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The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



• A Divinely Appointed Judge • How Quickly We Can Fall Away • Calling of Ministers • Looking Out and About
• Songs in Revelation 5 • God's Salvation from Eternity to Eternity (I) • URCNA Classis Reports • RC in Hungary

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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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A Divine Judge Saves a Devastated People

“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.” Judges 2:10

The Reformed Churches in New Zealand are more similar to the Canadian churches in terms of their demographics and history. They were established by immigrants from Holland who came after the second world war. Many of the elderly members today speak English with a thick Dutch accent. Some of those early immigrants have been blessed with the opportunity of traveling back to the Netherlands to visit with family, and almost to a man, they come back with the same woeful tale.

When they left in the 1950’s, they left a believing family that worshiped together twice on a Sunday. On their return they find members of the same family possibly attending once or not at all. They find their brothers and sisters to be divorced or living in sin. They now have nephews and nieces who are living in a homosexual or lesbian lifestyle, and if they attend church, they are more likely to hear a short message of love from a female minister than the full counsel of God preached with conviction from a male. All this has happened within the space of only thirty to forty years.

Knowledge Disappears

How can this happen? How does faithfulness become unfaithfulness in only forty years? The answer to these questions is set before us in all

its stark clarity in the Book of Judges. First, we notice that this generation “Knew neither the Lord,” and secondly, “What He had done for Israel.” We can not put this down simply to a lack of catechism classes. ‘Ah you see, the kids were not taught about church history. There was no education hour after the tabernacle service. That’s what went wrong!’ There certainly was an education failure, which we examine more closely later in this article, but there was a much deeper failure than that.

This generation did not know the Lord. In Hebrew the word KNOW means so much more than simple head knowledge. Do you remember how older versions of Scripture describe the act of marriage between husband and wife? Adam KNEW his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son... Cain KNEW his wife and she conceived.... This is why when we read in 1 Samuel 2:12 that, “Eli’s sons were wicked men, they did not KNOW the Lord,” we can not put this down to just a failure of education. Eli’s sons were *priests of the Lord*. They KNEW about Him, but they did not KNOW Him. The word “know” implies great intimacy, a waiting upon the Lord. It implies union and communion.

I come from a nation whose na-

tional anthem is called “God defend New Zealand.” As I study in the United States, I notice that the pledge of allegiance declares the country to be “one nation under God,” and the dollar bill declares “In God we Trust.” Every major speech from the president ends with “God bless America.” As I surf through the channels on television or radio, I see and hear preacher after preacher speak ABOUT God. There are churches all over the place, and huge churches at that. And yet, I fear that this nation, just like mine, knows about God, but does not KNOW Him.

So how is it with you? Do you KNOW God? Is your Christianity a submission to a personal King and Father? I am not asking about some mystical feeling; some flakey emotional experience that lasts for a few hours. What I am writing about is the substance of Q/A 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. “True Faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in His word is true; *it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ. Not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made right with God, and have been granted salvation.*” A deep rooted assurance. Do you have that? Because without it your knowledge is empty. Without it, you will join the crowds of ‘Christians’ who march boldly towards heaven on the wide path only to wake up in the fires of hell. Without it you will slide right off of the pew and into eternal damnation.

Israel ignored God's promise, to the point that later on in her history, Hosea would record these chilling words against her. "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children." (Hosea 4:6)

Scripture reveals that the experience of redemption is infinitely renewable. The promise of the covenant is declared to be to you **AND TO YOUR CHILDREN AND TO ALL WHO ARE FAR OFF!** This is why we baptize our infants, this is why we teach our children to love the law of the Lord from day one, this is why we catechize our children, this is why we seek out Reformed Christian schooling for our children, this is why we encourage them to profess their faith. Because our God is a God of covenant; A God to a thousand generations of **THOSE WHO LOVE ME!**

No matter how diligent our Sunday school teachers, catechism teachers, school teachers, or pastors are, the single largest influence in the lives of children is their parents. Fathers and mothers, but particularly fathers to whom belongs the responsibility of headship in the home. Are you fulfilling your covenantal obligations towards your children? Are you demonstrating true faith? Do your children know that you **KNOW** God? Or, are you too busy to tell the next generation the things the Lord has done for Israel? We see it all around us. Hundreds and thousands of busy, busy Christians, whose children are walking away from the church. Just walking away.

As a minimum, safeguard your supper time. Turn off the television, let the answering machine catch the phone calls or just let it ring, and give that time to your wife and children. End the meal with a time of fruitful, meaningful devotions. Do not just skip through a Bible reading and zap off the same old prayer. Talk about the reading. Ask questions of your children, take out the church directory, go through it and pray for one family a night. Show them you love the Lord and that you love His people. Use the Lord's Day not just to get your own rest, but to, again, show your family the things the Lord has done for Israel. Go through their Sunday school or catechism lesson with them. Discuss the sermons as you sit around the Sunday dinner table, and take out the Psalters/Hymnals and sing to Him.

Jesus came down to His own people. He attended the synagogue worship. He walked in the temple. He spoke with the "office-bearers" on a daily basis. He must have heard countless times, people read the Bible about the prophecies of the Messiah's coming. Yet what does it say in John 1:10-11? "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him." Neglect the next generation and they will reject Christ. Be Christ to

the next generation and they will embrace Him, by His Grace.

Idolatry Develops

Amnesia produces apostasy. Israel forsook the Lord for Baal and Ashtoreths; local gods of fertility. Baal worship which involved temple prostitutes where the locals would go to the temple and physically act out Baal's role in creation with "Mother Nature," so to speak.

We read it time and time again in the Old Testament, and we can just skip over it without too much thought, but I want us to consider just what this means. Israel – the covenant people of the Lord. What was the first article of her 'constitution?' "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other Gods before me."

And what was Israel to do in the promised Land? She was to completely destroy the Canaanite nations, to rid that place of idolatry, and live as a witness to the Lord's favor. And what happened? Not all the nations were destroyed. Some of the Levites were appointed to live in a city dedicated to the worship of the sun god. Before too long, the Canaanites were coming over to introduce themselves. "Howdy neighbor, that's a fine looking tent you got there. I see your corn crop ain't doin' so well this season. If you're interested I could give you a few tips on how we deal

Neglect the next generation and they will reject Christ. Be Christ to the next generation and they will embrace Him, by His Grace.

with bad crops in these parts. If you like I could take you into town and introduce to the local farming experts, they're a great bunch of girls, if you know what I mean! Say listen, Some of our kids are going swimming down in the Jordan this weekend, we wondered if your kids would like to come along?"

Soon enough each household had its own set of idols. You can read about this in Judges 6 and 17. Soon enough one man would murder his seventy brothers to protect his position of leadership. You can read about this in Judges 9. Soon enough the men of Benjamin would knock on the door of an old man and demand that he send out his guest so that they can abuse him. You can read about this in Judges 19.

You may think that this is not relevant for us. After all, we are a faithful church; we have no problem with Baal idolatry; you will not find any idols like that around here! Can we learn nothing from the Israelites? Can we learn nothing from some of the churches in the Netherlands that I mentioned earlier? Can we learn nothing from the history of some of the once great reformed Churches around here?

Take a look for a moment at the children who sit beside, in front, and behind you in church. Twenty-five years is all it takes for amnesia to produce apostasy. Twenty-five years for a generation of young boys who sit beside their parents with a shirt and tie on to become the most filthy, immoral, and degraded individuals possible. Twenty-five years for a generation of those young girls with their beautiful Sunday

Take a look for a moment at the children who sit beside, in front, and behind you in church. Twenty-five years is all it takes for amnesia to produce apostasy.

dresses to inform their parents that they intend to set up house with another woman.

Israel stopped relying on God's providence in their daily life and work. On who do you depend for your livelihood. The god of insurance? The god of tax evasion? The god of under the table dealings? Or do you depend on the God of Israel? Before which altar does your family worship? The altar of Hollywood with all its disgusting immorality and foul language? The altar of sports with all its corruption, greed, and bad behavior? The altar of technology with all its free downloads and new gadgets and great deals? The altar of lifestyle magazines with new appliances, new homes, new décor, new cars, new body image? Or, do you lead your family to worship before the altar of the living God!

What will be the standard for our corporate worship each Sunday. Will it be the standard of political correctness that demands equal participation for women. Perhaps an occasional Bible reading to begin with, and then the occasional public prayer. Perhaps some other instruments and music more in step with the younger generation. Perhaps some video presentations instead of a sermon, or some drama, because that really appeals to our eyes as well as our ears! Or will our worship continue to be regulated

by the principles which come from the Word of God?

Is there anything distinctive about our young people's social life; anything separate? Do you parents know where they are and who they are with? Are they enrolled to attend the young peoples conventions, to be in a place where they can fellowship with other Reformed believers, a place where lasting relationships can be formed; relationships with generational consequences?

Israel neglected these things and a whole lot more, and in as little as twenty-five years amnesia produced apostasy.

Invasion Distresses

In His anger against Israel, the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies whom they were unable to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them in the wilderness. They were in great distress.

Our God would have us take note in His punishment of Israel that His anger is a faithful anger. In Deuteronomy 31:17 God promised what to Israel if Israel they would forsake Him. "On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed.

Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?' And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods."

We can take tremendous comfort in the knowledge that our God's anger is a faithful anger. He deals with His people as His children. He is faithful to His covenant. He disciplines them for their own good. He will not abandon them. Psalm 103: "He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."

As Israel was occupied by the forces of Midian, Moab, or the Amalekites, we read repeatedly that they would cry out to God in their distress. Not always in repentance, but always in distress. Do likewise! When you are troubled, pour out your heart before the Lord who hears and answers prayers; the Lord who does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Salvation Delivers

Did God wait until Israel had rid itself of idolatry? Did God wait until Israel had cleaned up its immoral behavior? Did God wait for Israel to cry out in repentance? Did God wait for Israel to do anything? No. Here we see in all its boldness the doctrine of Salvation by Grace Alone. "Then the Lord raised up Judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders." What thrilling words! What words of tremendous comfort! Right in the

midst of Israel's wickedness and sin, salvation appears by the Hand of God. This is your God--a God of compassion and mercy, a God who dispenses grace and kindness to undeserving sinners.

Does this suggest that we need not cry out to God in repentance, or change our sinful behavior? No, it does not, for God's Word demands these things from His people.

These words should instead focus our attention on the Judge who saves. The Hebrew word for save is *YASHA*. The word means deliv-

We can take tremendous comfort in the knowledge that our God's anger is a faithful anger.

erance, rescue, safety, welfare, and salvation. From this exact word we get the name Joshua, and from this exact word we get the name Jeshua, which in Greek is translated as Jesus. "Then the Lord raised up a Judge who "*Jesus-ed*" them. What you need, what I need, what this generation and the next, and all subsequent generations need, is a Judge named Jesus, for only He can set us free from the ravages of sin.

When my family and I traveled over to the United States we traveled with two young ladies, who were also from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. They were both aged around their mid-twenties, they were both trained Christian

School teachers, and they were both attractive, godly women. They came to the States to further their teacher training at a seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. But a secondary reason for coming here was to search for a husband. Not for them were many of the eligible young men from a relatively small denomination of about twenty churches in New Zealand. Not for them were the young men, who in general terms often presented themselves as immature, money wasters, poorly groomed, ill-mannered, sports mad, drinkers and smokers. Unfit material for leading a covenant home. I am thankful to report that both of them are now recently married. There is certainly a much larger pool of eligible young men over here, but I have met other young men just like some of those back home.

The future of the church lies in godly young men who are able to lead covenant homes, who are able to be Christ to their wives, who can demonstrate God the Father to their children, who can impart the wisdom of the Spirit of God to their church communities.

Am I suggesting that so long as we have traditional worship services and do not watch bad television programs, that all will be well? Is it enough to get our daughters to wear modest clothing and discipline our sons with regularity that all will be well? With the proper training will they automatically be Christians and then the church will remain faithful? No, some of you can bear witness to the fact that you have raised your children faithfully and still gone through the agony of

watching them turn from the Lord; of watching them continue to walk the path of unrighteousness. It remains, as it always has, for God by His Spirit to call His own unto Himself. God must raise up before them a Judge who saves. To open their eyes to the work of Jesus Christ.

We worship a God who desires to demonstrate His faithfulness to a thousand generations of THOSE WHO LOVE ME! Let our hope and our confidence rest in these words from Psalm 22. “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before Him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations...Future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – FOR HE HAS DONE IT.”

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 31: Of the Calling of Ministers in the Church

“He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.” This is the outlook of our Confession. This phrase, penned by Cyprian and taken up by John Calvin, is expressed and applied in the words of faith in Belgic Confession, Articles 27-36. The doctrine of the church was where the stone cartwheel hit the road for the average Medieval European. These ideas of the Reformers inevitably led to a break with Rome. Would peasants, merchants, and aristocrats follow? If so, what would the churches they left for look like? The “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” church was a real organism as well as organization and it needed government, form, and structure.

As we saw in our study of Belgic Confession, Article 30, the Word of God does not give us every detail as to the government of the church. Yet it does give us the “general rules of the Word,” to use the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, I.6. Those basic rules began with the three offices in the church: pastors, elders, and deacons. So how does one enter into one of these offices?

Calling to Office

Following the clear teaching of Scripture, our Confession outlines how someone is called to one of the three offices of minister, elder, or deacon, saying,

We believe that ministers of God’s Word, the elders, and the deacons ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the Church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teaches.

The first feature is that this is to be done “by a lawful election by the Church.” This is in contrast to Roman hierarchy, in which church officers are appointed by bishops, archbishops, and the ecclesiastical elite. This also guards against Anabaptist enthusiasm, which we see so rampant in our day and age, in which someone feels “led” to become a pastor and start his/her own church.

The participation of the congregation in choosing its officers is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. In Exodus 18, we read how Moses, in judging cases between the members of the church, was wearing himself out. His father-in-law, Jethro, gave him some of the best advice he could have ever received, basically saying, “Divide up this work among other able, trustworthy men who feared God while leaving the extremely difficult cases for yourself.” As Moses described this at the end of his life, he said he told Israel to “Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads. And

We see the consciousness of the Reformation in seeking to follow the early catholic churches as opposed to the deformed Roman Catholic Church.

you answered me, “The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.” So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you...” (Deuteronomy 1:13-15).

This principle is also seen in the Old Testament hereditary institution of the Levitical priesthood, in which those to be consecrated as priests were brought before the assembly of Israel before this happened so that they could share in this ministry (Leviticus 8:4-6; Numbers 20:26-27).

In continuity with these Old Testament examples is the New Testament account of Acts 6. When the apostles, like Moses, had begun to wear themselves out by serving the people both by preaching and doing the work of benevolence. They called the entire congregation together and said,

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty...And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they

prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:3, 5, 6)

Other accounts of the church being involved in electing/selecting its leaders are found in the calling of Matthias to replace Judas as an apostle in the presence of the 120 (Acts 1:12ff) as well as the elders in Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch being “elected by a show of hands” (Acts 14:23).

Added to these Scriptural evidences are the testimonies of the ancient church to this practice. Here, as at many other points in our Confession, we see the consciousness of the Reformation in seeking to follow the early catholic churches as opposed to the deformed Roman Catholic Church. For example, in the very early church document *The Didache* (ca. A.D. 60-120), we read, “Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved” (15:1).

Later, the powerful and eloquent Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, wrote about the people of God, who

have the power either of choosing worthy priests, or of rejecting unworthy ones...Which very thing, too, we observe to come from divine authority, that the priest should be chosen in the presence of the people

under the eyes of all, and should be approved worthy and suitable by public judgment and testimony...And the bishop should be chosen in the presence of the people, who have most fully known the life of each one, and have looked into the doings of each one as respects his habitual conduct (Epistle 67).

These, and other testimonies from the fathers of the ancient church, make it clear that the biblical and historical practice is that of congregational nomination, prayer, and election of their pastors, elders, and deacons.

Second, the calling of men to the three offices is to be accompanied “with calling upon the name of the Lord” as the biblical examples above have shown. According to one commentator, this was applied in the “Strangers Congregation” in London, pastored by Johannes à Lasco, by the church having a stated day of fasting and prayer before the congregation gathered to elect its officers.

Third, election by the church is to occur “in that order which the Word of God teaches.” After the congregation has elected its officers in the spirit of prayer, these elected officials are to be brought before the church and be prayed over and have hands lain upon them. This is clear from the text we mentioned above concerning the first deacons, Acts 6:6, as well as the accounts of Barnabus and Saul (Acts 13:3) and Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6).

What all of this means for those in

the congregation is found in the summary of this part of Article 31, which says,

Therefore every one must take heed not to intrude himself by improper means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him, and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.

The benefit of an orderly and biblical calling process is that the church is protected from those who would intrude themselves into office by improper means. It also proves to all involved, especially the candidate, that his call is “of the Lord.” This is the case for, while the internal call is a powerful work, it is always accompanied by the external call of God through his people. This is why our “Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons,” asks in the first vow, “First: Do you, both elders and deacons, feel in your hearts that you are lawfully called of God’s church, *and consequently of God Himself*, to these your respective offices?” (emphasis mine)

Pastors & the Pastor

As the Confession continues, it next says a few words about the office of the minister which are intended to distance our church polity from that of Rome:

As for the ministers of God’s Word, they have equally the same power and authority

wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church.

It is often said in our day that the difference between a “Presbyterian” form of church government and that of Episcopal and Congregational churches is that Presbyterian churches are ruled by elders, not bishops or the people, respectively. While this may be true in some respects, this was not really the issue between the Reformers and their polity and that of Rome and later Anglicanism. As we can see from the writings of men such as Theodore Beza, the reason for this part of Article 31 is that, while there were different orders (Latin, *ordo*) of ministry in the church, such as pastors, elders, or deacons (cf. Ephesians 4:11), there were not different degrees (Latin, *gradus*) within each order/office.

What this means is that all of the order of minister are equal, all of the order of elder are equal, and all of the order of deacon are equal. The Confession specifically deals with the office of minister, saying, they have “equally the same power and authority...as they are all ministers of Christ.” This means that all ministers are of the same degree (*gradus*). And so within the ordained ministry there are not priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and a pope, moving from

lower to higher degrees of ministry and authority.

This does not mean, though, that within an order of ministry one cannot have a position of dignity above his fellow office-bearers due to a particular function assigned to him. For example, one of the ministers of a consistory or even an elder may serve as president, one of them may serve as moderator of a presbytery/classis, and even one of the deacons may serve as the “benevolence deacon” who specifically is dignified in serving the needy.

Because all ministers of Christ are equal in authority, whether they are in Rome, Geneva, Grand Rapids, or Oceanside, the Confession asserts that Christ alone is “the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church.” This is precisely what Scripture says when Christ is called the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4; Greek, *archipoimenos*), the great shepherd (Hebrews 13:20; Greek, *ton poimena...ton megan*), and the Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25; Greek, *episkopon tMn phuchMn humMn*). Our Lord is also called the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23 cf. 4:15; Colossians 1:18), head over all things (Ephesians 1:22), and head of all rule and authority (Colossians 2:10).

Therefore the true catholic and apostolic Church does not need a vicar (from the Latin, *vicarious*, “in the place of another”), that is, a visible representative of Christ on earth, for He, being the head, has given His authority to men “wheresoever they are” to preach His Word, administer His sacraments, and pastor His people all over the world.

All of the order of minister are equal, all of the order of elder are equal, and all of the order of deacon are equal.

What is so interesting is that while Rome persists in claiming that Peter was the first Pope, the bishop above all others, he was “opposed” by Paul to his face for the hypocrisy of eating with Gentiles only when leaders from Jerusalem were not present (Galatians 2:11-14). This was in practice a denial of justification by faith! And far from being the Pope, Peter spoke to the leaders of the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia as a “fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1; Greek, *sumpresbuteros*), that is, one in the same office, of the same degree, and authority as them.

Because of these testimonies of Scripture, the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in 1647, codified the Reformed belief toward the Papacy, saying,

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God (Chapter 25:6, “Of the Church”).

Respect for Officers

The final words in this article of the Belgic Confession speak about the dignity and honor that the offices of minister and elder have, and the resultant respect those who are pastored and ruled by them are to give:

Moreover, in order that this holy ordinance of God may not be violated or slighted, we

say that every one ought to esteem the ministers of God’s Word and the elders of the Church very highly for their work’s sake, and be at peace with them without murmuring, strife, or contention, as much as possible.

The people of God must recognize that the offices of minister and elder are filled by men who do not enter into them lightly. To preach God’s eternal and infallible Word, to shepherd Christ’s flock, to adminis-

The true catholic and apostolic Church does not need a vicar.

ter discipline with the wayward and so protect the whole church from the leaven of sin are the holy “work” these offices entail. And so there is an inherent honor in being a minister and elder.

For this reason the church is to

“esteem...very highly” their pastors and elders. We see this so evidently taught in Scripture. At the end of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul says, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The epistle to the Hebrews has some of the most pointed commands to the people in this matter, saying,

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

Paul also briefly speaks in this way when he tells the church at Philippi that he is going to send Epaphroditus to them. In response, they are to “receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men” (Philippians 2:29).

Study/Application Questions for Article 31

1. Who calls men to the offices of the church? Describe the internal and external calls.
2. How does the church go about recognizing a man’s internal calling? (1 Timothy 3:1-13)
3. Why is it important to say that all pastors have the same authority?
4. What do we say about the Pope or anyone else who claims to be *the* pastor of the Church?

Finally, in 1 Timothy 5:17 we read some of the most familiar words to this end, where Paul tells Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

A final note to consider is why these apostolic imperatives are found in the New Testament. They are there precisely because submitting and honoring those over us in the Lord is difficult to do. Not only do our sinful nature, the world around us, as well as the Devil tell us not to submit and honor them, but this is also a very practical challenge if the one in the office of minister or elder is a friend, peer, family member, or even younger than others. To this last difficulty Paul exhorts Timothy, a young pastor, saying, “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Timothy 4:12) precisely because in this very same chapter Paul calls Timothy a “good servant of Christ Jesus,” that is, a minister of Christ (1 Timothy 4:6). After all, his heart was inwardly called, he was externally called and validated by the church, he was prayed over and consecrated with the laying on of hands, and he entered the sacred office of Word and Sacrament. It is the same today. May we be grateful to God for our ministers, especially, as they are God’s gifts to our souls.

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

Looking Out and About

- Candidate James Sinkey who graduated from Mid-America Reformed Seminary last May has accepted the call extended to him by the newly organized United Reformed Church in Rock Valley, Iowa.
- Mr. Talman Wagenmaker, who also graduated from Mid-America Reformed Seminary in 2005, has accepted the call to the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun, Wisconsin. He had been serving as the stated supply at the church in Momence, Illinois which recently joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
- Rev. John Klompfen, who has been serving as Pastor of Discipleship at the First Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan has accepted the call extended to him by the North Street CRC of Zeeland, Michigan. He will be installed on March 26, 2006.
- Rev. Tymen Hofmen died on January 6, 2006 at the age of 83. Rev. Hofmen served several Christian Reformed Churches throughout North America and is the author of a history of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada and a book celebrating the first one hundred years of the Christian Reformed Church.
- The World Reformed Fellowship General Assembly will meet this week in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Plans are being made for the tenth annual women’s conference to be held at the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan on March 24-25, 2006. The theme this year is “Oil in My Lamp.”
- Rev. Gene Crow, who began his ministry serving as a church planter in Muskegon, Michigan for the United Reformed Church in North America, has accepted the call to be the pastor of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in Cambridge, Ontario.
- Mr. Jody Lucero, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, has accepted the call to serve the Providence Reformed Church in des Moines, Iowa. This church is a church plant under the supervision of the Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.
- Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI, dedicated the Puritan Resource Center section of its library on October 20, 2005. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, professor at Dallas Westminster Theological Seminary, addressed about 350 attendees on the topic, “The Puritans: Can They Teach Us Anything Today?” The Center contains 2,500 volumes in a climate-controlled room protected by a Halon fire suppression system, and will soon include an additional 500 volumes from the Seminary’s 40,000-volume main library.

Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 5:8-14

“*The Song of Heaven*” (Part 2)

In our last article we looked at the three songs of Revelation 5. The first song, found in verses 9-10, taught us that it is the role of the elders and the preachers to keep the eyes of the flock upon the Lamb that was slain. The second song, found in verses 11-12, taught us the glories of the gospel as angels join the church in singing the worth of the Lamb. The third song, found in verse 13, taught us that all creation will one day sing to the Lord.

But what does all of this have to do with us? What does all of this mean for the life of the church? What does all of this mean for the life of the church as she lives in the midst of the world? What does all of this mean for the life of the church as she lives between the first and second comings of Christ?

To answer those questions, I direct your attention to the harps and the song. The new song is sung to the accompaniment of harps. It is sung before the loosing of the seven seals. It is sung before God sends forth His judgments upon the earth.

We find the imagery of a harp and a song once again in chapter 14. In 14:2-3, we read “And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne...” This song is sung before the hour of God’s judgment comes (note verse 7). It is a

new song sung to the accompaniment of harps before the sending forth of judgment.

We find the imagery of harps and a song again in chapter 15. In 15:2-3, we read, “And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb...” Again we read of harps and a song. It is sung before the pouring out of the seven bowls of God’s wrath, those bowls in which the wrath of God Almighty is complete. A song is sung to the accompaniment of harps before the pouring out of God’s wrath.

Are you getting the picture? In each of these passages a song sung. In each of these passages a song is sung to the accompaniment of harps before the judgments are poured forth.

Do you see what this has to do with the church? The church sings a new song, to the accompaniment of instruments, prior to the pouring out of judgment! That means that even now we sing! Even now the church sings a new song! Even now the church sings the song of heaven!

As we find ourselves living in the midst of the world, between the first and second comings of

Christ—the four living creatures preach Christ! Preachers proclaim the Lamb that was slain! As we find ourselves living in the midst of the world, between the first and second comings of Christ—the twenty four elders worship Christ! Elders set the eyes of the congregation upon the Lamb that was slain! Even now as we find ourselves in the world we sing the song of heaven! Even now as we await the return of the King we sing the song of heaven! Even now we sing “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!”

In the Old Testament, the people of God sang in response to the great acts of God in history for the salvation of His people. After the crossing of the Red Sea, they sang the song of Moses, commemorating what God had done. In Psalm 33:1-3, we are commanded to sing a new song, because of what God has done (note verses 4 and following). In Psalm 40:3, the psalmist sings a new song, again because of what God has done (note verses 1-2). In Psalm 96:1, all the earth is commanded to sing a new song, because of what God has done (note verses 2-3). In Psalm 98:1, we are commanded to sing a new song, because of what God has done (note verses 1-3). In Psalm 144:9, David sings a new song to the Lord because of what God has done (note verses 9-10).

We turn to the opening of the New Testament, and again we find the people of God singing in response to the great acts of God in history for the salvation of His people. Mary is told that she will bear the Christ, and she sings the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). When John the

Baptist is born, his father's mouth is opened, and he sings the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79). When the Christ is born, the angels of heaven sing the *Gloria* (Luke 2:14). When Simeon takes the Christ child in his arms he sings the *Nunc Dimmitis* (Luke 2:29-32). God sends His Son for the salvation of His people, and His people sing a new song!

We turn to John's Gospel, and we find in the Prologue, verses 1-18, what appears as a hymn—a hymn to the great act of God in the giving of His Son—sending to us the One who was in the bosom of the Father, that we might return to the bosom of the Father, bringing His sheep into the bosom of the Father.

We turn to the book of Revelation, and we find songs—new songs—songs which center upon the person and work of Christ!

Again and again in the Scriptures God's people sing in response to the mighty acts of God for the redemption of His people.

This passage has several implications, then, for the church. In the first place note the presence of the harps. Instruments can and should be used in worship, and that for the accompaniment of the singing.

Note in the second place that the song is a new song. The position of exclusive psalmody—the idea that only psalms can be sung in wor-

ship—is untenable. To be sure, as the people of God we ought to love the psalms, we ought to sing them with great regularity. But we are also called to sing a new song. The history of redemption has progressed. We live on this side of the cross and that should be reflected in the songs of the church.

Though we are called to sing a new song, we take our cue from the psalms. As the psalms were new songs sung in response to what God had done for the salvation of His people, so the songs that the church sings must be songs sung in response to what God has done in Christ for the salvation of His people. Our music and our songs must be directed, as all of our worship must be directed, to what God has done in Christ! Worship is worshipping God and the Lamb; it is not about entertaining the sheep!

As C.S. Lewis once put it: "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was 'Feed My sheep,' not 'try new experiments on my rats,' or even, 'teach my performing dogs new tricks.'" How are the sheep fed? They are fed with what God has done in Christ? How are the sheep fed? They are fed by the Lamb that was slain!

Do you need proof? Consider the songs of Revelation: 4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:12; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 16:5-6. Notice not one of those songs speaks about you or about what you

have done: nothing of your works, nothing of your decisions, nothing of you or what you have done whatsoever. The songs are simply not about you! All of the songs speak about what God has done in Christ. The songs are about His work. The songs are about the work of His hands. The songs are about Him!

Indeed, the book of Revelation has much to teach us about the life of the church concerning her music and songs. There is no room in heaven for singing the praises of man! There is no room in heaven for singing of the so-called decisions of man! There is no room in heaven for singing of the works of man's hands! And if there is no room in heaven for the singing of man-centered songs, then there is no room in the church for the singing of man-centered songs!

New songs? Yes! But new songs that are centered upon God and what He has done in Christ!

Worthy is the Lamb! That is the song of heaven. And that is the song of the church, even now, as she joins the chorus in heaven, and as she awaits her entrance into heaven! O sing to the Lord a new song!

Rev. Brian Vos is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.

*The songs that the church sings must be songs
sung in response to what God has done in Christ
for the salvation of His people.*

God's Salvation from Eternity to Eternity

The ultimate basis for the salvation of man lies in the recesses of eternity, emanating from the counsel of God's will. Before the foundations of the world were framed, and before any creature was brought into being, it was by the eternal counsel of God, whereby He has determined the eternal destiny of all mankind.

God decreed in eternity. We know that decree as Predestination. It is the eternal counsel of God, whereby He has elected in Christ certain definite individuals of fallen humanity to salvation, and left the remainder in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

The decrees are the beginning of God's works in eternity, and they are eternal. God's eternity is that perfection of God whereby He is exalted above time, so that with Him there is no past or future, only an eternal presence. The other works of God, those works in nature and grace, fall within the pale of time, but the decrees belong to eternity.

The decree of predestination is the concurrent act of the three persons of the Trinity, who are one in their counsel and will. Predestination was so decreed at the great Counsel of Peace or the Counsel of Redemption. Before anything was, the Scriptures tell us, the Triune God had thoughts of peace concerning the children of men, and that before He created a single being.

Election

Now predestination consists of two parts, that of election and reprobation. Election is defined as: "That eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no unforeseen merit in them, chose a certain number of persons to be the recipients of special grace and eternal salvation." Since election is the expression of the sovereign will of God, it is immutable and therefore renders the salvation of the elect as certain. This is of great comfort to the believer because their final salvation does not depend on their uncertain obedience, but has its guarantee in the unchangeable purpose of God.

Election is from eternity and does not in any way depend on foreseen faith, as taught in Armenian doctrine. It is exclusively based on the sovereign good pleasure of God, who is also the originator of faith and good works. Paul wrote, "According to the power of God who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began" (II Timothy 1:9). Peter greets the various churches throughout Asia Minor as "Being elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter 1:2).

This election is irresistible. It is possible for man to oppose its execution to a certain degree, but man's opposition cannot and will

not prevail. This does not mean that God simply by decree overpowers the human will in a manner, which is inconsistent with man's free agency, but rather God can and does exert an influence on the human spirit, to make it willing.

The fact that God favors some and passes others by does in no way warrant the charge that God is unjust. If God owed forgiveness and eternal life to sinners, than it would be an injustice if He saved only a limited number of said sinners. However, we have no claim as sinners on the blessings, which flow from eternal election. Not only do we have no claim or right to call God into account for electing some, and passing by others, for we must admit that He would have been perfectly just if He had not saved any. Particularly since all mankind are born in sin, and having a corrupt nature, are inclined to hate God.

Reprobation

The very decree of election implies the existing fact of reprobation. If the all-wise God possessed of infinite knowledge has eternally purposed to save some, than it goes without saying that He also purposed, by that very fact to reject others.

Election and reprobation both determine with absolute certainty the end to which each is predestined, and the manners by which that end is realized. God will bring to pass by His own direct efficiency whatsoever He has decreed. While it can be said that God is the Author of regeneration, calling, faith, etc., and in that way brings their election to come to pass; it cannot be said that

He is the author of their fall, nor the unrighteous conditions, and the sinful acts of the reprobate. God does not place any direct action upon them, or in any way cause them to realize their danger in being reprobate.

We must accept and uphold the doctrine of election as a fundamental truth, because election is one of the indispensable doctrines of grace. If we deny this doctrine, then it will inevitably lead in one way or another, to a denial of the truth that we are saved not by our works, but by grace alone.

There are those who claim the doctrine of election destroys all motivation to believe, because, one way or another, our destiny is set, and we can do nothing to change our situation. This line of reasoning assumes that God has determined the end without the means, when just the reverse is true. The event is determined with the means. For example, God having decreed that man shall live by the eating of food, however if we refuse to eat we shall die. Likewise, God has decreed that we shall be saved through faith, but if we refuse to believe, we will perish.

Calling

We now to turn the scriptural spotlight on God's works in time, keeping in mind that without the works of God in eternity, as a foreshadow to the works of God in time, there would be no salvation for anyone.

God's works in time, relative to the salvation of the elect, are known to us as the doctrine of the application of grace, or more commonly, as the way of salvation. The way of sal-

vation includes the following parts: 1. the calling, 2. Regeneration, 3. Conversion, 4. Faith, 5. Justification, 6. Sanctification, and 7. Glorification. Our God being a God of order, these parts constitute God's orderly plan for the salvation of sinners.

As to the calling, God has entrusted the church with that responsibility, even as Jesus commanded his disciples saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to

If God owed forgiveness and eternal life to sinners, than it would be an injustice if He saved only a limited number of said sinners.

every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned" (Mark 16: 15, 16).

This calling of men to be saved is divided into two parts: the external call, and the internal call. The message of these calls are the same to a point, namely, the preaching of the gospel message, and the rich and full offer of grace. Both calls present the well-meant offer of salvation, but here the similarity ends.

The external call comes by the Word, and comes to everyone who is privileged to hear it. This call

touches the exterior of man but owing to his corrupt nature, inherited from the "Fall", it does not reach into his soul. Being spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, he hears the call with his ears; however, the ear of faith has not been restored to him, thus preventing the message from reaching his soul. Therefore, the Scriptures inform us that the external call is insufficient for salvation, as we read, "many are called, but few are chosen".

The external call comes by the Word whereas the internal call comes by the Word and Spirit. The external call comes to all who are privileged to hear the gospel, while the internal call comes only to the elect. The external call is not saving and it is insufficient to cause the sinner to come to repentance, while the internal call, by means of the Spirit, who opens the heart to receive the call to repentance.

While it is the Spirit of God who brings life, we should not lose sight of the fact that salvation is the work of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity has a specific part to play with respect to our salvation. First, it is God the Father who in His electing love determined to save a multitude of persons, so great that no man could number them. Secondly, salvation apart from the merits of Christ is utterly impossible and all together inconceivable, for it was Christ who by His perfect obedience and sacrifice has earned salvation for His people. Third, it is the work of the Holy Spirit who opens the heart to enable it to receive the Word unto salvation.

Therefore, salvation is truly the work of God, and man is not the captain of his soul, nor is he the

master of his fate. It is God the Father who elects, the Holy Spirit who turns the hearts of the elect to Christ, and Jesus who is able and willing to present the believer as righteous before the Father.

Regeneration

The next part in the order of salvation is regeneration. This, too, is entirely the work of God. In regeneration man undergoes a revolutionary change, in which man himself is totally passive. This change is absolutely necessary if the sinner is to be made alive, and become a child of God.

Without regeneration man remains in his natural state of sin in which his understanding is darkened, his will perverse, and his affections unholy. What is it then that takes place by means of the revolutionary change in man? The Old Testament tells us: "And Jehovah Thy God will circumcise thy heart to love Jehovah with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that ye may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6); and again "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:24). This is what takes place in regeneration, and it is totally and completely the work of the Holy Spirit.

Looking to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was led to go out of the city, on a Sabbath afternoon, to the riverside, where prayer was wont to be made. He sat down and spoke to the women who were gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, heard Paul and attended to the things spoken of him. The Lord

opened her heart, so that she received the Word and believed. Consequently, both she and her household were baptized the same day. Who then can deny that salvation is the work of God?

There is one interesting note to this revelation. There were a number of women there with Lydia who heard the same gospel message given by Paul, yet they did not respond. Why? The obvious answer is that God did not open their hearts to receive the Word and repent, and they having rejected the call returned to their homes unsaved. Out of the depravity and the corruption of their own hearts, have they willed not to believe?

God's ways in dealing with sinful men is beyond our comprehension, and at times, we have troubled thoughts about the unsaved. We must remember that the unregenerate have no desire within themselves to be saved. Jesus gives us the reason saying, "how often would I have gathered thee together as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not. Ye will not come unto me that ye may be saved" (Luke 13:34; John 3:40).

Conversion

Conversion is the act of turning or becoming turned, from a sinful course to a life of obedience. A turning in conduct, whereby one who formerly wandered away from God, turns in his path and begins to walk toward God.

When man repents, his repentance is through grace given by God, given to him not only in a change of heart, but also to a change of life. Man is not passive in conversion as he is in regeneration, but remains active. In regeneration, God transforms the heart of stone and renders it into a heart of flesh. This must precede conversion, since the man with a heart of stone will not confess his sins nor confess faith in Christ.

These gifts of grace are especially active in conversion, namely knowledge of one's sin and misery together with the gift of faith to believe. Such knowledge turns one to sorrow for sin, even as the gift of faith drives one to Christ. Thus, we must never lose sight of the fact that conversion is first of all, the work of God. It is God's influence in the heart of a sinner, which causes him to turn. He is not forced to turn but his will is renewed, so that he desires to do what God wills.

Man is given certain measure of power to do as he wills, but in every act, he is dependant on the inspiration of God. Therefore, his conversion is first a work of God. In the act of conversion, God leads people in different ways in their conversion, so we must be careful not to dictate a certain method to all alike. The Philippian Jailor, under desperate circumstances cried out to Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" We must assume that Paul had presented him with the gospel, (external call) at one time or an-

Each member of the Trinity has a specific part to play with respect to our salvation.

other. The Spirit working in his heart prepared him for such a time of crisis, and the result was a sudden and dramatic conversion.

On the other hand, there are those covenant children who are born and baptized in the church. They were given the blessings of the covenant of grace from early childhood. They were born again as children, and grew up in the service and fear of God. In such people there is no dramatic crisis, no conscious turning from a sinful life. Yes, they, too, were regenerated and converted, although we cannot say when. It could have happened at anytime under their religious training. The fact that they appear before the Elders to confess their faith in Christ is evidence that they have been converted.

In the command to repent, Divine grace is speaking. This command to repent is not a command of man, or even the minister of the gospel, but is the command of God. Repent ye and believe in the gospel. Man cannot claim spiritual ignorance as an excuse for disobedience.

When it comes to conversion much depends on the outward means of grace. They must be suitable to the needs of the heart, and proper training and teaching must be available for the seeking soul. The word of God is the means used by the Spirit to convict one of sin and lead one to Christ. Thus, the preaching of the word is a very important element in the means to conversion. The word must be preached in its entirety and adapted to various ages, and conditions of life.

God calls and man is duty bound to respond. Some say, "I am not ready yet!" Will you be ready when God calls? The Psalmist said, "So teach us

Man is given certain measure of power to do as he wills, but in every act, he is dependant on the inspiration of God.

to number our days" something no man can do. God will not ask whether or not you are ready, when He calls, you will go.

True Faith

In the natural sphere, believing is to accept as true that which a person says, and in like manner, a saving faith is to accept as true that which God says in His Word. When we have heard about a matter, we can either accept it or reject it. When we believe we accept it as true, that is the manner of faith.

Saving faith is the living conviction wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit testifying that the gospel is true. Such a faith accepts the offer of the gospel, obeys the demands of the gospel, and puts his trust in the assurance of the gospel. Accordingly, we not only embrace Christ as Savior, but we also desire to obey Him as Lord.

This faith must be ascribed to God who has chosen His own from eternity in Christ and He calls them effectually in time and confers upon them faith and repentance. He rescues them from the power of darkness and translates them into the kingdom of his own Son.

There are three essential elements of faith which are necessary in order that a person may believe, namely knowledge, conviction, and surrender.

The object of faith is God's testimony, and to believe this testimony, we must

have knowledge. It is a known fact that one cannot believe in something of which he has no knowledge, and the soul cannot desire or love what it does not know; this would be impossible! Therefore, God has given us His Word, that we might have the means to acquire this knowledge and it requires us to study diligently the word, to assure us regarding that Faith.

The more we know about God and His Word, the greater will be our confidence and ability to believe. The measure of our Faith can often be determined in accordance with the measure of knowledge we possess concerning God's word. Man cannot place his faith in God, unless he has first lost faith in himself, this he will only realize through the study of the Scripture.

The second element of Faith is conviction. We learn from the Word that our knowledge concerning that Word should build within us a conviction of the truth of God's Word, and one not only desires fervently to live by it, but if need be is prepared to die for it.

We are not presently being tested to the ultimate, as were our forefathers, who in refusal to deny their faith were fed to wild beasts, burned at the stake, or placed on the rack. However, the hatred of Christ and Christianity is building so rapidly, even in America, that Christians of our present day may soon be required to defend their faith in the face of severe persecution.

The third element of true faith is surrender. This is related directly to conviction. In this instance, the word “surrender” means that we surrender our life to Christ, in obedience to His word and will.

Many verses in the New Testament confirm what God had ordained in Genesis 3:15. God decreed from that time forth there was to be a line of demarcation established between Christianity and the World. Thus the Christian, in obedience, is to fight against all evil, and abstain from all worldliness, living his life in accordance with the Word of God. True faith therefore evidences itself in such obedience, and such obedience is impossible without faith.

Living the Christian life will inevitably bring conflict with the world. Satan is ever present to deceive us in an effort “to take away the word” (Mark 4:15). Consequently, the Christian finds himself struggling between the life he is living, and the life he knows he should be living. A conflict exists between what he is, and what he should be. This is expressed in the willful desires of the human heart as compared to the will of God for his life.

True faith is not only to surrender, but also to be glad you surrendered. The act of surrender is one of the fruits of faith and represents the life of thankfulness of which our catechism speaks. Only in complete surrender may one expect the peace of God to flood his soul.

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United Reformed Churches in North America Classis Southwest U.S. Report

The sixteenth meeting of Classis Southwest U.S. was hosted in the Valley of the Sun, January 17-18, 2006, by the Phoenix URC. The eighteen organized churches of Classis assembled to examine a man for candidacy, deal with three overtures, as well give concurring advice to several churches in their labors to maintain the three marks of a true church.

The entire first day of Classis was taken up with the candidacy examination of Mr. Steve Oeverman, a 2004 graduate of Westminster Seminary California, who is a member of the Escondido URC. After sustaining all sections of his exam, the delegates then prayed for him and the Lord’s will to be done in his life.

The Council of the Cloverdale URC (Boise, ID) overtured Classis to give its concurring advice in the organization of the URC of the Magic Valley (Twin Falls, ID). After hearing from Rev. Christopher Folkerts about the Lord’s hand in sustaining and maturing this little flock, the assembly joyfully gave its advice and offered a prayer of thanksgiving. Classis SWUS continues to grow as this congregation will be its 19th organized church. In that light, Classis also welcomed Rev. Carl Heuss and Stuart Van Kooten of the Coram Deo Reformation Church (Denver, CO), which has voted to unite with the URCNA and which is being overseen by the Calvary United Reformed Church (Loveland, CO).

Two other overtures were brought to Classis by the Phoenix URC. First, an overture dealing with modifying several items in Classis’ “Rules of Procedure” was brought. All but one of the recommendations were adopted. The second overture dealt with the URCNA’s Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. The churches adopted the overture, which will be forwarded to Synod 2007, to change the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity used by CERCU. The change consists of dividing “Phase 3 - Church Union” into two distinct steps: first, in developing a plan of ecclesiastical union which would require ratification by a majority of consistories of the federation, and second, in implementing the plan of ecclesiastical union, which, as well, requires ratification by a majority of consistories. Classis SWUS believes this will give the federation more flexibility in our ecumenical relations by allowing us to recognize other true churches without at the same time committing ourselves to eventual integrated federative unity with them as well as allowing a more realistic application of “Phase Two” relations with other federations and denominations.

A request from the Christ Reformed Church (Anaheim, CA) was adopted that Classis SWUS join the Protestant and Reformed Joint Commission (PRJC), an endorsing agency for prospective chaplains in the U.S. Navy as one

of their members and seminary students is planning to pursue that calling.

Finally, an *ad hoc* committee was formed, and which will report to the next meeting of Classis, in response to a request by the Pasadena URC in regards to how best to deal with members in our churches and their relationship to the second service. The next meeting of classis will be hosted by the Zion URC (Ripon, CA), June 27-28, 2006.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Daniel R. Hyde, Clerk

United Reformed Churches in North America

Classis Central U.S. Report

Classis Central US met at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa — January 16-17, 2006

A lengthy agenda awaited the delegates of Classis Central US when they met on the evening of January 16 at Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa. Despite its length, however, the business at hand was ripe with opportunities to sing songs of rejoicing before the Lord.

Rev. Bill De Jong served as chairman pro tem, calling the meeting to order. Thereafter Rev. Harold Miller wielded the gavel as chairman, Rev. Tom Wetselaar served as vice-chairman, and Rev. Todd Joling served as clerk. Much of Monday evening was consumed with reports of committees and officials, church visitors concerning six churches, and administrative tasks.

Classis was blessed to receive fraternal greetings from Rev. Peter Holtvluwer, representing Classis Manitoba of the Canadian Reformed Churches; and from Rev. Jeff De Boer, representing Classis Covenant East of the Reformed Church in the US. The following day, greetings were received from Rev. Rodney King, representing the Presbytery of the Midwest of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and from Rev. Robert Grossmann, representing Classis South Central of the RCUS. Our own ministers also made some fraternal visits – Rev. Larry Johnson to Dakota Presbytery of the OPC and to South Central Classis of the RCUS, and

Rev. John Vermeer to Classis Manitoba of the CanRC.

Tuesday proved to be a long but fruitful day for delegates.

The first major item of business was a request by Illiana Reformed Fellowship of Dyer, Ind., for entrance into the federation. Elder Brian Yonkman of Lynwood URC – which sponsored the fledgling congregation – presented the request, noting the agreement of IRF's office-bearers to both the Three Forms of Unity and our Church Order. After a short period of questioning, delegates granted the church provisional admittance to the federation, pending ratification by the synod to be held in 2007.

The next matter of business was to examine the two ministers who hold memberships in the new congregation: Rev. Dr. J. Mark Beach and Rev. Dr. Cornel Venema. Both men are Mid-America Reformed Seminary professors whose ministerial credentials are in the Christian Reformed Church. Following an extensive oral examination, the men sustained their exams and were welcomed warmly.

Next up was Mr. Jody Lucero, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in California and candidate from Classis Southwest US. Mr. Lucero was called to serve Providence Reformed Church, a Des Moines church plant supervised by Covenant Reformed Church of Pella. He too sustained

his examination, making him eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments.

Finally, classis examined Mr. Spencer Aalsburg, a 2005 Mid-America graduate who has been providing pulpit supply for a small group meeting in DeMotte, Ind. A native of the Pella area who is under the supervision of Covenant Reformed Church, Aalsburg emerged from his lengthy examination weary but triumphant. After privately conferring, Aalsburg's elders declared him to have sustained his examination – a decision with which classis concurred, agreeing to waive his ordination exam if he receives a call in a church of Classis Central US.

After congratulating Mr. Aalsburg – and with the evening growing late – delegates debated the wisdom of finishing the meeting the next day. However, delegates from several congregations offered to defer requests for advice to the next meeting, allowing business to conclude late Tuesday.

Before adjourning, however, delegates offered concurring advice regarding a discipline case for Covenant Reformed Church of Kansas City.

They also elected a new stated clerk. Rev. Todd Joling has been serving in this capacity since Rev. Peter Kloosterman accepted a call to New Zealand in August 2005. However, Rev. Joling also serves as a member of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity, and he asked to be released from the full-time duties of clerk. Rev. Doug Barnes was given the task.

Classis is scheduled to meet again on March 21 in Waupun, Wisc., with the Consistory of Oak Glen URC convening. That classis will be charged with performing ordination exams for Mr. Talman Wagenmaker, who recently accepted a call to Grace URC of Waupun; and for Mr. James Sinke, who recently accepted a call to the Rock Valley church plant that is supervised by Doon URC. Another classis meeting is scheduled for June 13, with the intent of conduct-

ing four candidacy exams for men expected to graduate this spring from Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Many thanks to the Consistory and members of Covenant Reformed Church for their hospitality!

For further information, contact Rev. Doug Barnes, pastor of Hills URC & Stated Clerk of Classis, by telephone at 507-962-3254 or via e-mail at hillsurc@alliancecom.net

United Reformed Churches in North America Classis Michigan Report

Classis Michigan met on January 12 for the purpose of granting Rev. James Admiraal a second colloquium doctum. Rev. Admiraal had sustained his first colloquium doctum and was granted emeritus status in the URCNA. As a retired minister, Rev. Admiraal took a part time position at the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan for almost two years as their pulpit supply.

When the congregation extended a call to Rev. Admiraal to come out of retirement to be their full time pastor, classis felt they want to ask Rev. Admiraal a few more questions. Rev. Admiraal very ably defended the Reformed faith and sustained the exam.

Classis also offered advice to a consistory seeking counsel from the classis and bid farewell to Rev. Gene Crow who has accepted a call to an Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in Cambridge, Canada.

Rev. Admiraal was installed as the Senior Pastor of the Cornerstone URC on January 15, 2006. Rev. Edward J. Knott conducted the service. Rev. Jeff Doll also participated in the service.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. W. H. Oord
Clerk of Classis

Classis Western Canada Summary Report

The sixteen churches of Classis Western Canada met on January 18 & 19, 2006 in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The meeting was scheduled to start on Wednesday afternoon at 5 PM and after opening devotions and tackling some preliminary tasks such as appointing a vice-chairman and clerk, Rev. Eric Pennings introduced his work with Hispanic Christian Ministry and treated the classis to an inspirational and informative presentation.

The following morning, classis took up the task of discussing the three overtures that formed part of our agenda. The first overture asks Synod 2007 to instruct the Website Oversight Committee to update the URC Website to include sermons of current URC ministers. This overture was adopted.

The second overture asked Classis Western Canada to counsel the Covenant Reformed Church of Grand Prairie that if they are going to continue to reject the decisions of Classis Western Canada (2003) and of Synod 2004, they should withdraw voluntarily since with their declarations and actions they already in effect are breaking unity (covenant) with the federation. By this voluntary withdrawal they are being at least consistent with those actions and declarations. This overture was defeated. Classis recognized that the consistory of Grand Prairie is currently in a process of following Church Order Art.29.

The third overture asked Classis Western Canada to appoint a clerk

of classis with a 3-year term and to appoint an alternate with the same 3-year term. After this overture was adopted, Rev. William Van der Woerd was appointed as clerk and Rev. Kevin Efflandt was appointed as the alternate.

There were no church visitor reports at this classis, but some of the churches did report on their ecumenical activities with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Some of the churches requested advice with regard to the ministerial credentials of ministers who either do not have a call in the URCNA or have taken calls outside of the URCNA. Offering this type of advice gives the churches of Classis Western Canada the ability to assist one another.

Several churches asked for advice from classis as they proceed with steps of exclusion for delinquent baptized members. A married couple appealed the decision of their consistory to place them under discipline. Classis sustained the appeal that this couple had been wrongfully placed under discipline and offered advice to both the couple and the consistory involved.

What began with what seemed to be a light agenda, turned into a full day's work as churches benefited from the wisdom of the broader assembly. The next scheduled meeting of Classis Western Canada is planned for June 14 & 15, 2006 in Winnipeg.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. W.T. Van der Woerd, Clerk

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for a full-time 7th-8th grade teacher/administrator beginning in the fall of 2006. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, Biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resumé to:

Steve De Vries, School Board President,
Reformed Heritage Christian School
700 N. Fletcher Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49006

For more information, phone 269-375-8455.

A Historical Overview of the Reformed Church in Hungary Under Communist Destruction: 1948-1989

Introduction

(by Rev. F. Z. Kovacs)

In 1950 Dr. Pereszlonyi was drafted against his will into the Communist Army as a Medical Officer, because he refused to be an informant for the Communist Party. He was forced to leave the Bajcsi Hospital in Budapest where he worked as a resident. Dr. Pereszlonyi remained a faithful believer during his military service. As a result, the Ministry of Defense was determined to jail him for three years on fictitious charges of religious propaganda. However, the Lord delivered him and he was discharged from the military politically and professionally blameless. Through many providential signs he understood that it was the Lord's will for him to leave Hungary and come to Canada. He immigrated and by God's grace was blessed to practice 37 years of medicine in Rexdale, Ontario. Dr. Pereszlonyi was privileged to befriend the late Dr. P.Y. De Jong during his time as a resident in Hamilton. It was Dr. De Jong who introduced him to the editor of the *Torch and Trumpet* in which appeared Dr. Pereszlonyi's first article "The Inward Destruction of the Hungarian Reformed Church" published in 1963. The present article is an updated survey of the Hungarian Reformed Church's decline and struggle during Communism.

The Foundation of the Reformed Church in Hungary

The Calvinistic variety of the Protestant Reformation found fertile soil in Hungary. It was so deeply rooted that three centuries of fierce Hapsburg persecution and the plague of Rationalism could not destroy it. In fact, before WWI, the Reformed Church in Hungary had three million members, making it the largest Reformed body in Europe.

The infamous Treaty of Trianon¹ deprived Hungary of three quarters of her territory and of one million Hungarian Reformed people, who suddenly found themselves in other countries: Eight hundred thousand Hungarian Reformed people established the Reformed Church in Romania; one hundred sixty thousand founded the Reformed Church in Czechoslovakia; forty thousand constituted the Reformed Church in Yugoslavia. The Reformed Church in the U.S.S.R. was another Hungarian Church, resulting from the Russian annexation of a part of Hungary following World War II.

The Communist Takeover

The Russian occupation of Hungary after WWII found the two million strong Reformed Church in the springtime of a popular awakening. The Reformed Church had her 400-year-old network of parochial elementary and secondary schools, four theological seminaries, two hospitals, one school for deacons, three deaconess orders, and ap-

proximately fifty orphanages, old peoples' homes, and various other organizations.

The Communist tactic was to avoid open confrontation with the churches whenever possible. They encouraged dissatisfied elements to undermine the church leaders. The bishops were "requested" to remove educated elders by their "voluntary" resignation. Thereby, the church lost her most capable Laity. Ministers, deans and bishops were continuously pressured to declare their loyalty to the "Peoples' Democracy".

The Political Police created an atmosphere of fear. They "discovered" one "conspiracy" after another, and scores of Hungarians were arrested, beaten, tortured and hanged. In these so-called conspiracies, the aristocracy, the old Army and police, as well as the clergy, were invariably represented. Under duress, those arrested admitted to things that they had never done. Members of the parliament were no exception; many of them were imprisoned or forced to leave for the West.

At the right psychological moment, the last non-Communist parliament was forced to nationalize all the parochial schools. After that, religious education at schools was prevented by the most drastic means.

People were relieved when the government sought agreements with the churches. However, no sooner had the Reformed delegation engaged in negotiations than it became clear that they had to "agree" to a Communist blueprint. The government interfered with the

election of ministers, deans and bishops. “Unacceptable” nominees were threatened with jail, unless they withdrew.² All ministers had to take an oath on the Communist Constitution of the country, and they were repeatedly screened on their political views.

About two hundred ministers had to leave the ministry. Younger ministers were forced to resign; older ones were compelled to retire. In addition, many ministers of fame and good report were removed from large city congregations and put in charge of small, neglected country churches. Conversely, young, inexperienced traitors, or older, often alcoholic or immoral Communist collaborators, were forced upon famous and flourishing congregations. The Political Police ruthlessly stamped out any objections to these appointments, and they vigorously supported the collaborators in all their destructive activities.

The worst faction of the ministers—a small minority—realized that their great opportunity had arrived. They outdid each other in declaring conformity and loyalty to the “impetus” of the great constructive work of the People’s Democracy; that is, the Communist Party. The Party readily accepted their services, as informants and executors of their policies. These collaborators were called “peace ministers”, as their favorite topic was not the Gospel but “peaceful coexistence”: in other words, obedience to any Communist demands.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, every Christian organization was dissolved. Two of the four Reformed seminaries were closed down. The deaconess orders were

disbanded and their motherhouses were taken away. Christian publishing houses were nationalized. The Bethania Alliance was branded as an agency of American spies. The Soli Deo Gloria student alliance was charged with rightist policies. The Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. were declared unnecessary by the collaborators. The Society for Foreign Missions and the Good Shepherd Jewish Mission were also dissolved. With only a few exceptions, all the orphanages and old peoples’ homes were secularized. Ministers were not allowed to visit the hospitals or prisons. Prisoners’ Bibles were immediately confiscated. Dying hospital patients were forced to apply for permission, in writing, if they wished to see their ministers.

Every minister was confined to his own congregation, and could not preach anywhere else without special permission. The local congregations could function within the framework of their previous activities, with the exception of religious education. Parents who were insistent on the religious education of their children often lost their livelihood, or the children were refused entry to institutions of higher learning. Bible study groups were tolerated, but scrupulously controlled by often-frightened ministers. For almost three decades, the formerly popular preaching missions became extinct. There was some lenience in the operation of Sunday Schools, but children who attended

them ran the later risk of being denied secondary education.

The greatest offence was to touch a teenager with religious ideas. Men and women served prison terms for pursuing religious education in private homes. Christian students were either barred from college education, or expelled some time before graduation.

Publishing and distribution of the Bible was severely restricted. No Christian literature was available, apart from the inferior writings of Communist collaborators. New Bible translations, or Bibles with commentaries, were to be had only in limited numbers, and at prohibitive prices, so that their availability made but an insignificant departure from the above practice.

Suppression and Survival of the Church

How could the church live and survive under these circumstances? Ministers who were faithful to the Lord Jesus and to their congregations still had one or two services on Sundays, and Bible classes on weekdays. Born-again ministers preached the risen Lord on those occasions. Nevertheless, they had to buy these opportunities by reading aloud the circulars of the collaborating bishops. Sometimes, they omitted reading them, or did it quickly and monotonously, indicating their disagreement. They had to attend a few peace rallies each year, or else they were branded as “enemies of the peace and agents

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, every Christian organization was dissolved.

of the American imperialists.”

During elections, ministers had to encourage their congregations to vote, although it was public knowledge that not voting for the official list meant immediate loss of work, and unemployment, without aid, for years.

Ministers were utterly poor, their clothes shabby and often ragged. Not infrequently, they were forced to plough farm fields to earn their meager living. To obtain clothes and fuel was an almost insurmountable problem. Ministers' children were, as a rule, rejected from college education. Collaborators, on the other hand, often, received financial assistance from the State, according to their “merits”, and there was no hindrance to the education of their children.

How did the people in the congregations live, restricted as they were from every direction? They were exhausted, working hard six days a week for extremely low wages. Families could not survive on one salary, so women were forced to work also. Fewer appliances meant that housework was much harder. On top of this, women had to make preserves, and mend, patch and alter clothing. Simply accomplishing cleaning and laundering tasks made church attendance exceedingly difficult for them.

This is precisely what Satan desires: to make his power seem invincible, by alienating people from church and from God.

Next came a multitude of abortions and suicides. While Christian ministers could give comfort to their congregations, the collaborators

This is precisely what Satan desires: to make his power seem invincible, by alienating people from church and from God.

merely echoed the editorials of the Communist newspapers in their preaching. To support their treason, they invented this convenient “theology”: God loves the world; the Communists are the world; consequently, God loves the Communists. If God loves them, then the Christians have to love them as well. To love them means to bow to them and promote their cause.

Christian testimony was utterly suppressed. To speak of Jesus in an office or in a factory was unthinkable.³ Lay Christians had to put up with much more work and less pay than others. Christians, as a rule, could not hold any leading positions. They were second-class citizens in the Communist society.

When the Christian organizations were dissolved, individual Christians began to meet in small groups on a nationwide scale. They received teaching, advice and sound discipline from older, experienced Christians. Following the principles of the German Fellowship Movement, they met quietly, usually without singing (to avoid retribution). These small groups constituted the power base of the local congregations, and were the only way of survival for the persecuted Hungarian Christians.

During the 1956 revolution, the seminary students of Budapest participated in the peaceful demonstration. When the Political Police be-

gan shooting at them, three students died the death of heroes as stretcher-bearers, and four others were seriously wounded.

As soon as the pillar of the Communist Party, the Political Police, collapsed, all of the collaborating deans and bishops resigned. Executive committees were set up everywhere, and they prepared elections from the bottom up. The best of the ministers chaired those committees. However, fresh Soviet tank divisions annulled all the achievements of the Revolution, including the attainments of the Church. Sixty-three Reformed ministers were arrested by the reorganized Political Police. Those from the country were severely beaten. A few weeks later, all except two were released. One of those, however, was hanged.

Differing trends and changes in Communist Party policy marked the years following their 1948 takeover of Hungary. These became more obvious after the Revolution. Hungarians could eat and dress somewhat better than in the days of Stalin. Even mild criticism of the regime was tolerated. Strangely, though, the Communist-imposed church leadership did not change at all. Rather, the tyranny of the collaborators increased. The 400-year-old practice of free election of ministers had already been emasculated by the state-controlled “nomination committees”.

Preaching missions were permitted once again, but the collection received at these missions was directed to the building fund of the Schweitzer Institute, a show-window old peoples' home where "the admission policy would reflect social changes". Christians were now pressured to contribute to this fund, even beyond their means.

Foreign churchmen were often impressed by the full attendance at worship services they were led to visit. The friendly attitude of the worst collaborators was equally misleading. Foreign church leaders were treated to lavish banquets, and received amicable audiences with Communist dignitaries. Yet, no Hungarian could approach a foreign churchman without the permission of the collaborators.

The denominations comprising the Alliance of Free Churches received preferential treatment under Communism. These small denominations, including a few hundred Brethren, some Adventists, several thousand Methodists, diverse Pentecostal groups, and twenty-two thousand Baptists, had a much-restricted status before the Russian occupation of Hungary in 1945. The Communist thinking was that any advancement in the Free Churches helped bring about the destruction of the historical churches. Thus, the majority of the Free Church members entertained friendly sentiments to the Communist regime.

The future of the Reformed Church has preoccupied many who were familiar with Hungarian church affairs. The mere survival of the evangelical witness was often questioned. However: "The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked, the

scepter of the rulers" (Isaiah 14:5). In 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed and Hungary became a free country. One hundred and sixty Reformed Christian ministers established the Bible Union. They and other Christians, such as the remnant of the Bethania Alliance, immediately began and continue the re-evangelization of our alienated people. Despite encouraging results, it is an enormous task to "rebuild the walls of Jerusalem" after more than four decades of expert and systematic destruction. Nevertheless, we focus our attention unequivocally on our Lord Jesus, who said: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and *they follow me*" (John 10:27, emphasis added).

Endnotes

1. The 13.5. Congress refused to ratify the Treaty of Trianon.
2. There were only two cases where the congregations prevailed.
3. To testify privately was possible only in the last few years of Communism.

Dr. E. A. Pereszlenyi is lives in Rexdale, Ontario. He is a member of the Reformed Hungarian Church (ARP) in Richmond Hill, Ontario where **Rev. F. Z. Kovacs** is the pastor.

Dale Grotenhuis, former professor of music at Dordt College, has recently completed twelve volumes of Piano settings called "Psalms for Piano." These are Psalm tunes as found in both the 1912 Psalter and the 1959 Blue Psalter Hymnal. For further information, write to

Dale Grotenhuis
2299 Aimie Ave SE
Byron Center, MI 49315
or call 616-878-3733

Gisbertus Voetius

The war of independence was still going on in the Lowlands. It would last from 1568-1648. During that time the Reformed faith had taken root in the Lowlands and became the dominant religion. It was during that time, on March 3, 1589, that a baby boy was born in the family of a Dutch Reformed minister in the town of Heusden. His parents gave him a true Dutch name: Gijs Voet. In later years, this little boy became an ardent defender of the Reformed faith under his Latinized name, Gisbertus Voetius.

Voetius received his formal higher education at the University of Leyden under Arminius, Trelcatius, and Gomarus, by whom he was deeply influenced. He was an outstanding student with an excellent memory, advancing quickly in his studies. While still studying, Voetius was appointed as a lecturer in Logic and showed already then that he was a strict and uncompromising defender of Calvinism.

Upon graduation in 1611, Voetius became a minister in Vlijmen, where he served for about six years. Then he returned to his birthplace, Heusden, where he served the church for about seventeen years. Voetius was very faithful in his ministerial work and was loved by his congregations. He was deeply interested in evangelism and missions. In Vlijmen he was instrumental in bringing a large number of Roman Catholics to the Reformed faith; in Heusden, he was influential in

persuading the large trading companies to send missionaries to different parts of the world using their Dutch ships.

Voetius also studied Aramaic so that he could better understand the Semitic languages. In 1634 he was appointed professor of theology and oriental languages at the Academy in Utrecht. While teaching there, Voetius also served as pastor of a local church in Utrecht. When the Academy became a university in 1636, Voetius gave the inaugural address on Luke 2:46, "And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."

Under his unswerving leadership, the Utrecht faculty of Theology took over the lead from Leyden as the heartland of unyielding Calvinism. Voetius saw Arminianism for what it was: a wholesale attack on the very heart of the Reformed faith and a return to Roman Catholicism's view of salvation by works. Voetius was elected as a delegate to the Synod of Correct (1618-1619) and made major contributions in the debate which led to the defeat of Arminianism. Voetius was also instrumental in the discussion that led up to the printing of the Canons of Dort.

Firmly convinced that when the Reformed faith is embraced whole-heartedly it leads to Christian piety, Voetius reflected his

theology not only in the classroom but also in his life. He is often referred to as "the standard-bearer of the Nadere Reformation." Voetius wrote a manual for his students that gave them practical advice for daily walking in the spiritual life, covering such topics as prayer, meditation, the sacraments, and listening to God's Word.

Not only did Voetius defend the Reformed faith against Arminianism, but he also took up arms against other heresies. When French philosopher and scientist Rene Descartes promoted his view that the Christian faith could be supported by reason alone and that there was no need for faith to bolster its tenets, it was Voetius who attacked the philosopher's views, speaking boldly against a simple rationalism. Voetius also disagreed with the separatist views of Jean de Labadie. His greatest battle, however, was against Johannes Cocceius, a German by birth who studied at Franeker, Holland where he was appointed theological professor in 1643. He later began teaching in Leyden in 1650. Cocceius developed what later became known as Biblical Theology in which he made a sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments that led to the denial of the validity of the New Testament Sabbath.

Voetius had three sons. Two of them became professors, one a minister. One of his grandsons also became a professor. Voetius died on November 1, 1676. To read more about Gisbertus

Voetius: *The Unknown Voetius* by J. Van Oort, editor; *Gisbertus Voetius* by A. C. Duker; and *Reformed Dogmatics*, edited and translated by John W. Beardslee III.

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

Paedocommunion and the Reformed Confessions

Part Three: The Proper Recipients of the Lord's Supper

Though it might seem that our extended discussion of the Reformed confessions' view of the sacraments has taken us far afield of the specific question of paedocommunion, the position of the confessions on this question can only be understood within the broader framework of its doctrine of the sacraments in general. The insistence of the confessions that the recipients of the Lord's Supper be professing believers arises out of their general teaching regarding the nature and power of the sacraments. When the confessions insist upon the presence of faith on the part of the recipient of the Lord's Supper, they do so for reasons that correspond to their more comprehensive view of the sacraments.

As we have noted in the foregoing, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because it is a visible representation and confirmation of the gospel promise in Christ, *requires faith* on the part of its participants. Because the sacrament visibly signifies and seals the promises of the gospel, it demands the same response as the gospel. No more than the gospel Word does the sacrament work merely by virtue of its administration (*ex opere operato*). Only by a spiritual eating and drinking by the mouth of faith does the sacrament work to communicate Christ to his people. Therefore, the Roman Catholic teaching of an objective presence of Christ in the sacramental elements, irrespective of a be-

lieving response to the gospel Word which the sacrament confirms, is rejected. Not only does this Roman Catholic view improperly identify the sacramental sign and the spiritual reality it signifies, but it maintains that Christ is objectively present before, during, and even after the administration of the elements whether or not those participating (or not participating) actively accept the gospel in faith and repentance.

In the Reformed confessions, moreover, the kind of faith that is competent to remember, proclaim and receive Christ through the Lord's Supper is carefully defined. Before members of the church may receive the sacrament, they have a biblical mandate to engage in self-examination. This self-examination requires that the believers test their faith against the normative requirements of the Word of God. Essential to such faith are the acknowledgment of the believer's sin and unworthiness, the recognition that Christ alone by his mediatorial work has made atonement for the sins of his people, and a resolution to live in holiness and obedience to his will. In this way believers are called actively to embrace the promises of the gospel that the sacrament visibly confirm in the same way as they respond to the preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, it is the duty of the ministers and elders of the church to oversee the administration of the sacrament, prevent-

It would violate the nature of the sacrament to invite the unbelieving or the impenitent to partake.

ing so far as they are able those from participating who are unbelieving or living an ungodly life. Since Christ has instituted the sacrament for the purpose of nourishing the faith of believers, it would violate the nature of the sacrament to invite the unbelieving or the impenitent to partake. Unworthy participation, that is, participation on the part of those who have not properly examined themselves or who are unbelieving, would profane the table of the Lord and be contemptuous of its ordained purpose.

Since this feature of the Reformed confessions' teaching touches directly upon the propriety of paedocommunion, we need to take particular note of the confessions teaching regarding the proper recipients of the sacrament.

The Belgic Confession, after noting that the recipient of the Lord's Supper receives the body and blood of the Lord "by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul)," speaks directly to this subject.

[W]e receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eat-

ing of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are moved by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor. (Article 35)

According to the language of this article, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper requires the active engagement of its recipients. Only believers, who are capable of remembering the faith and the Christian religion, may come to the Table in order to be nourished and fortified in the way of faith and love. With an obvious allusion to the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11, this Confession also insists upon a proper preparation on the part of believers for the reception of the sacrament. Only those who have previously examined themselves should partake of the bread and the cup, lest they should eat and drink judgment unto themselves.

In its extensive treatment of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Heidelberg Catechism also expressly addresses the question of those for whom the sacrament is instituted.

Q. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted? A. For those who are truly displeased with themselves for their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them for

the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmity is covered by His passion and death; who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts eat and drink judgment to themselves.

It is important to observe that the three marks of true faith, which are identified in this question and answer, are the same as the three general headings of the Heidelberg Catechism. This is not accidental, since the purpose of the Catechism is to provide an instrument for the instruction of the children of believers in the Christian faith. True faith always includes three elements: (1) a conscious awareness of the believer's sin and misery; (2) an understanding of the person and work of Christ, who satisfied for the believer's sins by his cross and passion; and (3) a Spirit-worked readiness on the part of the believer to live in gratitude to God. When the children of believing parents, who have received the sign and seal of incorporation into Christ through the sacrament of baptism, are instructed in these principal elements of the Christian religion, they are being invited to respond in faith to their baptism and to come believingly to the Lord's Supper. Though this is not the place to answer the objections of proponents of paedocommunion, the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism does not seem to create an artificial and unnecessary barrier before children who might otherwise be received at the Lord's Table. All believers who are received at the Lord's Table come in the same way and with the

same obligations. Consistent with the nature of true faith (cf. Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 21), all believers who come to the Table of the Lord in order to be nourished in faith are expected to come believingly. If the sacrament is to be used to strengthen faith, it is only appropriate that those who receive the sacrament do so as professing believers.

That this is the consensus view of the Reformed confessions is also evident from the Westminster Standards. In Chapter XXIX.vii of The Westminster Confession of Faith, the necessity of a believing participation in the Lord's Supper is clearly affirmed: "Worthy receivers [of the Lord's Supper], outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death." Since the Lord's Supper is a sacrament that nourishes faith, it requires faith on the part of those who receive it. Perhaps the most relevant statements of the confessions in respect to the question of paedocommunion, is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism. In answer to a question about the difference between the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Larger Catechism states:

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that Baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's Supper

is to be administered often, in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and that only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves. (Q. & A. 177)

According to the Larger Catechism, baptism and the Lord's Supper differ in terms of what they signify and seal. Baptism signifies and seals to its recipients their regeneration and ingrafting into Christ. The Lord's Supper signifies and seals to its recipients their continuance and growth in believing union with Christ. Whereas baptism is administered but once to believers and their children, the Lord's Supper is administered often "to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves." Though the Larger Catechism does not spell out what it means by the expression "of years and ability to examine themselves," it transparently reflects the confession and practice of the Reformed churches, which has historically required a public ceremony of profession of faith on the part of the children of believing parents prior to their reception at the Lord's Table. The purpose of such a profession of faith by the children of believing parents is to confirm publicly the kind of faith demanded by their baptism and to be the occasion for admitting them to the Lord's Table.

Conclusion

The uniform testimony of the Reformed confessions is that, though the children of believing parents ought to be baptized as a sacramental sign and seal of their incorporation into Christ, they may only receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper upon an attestation of their faith in the gospel promise. Even though the practice of paedocommunion is not expressly rejected in these confessions, their general understanding of the nature and purpose of the sacraments stands opposed to this practice. Two emphases in the confessions especially militate against the practice of paedocommunion.

The first emphasis is the confessions' insistence that the sacraments do not communicate the grace of Christ apart from the preaching of the gospel, in relation to which they are confirming signs. The principal means whereby Christ dwells among and communicates himself to his people is the preaching of the gospel. Through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit produces faith in the hearts and minds of believers. Indeed, the saving power of the gospel Word is only communicated to those in whom such faith lives by the working of the Holy Spirit. Because the sacraments are visible signs and seals of the gospel promise, their effectiveness, like that of the Word they visibly proclaim, also requires a believing reception on the part of their benefi-

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ciaries. Just as the gospel Word is received through faith, so the sacramental pledges and seals of the gospel require faith on the part of their recipients. Though the children of believers are to be baptized, since they together with their parents are included in the covenant community, their baptism summons them to the same believing response that the gospel Word demands. Baptism, no more than the Lord's Supper, does not work by its mere administration. It only serves to confirm and bolster faith, which is principally worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Therefore, consistent with their emphasis upon the priority of the Spirit's use of the preaching of the gospel to produce faith, *the confessions insist that the route from the baptismal font to the Lord's Table can only be taken in the way of an active response of faith.* To argue that baptism alone is a sufficient basis for admitting the children of believers to the Lord's Table, would require a substantial change in the way the confessions understand the use and effectiveness of the sacraments in relation to the preaching of the Word.

The second emphasis is the confessions' view of the difference between the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Whereas baptism is a once-for-all sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and His church, the Lord's Supper is a frequently administered sign and seal of the gospel that nourishes faith, which the Spirit produces by means of the Word. Because the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is designed to nourish and strengthen faith, it requires a prior attestation of the presence of such faith on the part of its recipients. Though the language may be a little misleading, the Lord's Supper, unlike

Whereas baptism is a once-for-all sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and His church, the Lord's Supper is a frequently administered sign and seal of the gospel that nourishes faith.

baptism, requires for its proper reception an *active* and *believing* participation in Christ. Believers are summoned at the Table of the Lord to "take, eat, remember and believe." The purpose of the catechetical instruction of children of believing parents is to prepare them to make a credible confession of faith, which in the traditional practice of the Reformed churches is effected by means of a "public profession of faith." Unless such faith has been publicly attested, the children of believers are not yet prepared to make proper use of the sacrament that Christ has appointed for the specific purpose of nourishing faith.

Admittedly, the Reformed confessions do not stipulate a particular age at which such a profession should be made. Nor do they spell out in detail the kind of instruction in the faith that ought ordinarily to precede a mature profession of faith and admission to the Lord's Table. However, they clearly insist, in keeping with the nature of the sacraments in general and of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular, that the straight line that leads from the baptismal font to the Lord's Table includes along the way a confirmation of the baptized believer's embrace of the promise of the gospel. Though baptism summons the children of believers to faith and therefore to the Table of the Lord, it does not constitute a sufficient condition for their admission to the Table. Baptism summons its recipient to

faith, whose presence must first be publicly attested before the believer comes to the Table of the Lord.

To state the matter in a different way, the admission of children to the Table of the Lord without a prior attestation of their faith would require a substantial change in the historic Reformed understanding of the nature and use of the sacraments. If advocates of paedocommunion are able to demonstrate that such a change is demanded by the teaching of Scripture, then the confessions should be revised, of course. This is the obvious implication of the church's confession that the Scriptures must always remain the supreme standard for the church's faith and practice. Our consideration of the Reformed confessions, however, indicates that advocates of paedocommunion bear a significant burden of proof to show the basis for and extent of such revisions that this practice would require. No one should be under the illusion that anything less would be required.

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This is My Outlook

The Future of the Church

Twenty-five years! If you read the meditation by Seminarian Andre Holsleg, you are aware that today, as in Old Testament times, it only takes one generation - or 25 years - for apostasy to enter the church. Mr. Holsleg rightly challenges us to be faithful in training our covenant youth. His advice is something we must all take to heart.

This summer, my family and I were privileged to be able to take a road trip across this great country. We were able to fellowship with other Reformed believers in many states and worship with various URC and CRC congregations.

As we talked with this wide cross section of people, invariably the discussion would turn towards our covenant children and the future of the church. While it was a delight to see many of these churches bursting at the seams with toddlers and young children, there was also a deep underlying concern for the way in which these children would be trained.

Many young parents lamented the lack of good, solid Reformed schools in their area. Others were struggling to start Reformed schools before their children reached school-age, while still others felt that home-schooling was the only way in which their children could be solidly taught the Reformed principles in which our churches are grounded. If there were any Christian schools in the area, these had sadly left their Reformed foundation and, while still using Christian

in their name, they no longer could offer a Reformed Christian worldview to their students.

Many children, attending the schools their parents graduated from and where their parents learned much of the Reformed faith, now learn easy Bible verses, and simple Bible based ditties to sing. Lost somewhere between the generation is the firm foundation and love for the rich Reformed truths.

Children are now offered a watered down version of a generic faith that will not offend the diversity of students of which the schools now boast. A Christian school in our area, supported largely by Reformed churches, took out a full page ad in the local newspaper. In that ad it boasted not of its Reformed curriculum but of the fact that their students come from over thirty different denominations. Ironically, the local Roman Catholic Schools also had a full page ad in which they boasted of their decidedly "catholic centered education."

How can our church remain strong and fixed on the truths of Scripture when our children--the future church--attend weak schools? The catechism training given by the church is invaluable, but it is no match for the day-to-day, five days a week, indoctrinations of the schools. There is no question as to which will have the bigger and more lasting influence. The future pastors, elders, and deacons of our

churches may grow up to be well-trained in computers, skilled athletes in various sports, and masters of the latest dance steps taught to them in their P.E. classes, but what knowledge will they bring to the church in their understanding of the creeds and confessions which we say we love and adhere to? How will they be equipped to lead God's people? What attention is being given to their souls?

I fear that in 25 years we may be looking at a much different church. Each conversation we had this summer, with people in various walks of life, ended in much the same manner. We encouraged one another to remain faithful to the Reformed faith, to continue to place a strong emphasis on training our children in all spheres, home, Church, and school, with a Reformed worldview. We also prayed fervently together for our covenant youth and the future of the church, that parents will realize the vital importance of their responsibility to raise their children with a Reformed worldview. May God impress upon each one of us the importance of gathering with other Reformed believers and of training our covenant youth together with other reformed covenant youth.

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