faith is “a prerequisite or condition unto salvation” and affirms that faith is “a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ.” The Declaration adds: “This is plainly taught in the following parts of our confession.” It then quotes Question 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Article 22 of the Belgic Confession, and Articles 10 and 14 of the third and fourth heads of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt.

There is no explanation of these passages in the creeds. The creeds are clear, indeed explicit, on the issue. And the creeds are conclusive for a Reformed church. They are the end of debate. They are the end of controversy.

So evidently is the Declaration confessionally Reformed that even the opponents were hesitant to criticize its contents. Their criticism took this form: We agree with the contents in the main, but we judge the Declaration to be one-sided, imbalanced, and, above all, unnecessary. At the synod of 1951, which would adopt the Declaration over the objection of Classis West, that part of a divided committee of pre-advice that expressed Classis West’s opposition to the Declaration gave this advice to synod:

As Synod, we do not reject this Declaration of Principles as such; but rather reject the action which gave rise to it, and express that we agree with the essential thrust of it, which does not mean that we bind ourselves to its formulations.⁴

The decisive vote adopting the Declaration at the synod of 1951 (the Declaration was adopted by a majority of only one vote) was a minister from Classis West, who later left the PRC with the schismatics. He openly stated his agreement with the contents of the Declaration as expressing the teaching of the Reformed confessions.

... to be continued. 

⁴ Reported in *Concordia* 8, no. 10 (June 21, 1951), 5.

PR SPECIAL ED

PROF. HERMAN HANKO

Special Education: A Corporate Covenantal Responsibility

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This article, abbreviated somewhat for SB length, was written at the request of the Special Education Board.

A part of the rich and glorious inheritance of the Reformed faith is the doctrine of God’s covenant of grace.

The truth of God’s covenant of grace includes in it the promise of the Scriptures that God will be our God and the God of our children. We believe with all

our hearts that our children “as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God;...since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult” (Heidelberg Catechism, L. D. 27, Q&A 74).

We believe that the children whom God has given us are in fact regenerated and sanctified, and that they are possessors of the Holy Spirit. We teach them to pray when they can barely lisp a few words; we take them into the fellowship of the family when we have our family devotions; we send them off to school as those over whom God spreads His wings that they may learn God’s ways. We do not do all these things with such care because we hope that at some time in the future they might decide to fulfill the conditions of the covenant so as to become truly part of that covenant; we do this, rather, because we have received them from God’s hand when He delivered them to our homes as part of His elect bride and as those for whom Christ died on Calvary.

When God gives to covenant parents their children, He gives them in infinite variety. There are those who are able to learn early, and there are those who struggle to learn the alphabet and need constant help. And there are the majority of our children who lie somewhere between these extremes, closer to the one or the other.

Within our Protestant Reformed families there are children whom God has given to us in His grace who are unable to keep up with their peers in our schools, because they are cognitively or physically impaired and sometimes both. They are special gifts of God and are very precious, because they occupy a unique place in our families, our congregations, and our schools. They are special to God and they are special to us.

These children belong first of all, of course, to the families in which God has placed them. But they are also the children of the entire congregation in which the family worships and enjoys the communion of the

saints. And they are the treasure of the whole denomination in which the communion of the saints is most broadly enjoyed.

As the children of God’s covenant belong to the entire covenant community, this community has the responsibility to take all the covenant children into the life of the church. But all the covenant community also has the responsibility to teach all the children born within its family. Yes, *all the children*, without regard to any other considerations.

We are a covenant family in Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother. In that covenant family we need each other and we are under solemn obligation to help each other in the difficult path of our pilgrim’s sojourn. We need each other also in the education of our children—not only our own children; not only our grandchildren; but all the children of all the parents born within the covenant lines.

We establish wherever possible our own schools, because we believe that these children of the covenant must be educated to walk in the way of God’s covenant. When all the children of God’s covenant learn to walk, insofar as they are able, in the ways of God’s covenant, it is a special blessing to the church.

Sometimes we foolishly think that children with cognitive limitations cannot learn spiritual things; but if this idea is in us, we are guilty of underestimating the power of the Holy Spirit, who is able to apply the truth to all our children whom it is His good pleasure to save.

Twenty-eight years ago this past August the announcement was made of the establishment of a special society and board for the purpose of educating those who could not keep up with their peers in the regular classes. Since that time, the program has expanded and become increasingly important in our schools.

I want to tell you a bit how it works.

The entire program is carried out in our existing school buildings. I consider this to be of great impor-

But all the covenant community also has the responsibility to teach all the children born within its family. Yes, all the children, without regard to any other considerations.

tance. All the children, regardless of what part of the program they are in, are together with the other children for at least Bible, physical education, and recess. There may be the rare exception, of course: the child that is unable to participate in recess activities and in physical education, or the child that has behavior problems. But the point is that each child is with his or her peers as much as possible.

This has two profoundly good results. On the one hand, the cognitively and physically impaired child enjoys being a part of a group of fellow saints, to work with them and play with them, something that erases their sense of lonesomeness and mitigates their feelings of being different; and on the other hand (just as important) it gives the children in the regular classroom program training in kindness, sympathy, understanding of another's weaknesses, appreciation for one's own gifts from God, and special opportunities to be of assistance in helping others with activities they cannot do themselves. I am told by board members that, on the whole, our children respond eagerly to this need to help others and that, at times, each child who needs extra help has two or three other children who assume everyday responsibility for his or her care. I knew the other side of the coin when I was attending a Christian school, and it was not always very nice.

These benefits of having special education in our schools are of great importance for the education of our children. Our children are being taught to live as covenant people in the communion of saints. Part of that teaching is to learn to live with others in peace and unity, but part of that learning is also "to bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

The Society for Special Education, through its Board, supports two programs. The one program is named "Special Education," and it is set up to teach those children who are unable to master the material in almost every subject of the normal curriculum. Although each child is evaluated separately, the usual "cut-off" point for a child to enter the special program is an inability to learn with his or her classmates in more than three subjects in the curriculum. These children are taught separately by teachers who have been specially trained for this work, and whose success with the education of these children is phenomenal.

The education of these children is financed through the gifts of many, as only a small fraction is supported by tuition. For this current school year a mere 6% of the costs of Special Education is attributable to tuition, as opposed to our day schools, where tuition income is in the 75% range. The remainder of the cost for Special Education is brought up through gifts, drives, and other means of income.

In the Western Michigan area this part of the program is carried out in Heritage Protestant Reformed Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan. Several schools in the denomination have started or are starting their own special education program due to growing need. This includes Covenant Christian High (which is investigating the start of both a special education room and a resource room) and elementary schools in Loveland, Doon, Dyer, and Randolph. With the exception of the program in West Michigan, each local school board retains complete control over its own special education program. The board and staff of the Special Education Society offer their services and expertise to help other schools with this project and further support with financial gifts. Much of the texts and supplies that are used in this program are obtained from Elim Christian School in Illinois, a school that has a long and successful history of educating children with special needs.

The result is that these children, so important in the life of the church, are trained to function in society and in the communion of saints to the full extent of their abilities. They add to the spiritual life of the church in immeasurable ways.

The program is very expensive, for most of the work is done with these children on a one-to-one basis. And, while the parents are grateful to pay some of the cost, they cannot pay it all, especially when they have other children in the educational system.

The Special Education Board also supports resource rooms. This program is set up to help those students who have difficulty in one, two, or three subjects. There are students who, while able to master the curriculum in the regular classes, are deficient in certain areas. They have trouble learning to read; or they need help in math. They need help in conquering these subjects beyond what they receive in the classroom. To meet

these needs, many, if not most, of our schools have now added a “Resource Room” to the many classrooms in the school.

These resource rooms are also staffed by teachers who may share time with the regular classrooms or may teach full time in a resource room. But they also are trained and skilled in their own area of teaching and do a wonderful job of helping children with the additional instruction they need. I have been in these resource rooms, and I marvel at the means these teachers use to help children in reading, math, etc. And I have talked with parents whose children have made use of these resource rooms and to whom it seems almost as if miracles have been performed in them.

Each resource room is operated by the society and board of the school in which the room is set up. All decisions are made by the school board as to how they are to operate and who is to teach in them. The financing of these resource rooms is also the responsibility of the local school; that is, 80% of the financing. The Special Education Board provides 20% of the financing.

Members of the Board for Special Education periodically visit a resource room to encourage the work and to offer assistance where possible. And the board and staff in the Special Education program are always available for consultation, advice, and help. They eagerly share their expertise with those who ask for it.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers and

staff who are involved on a day-to-day basis with our covenant children in special education and resource rooms.

But what needs to be stressed more than anything else is the need for all our people to know of these programs, to realize their importance, and to contribute to them, whether to the resource rooms in their own schools or to the special education programs wherever they are set up as a part of the school. I know that the cost of educating our children is high. I know that families already sacrifice many worldly possessions for the sake of Protestant Reformed education. But I know too, and our people without exception ought to know, that the education of all the children is not a burden to bear, but a privilege God gives us. We cannot spend our money on anything of greater value in the kingdom than on the education of the children of the covenant, the ministry of the Word alone excepted. If we love God’s covenant, we love our schools. If we love our schools, we love the covenant children taught in them—*all the children*. We will learn to pray more fervently for our schools—societies, boards, teachers, and children, and we will learn that to support these educational enterprises carries with it untold blessings of our faithful God and an enrichment to the life of our churches by the addition of those children who have challenges, but are so precious to God, to their families, and to us all. 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. JAMES LANING

A Critique of “Reformational” Views on Revelation (1)

How God Reveals to Us His Will

Some of our young adults at college are being told that they need to follow the guidance of a source of divine revelation other than the Scriptures.

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The students are assigned to read books that seek to persuade the reader to believe that God’s will is not sufficiently made known in the Scriptures, and that therefore he must look elsewhere, if he is going to know more specifically what God’s will is.

We do, of course, hold to the Belgic Confession, which in the second article says that there are two means by which God makes Himself known to us:

1. The creation, preservation, and government of the universe

2. His Word

But does that mean that God's will is only partially revealed in the Scriptures, and that we must look to the creation to fill up the gap?

Neo-Calvinism and Reformational Philosophy

To help in understanding this subject, I would like to begin by discussing very briefly a few terms.

Many of the colleges today that refer to themselves as Reformed are teaching a system of thought that is commonly known as *Neo-Calvinism* (*Neo* meaning *new*). Neo-Calvinistic instructors claim that what they are teaching is a new and improved version of Calvinism, updated to help Christians today address modern problems. In reality, what they are teaching is a deviation from the Reformed faith, designed to get Christians to devote themselves to the carnal and vain pursuit of Christianizing the culture of this world. Students who come under this instruction become familiar with phrases such as *cultural mandate*, *sphere sovereignty*, *common grace*, and *redeeming creation*. Calvin College, Dordt College, Redeemer College, and Trinity Christian College are all examples of institutions in which Neo-Calvinistic views are promoted.

There is a benefit in making use of the terms *Neo-Calvinistic* and *Neo-Calvinism* to refer to these institutions and their teachings. Instead of calling these colleges *Reformed*, we could more accurately refer to them as *Neo-Calvinistic*.¹ This then would make it easier for us to contrast the teachings of *Neo-Calvinistic* colleges with those maintained by *Reformed* churches.

Another term that we should know is *Reformational*. Though the term sounds similar to the word *Reformed*, it is actually used to refer to a version of Neo-Calvinism that teaches people to look to the creation to discover the will of God. That God's will is made known to us in Scripture, they would

¹ It is true that they would want to be referred to as both Reformed and Neo-Calvinistic. But the truth is that one cannot really be both.

acknowledge. But far and away the majority of their time is spent stressing to students the importance of submitting to the will of God as it is supposedly made known to us by what they refer to as *the creation order*.

A denial of the sufficiency of Scripture

Reformational teachers are not genuinely Reformed teachers. The former are not satisfied with the revelation of God's will that is recorded for us in the Scriptures. They insist that something else is needed.

Gordon Spykman, who was a professor of religion and theology at Calvin College, wrote rather late in his life a dogmatics in which he summarized what he had been teaching for many years. The title itself makes known that Spykman intended to lead theology in a new direction. The work is entitled, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*. Turning to the chapter in which he sets forth more specifically what is new about his way of thinking, we see that he intends to lead people to hearken to a divine revelation other than that which we have in the Scriptures:

Scripture does not close the doors to other forms of revelation.

Taking Scripture seriously as Word of God leads us to recognize that there is more to the Word of God than Scripture alone.²

Another reformational philosopher, and one whose book is commonly assigned to students at Dordt College, is Albert Wolters. A professor at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, Wolters has written a book entitled: *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. In this work, he argues that we often must turn to the creation, rather than the Scriptures, to discover the will of God.

He quotes Colossians 1:9, which is one of a number of passages that speak of our need to grow more to know what the will of God is: "For this cause we also,

² Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 78.

since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Then, referring to this passage, he makes the following comment:

There is a spiritual discernment necessary if we are to know God’s will. There are many things about which the Scriptures are silent, but about which we must nevertheless seek to know the Lord’s will. Above and beyond the explicit guidance of Scripture we need “spiritual wisdom and understanding.”³

But where are we to get this wisdom? How do we hear wisdom’s voice? According to Wolters, we hear the voice of wisdom crying out to us from the creation itself.

He makes a reference to Proverbs 1, which speaks of God’s wisdom calling out to people and making known words of instruction and direction:

Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you (Prov. 1:20–23).

Wolters says this call of wisdom comes to us from the creation:

This call going out to all people is the appeal of creational normativity, God’s knocking at the door of our hearts and minds, urging us to open and respond to the ways of his law. To those who give heed Wisdom promises the riches of her knowledge; those who ignore her are fools and scoffers.⁴

The Scriptures supposedly are insufficient to teach us all that we need to know concerning the will of God. In addition to what Scripture teaches, we and our chil-

³ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 34.

⁴ Wolters, 30.

dren are being told to hear and follow what they call the “norms” made known to us in the creation.

The need for the Spirit, not another revelation

It is true that we need more than the Scriptures to understand the will of God. But that something more is not another revelation. There is nothing lacking in the Scriptures. The problem is that we of ourselves are unable to understand the Scriptures. What we need is the Spirit of Christ, who guides us to understand the words that He has inspired.

To understand the Bible, we need Christ to do for us what He did for His disciples shortly after His resurrection:

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

By nature we are not able to discern what the Scriptures are saying. The Spirit of Christ has inspired the Scriptures, so that what we have in Scripture is rightly referred to as His words. But man by nature is unable to understand what the Spirit says: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14).

Christ by His Spirit must work graciously in us, opening our understanding, so that we are able rightly to “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:7).

We do need the Spirit’s guidance, but there is nothing lacking in the Scriptures themselves. Christ has fully revealed to us the will of His Father, and we have this revelation infallibly recorded and preserved for us in Holy Scripture.

The Scriptures fully revealing to us God’s will

What we have in Scripture is not a partial revelation of God’s will. Rather, it is the full revelation that

teaches us all we need to know concerning the will of our Father in heaven.

Christ Himself assures us of this: “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). All that the Father has said to the Son, He has then made known to us, His disciples, in the Scriptures.

This, in fact, is our official Reformed position. In the seventh article of the Belgic Confession, we make this statement about the sufficiency of the Scriptures:

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since

it is forbidden to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.

We wholeheartedly confess that the Scriptures “fully contain the will of God.” We say that it is “perfect and complete in all respects,” and that it teaches us “the whole manner of worship which God requires of us.”

It is to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, that we turn for instruction concerning the will of God. A deviation on this fundamental point is clearly a radical one.

Yet what about the second article of the Belgic Confession, which speaks of God making Himself known in the creation, preservation, and government of the universe? What exactly does that mean?

Clearly, more needs to be said on this subject, and we will continue, Lord willing, next time. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (2)

The Prophets Hosea and Amos

As we saw last time, the prophet Jonah’s testimony to backslidden Israel occurred probably during the first part of the long reign of Jeroboam II. During the latter part, God spoke through Hosea and Amos.

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Previous article in this series: November 1, 2011, p. 67.

Assyria was the world-power most to be reckoned with at that time, but its kings were then so preoccupied with internal problems that they abandoned temporarily their policy of expansion. Israel was able therefore to enjoy a period of peace and prosperity unparalleled in the 200-year history of the ten tribes.

A peace and prosperity, it was, that led to further spiritual decline. Hosea and Amos were very likely making reference to that prosperity in passages such as Hosea 12:8 and Amos 6:4-6. “Ephraim said, Yet I am

become rich, I have found me out substance.” In spite of, or perhaps, rather, *because of* the luxury enjoyed by the people of Israel, this was a time of increasing apostasy. They rejected the message of the prophets that God continued to send. They denied that the *Lord* gave them their plenty (Hos. 2:8); they burned incense to Baalim (Hos. 2:13); they were guilty of “swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery” (Hos. 4:2); they oppressed the poor (Amos 4:1); “they knew not to do right” (Amos 3:10); they attributed their wealth to their own strength (Amos 6:13).

At the same time, they were apparently scrupulous in their observance of religious rituals. For the Lord declared, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols” (Amos 5:21-23). Insincere it all was, besides being unsanctioned, in that the form of worship was an invention of Jeroboam I.

The Lord continued to send prophets to this stiff-necked people. The message of God to Israel through the prophets was increasingly emphatic concerning Israel’s future. “Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land” was the word of Amos to the people of the ten tribes (7:17). Further, though the prophets continued to warn and admonish the people of Israel, they looked increasingly beyond the present—beyond, even, the captivity, which the prophets knew to be imminent.

What did lie in the future for God’s people? This: “I will *bring again* the captivity of my people Israel” (Amos 9:14). And: “They that dwell under his shadow shall *return*” (Hosea 14:7).

How the people of God, true Israel, needed to hear that! Were it not for those words of *hope*, all would

indeed seem to be lost. “The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth.... For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve” (Amos 9:8, 9). What could that mean but that the nation of Israel would be *obliterated*? But then, this: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this” (Amos 9:11, 12).

An astounding prophecy! But what did it *mean*?

On the surface, it would appear as if the prophet spoke of a literal return of the people of Israel to their land, and a likewise literal restoration of the house of David and expansion of the boundaries of the Davidic

kingdom. In light of subsequent history, however, it is clear that that could not have been the meaning of this prophecy of Amos. The northern kingdom was never reestablished in the land of Canaan. And hardly was the restoration under Zerubabel a revival of the glory days of Israel under David and Solomon. Something else, therefore, must have been in the view of the prophet here.

Appropriately, we look to the New Testament Scriptures for

insight into the Old. And we are not disappointed. For in this instance we find direct reference to this prophecy of Amos in the book of Acts. In Acts 15:13-17, James explains that the “building again of the tabernacle of David,” and the “building again of the ruins thereof,” is nothing less than the “Gentiles seeking after the Lord.” And James added, significantly, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (v. 18). In other words, out of the ruins of the house of David comes the glorious kingdom of David’s greater son—which was God’s purpose from the beginning!

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Yes, the Messianic kingdom! As hope faded for the backslidden northern kingdom under the godless rule of Jeroboam II, it was the Messianic kingdom that came into ever clearer focus in the prophecies of Hosea and Amos. Which was as it should be. No hope could there be for the people of Israel *in themselves*. Only judgment. Only sifting. Only ruin.

And yet, when all seems lost, when the tabernacle of David has fallen, when the house of David is just a stable in Bethlehem, then, then, says the prophecy of Amos, “I will raise up his ruins.” A reference, surely, to *Christ*. For only in *Him* will the boundaries of Israel, once confined to a small area just east of the Mediterranean Sea, be enlarged to encompass those of every nation, tribe, and tongue “which are called by name” (Amos 9:12). And only in *Him* can that kingdom be *everlasting* (9:15).

Did the prophets themselves understand their prophecies? In his own experience in the whale’s belly, did Jonah see the burial and resurrection of

Jesus? In their own prophecies of the downfall and restoration of Israel, did Hosea and Amos see the rising of a new, *spiritual* Israel out of the ruins of the old? No. At least not with any clarity. The apostle Peter explains that the prophets of the old dispensation were left to “search diligently” concerning the meaning of the Spirit when He “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (I Pet. 1:10-12). We see it. The *prophets* couldn’t. But one thing they did know, and one thing they could testify to the people of God in Israel: *God will be true to His promise*. The faithful will be led away into captivity in Assyria right along with apostate Israel. But all will not be lost. The “tabernacle of David” will fall. But God will raise it up. And the glory of the new will far surpass that of the old. Think Genesis 3:15. And Genesis 15:5. And Genesis 22:18. And II Samuel 7:16. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.

Next time: Cast off by their calf. 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Receiving David: The Gift of a Son who Taught Us How to Live and Love, by Faye Knol. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010. 173 pages. \$15.00. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8028-6543-4. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability, by Stephanie O. Hubach. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006. 234 pages. \$14.99. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-59638-051-6. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

I’ve read two books recently written by mothers of special needs children. Both mothers are Christians of Reformed and Presbyterian background. Both have in-

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

sights in the area of special needs individuals in the church, insights that will make us benefit from the books. Both books make the reader laugh at times and weep at others.

Yet the books are different—different circumstances, different “special needs,” and different purposes.

Receiving David educates the members of the church regarding the joys and sorrows of caring for special needs children. The reader will learn to empathize with fellow saints whom God has blessed with special needs children (or adults).

Same Lake, Different Boat does the same, but also addresses the matter of what the church as a body and an institute can do for such members. Pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers—such should read this book with a view to learning how better to minister to special needs individuals.

Receiving David is the story of the life of David Knol, born 14 weeks premature, and afflicted for the rest of his 22

years with physical and intellectual disabilities. The word “disabilities” certainly is not out of place: David was blind, prone to seizures, small of stature, and attended Lincoln School in Grand Rapids, a school devoted to special needs children. But the book speaks also of David’s physical and intellectual *abilities*: he could walk and talk; he enjoyed “high energy play” (typical boy!); and he confessed his faith in a Christian church that, although the book does not say explicitly, seems to have been in the Reformed tradition. Of these abilities, his mother writes: “David’s memory for people, events, and facts (including trivia) soared, amazing and baffling us” (43). “With his keen ear, David was great at doing imitations. Dogs were his specialty. It was hilarious to watch dogs respond by darting back and forth, looking for the source of the barking” (52).

The book is primarily biographical. The reader will learn of the challenges that not only David, but also his parents, faced as he grew up. The author, David’s mother, opens up her own home and life to the reader, for all to see.

The book is valuable for several reasons.

It demonstrates that the daily life of families with special needs members differs greatly from the daily life of others. The challenges that such parents face and the multitude of decisions they must make are set forth: “We were aware that many of our peers did not grasp the extra strength and effort it took for us to care for David” (22). “We’d all had to come to terms with the difficulties of taking David out in public...as he grew older, the stares, pointing, and questions became more common” (39). And, in David’s last months on earth (he died from kidney failure), the question: do we arrange for a kidney transplant? Put him in dialysis? Or see this as God’s way of delivering him from this life? “Friends and family began to protect us from people who would find it difficult to comprehend the extensive deliberations and agony involved in our decision” (86).

The book reminds us that, when such a child dies, the parents experience *grief*. Some who imagine that a special needs child is only a “burden” do not understand this point: “Some thought that after arranging our lives around David’s needs for twenty-two years, we would now have a sense of relief... But we had loved him. And now there is always someone—and a piece of our own life—missing” (150).

The book provides nuggets of wisdom, which families of such children do well to remember. “Harry [David’s

father]...resolved that David should be treated as a part of the family, not the center of it” (9). And: “Harry began a daily routine of praying for David to become happy” (21). God answered this prayer!

The book reminds those who do not have personal experience with special needs individuals that our responses to the burden God has given others are often unhelpful: “We often heard comments about others’ not being able to handle a child such as David. These cliches weren’t necessarily helpful and often fell flat” (21).

The book reminds us that parents or caregivers of special needs children need a break from time to time. Fellow saints—not just anyone, but those who truly care and make an effort at understanding the needs of the child—can help give that break: “Harry’s parents...learned to manage all aspects of David’s care” (34). Also, Knol’s friends formed a “Friends of David” team, from which team three families were designated every month as those who could be called on to watch David for a few hours (57).

The book has its value. But it also has its price. At \$15, I think it a bit steep, considering the content. Few will read the book more than once. If your church library includes books of this sort, encourage your librarian to buy it; or get it from your local library.

And read it, not to conclude what you would have done in a similar situation, or to criticize the decisions the parents made, but to learn to empathize with brothers and sisters in Christ who are in different circumstances.

Same Lake, Different Boat is a story, too—the story of Timmy Hubach, who has Down’s syndrome, and his family. But it is much more than a story. Timmy’s mother analyzes the place special needs people have in the church, puts the struggles of families with special needs children in proper, biblical perspective, and helps the church understand how, in a practical way, to include such members in their own congregation.

I’m not going to try to summarize this book at length. Suffice it to say that part one (the first five chapters) helps the reader come to a right perspective on the fact that God gives some mental and physical disabilities. These are “a *normal* part of life in an *abnormal* world” (27). It is not accurate to think of those with disabilities as being “in the same boat” with others who do not have disabilities; and yet they are on the “same lake,” being members of the same body of Christ. These children are to be received with

respect, in recognition of the fact that they are God's gifts to His church.

Chapter four, which is in part one, and all of part two, are meant to show the reader the many facets of the trial, the ways in which it takes its toll, and the spiritual temptations that beset the caregiver of special needs children. Those on whom God has placed this burden must not view themselves as victims, nor think their trial will soon be over, but rather take up their cross cheerfully every day, by putting their focus on God.

And part three is "about facilitation in the church." The church must avoid being like the innkeeper who had no room in the inn for Joseph and Mary. The church must actively include these special needs members in Christian

education, church life, worship, and other ways. This requires great wisdom on the church's part, and hard questions must be asked and answered. The book ends with an encouragement to churches to make the inclusion of special needs children a goal.

Mrs. Hubach writes well, and in an interesting manner. She not only tells a story; she teaches, and requires the individual reader as well as the entire congregation to practice the painful exercise of self-examination.

This book, too, belongs in church libraries that permit books of this sort in it; but pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and the like might also find their own personal copy helpful. 

CLASSIS EAST REPORT

MR. JON HUISKEN

November 2, 2011
Cornerstone PRC

Classis East met in special session on Wednesday, November 2, 2011 at the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. The purpose of this session was to examine Pastor-elect Jonathan Mahtani with a view to his ordination and installation as the pastor of the Cornerstone PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Revs. D. Kuiper, N. Langerak, and C. Spronk were present as the synodical deputies from Classis West.

Classis unanimously approved the examination of Pastor-elect Mahtani. It was with thanksgiving to God that the churches received another minister of the gospel

into the Protestant Reformed Churches. After a two-year vacancy, it was a particular joy for the Cornerstone PRC to witness this successful examination and to proceed that very evening to the ordination and installation of their new pastor, Jonathan Mahtani.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$2,535.73. Classis will meet next at its regularly scheduled meeting of Wednesday, January 11, 2012 at the Hudsonville PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Minister Activities

Rev. Ron Hanko, pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC, declined the call

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

extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

Prof. and Mrs. Herman Hanko left October 27 for a visit to Singapore and the saints of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church.

Plans called for Prof. Hanko to spend the time there preaching and speaking for our sister church. The Hankos planned to make a short visit to the Philippines on their way to Singapore. The Lord willing, they plan to return home on De-

ember 27. We pray God's blessing on them as they spend time in Singapore, and for our fellow saints there.

Mission Activities

We pass along our belated congratulations to the First Reformed Church of Balacan, the Philippines, which celebrated their 9th anniversary as a Reformed church on Sunday, October 30. The congregation is very thankful to God for His goodness in delivering them from error and bringing them to a saving knowledge of the blessed truths of the Bible and the Reformed faith. We add our prayer that God keep them faithful as they continue to walk the old paths (Jer. 6:16).

We can also add here that Prof. H. Hanko led the worship service in this congregation when he was in the Philippines on Sunday, October 30.

Evangelism Activities

October 31 was Reformation Day. We rejoice in thankfulness to God for His mercies and faithfulness to His church in preserving her in the truth and faith of the infallibly inspired Holy Scriptures. We are reminded of the work of His faithful servants, including Martin Luther, whose reformation work began with his nailing 95 theses to the door of the Wittenburg church 494 years ago, in 1517. To commemorate and celebrate that beginning of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, many of our congregations sponsored Reformation Day lectures.

On Friday, October 21, the Evan-

gelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a lecture at the Grandville High School, where Prof. Barry Gritters spoke on "The Prince of Darkness Grim: the Reformed Teaching on Satan."

On Friday, October 28, the Wingham Ontario PRC sponsored a lecture at their church entitled, "The Bible and Worship." Their pastor, Rev. Martin VanderWal, looked at the Reformation's restoration of proper worship in the church, including a critical look at present forms of worship in the light of God's Word, and encouragement to maintain the proper worship of God.

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of our sister church in Ballymena, NI, the Covenant PRC, spoke at a Reformation Day lecture on Friday evening, October 28, on the subject, "Christ Alone."

The Kalamazoo, MI PRC sponsored a Reformation lecture on October 28 at Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo. Prof. Ronald Cammenga spoke on the topic, "The Heart of the Reformation: Justification by Faith Alone." Prof. Cammenga asked his audience two very important questions. Does the heart of the Reformation beat in the church today? And does it beat in you?

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Doon, IA PRC extended an invitation to surrounding PR congregations, as well as their own, to join them in their annual Reformation Day Singspiration, after their evening worship service on October 30.

The young people of the Randolph, WI PRC met together on Sunday evening, October 30, to discuss the subject of the end of the world, and the prophecies of the end. Rev. Kenneth Koolé's editorial in the October 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer* was required reading for that discussion—a requirement with which we heartily agree.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adult Society of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together Sunday, October 23, after their evening service. The topic that Sunday was a discussion on a NPR (National Public Radio) program that aired recently, in which Dr. Al Mohler, a six-day creationist, debated Daniel Harlow, a Calvin College professor who denies the historicity of Adam and the fall.

Congregation Activities

The members of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI enjoyed a "Request Night Program" on October 23. There was singing by everyone, a variety of special numbers, and an offering taken for the 2012 Young People's Convention.

Prof. Russell Dykstra began a series of 5-6 lectures on the "Split of 1953" for the Senior Bible Fellowship of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on November 2.

The ladies of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD invited the ladies of nearby PR congregations to join them for the "Fall Ladies League" meeting on October 27 at Trinity Reformed Church in Sioux Falls. Rev. Allen Brummel, the pastor at

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Heritage, spoke on "The Transformational Power of Prayer." An offering was taken for the Dale Kooienga Memorial Fund, which has been set up to defray the medical expenses of both Nicole Kooienga and Leah Griess.

Pastor-elect Jonathan Mahtani was ordained and installed as the second pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN on Wednesday

evening, November 2. This very special public worship service took place following a special meeting of Classis East held that same day to examine Mr. Mahtani. Rev. Carl Haak had the pleasure and privilege of leading that worship service and officiating at the ordination and installation ceremony of his son-in-law. Rev. Haak preached from Isaiah 51:6, under the theme, "Planting the Heavens," looking at

three points: I—God's Promise to the Minister; II—God's Purpose for the Ministry; III—God's Pledge to the Congregation. We rejoice with Cornerstone that the Lord has blessed us with another pastor in our churches. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15).



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recordings

■ The recording of the RFPA Annual Meeting lecture by Prof. Engelsma concerning the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Principles is now available on CD and DVD for \$6 each. Order your copy of the recording today by emailing the RFPA at mail@rfpa.org.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Alvin and Sally Kooiker, David and Lori Kooiker, Seth and Mary Vis, Paul and Cheryl DeRoos, Dan and Sheila Blankespoor, and Jon and Rachel Mooy and their families in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother,

MRS. DENA BLANKESPOOR.

"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" (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. James Laning, President
Brian Gritters, Clerk of Records

Teacher needed

■ Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed churches to fill teaching positions for the fall of 2012. Due to the addition of the 9th grade to the High School program, teachers are needed in many areas. Applicants should be certified for Secondary Education in the areas of English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Foreign Language, or Physical Education. Those with interest in and qualifications for teaching Bible and Religion and Academic Support are also encouraged to apply. Applications can be obtained by contacting Rick Noorman (616-453-5048 or ricknoorman@gmail.com) or Tom J. Newhof (616-893-9677 or tjnewhof@preinnewhof.com).

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 11, 2012, at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 10, 2011.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour
December 2011

Date	Topic	Text
December 4	"Then Shall a Lame Man Leap"	Isaiah 35
December 11	"The Mirage Shall Become a Pool"	Isaiah 35
December 18	"A Highway Through the Desert"	Isaiah 35
December 25	"Great Joy Brought to You"	Luke 2:10,11