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# The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



Remembering P. Y. De Jong

- Paedocommunion
- Willem Teellinck
- Church Order Report
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"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.'" (Judges 7:20).

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# God Justifies the Gentiles Just as He Justified Abraham - By Faith

*“Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Galatians 3:6.*

Family trees are usually treasured things. If you have admirable people or characters of historical importance in your family heritage, you are more likely to be positive about your family history. The Jewish people of Paul’s day were no different. Each and every Jew could claim to have a wonderful family heritage stretching back thousands of years.

The father of the Jews was considered to be Abraham. Being a child of Abraham was a matter of family pride. The Jews claimed Abraham to be a righteous man because he kept God’s law. The Jews of Paul’s day identified righteousness with conformity to the Mosaic law. This was also what certain people in Galatia thought. Paul had preached the gospel of free grace in Jesus Christ, but Judaizers were perverting that gospel.

The idea that faith in Christ was not enough to be right before God was taking hold. The Judaizers insisted that the Gentile Christians follow the law and be circumcised, just like Abraham. Otherwise they could not be right before God. To be a good Christian you first need to be a good Jew. Paul sees this for what it is: it is a satanic attack upon the gospel.

Paul was deeply concerned for the salvation of the Galatian believers — they were turning away from faith, turning away from Christ, and

relying on themselves. This was why Paul gave the illustration of Abraham, the one who was so close to the hearts of the Jewish people. He does it to vindicate the proclamation of the true gospel and ultimately to bring the Galatian believers back to the truth.

## The Background of Abraham’s Justification

Paul begins by appealing to what happened with Abraham in Genesis 15. God came to Abraham in a vision to give him comfort. The Lord told Abraham not to be afraid, for He is Abraham’s shield and his very great reward. In this context, God established the covenant with Abraham. This is important for understanding Paul’s use of this passage. We see that in the covenant, God is everything to His people. God shows Abraham that everything comes from God. It is all God’s grace and not man’s work.

But Abraham still had questions. In chapter 12, God had promised to make Abraham into a great nation. But how is God going to fulfill that promise? Abraham was still childless at this point. In response, God showed him the starry heavens. He told Abraham that his offspring would be as innumerable as the stars. Then we find the text quoted by Paul: Abraham believed the LORD and He credited it to him as righteousness. Abraham literally said his “amen” to God’s promises.

He did not trust in what he had done or could do, but in what God had said and would do. The result is that God credited this to him for righteousness.

Paul chose this text very carefully. Take note that Abraham was declared righteous by God before the Mosaic law — that did not exist until 430 years later. Moreover, all of this took place before Abraham was even circumcised, that does not happen until Genesis 17. Abraham was justified without works of the law and without circumcision. He believed, and God credited his faith to him for righteousness.

In other words, God declared Abraham to be righteous by means of his faith. Therefore, Abraham was in a right relationship with God. Abraham enjoyed wonderful communion with the LORD in which his sins were forgiven. Abraham was justified before God, declared to be righteous, even though in and of himself he was, and continued to be, a sinner.

This was possible because Abraham did not look to himself or his works. He looked to God’s promises, specifically to God’s promise for seed. This seed would ultimately be for the salvation of Abraham and his descendants. Jesus Christ would be born of the line of Abraham. And so it was possible that Abraham’s sins could be forgiven and he could be considered righteous by faith in God’s promises.

If Abraham was justified, not by following the law, nor through circumcision, but by and through faith, why should it be any different to-

day? No amount of holy and righteous living is good enough to earn our justification. We are not going to be justified by visiting the elderly and the sick. We are not going to be justified by welcoming outsiders into our congregation. We are fooling ourselves if we think otherwise. We must therefore renounce our own so-called righteousness and place all our trust and faith in God's promises for salvation in Christ Jesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ kept God's law perfectly. He did what we could not do and so, through Him, we are justified before the Father. It all comes through faith. That is the way it was with Abraham and that is why Paul points to him. Paul wants to show that faith stands alone as the means of justification, there is no room for works of the law. That was true for Abraham, the covenant child of God, and that remains true for us as covenant children of God today.

### **The Identity of Abraham's Children**

The Jews said to Jesus, "We are the children of Abraham!" In a sense they were right. They were physically descended from Abraham. They made much of that, as if it were a matter of merit on their part.

Paul, however, concluded otherwise from his quote of Genesis 15. He claimed that those who have faith are the real children of Abraham. Those who trust in God's promises that He will be everything for us in Jesus Christ, our shield and reward; those are the ones who are the children of Abraham. That totally contradicted those who relied on observance of the law. They

were trusting in themselves and their own obedience rather than looking to the satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ through faith.

There is an implicit contrast, or antithesis, in our text. There is an opposition set up (which has been there from the beginning) between those who are of faith and those who are of works. Indeed, there is a difference between those who claim to be the children of Abraham (and are not), and those who really are the children of Abraham. Paul is trying emphatically to make the

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and righteous living  
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point: it is only by faith that you can be a child of Abraham.

This has covenantal significance. To be a child of Abraham means that you are in the line of the covenant. One's position in the covenant is determined by God's gracious reckoning by means of faith. Yes, in general one may have a place in the covenant by birth, but whether that place works to your justification is a matter of the means of faith. Faith is the means or the tool by which we appropriate God's covenant promises and thereby become children of Abraham.

This is what Paul was teaching the Galatian believers. But this was nothing new. Jesus Christ taught

the same thing. When the Jews claimed to have Abraham as their Father, our Savior replied, "If you were Abraham's children, then you would do the things Abraham did" (John 8:39). That of course includes looking to God's promises and trusting in the Lord 100% for salvation, rather than trusting in their own "righteous" works of the law. So Paul does not bring anything new, he is not teaching man's gospel, but only what he "received by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12).

Therefore, if we walk in faith, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as our satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness, then we too are children of Abraham. As Abraham was justified before God then, so are we today. Justification works the same way for us as it did for Abraham. Why? Because Abraham's God is also our God and because Abraham's Savior is also our Savior.

Justification is for us totally by faith alone. This is a lesson that we ought to have learned, not only from Scripture, but also from the struggles of the church in history. Think only of the Reformation and how central this doctrine of justification by faith alone was in that era. October 31<sup>st</sup> is the day we normally commemorate the Great Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During the Reformation, there was a huge struggle about justification by faith alone.

There was a struggle because the Roman Catholic Church rejected this Scriptural teaching. To be sure, Rome does not deny that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ. The question is: how is this

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righteousness appropriated or seized by believers? The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the righteousness of Christ is infused, or ‘poured into’, the believer. This happens at baptism. But in order to be really justified, they continue, the believer has to cooperate with this infused righteousness.

Rome says that justification is by faith – but not by faith *alone*. There also have to be works and the sacraments. In fact, the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church says it bluntly, “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith.” Baptism is what really causes justification. So while faith has a role in justification, it does not have the central place that it does with Paul in Galatians. That is part of the reason why the Reformation took place. The Roman Catholic Church was clearly no longer the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The separation between Rome and us remains necessary. The Roman Catholic Church has not changed its position over the last five hundred years. According to the Council of Trent, Reformed believers are accursed, destined for hell – because we deny the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on this point. That has not changed. The pope has not revoked it – indeed he cannot.

We believe that justification is by faith alone. But can it happen that we take this for granted? Could it happen that sometimes we think that our (pretended) righteousness really does earn us something for our justification before God? Or do we go in a slightly different direction, thinking that our place in the covenant assures us of our righteousness before God? In either

case, we are looking to something other than faith in God’s promises in Christ for our justification. Do not think that you have a sure ticket to heaven just because you belong to a Reformed church. If we do that, we are saying that Christ is not enough; He is not a complete Savior. We cannot become complacent and apathetic. It is by faith in Christ that God graciously reckons His righteousness to us, so that we may stand before Him without fear and trembling.

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### **The Blessing of All Who Have Faith**

Abraham’s seed was to be the means of blessing to all the peoples of the earth. This seed of course is the promised seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent, Jesus Christ. Already in the Old Testament, God indicated that His plan of salvation included the entire human race, not just those physically descended from Abraham. Already at the time of Abraham, God had Pentecost in view. The Gentiles were going to become children of Abraham by faith in the promises given to Abraham.

All nations were to be blessed. That is really something if we stop and think about it! What is the opposite of being blessed? Cursed. The good news was that all nations would not be cursed by God. In Abraham they would be blessed. Of course, this does not mean that every person of every nation would partake of this blessing. The Bible clearly teaches limited atonement. But it does mean that the blessing is not restricted to people from one particular nation. Through faith, all can have a part in this blessing. This blessing comes from God. In the seed of Abraham, that is, in Jesus Christ, people of every tribe, tongue, and nation are received into fellowship with God. They can have a right standing before Him, not standing accursed, but justified, declared to be righteous.

In a world of sin and darkness, there is good news on the horizon for Abraham, and this good news comes through Abraham’s seed. The promise with which God came to Abraham is similar in essence and content to the gospel that Paul proclaimed. This was the gospel that the Galatians were first taught and that they first believed. They had heard the apostolic proclamation that salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Abraham heard the same message in a different form, as a promise yet to be fulfilled. A promise of salvation for all who believe, Jew and Gentile.

The difference between Abraham and the Galatians was that the promise is even better news for the Galatians because they know it as a fulfilled reality. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world and died for those who are His own. For the

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Galatians to turn their backs on that now would be disastrous. The gospel of salvation full and free through faith in Christ would be lost. We would still be under the curse. So Paul wanted to show the Galatian believers: don't you see what you deserve as sinners? We deserved God's curse, but instead we receive a blessing graciously through the seed of Abraham. This blessing does not come to us through works of the law, but it comes by means of faith. Faith — the gift of God. All of it is from Him!

Thus Paul draws a second conclusion in our text: all who believe as Abraham did are blessed as he was. The blessing is that those who have faith are justified. They may have sweet covenantal fellowship with God. Paul goes on to write in verse 10 that those who rely on observing the law are under a curse, but those who are righteous by faith have life; they have the promise of the Spirit and they have it fully. They no longer stand condemned, but they stand before God rightly. They have a right relationship with God. Abraham had faith, he believed God and was blessed; and so we can expect that those who have faith today will also be blessed.

The implication is that this has nothing at all to do with works of the law. The Judaizers are dead wrong! Our keeping the requirements of God's law, whether those be precepts found in the Mosaic law or anywhere else in the Bible, has nothing to do with the root of our justification. Indeed, Paul is saying in Galatians, if it were up to us, who could be saved? Neither Jew nor Gentile. There would be no good news.

We must come as sinners to the gospel of God's free grace in Christ. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in Him alone for your salvation. Abraham believed the promise — and so should we, much more so now that we see the fulfillment of that promise in our Lord and Savior. When we do that, good works come into the picture, not as part of our justification, but as part of our sanctification. Indeed, it is always good to be reminded that good works are not the root but the fruit of our justification. When we keep that in mind, then we avoid the error of the Galatians.

On the scale of human history, it was not that long ago that most of our forefathers in Europe were rank pagans. But if we, by the grace of God, with His Spirit working in our hearts, follow the way of faith, then we may be assured that God justifies us just as He justified Abraham. We do indeed then have Abraham as our father. And that is the glorious gospel — we have been adopted, not only as sons of Abraham, but most importantly as sons of the Most High God — by faith in the eternal Son of God. He is our Father and we are His children who may stand before Him without fear, for we have been justified through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

**Rev. Wes Bredenhof** is a co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church in Smithers, British Columbia, Canada.

## Looking Out and About

- The Consistory of the Covenant United Reformed in Kalamazoo, Michigan has declared Mr. Talman Wagenmaker as a Candidate for the Ministry. Mr. Wagenmaker sustained his classical exam in Classis Michigan this past June. He has served the Covenant United Reformed Church as a Deacon and also as an Intern. The Consistory heartily recommends him to the churches.

- On June 28, 2005 Mr. Greg Lubbers was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments at the Covenant United Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan. Rev. Edward J. Knott conducted the service of the ordination, preaching on Romans 10:14b,15. Rev. Arthur Besteman charged the newly ordained pastor. Rev. Lubbers is a recent graduate of Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

- Rev. Fred Handlogten, a retired minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America, passed away on July 23, 2005. Rev. Handlogten had served churches in Allison, Iowa; Dutton, Michigan; Holland, Michigan; Randolph, Wisconsin, and Sanborn, Iowa. He was 97 years old at the time of his death.

- From July 20, 2005 until July 27, 2005, 1300 Cadets and their Counselors from all over America gathered just east of Des Moines, Iowa for the Cadet International Camporee. The Camporee is held every three years and will meet in Canada next.

*(continued on page 10)*

# We Confess

## *An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession*

### *Article 27: Of the Catholic Church*

Who needs a church when I have the Bible? Why waste my time with the Church when I have a personal relationship with Jesus? Studies have shown that only sixty per cent of self-proclaimed “born again” Christians attend church in a typical week. One of the reasons is that many have lost confidence in Christian churches. While forty-three of these “born agains” say they have a lot of confidence in Christian churches, thirty-seven per cent say they have “some;” thirteen per cent said they do not have much confidence in them; and four per cent said they have no confidence in these religious bodies.

The dramatic dogma of Christianity is not an individualistic drama, though. While Christ saves individual sinners, he does not save them in isolation, individualistically. The Scriptures teach that God the Father so loved the *world* (John 3:16) that He sent His Son “to save His *people* from *their* sins” (Matthew 1:21); and both the Father and Son poured out the Spirit “on *all* flesh” (Acts 2:17, 33) to apply the benefits of Christ to the Church.

#### **The Centrality of the Church**

We “waste” our time in church planting, corporate life, and weekly worship because one of the central tenets of the Christian faith is the centrality of the church in God’s redemptive plan. Christ came to build a Church (Matthew 16:18)

and that Church is “a pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

For us as Reformed Protestants, the centrality of the Church can be seen in the amount of discussion on the doctrine of the Church in the Belgic Confession. Whereas there is only one article on what many Reformed Christians think is our central tenet of faith, the doctrine of election (art. 16), and only one on what many Evangelical Christians think is the most important topic, the doctrines related to eschatology (art. 37), nine of the thirty-seven articles in our Confession are on what we believe about the Church of Christ (arts. 27-36).

In the time in which the Belgic Confession was written there were those who denied the “organized religion” of the established church and its ministry, as well as those who limited the Church to its Roman expression. So too, in our day, the Church is under attack. Even worse, it is not very important to many so-called Christians.

And so the dramatic portrayal of our redemption continues in the Belgic Confession of Faith as we confess where our redemption is found. Our drama turns, then, from *theology proper*, *anthropology*, *Christology*, and *soteriology* to *ecclesiology*, the doctrine of the Church.

#### **The Attributes of the Church**

Article 27 opens by saying, “We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” Here our Confession, as it does so often, reflects the teaching of the great Christian creeds. In Article 27 we read an exposition of what the Nicene Creed means when it confess that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”

Underlying all the issues between Rome and the Reformation on authority in the Church and man’s salvation was the issue of whether the Protestant churches were truly catholic and in line with the ancient churches and the Scriptures. Or were they schismatics, like the Donatists of old and the Anabaptists of the Reformation period? Our Confession includes a summary of what many of the Reformers, such as John Calvin (1509-64), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), and John Jewel (1522-71), said to Rome about the Reformers being the continuation of the true, catholic Church.

#### *One*

When the Creed and Confession say that we believe “one” church, they are saying what Scripture says. In Paul’s “epistle of the Church,” Ephesians, he begins what may be a baptismal creed, saying, “There is one body” (Ephesians 4:4). Earlier he explained that the Gospel of Christ forever abolished the wall between Jews and Gentiles so that there was not a church of

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the Jews and a church of the Gentiles, but one church (Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:6). The Gentiles had been brought near (2:13) and made fellow citizens and members of the household of God (2:19, 3:6), and both Jews and Gentiles had been made one new man (2:15), were both given access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father (2:18), and are now being built into a holy temple in Christ (2:21-22).

### *Holy*

The “holy” Church of the Creed is explained by the Confession as meaning that it is “a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” Paul says in Ephesians, this is both a present reality (2:21) and a future expectation (5:26-27). Whether we have in mind the present reality or future expectation, this confession is a confession of *faith*.

We believe it will be true one day, but even now we confess that the sin-laden, divided, messy institution and organism we call the Church has been made holy in Christ. Despite our sins, God’s grace abounds beyond them (Romans 5:20). We can say with Scripture that the Church is a holy people (e.g., Exodus 19:6; 1 Corinthians 1:2) because the Church is the covenant people of God. So while we do know that not all Israel is Israel (Romans 9:6) from the point of view of election, when we speak of the Church as *Christ’s Church*, we speak of it as the holy bride of Christ (Ephesians 5; Revelation 21).

### *Catholic*

The Christian Church is located

among all people, places, and times, as Thomas Aquinas said. It existed before the church in Rome came into being. The Confession says, “...this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.” The Heidelberg Catechism expresses this very simply, saying, “...out of the whole human race” (Q&A 54).

The Church is universal in a geographical sense, reflecting such texts as James 1:1, where the Church is described as the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad. 1 Peter 1:1 describes the elect of God as members of *Diaspora*, the geographic dispersion of the people of God mentioned in the Old Testament prophets.

The Church is also catholic in an ethnic sense. The Abrahamic promise was that in Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). God so loved the *world*, not merely Israel (John 3:16). *All* who labor and who are heavy laden and come to Christ receive His rest (Matthew 11:27). God has made the Gentiles clean (Acts 10:27-28). Christ has purchased a multitude of peoples which no man can number from every tribe, tongue, language, and nation (Revelation 7:9, 5:9). The hour has come in which true wor-

shippers will not worship on Mount Gerazim or Zion, but in Spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

The church is also catholic in a chronological sense: “This Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be.” Even more succinct are the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, which says the Church exists “...from the beginning to the end of the world” (Q&A 54).

What this means, in our contemporary language, is that the Church did not begin at Pentecost. Our Dispensational brethren have been teaching this to American Christians for well over a century, which has led to the belief that there are two churches, Israel and the Church. Yet the Confession offers a brilliant “proof” for the Church existing from the time of Adam. Since Jesus Christ is eternal, he is an *eternal King*, which means He must have always had a people to rule over. All those He was given by the Father in the eternal counsel of redemption (e.g., Ephesians 1:4 cf. Psalm 110) He has ruled over as Head of the Church throughout history.

This was a common theme in Reformed thought. We see it also in the words of John Knox, who like de Brès was in Geneva with John

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***Even now, by faith, we confess that the sin-laden, divided, messy institution and organism we call the Church has been made holy in Christ.***

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Calvin. In the Scotch Confession of Faith (*Confessio Fidei Scoticana*) he wrote,

As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God ... This Kirk is catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with God the Father, and with his Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit (art. 16).

The purpose of these statements, along with being biblical, was to counter the Roman Catholic apologists who were arguing that because of the recent rise of the Protestant Churches, they could not be true churches. The Reformers, by pointing to the multiplex meaning of “catholic,” were giving their counter-argument that the Church began even before Rome came to be the “mother” of the Western Church. And so the implication was clear, while the Reformers left the *Roman Catholic Church*, they were reunited

themselves with the *true, catholic Church*, which Rome had left.

#### *Apostolic*

The apostolicity of the Church was a contentious issue between Rome and the Reformers during the Reformation. Whereas Rome pointed to the apostolic succession of the bishop of Rome, the Reformers pointed to true apostolicity being found in adherence to and teaching of apostolic doctrine. And so men like Vermigli said things such as,

We do not propose any novelty, but have rather returned to the fountainhead of pure and apostolic teaching. We value and maintain continuity, communion, and fellowship with all the holy Fathers and bishops who were truly orthodox.

The Reformers were on solid biblical ground in claiming this as the meaning of “apostolic.” For example, the earliest New Covenant Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42) and Paul taught that the Church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20 cf. 4:11). The glorious vision of the New Jerusalem, described as having twelve foundations “and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:14).

#### **The Preservation of the Church**

Our Confession taught that the Protestant churches were the true continuation of the catholic, Christian Church. Yet one of the popular claims Rome used against the Reformers to “prove” that they were the true Church was to point to numerical superiority. How could these new, numerically small churches and regions of churches be the true Church when there are so many who follow Rome?

The Reformers, who said “...greater numbers in themselves do not constitute a true mark of the Church,” turned to the theme of the remnant church in Scripture for polemic as well as pastoral reasons. One such account is the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in the days of Ahab. As the Confession says,

And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though it sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing; as during the perilous reign of Ahab the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Outward success was no more an outward mark of the truthfulness of the church in Elijah’s dark days than it was for the Reformers or even us today. This, the account of 1 Kings 19 makes clear, as a remnant of a mere 7000 out of an entire nation was

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***The apostolicity of the Church was a contentious issue between Rome and the Reformers during the Reformation.***

## *Study/Application Questions for Article 27*

1. Why is the Church so important in God's plan of salvation?
2. Is the Church relevant anymore? Why or why not?
3. Can the Church be destroyed? (Matthew 16:18)
4. Is the Church always "successful" in the eyes of the world (1 Kings 19)? What are we to think about numerical success from a biblical point of view?

reserved for the Lord.

Despite the rage of the nations and the seeming calamity of the world, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved" (Psalm 46:5). Despite the onslaught of the armies from the gates of hell itself, Christ will establish and protect His church (Matthew 16:18) as He always has. When the exploits of the ungodly line of Cain were displayed in impressive array, the Sethites "began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26). When the world was as wicked as it ever has been and the impending judgment of the Flood was on the horizon, God saved a mere eight souls (1 Peter 3:20). Although the church seemed small and "reduced to nothing," becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah, the LORD reserved a remnant (Isaiah 1:9). And the same is true in this age. Although many of the Reformers like Calvin shied away from commenting on the book of Revelation, they believed it spoke of them. When the Devil could not kill Christ, he turned to his Church. Yet, God nourishes her in the wilderness as a pilgrim church (Revelation 12:6).

### **Our Response to Rome**

So how do we live these words, especially in a day in which the Pope is so likeable and seemingly ecumenical and in which many Roman Catholics do not see us as false Christians and churches? While we do believe Rome is the false church and the Papacy the antichrist, the words of Peter Martyr Vermigli should become ours,

...we will not cease to love them in a Christian way because we desire a better life for them. We continually hope and pray that they may be converted to the Gospel of God's Son, and eventually correct and reform what they have ruined and corrupted in the Church.

**Rev. Daniel R. Hyde** is the pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.

## **Looking Out and About**

*(continued from page 7)*

- The annual Reformed Youth Services convention was held July 25-29, 2005 on the campus of Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. The speakers included Rev. Phil Grotenhuis and Mr. Rip Pratt. A number of workshops were also offered. Four hundred eighty-six young people were registered. The convention next year will be held on the campus of Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. More information about the convention will be in the next issue of *The Outlook*.

- On August 12, 2005 the newly constructed auditorium of the Grace United Reformed Church of Alto, Michigan was dedicated. The auditorium with a present seating capacity of two hundred seventy has room for additional pews. The new addition also includes a large study, nursery, cadet room, as well as classrooms and restrooms. The area formerly used for worship services will now serve as a fellowship room.

- On August 18, 2005, the congregation of Grace Church in Waupun, Wisconsin held a special farewell gathering for their pastor, Rev. Peter Kloosterman, and his family. Rev. Kloosterman has accepted the call to serve the Reformed Church of Masterton, one of the Reformed churches in New Zealand.

- Mr. Talman Wagenmaker, a recent graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary declined the call he had received from the Independent Reformed church in Momence, Illinois. The congregation of Momence re-

*(continued on page 18)*

## The Prince of Darkness Grim: Luther's Battle Against the Devil

*"Satan would gladly kill me if he could. Every moment he is pressing me, is treading on my heels. Yet what he wishes will not be done, but what God wills." (Martin Luther)*

I Peter 5:8 gives a description of Satan that is horrifying and vivid. It is too easy to read over Peter's words without actually understanding the implications they have for us. When we hear graphic stories of the devil's assaults they are often reduced to medieval or superstitious myths.

However, for Martin Luther, the devil was as real as Christ was. His conception of Satan was so intense, that when we notice some of his statements concerning the devil, we might think of Luther as a reformer who was steeped in superstition. Before we write Luther off for his flaws, we should be aware of the historical context at the dawn of the Reformation as well as Luther's own view of his dreadful enemy. By doing so, we find that his struggle with the devil becomes essential for understanding the reformer, the reformation, and can even help us in our encounters with Satan.

### Historical Perspective

To be sure, there *was* much superstition in Western Europe during the period shortly before the Reformation. We must realize, however, that some superstition was merely an overreaction to the widespread anguish and misery.

The average person was surrounded by death. Scholars estimate that the Black Plague (Black

Death) eliminated nearly thirty percent of the population in the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Famine was common, as were other natural disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, and locust swarms.

Witch, demon, gnome, mermaid, and hobgoblin myths were familiar to people of all ages and classes. Widespread were reports that the devil entered into an animal or even a person. People thought devils were everywhere: in houses, in fields, on the streets, in the water, in forests, and in fires. Recall also the words to Luther's *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*: "And though this world with devils filled..."

Sadly, the church did nothing to soothe troubled consciences. Instead, it actually added to the darkness and misery by printing many woodcuts depicting the devil attempting to drag a corpse into hell. More than that, a church booklet entitled "On the Art of Dying," contained illustrations that portrayed a dying man surrounded by devils who tempted him to commit the unpardonable sin of giving up hope in God's mercy.

The church also taught that Christ was a judge who could be appeased by the invocation of saints along with good works. The crucifix was a tool to resist the devil. Satan would steal a man's soul if he forsook the mass. From the beginning

of his life to its end, the only secure course a person had was to lay hold of every help the church had to offer: sacraments, pilgrimages, indulgences, and the intercession of saints.

The religious atmosphere was as dark as the plague which took the lives of so many. There was very little hope found within the cathedrals and monasteries of the day. The Roman Church was the only place many could turn during such tumultuous times. Ironically, all they found there was more darkness.

### Luther's Influences and Views

Martin Luther lived in the midst of this darkness and death during the late Middle Ages and was exposed to the teachings, superstitions, and fears of the day. Martin's father worked in dark mineshafts, which only added to his constant exposure to devilish teaching, both true and false. His mother often accused devils of stealing food from the kitchen. Clearly we can see that during his childhood the devil was not simply an abstract idea for Martin. Never during his life did Luther think that the devil and his hellish tactics were simply superstitious fables. The thought that Satan was a genuine enemy was firmly fixed in the reformer's mind, even to his deathbed.

Satan was dreadfully real to Luther. The devil was the demonic hater of Christ and His followers, while Jesus was the Christian's divine and mighty Savior. Rather than add to the superstitions of the day, Luther pointed out how real and vicious Satan actually was. He

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knew full well that Satan was an existent being, an ever-present and powerful threat to the followers of Christ. It was no joke for Luther that the devil prowled around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour—especially since the wicked one always tries to torment Christians into despair and doubt.

Luther did at times attribute too much mischief to the devil. For example, when preaching about Job's tribulation, he said, "When mishaps occur, when one falls into a fire, another into the water, these clearly are blows and strokes of the devil who is constantly aiming and pitching at us, hoping to inflict all manner of hurt upon us ... We Christians ... know that it [misfortune] is the work of the devil who possesses such an arsenal of halberds and missiles, of spears and swords to hurl, thrust and mount against us, if God allows him ... it is the devil who harms us in body, possessions and honor..."

Luther did understand and preach that God is completely sovereign over the devil, limiting his activity and disturbances. He preached that we can let the prince of this world, the devil, bare his teeth, growl, and threaten because he can do no more than a vicious dog on a chain. It is comforting for the Christian to know that the devil is simply an evil rogue who is a pitiful nothing compared to Christ and His gospel.

### **Personal Combat**

"The devil plagues me at times, too, creating such a tempest and fire over a forgivable sin that I find I do not know what to do. Those are his tactics with sin ... He is a virtuoso

and a champion when it comes to sin and death, reproaching a person in a very masterful manner." Frequently Luther spoke of his bouts with the devil, vividly describing the evil wretch as a demon who physically, mentally, and spiritually assailed him. The reformer said that Satan would even kill him if God would allow it.

Luther stated that the prince of darkness often tormented him during the night, waking him and plaguing him with wicked thoughts and accusations. When the devil besieged him in the house at night he rebuked the rogue: "'I know that God has placed me into this house to be lord here. Now if you have a call that is stronger than mine and are lord here, then stay where you are. But I well know that you are not lord here and that you belong in a different place—down in hell.' And so I fell asleep again and let him be angry, for I well knew that he could do nothing to me."

Martin Luther rightly knew why Satan was after him—because he believed, preached, and taught the gospel. Wisely, he understood Satan's chief work of trying to do away with the gospel. Where the gospel is, said the reformer, the devil is as well, seeking to take away the Word. Satan hates the gospel preached and he hates it more when a person believes the good news. Luther vividly ex-

plained this fact: "When the devil harasses us, then we know ourselves to be in good shape!"

From the outset of his work as a reformer, Luther knew well that Satan would assault him aggressively because the devil did not want the gospel to go forth. It seems as if Luther preached the gospel more boldly *because* the devil attacked and accused him. As Satan's attacks against Luther increased and intensified, so did the reformer's preaching of the gospel. As we weigh the reality of Satan's existence and his hatred for the gospel, we must take seriously Luther's claims of the devil's violent attacks.

### **Dialogue With the Devil**

The primary manner in which Luther responded to the devil's arrows of accusation was with the Word. Since the Word proclaims the forgiveness of sins through Christ, Satan detests the Word and seeks to trouble the conscience of believers by doubt and unbelief. Luther said that we must cling to Christ's Word and face Satan's hatred and accusations by reminding him that the Word proclaims the forgiveness of sins.

Luther explained: "You should tell the devil, 'Just by telling me that I am a miserable, great sinner you are placing a sword and weapon into my hand with which I can decisively overcome you; yea, with your own weapon I can kill and

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***Where the gospel is, said the reformer, the devil is as well, seeking to take away the Word.***

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floor you. For if you can tell me that I am a poor sinner, I on the other hand, can tell you that Christ died for sinners, and is their Intercessor ... You remind me of the boundless, great faithfulness and benefaction of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... to Him I direct you. You may accuse and condemn Him. Let me rest in peace; for on His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins..."

### Preaching and Satan

"For though ... a Christian be tempted by the devil, he can easily oppose him and say, 'Devil, are you listening? Do you know that a Child has been born? Yes, indeed, do you know that He was born for us, that is, for me?' That's when the devil has to back off." Luther preached words like these many times. Very often in a sermon, Luther would remind his hearers how inexorably Satan torments Christians. Since the devil never takes a vacation, his accusations and torments will constantly assail Christ's followers. Satan will frequently come to you, Luther said, and his torments will remind you how wretched you are, how little you pray, how often you transgress God's law, and how you need to obey God more to be in His favor. After Luther reminded his congregation of Satan's devious work, he would always preach to them of One who is greater than the devil and his threats.

Luther relentlessly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to his congregation. We need to hear this gospel over and over, he would explain, because we are so dull and dimwitted that we forget it or simply cannot believe it. To add to our lack of faith, Satan is ever shooting his poisonous arrows at us, trying to

tear us away from the Word by accusing us of great sin and making us afraid of judgment and death. "If the devil approaches us and says, 'Look here, see how great your sin is; see too, how bitter, how terrible is the death you must suffer,'" we can answer: "Devil, don't you know the power of my Lord Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection? In Him there is eternal righteousness and eternal life; His resurrection from the dead is mightier than my sin, death, and hell' ... this is all so very true that the devil cannot deny it."

### One Little Word: Conclusion

The Lutheran version of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" displays the reformer's confidence in the power of the gospel over Satan:

*This world's prince may still  
Scowl fierce as he will,  
He can harm us none,  
He's judged; the deed is done;  
One little Word can fell him.*

That "little Word" is the name of Christ, the beautiful message of the preached gospel. It is "little" because it is seemingly insignificant compared to the so-called power and glory of worldly splendor. But the devil knows that the power God is the preaching of a Man bleeding and dying on the cross. This Word alone can cause Satan to flee in terror; this Word alone is what we need to fight the arrows of the great deceiver. The Word was Luther's weapon, buckler, and defense against Satan's powerful blows.

Luther was not some superstitious son of the Middle Ages; he was a reformer who was extremely

aware of the devil's might, his own weakness, and the power of the gospel. Once we understand Luther's place in the history of the church as a leader in the reformation, we can see that Satan no doubt aggressively attempted to prevent Luther from preaching the gospel.

And Luther was right: Satan is powerfully real and present. We too must realize that Satan is no mythological figure, and that his blows are powerful and lethal. With Luther, let us remember that we have a Savior who has crushed the Serpent's head and is stronger than death, sin, hell, and even that damned devil. May we, too, fight Satan's real and deadly assaults with the weapon of the Word, the gospel of Jesus Christ!

**Mr. Shane Lems** is a member of the Trinity United Reformed Church of Caledonia, Michigan. He is attending Westminster Seminary in California.

## Willem Teellinck

The purpose of the Nadere Reformation was to get a true Reformation, not only in theology but also in life. One had to practice what was preached and that had to be visible in one's daily life. All kinds of programs to achieve this goal were attempted. Willem Teellinck gave an example of this way of thinking in "Noodwendigh Vertoog" (Needful Representation). In these writings, he addressed the following situations: immorality, desecration of the Sabbath, drunkenness, going to church out of habit, no discussion among church members about the proclaimed Word, bad taste in clothing and entertainment.

Willem Teellinck was born in 1579 to a magistrate family in Zierikzee, a town in the province of Zeeland, Netherlands. At the turn of the seventeenth century, he began to study law at St. Andrews in Scotland. Later he studied in Pontiers, France where he earned his doctorate of law in 1603.

Two Puritans had a profound influence on Teellinck. The first was William Ames (1576-1633), who later became a professor of theology at Franeker University (1622-1633). William Ames was a very popular theologian and teacher. He attracted Protestant students from all over Europe. The other was William Perkins (1558-1602), a Fellow at Christ's College in Cambridge (1584-1594). His writing, "*The Condition of the Christian in This Life*," was translated into the Dutch language. In addition to studying with these men, Teellinck spent nine months in England in

1604. The influence of Puritan life and his contact with Puritan-Pietist circles changed Teellinck's life. Through them, he learned of the sanctification of life in all of its aspects fed by a deep personal religious life.

This became his ideal and goal for life. He tried to apply this worldview to his family life with his English wife, Martha Greendon, and also in his parish work. After studying theology at Leyden, he served as minister to parishes in Burgh-Hampstead (1606-1613) and Middleburg (1613-1629), both in Zeeland. Having kept intense contact with England through family ties and overseas travel, Teellinck also conducted services at the English parish, also named Middelburg. He passed away in 1629.

The time in which Teellinck lived, many co-religionists of German and French origin became ministers in the Netherlands. In some areas of the Netherlands, the Dutch were very French oriented, attracting French ministers to the area. In other areas, particularly in the German frontier region, there were many German speaking Dutchmen, attracting German preachers. Add to this mix, all those who fled to the Netherlands to find shelter from the persecution they were facing in their own countries. Jews, Polish, and French Huguenots were all attracted to the safe haven of Holland. Throughout the country the Word of God was preached in French, German, and Dutch. Worshipers would attend the church

where their language was being preached.

Willem Teellinck's first book was published in 1608, the year regarded by many as the birth date of the Nadere Reformation. Because of this, Teellinck is often considered to be the father of the movement. Although Teellinck's way of life made a deep impression upon his parishioners, the influence of his writings was much more important. In all, he wrote 127 works of which over sixty were published. Many of Teellinck's books are still available in the Dutch language. In the series, *Classics of Reformed Spirituality*, one can read "The Path of True Godliness" by Willem Teellinck translated by Dr. Annemie Godbehere.

**Mr. Nicolaas Van Dam** is a member of the United Reformed Church in Escondido, California

## Press Release of the Church Order Committees of the CanRC and the URC

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order held August 8-10, 2005 at the First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Rev. Raymond Sikkema of the URCNA was unable to attend due to health reasons.

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Acts 15: 1-5, and prayer. The minutes of the March 15-17, 2005 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

Correspondence from two United Reformed Churches interacting with the committee's reports to the respective synods and press releases was acknowledged. Feedback from the churches is much appreciated. These comments will be taken into consideration when the committee deals with and reviews the relevant articles.

In a review of the articles thus far adopted, some articles were modified and improved for grammar, punctuation and style.

### Authority in the Church

The matter of authority and governing as it relates to the broader assemblies was again extensively discussed. This resulted in a change to Foundational Principle 6 "The Lord gave no permanent universal, national, or regional offices to His church by which the churches are to be governed. Rather, the offices of minister, elder, and deacon are local in authority and function. Therefore, the decisions of the broader assemblies are settled and binding among the churches only when they agree with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, and a commonly adopted church order." The Scriptural references are: Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5

In connection with this, the last sentence in Foundational Principle 10 was changed to read: "The decisions of such assemblies are settled and binding among the churches unless they are contrary to Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the commonly adopted church order."

To reflect this principle in the church order, a paragraph was added to the article dealing with Ecclesiastical Assemblies as follows: "All decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be received with respect and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions, or the church order."

An article dealing with equality

among office-bearers was finalized to say that among the office-bearers equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their respective offices and in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of classis. A similar article was adopted stating that no church shall in any way lord it over other churches, and no office-bearer over other office-bearers.

### Ministers Entering the Federation

An appendix dealing with the examination for ordained ministers from outside the federation was reviewed in detail. We are looking at three possible situations: 1) An examination of a minister of a church with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who has received a call to a church of the federation; 2) An examination of a minister of a church with which we do not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking eligibility for call to the churches of the federation; 3) An examination of a minister of a church with which we do not maintain ecclesiastical fellowship, and who is seeking entrance into the federation with his congregation. More work needs to be done on this before it can be finalized.

The question: "Who, from outside the federation, may be admitted to the pulpit" was once more discussed. Also this matter requires further study and will be on the agenda of the next meeting as will the article regarding the right and procedure of appeal.

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## **The Form of Subscription**

Consensus was reached on the article on subscription. Each office-bearer shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription. Anyone refusing to subscribe shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone in office refusing to subscribe shall, because of that very fact, immediately be suspended from office by the consistory, and if he persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

This requirement was also included in the article on Ecclesiastical Assemblies by adding the sentence: "These assemblies shall require each delegate to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription."

An article on the protection of doctrinal purity was formulated: "Ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, refutation, warning, and admonition in the ministry of the Word as well as in Christian teaching to protect the congregation from false teachings and errors which endanger the purity of its doctrine and conduct."

## **The Sacraments**

Regarding the sacraments the following articles were adopted:

The sacraments shall be administered under the authority of the consistory in a public worship service by an ordained minister with the use of the synodically adopted forms.

The consistory shall ensure that as soon as feasible God's covenant shall be signified and sealed by holy baptism to the children of communicant members in good standing.

Adults who have not been previously baptized shall be engrafted into the Christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

At least every three months the Lord's Supper shall be administered according to the teaching of God's Word and in a manner most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

The article dealing with the administration of the Lord's Supper and who may be admitted to the table of the Lord received lengthy discussion and deliberation. Clarification on differing practices and understanding of the sacrament were helpful. However, the article could not be finalized at this meeting. Both the CanRC men and the URC men will prepare proposals to be presented at the next meeting for further deliberation.

## **Other Matters**

Several other articles were discussed and completed.

Church records - The consistory shall maintain accurate records which includes the names of the members of the congregation and the dates of their births, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages, receptions into and departures from the church, and deaths.

Funerals. - A funeral is a family

matter and shall not be conducted as a worship service.

Prayer Services - It was deemed unnecessary to have a separate article for special days of prayer, but to include this in an article on worship services.

The weekly worship services - The consistory shall call the congregation together for public worship twice each Lord's Day. The consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word, namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, the confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and the gifts of gratitude be offered. At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence, and may give attention also to the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort.

Special worship services - In the manner decided by the consistory, special worship services may be called in observance of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. Special worship services may also be called in connection with prayer for crops and labor, Thanksgiving Day, the turn-

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***The article dealing with the administration of the Lord's Supper and who may be admitted to the table of the Lord received lengthy discussion and deliberation.***

ing of the new year, and times of great distress or blessing.

The next meeting of the committee will take place D.V. November 1-3, 2005 at the Ebenezer CanRC of Burlington, ON. Appreciation was expressed to the First United Reformed Church in Chino for the hospitality and the assistance received from many members of the congregation. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, expressed his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labors and the amount of work that could be accomplished. To God be the praise and glory.

For the committee  
Gerard J. Nordeman

## This is My Outlook

# Complete Unity or Ecumenical Relations?

The very first synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, meeting in 1996 appointed an Inter-Church Relations Committee for, “correspondence and contact with other churches”. Since then, the committee has begun working toward what is termed “complete church unity”, with a number of Reformed and Presbyterian churches that share a common expression of faith with the URC.

The Inter-Church Relations committee was originally appointed for the purpose of “correspondence and contact with other churches.” This would be in keeping with URC Church Order, Article 36, which refers only to ecumenical relations but says nothing about organic union with other churches. That is not to preclude however, that church union certainly could result eventually through ecumenical relations.

In its report to Synod 1999, CERCU states that the mandate of ecumenical relations and church unity is found in John 17 and Ephesians 4; as well as in Heidelberg Catechism, Lords Day 21 and Belgic Confession, Articles 27-32. In the zeal to achieve complete church unity, Biblical and Confessional references that deal with unity are emphasized along with the importance of confessional unity. Overlooked however, is that

Ephesians 4, according to verse 3 also requires, “Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

It should also be noted that John 17:23 in the NIV is interpreted as “complete unity” while most other translations use the word “perfected” or “perfect”, which in the Greek have different meanings.

The unity spoken about in Ephesians 4 and Catechism, Lord’s Day 21 is the unity of the universal church through Christ, the head of the church. Because of our sinful natures, complete unity will not be achieved this side of heaven, and it is only possible to be one in a very limited sense on this side of heaven as the Father and the Son are one, (John. 17). Nonetheless, we must strive toward certain unity on this side of heaven, but doing so in the diligence of preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as we already are doing through such endeavors as NAPARC and ICRC.

Consider for example, what happened when congregations that are now a part of the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America seceded from the Christian Reformed Church. In that instance, separation was justified because the unity of the Spirit was already broken on the basis of biblical and confessional integrity, but in each instance without excep-

tion, there were those who did not go along with their congregation but went their separate ways.

Likewise, it can be anticipated without a doubt, that even churches with common confessions of faith joining together in organic union would result in splintering. Not all members and perhaps not all congregations would choose to enter into such a union. It would result in disrupting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in all the churches involved. The end result would be a further fragmentation of the church in the pursuit of complete unity.

CERCU in 1999 also stated, “We acknowledge that due to the many limitations and shortcomings of human understanding, there is a brokenness of the church both in local situations and in broader federations. This implies that there can be more than one true church in a particular place at any given time. We need to reject a broad denominationalism on the one hand, as well as a narrow sectarianism on the other. Churches of various backgrounds but of one confession have the duty to pursue the highest form of ecclesiastical fellowship in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in a federation of churches.” To that, we can say we already have that unity through NAPARC and ICRC.

Furthermore, the churches with which CERCU is exploring the possibility of organic union all have their differing peculiar diversities with which the committee seems to believe we all can live together with in an organic union. It is conceivable then that each would be able to do

things much in the same manner that they have always done them, all under the umbrella of one organic union. Allowing for various differences among the churches was precisely one of the reasons many of us left our former denomination and in the unity of the Spirit joined together in a new federation of churches.

To each one of those denominations with which CERCU seeks to explore unity, “Grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” (Ephesians 4:7). In that context, it would be best that we work together each according to those gifts, in reaching out to the world with the truth of the Gospel as expressed in the Reformed faith.

The URCNA Synod should go back to 1996, return to the Church Order and work diligently with those churches of a common confession in preserving and promoting the Reformed faith everywhere by way of ecumenical relations. Real unity in the bond of peace can best be accomplished in that way, as we look forward to complete unity with Christ in the mansions of glory

**Mr. Myron Rau** is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

## Looking Out and About

*(continued from page 10)*

cently voted to join the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

- Rev. Russell St. John, who served on the Ministry Staff of the Grace United Reformed Church in Kennewick, Washington, was installed as the Pastor of the Oakwood Presbyterian Church (PCA) in State College, Pennsylvania. His new address is 1311 Curtin St. State College, PA 16803.

- The Community United Reformed Church of Schererville, Indiana voted to extend a call to Rev. Rich Kuiken of the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church in New Jersey, a church he has served since 1983.

- A group of families that have been meeting together as the Illiana Reformed Fellowship recently voted to join the United Reformed Churches in North America. Both Dr. Mark Beach and Dr. Cornelis Venema of Mid-America Reformed Seminary have been preaching at the Illiana Reformed Fellowship.

- Mr. Chris Folkerts sustained his classical examination in the Classis Southwest U.S. of the URCNA and was ordained in the United Reformed Church of The Magic Valley in Jerome, Idaho. The newly ordained Rev. Folkerts is a 2005 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

*If you have information or events you would like placed in Looking Out and About, please email the editor at [wymbkath@juno.com](mailto:wymbkath@juno.com)*

# Looking Above

*A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ  
Revelation 5:1-7  
“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah”*

The centrality of the throne in chapter 4 continues in chapter 5. There is, however, a shift in focus as we move from chapter 4 to chapter 5. Chapter 5 begins, “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne, *a scroll...*” In chapter 5, but the focus now shifts to the scroll.

Verse 1 describes the scroll for us: “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.” What are we to make of this scroll?

Notice first of all that it is a scroll “written inside and on the back.” It is like the scroll that Ezekiel was once commanded to eat. The Lord said to Ezekiel: “You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; *and there was writing on the inside and on the outside*, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe” (Ezekiel 2:7-10). Like the scroll of Ezekiel 2, the scroll of Revelation 5 is written on the inside and on the back; it is a scroll covered in writing; it contains lamentations and mourning and woe.

We find a similar picture in Daniel 12: “And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt... (Daniel 12:1b-2). Daniel was commanded: “Shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end” (Daniel 12:4). Daniel responded, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end’” (Daniel 12:8-9).

On the basis of Ezekiel 2 and Daniel 12 we begin to understand that the words written upon that scroll contain the words of judgment upon the wicked, as well as the words of deliverance for the righteous. The scroll of Revelation 5 contains the history of redemption—that same history that brings judgment upon the wicked and deliverance for the righteous.

The fact that the scroll is sealed with seven seals confirms this interpretation. Seven is the number of fullness and completion. This scroll, sealed with seven seals, is the unfolding plan of redemption; it contains the history of redemption, which brings judgment upon the

wicked even as it brings deliverance for the righteous.

## Is No One Worthy?

Having identified the scroll as symbolic of the history of redemption, we then move on to verse 2 and the cry of the angel. “Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’”

Note carefully the language. “Who is worthy to open the scroll?” In other words, who is worthy to reveal the contents of the scroll? Who is worthy to reveal the history of redemption? Who is worthy to reveal the judgments upon the wicked? Who is worthy to reveal the deliverance of the righteous? Who is worthy to open the scroll?

The angel asks another question as well: “Who is worthy to loose its seals?” In other words, who is worthy to execute the contents of the scroll? Who is worthy to bring about the history of redemption? Who is worthy to execute judgment upon the wicked? Who is worthy to bring about the deliverance of the righteous? Who is worthy to loose the seals of the scroll? That is the great question of the strong and mighty angel. He cries out with a loud voice so that all in heaven and on earth and under the earth might hear. Who is worthy to reveal God’s plan and to carry out God’s plan?

Verse 3 gives the answer: “And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.” No one under the earth is able to

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open the scroll or look at it: the inhabitants of hell hear the cry of the strong angel, and they are silenced; they cannot open the scroll; they cannot look at the scroll; they are unworthy. No one on the earth is able to open the scroll or look at it: the inhabitants of the earth hear the cry of the strong angel, and they are silenced; they cannot open the scroll; they cannot look at the scroll; they are unworthy. No one in heaven is able to open the scroll or look at it: the inhabitants of heaven hear the cry of the strong angel, and they are silenced; they cannot open the scroll; they cannot look at the scroll; they are unworthy. The cry of the angel is answered with silence.

Soon, however, the silence is broken by the sound of weeping. Bitter weeping. Sorrowful weeping. Intense weeping. The weeping of John. “So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll” (5:4). The weeping of John breaks the silence.

Why does John weep so bitterly? Remember what the scroll represents: it represents the history of redemption. Think of the implications if that scroll is not opened and loosed. William Hendriksen writes as follows: “History will not be governed in the interest of the church; there will be no protection for God’s children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance!” Is it any wonder John weeps, and that bitterly?

### One Who Is Worthy

John would be left in his bitter weeping for all eternity, but he hears the pronouncement of one of the elders, verse 5, “But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’”

Notice the title that He is given: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The imagery comes from Genesis 49:8-12: “Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.”

Notice also that He is called the Root of David. This language comes from Isaiah 11: “There shall come forth a Rod from the Stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,

the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist” (Isaiah 11:1-5).

Taken together, the imagery becomes clear: it is that of a conqueror. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah—what beast more powerful and regal than the Lion? The Root of David—what king more successful in battle than King David? The imagery is that of a conqueror. And indeed, that is how verse 5 describes Him: “The Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” The Greek word translated “prevail” is usually translated “conquer” or “overcome.” The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has conquered. The Root of David has overcome. He has prevailed!

Because He has prevailed, He is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals. He is worthy to reveal the history of re-

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*John would be left in his bitter weeping for all eternity, but he hears the pronouncement of one of the elders...*

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demption. He is worthy to bring about the history of redemption. He is worthy to set loose the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6:1-8). He is worthy to give to the martyrs under the altar a white robe, clothing them in His own righteousness (Revelation 6:9-11). He is worthy to shake the earth with the final cataclysmic earthquake that shall shake the heavens and the earth (Revelation 6:12-17). He is worthy to open that seal that ushers in the sounding forth of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-6). The Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed! The Root of David has conquered! He alone is worthy to open and loose the seals of the scroll!

### **The Lamb of God**

John, having been instructed by the elder concerning the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, now expects to see that powerful, regal, majestic, mighty, conquering Lion. Instead, he sees a Lamb. Verse 6, “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.” Don’t let the drama of this scene escape you. John turns, fully expecting to see a powerful Lion in all of its might and majesty, instead he sees a meek and humble Lamb.

Not only does he see a meek and humble Lamb, but the Lamb looks as though He has been slain. The Greek reads literally, “...a Lamb having been slain...” The Lamb has been slain once in the past, but the results of that slaying are

## ***The Lion who has overcome is the Lamb who was slain; in fact, it is precisely in His being slain that He overcomes!***

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abiding. The slaying of the Lamb continues to have effects to this very day, and for all eternity. This slaying, then, is crucial to the identity of the Lion who has overcome. The Lion who has overcome is the Lamb who was slain; in fact, it is precisely in His being slain that He overcomes! The cross, then, is central to the identity of Jesus. The cross bears its mark on the very person and work of Jesus Christ. You cannot understand Jesus apart from the cross. Even in heaven, He appears as a Lamb having been slain.

But notice as well, He stands. He has overcome His slaying. He has overcome the cross. He has overcome the enemy. He stands! We have here the picture of the Resurrection: the grave is powerless to hold this Lamb. Neither the tomb nor death can hold this Lamb! He was slain, but now He stands!

Furthermore, He has seven horns signifying the completeness of His power. He holds the keys of Hades and death in His hands. He was dead, but is now alive, and He lives forevermore! He has seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He is a life-giving Spirit; He sends forth the Comforter to do His bidding. We have here the picture of Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit who

now works in and through the Word to proclaim Christ!

Finally, notice verse 7: “Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.” We have here the picture of the Ascension. When Christ entered into heaven He earned the right to reveal the history of redemption! He earned the right to carry out judgment upon the wicked! He earned the right to deliver His own! He entered into heaven and asked the Father for the elect of the nations (Psalm 2). The elect belong to Christ: they are His by right; He earned them; He merited them! He has secured them beyond probation!

The Lamb that was slain now stands in the midst of the throne, the elect belong to Him, and He now sends forth His Spirit to gather in every last elect sheep of His pasture! He sits on the throne! No one can thwart His plan: no one in heaven above, no one on earth below, no one under the earth; not the angels of heaven, not the kings of the earth, not the demons of hell, not even Satan himself! Christ is King! The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed! The Lamb slain has accomplished your redemption! Nothing in all of creation, nor in all of history, can change that fact!

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Is it any wonder that though the throne room scene of Revelation 4 continues on in Revelation 5, our attention is now focused upon the scroll. In turning our eyes upon the scroll, our eyes are turned to the history of redemption. And in turning our eyes upon the history of redemption, our eyes are turned to the Lamb. And in turning our eyes upon the Lamb, our eyes are turned to the cross. Yes, the cross is central—central to the history of redemption—central to the Lamb.

Can you ever tire of the cross? Can you ever grow weary of its centrality? Can you ever say the cross has been impressed upon us enough? Can you ever say we no longer need the message of the cross? Without the cross, without the Lamb slain, we would weep as bitterly and as intensely, as John himself, and our weeping would never, never end.

That is why in heaven the redeemed of the Lord shall look again and again upon the Lamb slain. There we shall ask to see His hands and His feet; we shall ask to look upon His side. There for all eternity we shall rejoice in the Lamb who shepherds us, the Lamb who wipes away every tear from our eyes, the Lamb who was slain, and who now stands in the midst of the throne.

**Rev. Brian Vos** is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan. He also is the President of the Board of Reformed Fellowship.

## In Memoriam: Dr. Peter Ymen De Jong

Just two months short of his 90th birthday, God called home Dr. P. Y. De Jong in the 65th years of his marriage and ministry.

Peter Y. De Jong graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary and Hartford Theological Seminary. During his ministry, he served Christian Reformed congregations in New Jersey, Michigan, Iowa, and Ontario. He served on numerous denominational boards and committees and was Professor of Practical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary for six years. He was a missionary to India for a short time and continued to oversee that work for nearly fifty years.

Dr. De Jong was influential in beginning *The Outlook* and *Christian Renewal* and was a frequent contributor to both publications. For many years, he wrote Bible studies for *The Federation Messenger*. He also wrote other educational materials, a two-volume commentary on the Belgic Confession, and a study of covenant theology. He edited a collection of essays on the Synod of Dort.

He continued his active pace during his retirement years, visiting his former mission field in India and lecturing for seven winters at a Presbyterian seminary in Mexico. He wrote Bible studies that have been translated into Telugu, and translated Jean Taffin's *The Marks of God's Children* from the Dutch.

Dr. De Jong was one of the founders of Mid-America Reformed Seminary and served as its Administrative Dean and Professor of Practical Theology. He provided leadership in the formation of the United Reformed Churches in North America. During his retirement, he served numerous churches as interim pastor and preached at over 900 worship services.

Those who mourn his loss are his wife, Joanne, and his six children and their spouses; James A. and Lois De Jong, Deanne and E. Robert Tigchelaar, Peter and Charolotte De Jong, Stephan and Deanne De Jong, Corrine and James Hentges, and Christine and Dale Zylstra as well as seventeen grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren.

Because Dr. De Jong continued to be a source of wisdom and counsel to many, the Reformed community also mourns his loss. We recognize, however, that our loss is his gain. He now sees and hears what "eye has not seen, nor ear heard" and which has been prepared for Dr. P.Y. De Jong, who loved Him.

Glenda Mathes

# God's People, My Parish

## *Taking Heed to the Flock*

The church militant lost one of her generals last month. He was promoted to glory where he now stands before the King of kings. Dr. P.Y. De Jong was a giant in the faith. His accomplishments were numerous. In his illustrious career, the Lord used him to serve as pastor to several churches, as missionary to India, and as professor at two seminaries. He authored and edited several books. His writings for periodicals, including *The Outlook*, were numerous. He was a brilliant man whom the Lord used to accomplish many brilliant things. But there was something else about Dr. De Jong that made him a giant, and that was the kindness that filled his heart.

I first heard Dr. De Jong preach when he was serving First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa. A craftsman of the English language, he presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that left his listeners in awe of the salvation God provided for all who come to Him through Christ. Those who hungered for manna from heaven were truly fed.

Over fifteen years later, Dr. De Jong gave the Charge to the Congregation at the ordination of a young minister who was scared to death of this calling that the Lord had placed upon him. When then Classis Orange City proposed a mentor for me, as was the custom in the CRC, I asked if I could have Dr. De Jong as a mentor instead of the minister they had suggested.

The reply was, "All you will get from P. Y. De Jong is a bunch of stories." In a moment of boldness I retorted, "But I will learn more from his stories than any lectures or visits this other minister will ever give me."

What a blessing Dr. De Jong was as a mentor! Both he and his wife, Joanne, would drop by the parsonage frequently, and yes, he would tell stories. But those stories always had a message. They were always profitable to something that I was dealing with in the church at that time. He would call and invite Kathy and I over, as well. We would sit among the souvenirs of India, drinking tea and talking about different aspects of ministry. "Wybren," he would say, always rolling the 'r', "you have to remember that times are different today than they were years ago, but the heartaches are still the same."

I remember one Sunday evening, just two weeks in the ministry, this young, unsure of himself, preacher looked out at his congregation and saw the bushy eyebrows of the twentieth century Prince of the Pulpit in the pews. I was a nervous wreck throughout the service! Afterwards I expected this great theologian to tell me the things I had done wrong and how the text could have been applied better, etc. Instead, as I approached the group of people surrounding him, I heard him say, "Wasn't that a wonderful message your minister brought this evening." It absolutely floored me

to hear him talk about the blessing he had received from a worship service I had led. But he was always that way. Invaluable words of advice and encouragement were given as my wife and I began our joy-filled journey into ministry, and then again into parenthood as Dr. De Jong baptized our first born son in Ireton, Iowa.

Years later, when we moved Michigan our contacts were fewer — a note that they were going to be going to Texas for the winter, a Christmas card each year, telephone calls to show his interest in our lives, a special trip up from Illinois to install me as pastor of the Faith URC in Borculo, MI, and a letter congratulating me on becoming the editor of *The Outlook*. In every one, always words of encouragement were added. Once in a while Dr. De Jong would drive up from Illinois "just to see how things were going in the Oord family." By then he was in his late seventies, early eighties. We always had a pleasant visit, but Kathy and I would worry a bit to watch him pull out of our driveway and to think of him driving back to Beecher.

As I write these memories of Dr. P. Y. De Jong, I know there are many other once-young ministers who are nodding their heads and recalling similar encounters with this great man of faith. It wasn't just me. No. This pastor's pastor called on many others, offering them words of encouragement, counseling them through difficult times, making them feel special and needed in the work of the kingdom. Rev. Harold Miller of the Wellsburg URC in

*(continued on page 32)*

# Finding Happiness in God

In his epistle to the church in first-century Colossae, the apostle Paul expressed his thanksgiving for the faith that the Colossians had in Jesus Christ and for the love which they had for one another. Faith and love are the two indispensable elements found in the heart of every true Christian. But they only stand at the beginning point of the Christian life!

That is why Paul immediately went on to say that he prayed for the Colossians that they would be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10). The Greek noun that Paul used — the word *epignosis*, translated “knowledge” — refers to a knowledge that is true, correct, and precise. Clearly, the will of God for all Christians — for all of us who trust in Christ for salvation and who love our brothers and sisters in the faith — is that we advance in our understanding of who God really is and what He is really like.

Theologians who spend their lives in the study of the Scripture can help us to understand more clearly the teaching of the Bible on the nature of God. One of the great teachers of the church was Henry Bullinger, the sixteenth-century Zurich Reformed theologian. In the *Second Helvetic Confession* which Bullinger published in 1566 — one of the great confessions of the Reformation period that was written by just one individual — we find a biblically-faithful testimony as to what God is like. Bullinger declared, “We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting

by himself, all-sufficient in himself, invisible, without a body, infinite, eternal, the Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the chief good, living, quickening and preserving all things, almighty and supremely wise, gentle or merciful, just and true” (Chapter III).

This indeed is what God is like according to the biblical revelation. But there is more to the witness of Scripture. It is a fundamental truth in the teaching of Paul that God is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ: “In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). The apostle sets forth this conception as to incarnation of the divine nature in the midst of an epistle dealing with an ancient heretical movement that entailed the worship of angels along with a corresponding depreciation of the preeminence of Christ (Colossians 2:18).

Thus, the apostle had to stress that Christ was the creator of all things, including the angels! It was the Son of God who created everything that exists, “both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” (Colossians 1:16).

Here Paul affirms that every being in the angelic hierarchy of greater

or lesser thrones — and their corresponding dominion, rulership, and authority — was actually created by Christ (the very divine person whom the Colossians were losing interest in)!

It is Christ the creator who in reality is the chief good — what the medieval theologians called the *summum bonum*, the One in whom our happiness is to be found. Paul can say that “all things have been created” not only “through him,” but also “for him” (Colossians 1:16).

It is obvious from this that Paul would contend that we humans should not expect to find our ultimate happiness in the accumulation of wealth, the acquiring of a famous name, or in the attainment of political power. We have been created, the apostle declares, “for Him.”

The nature of reality is such that only Christ Himself can satisfy the longings of the human heart. This Pauline declaration was rooted, of course, in the Old Testament Scripture. In the Abrahamic covenant, the Lord informed Abraham as to where he would find the real purpose for living: “I am a shield to you; your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

Herman Witsius, the great Dutch Reformed theologian of the seven-

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***The nature of reality is such that only Christ Himself can satisfy the longings of the human heart.***

teenth century, aptly remarked that when God “gives himself to man, he gives him all things” (*The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, I.293).

In light of the fact that God the Christ is everything for us (the One in whom we find eternal life and delight), let us remember the exhortation with which the apostle John concluded his first epistle: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Surely, this is true wisdom, to keep ourselves from vain attachments and to hold to him for whom we were made.

**Dr. Mark Larson** is the home missions pastor at Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Aiken, South Carolina.

## ‘Paedocommunion’: Should Covenant Children Be Admitted to the Lord’s Table? An Introduction

The way a question gets formulated often betrays a bias. This is certainly true when it comes to the question that I wish to address in this and in several subsequent articles, namely, should covenant children be admitted to the Lord’s Table?

Though the question seems benign, it could suggest that such children have been excluded in a way that is to their detriment. Some years ago an advocate of admitting children to the Lord’s Table entitled his response to a book that defended the historic practice of the Reformed churches, *Daddy, why was I excommunicated?* Now that’s a title that gives new meaning to the expression, “begging the question”! This author’s question was not really a question at all; it was an answer masquerading under the guise of a question. In the opinion of this author, the typical practice of Reformed churches amounted to an illegitimate exclusion of children from one of the rights and privileges that belong to them as members of the covenant community.

It is important to acknowledge this feature of the question we wish to address in this series of articles. Contemporary proponents of what is often called “paedocommunion” frequently allege that the traditional view throws up an artificial barrier to the reception of children of believers at the Lord’s Supper.

Whether this is true or not, however, depends upon a more basic ques-

tion: on what basis should anyone be received or admitted to the Lord’s Table? A defender of the traditional Reformed view, which emphasizes the necessity of a public profession of faith prior to a believer’s admission to the Table, could well argue that this position does not exclude covenant children. It actually excludes all persons, children or adults, who are not qualified to come to the Table because they have not responded properly to the invitation that was extended to them. The historic view does not deny that the children of the covenant are invited to the Lord’s Table. As a matter of fact, if their baptism means anything, it means that they are invited to respond to the Lord’s gracious promise in the way of faith, which would qualify them to receive the sacrament that nourishes faith. The only thing preventing such children or any others from coming to the Table, therefore, is the absence of an appropriate response to the invitation extended. All believers who answer properly the “R.S.V.P.” that accompanies the overtures of God’s grace in Christ are welcome to come to the Lord’s Table.

When the matter is looked at from this point of view, the question we are addressing takes on a little different shading. Though I will be defending the historic answer of the Reformed churches to this question, I wish to challenge at the outset the claim that this view

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*One of the confusing features of contemporary debates about paedocommunion is that advocates do not always spell out what they are defending.*

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amounts to little more than an arbitrary exclusion of covenant children from admission to the Lord's Table. The historic answer of the Reformed churches acknowledges that such children should be admitted to the Lord's Table, provided they answer in an appropriate manner the invitation that they have received.

#### **Clarifying Our Terms**

The question we are addressing is an ambiguous one for another reason. Not only could it subtly suggest that the traditional position inappropriately refuses children admission to the Lord's Table, but it also leaves uncertain what is meant by "covenant children." In order to prepare for our consideration of the subject of paedocommunion, therefore, we need to spend a little time clarifying the terms that are often used in contemporary debates. It is surprising how often discussions of the issue become confused quickly because of a failure to be clear about the terms being used.

The subject of children at the Lord's Table is commonly referred to as "paedocommunion" (lit. "child communion"). This language is used as shorthand for any position that argues for the admission of children to the sacrament of holy communion. Though a useful piece of shorthand, it does not distinguish adequately between two very different views of the children who are to

be admitted to the Table. Some advocates of paedocommunion favor only the admission of children to the Lord's Supper at an earlier age than is customary among many Reformed churches (middle to late adolescence).

Other advocates of paedocommunion wish to admit any baptized child of believing parents who is physically able to receive the communion elements. One of the confusing features of contemporary debates about paedocommunion is that advocates do not always spell out whether they are defending a "soft" paedocommunion view, which admits younger covenant members to the Table who have made a simple, but credible profession of the Christian faith, or a "strict" paedocommunion view, which admits any covenant member who is able to receive the elements. The latter view is evident in the practice of the Eastern Orthodox churches who serve communion to infants on the occasion of their baptism and thereafter. Though these two views may seem very close, they are quite distinct and need to be treated as such.

Our question focuses upon the second position and understanding of paedocommunion: should all members of the covenant community, who have received the sign and seal of the covenant promise in their baptism, be admitted to the Lord's

Table? Though there may be some room for differences in practice among advocates of this "strict" form of paedocommunion, the fundamental point is that any member of the covenant community ought to enjoy the privilege of being admitted to and nourished at the Table of the Lord.

Consequently, some advocates of this strict sense of paedocommunion propose that we might better speak of "covenant communion" than "paedocommunion." Just as the language of "infant" baptism may give rise to the false assumption that infants are baptized upon some other basis than adults, so the language of "paedocommunion" could suggest a unique kind of participation by children in the Lord's Supper. The point of paedocommunion, however, is that there is only one basis for admission to the Table of the Lord, namely, membership in the covenant community. All covenant members ought to receive the sacrament, which has the same meaning and benefit for all its recipients.

The confusion between these two different views of paedocommunion can be illustrated by taking note of another term that is sometimes used in debates about the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper. Some defenders of the historic Reformed position on this question speak of "credocommunion" in distinction from "paedocommunion." On analogy to the customary terms used in debates about the proper recipients of baptism, this language emphasizes that the Lord's Supper is reserved for those who have publicly professed the Christian faith. Because the sacrament is provided as a means to nourish and strength

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faith, it should be received by believers who have professed their faith before God and his people. The language of “credocommunion,” therefore, serves to stress the indispensability of a prior profession of faith before admission to the Table of the Lord.

Even though this language can be helpful, I am unwilling to concede that advocates of a strict paedocommunion position are entitled to ownership of the language of “covenant communion.” When advocates of a strict paedocommunion position apply this language to their view, they assume what needs to be proven, namely, that the covenant demands the admission of all its members to the Table of the Lord, whether they have professed the Christian faith or not. But what if the new covenant in Christ, which is to be administered according to the New Testament Word, requires that those who receive the sacrament of holy communion do so in a way that demands a prior profession of faith? Administering the sacraments of the new covenant in accord with the demands of the divinely-authored Word of the covenant surely has as much right to be called a “covenant communion” view as the alternative, paedocommunion view. For this reason, the historic view of the Reformed churches may well be termed both a “covenant communion” and a “credocommunion” view. To treat these terms as incompatible is another form of the kind of “begging-the-question” argument we noted above.

I offer these comments, not to make matters more difficult than they need to be, but to achieve a

measure of clarity regarding the precise question we aim to address in this series of articles. The question I am addressing is not so much the question of the approximate age at which children of believing parents should profess their faith and thereupon be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. This is a related question, and it is one that we will take up in the course of our discussion of the issue of paedocommunion. But the question of the optimal age at which covenant children should profess their faith is not the fundamental question. Indeed, it is not a question that, as we shall see, is finally able to be answered in a definitive manner. *The exact question we aim to address is: does membership in the covenant, which is signified and sealed to the children of believing parents through their baptism, constitute a sufficient basis for admitting them to the Table of the Lord.* We will not focus our attention so much upon the “soft” paedocommunion view, which is itself but a modification of the historic view of the Reformed churches (but encouraging children to profess their faith at an earlier age). Our focus will be upon the “strict” paedocommunion view, which claims that membership in the covenant is a sufficient basis for admission to the Table of the Lord.

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***The exact question we aim to address is: does membership in the covenant, which is signified and sealed to the children of believing parents through their baptism, constitute a sufficient basis for admitting them to the Table of the Lord.***

### **The Principal Arguments for Paedocommunion**

During the last several decades, a remarkable amount of attention has been given the subject of paedocommunion by Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Many (perhaps most) confessionally Reformed denominations have studied at length the biblical and historical dimensions of this issue, often prompted by vigorous advocates of the paedocommunion position. Though these studies have not led many of these denominations to alter their historic practice, agitation for paedocommunion continues unabated in some quarters. It is risky to offer a generalization about the reasons for this continued agitation. But the advocacy of paedocommunion seems to find its home especially among Reformed believers who are relatively recent converts from broad evangelicalism to a more specifically Reformed understanding. Among such converts, there is a keen interest in the Reformed view of the covenant and its implications for the life of the church and the calling of her members. This interest has spawned a number of calls for a more thoroughly covenantal view of things than has historically been the case in the Reformed churches. The advocacy of paedocommunion is, in this respect, something of a symptom of a broader desire to see the

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distinctives of Reformed covenantal theology worked out in a more thorough fashion.

To conclude our introduction to the issue of paedocommunion, we need to identify briefly the principal arguments that are often cited by its advocates. Since this article is only an introduction to the subject of paedocommunion, we will reserve to future articles a more thorough account of these arguments. An examination of the writings of paedocommunionists indicates that the arguments for the paedocommunion position are of four kinds.

### **The Historical Argument**

The first argument for the paedocommunion view is an historical one. According to paedocommunionists, the admission of children to the sacrament of holy communion best conforms to what we know of the ancient practice of the church. Even though the ultimate standard for the church's practice must be the teaching of Scripture, it is important to observe that the practice of paedocommunion was widespread in the early church and continues to be the practice of the Eastern Orthodox churches to this day. The occasion for the cessation of the practice of paedocommunion in the Western church was the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation, which was formally codified at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 A.D. Because the doctrine of transubstantiation taught that the sacramental elements of bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ, participation in the sacrament became a more

fearful prospect for believers and their children. In the instance of infants and children, the fear of desecrating or misusing the consecrated elements came to form an obstacle to their admission to the sacrament. In spite of the Reformation's recovery of a more biblical understanding of the sacrament, it did not challenge the Western church's abandonment of the older practice of paedocommunion.

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### **The Covenant Argument**

Reformed believers who advocate the practice of paedocommunion generally recognize that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, not the traditional practice of the church, finally determines the faith of the Christian church. Therefore, it is not enough to argue from history for paedocommunion. There must be clear biblical warrant for admitting children to the Lord's Table. In addition to the historical argument, therefore, proponents of paedocommunion appeal to three biblical kinds of arguments.

The first of these biblical argu-

ments is really the linchpin of the case for paedocommunion. As we noted above, many who favor paedocommunion insist that their position ought to be called a "covenant communion" position. All who are members of the new covenant community—believers and their children—ought to be admitted to the Table of the Lord. As recipients of the promise of the covenant, the children of believing parents ought not only to be baptized but also to be received at the Lord's Table. The prohibition against children of the covenant being admitted to the Table of the Lord amounts to a kind of backhanded "excommunication." It also betrays a failure to rid the church's practice of a kind of "baptistic" thinking, which does not fully acknowledge the rights and privileges that belong to every member of the covenant community.

If the sacramental practice of the Reformed churches is to measure up to its covenant view, the children of believing parents, who have received the sign and seal of covenant membership in baptism, ought to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Otherwise, the "Baptist" argument that Reformed churches do not "practice what they preach" when they refuse children at the Table of the Lord is irrefutable. A consistent covenant position demands that all members of the covenant receive the privileges of the covenant. The Lord's Supper, which the Lord instituted as a means of grace to confirm and strengthen those who are his members, is one such privilege that may not be withheld from the children of believing parents.

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### **The “Analogy With the Passover” Argument**

Lest it appear that the biblical argument for paedocommunion is simply a covenant argument, which appeals to the broad implications of covenant membership and privilege, proponents of paedocommunion also appeal to the analogy between the Lord’s Supper and the Old Testament Passover, as well as other covenant meals. Since the Lord’s Supper was instituted on the occasion of the Passover as the new covenant fulfillment of the old covenant rite, the church should admit children to the Supper just as they were formerly admitted to the Passover.

Unless we fall prey to a kind of “dispensationalistic” view of the discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, we should not withhold the privilege of admission to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper from the children of believing parents. The Reformed practice of prohibiting children from coming to the Table of the Lord represents an impoverishment of their circumstance, when compared to the privileges that they enjoyed under the old covenant administration. Moreover, we have an additional precedent for the inclusion of such children in the privilege of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in the Old Testament practice of sharing various covenant meals and sacrifices with the children of the covenant. Here too the traditional practice of the Reformed churches opens them up to the charge of inconsistency. If Reformed churches may argue from the Old Testament practice of circumcision and the inclusion of children within the covenant to the New Testament prac-

tice of baptizing the children of believers, then they may also argue from this Old Testament practice regarding the Passover and other covenant meals to the New Testament practice of admitting children to the Lord’s Table.

### **The 1 Corinthians 11 Argument**

The last argument that advocates of paedocommunion often present is an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 that appeals to the

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### ***The traditional practice of the Reformed churches opens them up to the charge of inconsistency.***

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historical occasion for its teaching about “worthy” participation in the Lord’s Supper. The historic Reformed view of this passage is that it sets forth a general principle, namely, that those who partake of the Supper must do so in a “worthy” manner by properly discerning, remembering and proclaiming the body of the Lord.

In this interpretation, the apostle Paul stipulates that the reception of the elements of the sacrament requires faith on the part of those who partake. This faith is of a sort that is competent rightly to discern and proclaim the reality and meaning of Christ’s death upon the cross. Many who argue for

paedocommunion, however, emphasize the historical occasion for Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11. In this passage, the apostle addresses a particular failure in Corinth, namely, the failure to discern properly who belongs to the body of Christ or the church. By their factionalism and practice of discriminating between rich and poor, the Corinthian believers were contradicting the profound meaning of their common participation in Christ. As members of one body through faith in Christ, they were obliged to treat equally every member of the body.

According to some paedocommunionists, this specific occasion for Paul’s admonitions in 1 Corinthians 11 limits their application. The admonition to discern the body of the Lord, for example, is not a general rule that every participant in the Lord’s Supper should have a proper understanding of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. It is rather a specific charge to some believers in Corinth who were acting inappropriately in the context of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (and some believers today who may commit a similar offense).

This specific charge does not apply in the case of children who have not committed a similar offense. It may even be the case that the historic Reformed practice of excluding children from the Table of the Lord represents a failure to discern the body or church in a manner that is similar to the practice Paul condemns. For these reasons, the traditional appeal to 1 Corinthians 11 against

the practice of paedocommunion proves to be invalid.

### Conclusion

In our subsequent articles on paedocommunion, we will have occasion to consider each of these arguments at greater length. Though none of these arguments can stand alone, we will follow the sequence of these four arguments as we address the subject of paedocommunion. Bearing in mind what we have defined as the focus of our question, we will consider in our next article the history of the Christian church's teaching and practice regarding the proper recipients of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

**Dr. Cornelis Venema** is the President of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He also serves a contributing editor of *The Outlook*.

## Book Reviews

Rev. Jerome Julien

Herman Hoeksema.  
*Whosoever Will* Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002. xi, 111 pp., including Scriptural index.

The content of this volume is no less important today than when it was first published in 1945. Originally given as radio messages on the *Reformed Witness Hour*, their sound words would have been long lost had they not been published. Now, thanks to RFPA and Rev. Hoeksema's daughter, Lois, they have been completely gone over for use today. It is interesting to know that this book has been translated into Spanish and is distributed by the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Seville, Spain. This is a testimony to the great worth of this volume.

Hoeksema used the words of Revelation 22:1 and 17 as a basis for this series which points to the error of Arminianism. But do not think of this series of messages as a dry polemic against Arminianism. Rather, see it as a warm expression of the Biblical truth of calling and coming unto salvation. Hoeksema points out that the popular Gospel song, "Whosoever Will," when understood in the Biblical context, is very true. Many of the texts in the series include the word "come," as do most of the titles: "Coming to Find Rest," "Coming to Drink," "Coming to the God of Our Salvation," "Coming Ever Nearer."

Anyone who might be tempted to say carelessly that Hoeksema did not preach a warm Gospel will find this book makes clear that he did!

In this day of Arminianism's great acceptability by ever so many sincere but misunderstanding believers, this book will help firm up their necessary understanding of the faith.

van Bruggen, Jan. *The Church Says Amen: an Exposition of the Belgic Confession*. Neerlandia, AB, Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2003. 230pp, including index. \$13.90 US, paperback. Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien.

"Getting doctrine right is the first step to getting life right." So writes C. Bouwman in the preface of this newly translated exposition of the Belgic Confession. Then he adds, "The truth of that reality may not be widely accepted today, but it remains reality nevertheless." *The Church Says Amen: an Exposition of the Belgic Confession* was originally written by Rev. Jan Van Bruggen in Dutch and published in the Netherlands in 1964. The author lived only a year beyond its publication. Now it has become available in English, thanks to Inheritance Publications.

The volume begins with a short and

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general chapter on the creeds and confessions of the Dutch Reformed Churches. That is followed by a short but very informative chapter on Guido De Bres and the Belgic, or Netherlands, Confession. From that point on there is an explanation or commentary of over two hundred pages on this monumental statement of faith.

The author has compressed many ideas into this volume. Sometimes the reader must lay it down and take a little time to meditate on what he has read. Some chapters are longer; some are shorter. Always, however, there is food for thought. Often, historical background is given by the author. Sometimes the translator gives helpful information in a footnote. This is all valuable to the reader since an understanding of the Dutch history is somewhat remote for many American readers, and ecclesiastical circumstances are different.

Many fine explanations could be mentioned. For example, the significance of believing in creation (p. 70); the explanation of the three marks of the true church (p. 167-168); how office-bearers are to rule (p. 173); how discipline is to be exercised (pp. 178ff.); why we must have a clear understanding of the sacraments (p. 184); the general significance of the sacraments (pp. 186ff.); the explanation of the word “into” in the baptismal formula (pp. 193ff.); and the reason for including the thirty-seventh article: “The Civil Government” (pp. 215ff.).

This volume is a must for those who study and teach the Belgic Confession. It is provocative and

informative. As a tool for study, it will take its place alongside Lepusculus Vallensis’ *The Belgic Confession and Its Biblical Basis* and J. van Bruggen’s *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism* by the same publisher.

Engelsma, David J.  
*Unfolding Covenant History, An Exposition of the Old Testament, Volume 5, Judges and Ruth*  
Grandville, Michigan:  
Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005. xxvi, 213 pp. \$24.95 hardcover.

As promised, the fifth volume in this fine series is now available. Each additional volume increases the value of this series. The first four were the work of the late Professor Homer Hoeksema, and covered the first six books of the Bible. This volume, dealing with the Books of Judges and Ruth, is the product of the pen of Professor David Engelsma, professor of both dogmatics and Old Testament at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Grandville, Michigan. He is also the author of many books, pamphlets, and articles. The style of his writing has changed with this new volume, but the content is of the highest quality, keeping with the character of the series.

While there are some very fine conservative studies available on this part of the Old Testament, few of them emphasize the covenant, which is essential to the understanding of God’s Word. The covenant promise is at the heart of

God’s message of redemption, and at the heart of how God deals with His own. God not only blesses His people, He also chastens them. Judges makes this clear. The period of time covered is about three hundred fifty years.

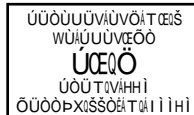
The author wisely deals with Judges in a way a commentary would not. He begins by looking at the setting of the book in Chapters 1-3:6. Then he goes to Judges 17-21 where the depth of Israel’s departure from God is laid before us. Next, he turns to the accounts of the individual judges.

In spite of the spiritual darkness and carelessness seen in the days of the judges, there is always a ray of hope and light. “God will not turn back on His word of promise, nor give up on His chosen people. In the Messiah He will bring them to repentance and forgive them. There will be the atoning sacrifice” (p. 30).

Some fifty pages are devoted to Ruth. Valuable insights and good exegesis characterizes this part of the book, as is true of the entire volume. Throughout this volume, Professor Engelsma shows his pastoral touch by making practical applications of the various events.

Since it is true that there is such a shortage of material on the Old Testament from a Biblical and Reformed perspective, this book supplies a great need and fills a large void. A Bible student reading casually and a minister who digs deeply for the golden truths of Scripture will both find Professor Engelsma’s new book of great and abiding value.

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**Grandville, MI 49418**  
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## ***Reformed Fellowship Annual Meeting***

**Thursday, October 27, 2005**

**Trinity United Reformed Church  
Caledonia, Michigan**

***Rev. Rich Kuiken***

**"The Riches of the Reformed Faith"**

6:00 PM. Punch Bowl  
6:30 PM. Dinner  
7:30 PM. Business Meeting  
8:00 PM. Mass Meeting

***For reservations to the dinner call  
616-554-5763***

***The Mass Meeting is free and  
open to the public.***

### **God's People, My Parish**

*(continued from page 24)*

Iowa summed it up so beautifully in a note sent to the URC-list. He wrote: "Dr. P. Y. De Jong, master of several languages, past Emeritus professor of at least two major institutions; prolific and readable author; former Pastor to many hundreds of congregants; influential counselor to a multitude of pastors; Father, Grand and great Grand father; brother in the Lord to -only the Lord knows how many thankful Christian men and women world-wide - used to call me often to ask about the welfare of a tiny congregation in North Central Iowa that doesn't even come up as a blip on the radar. That is the heart of a true under shepherd of Jesus Christ."

Throughout his sixty-five years of ministry, Dr. P. Y. De Jong was faithful in taking heed to the flock, especially to young shepherds about to lead their own flocks. I am thankful for the many things this prolific professor wrote because now, upon reading them, I will be reminded again of the precious visits and needed encouragement he provided.