



The Outlook
Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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True Christians Bear a Gentle Fruit

Let's suppose someone filled your gas tank with water instead of gasoline. How would you know? Most obviously your car wouldn't start. Over time the engine would corrode itself tight.

Every human being burns with a spiritual gasoline. Either it is the Third Person of the Trinity or it is the untamed passion of our fallen human nature. Which one propels you down the highway of life? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in the belly of your soul? Or is your spiritual tank filled with **you**—**your** personal preferences, **your** ambitions and **your** passions? How would you know?

That's what Galatians 5:19-23 force us to examine: "the works of

the flesh ... are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness. . .". These all describe immorality—especially sexual immorality. Further works of the flesh are *idolatry* and *sorcery* which are blatant rejections of God and His Word. The Flesh-Tree also bears the fruit of *hatred* [the seed], *contentions* [the 'skin' or appearance], *jealousies* [the core], *outbursts of wrath* [the fully ripened fruit]. On other branches of the Flesh-Tree grow "*selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, rev- elries, and the like . . .*". That's the picture of a life fueled by the untamed passions of human nature.

In previous issues of this publication the meditations have been focusing

on the person's life as it is fueled by the Holy Spirit of the living God. Now we come to the first word in Galatians 5:23—gentleness.

What Is Gentleness?

In the Bible the New Testament often translates the word for gentleness as 'meek' or 'meekness' (cf. NKJV 2Cor. 10:1, Col. 3:12). Another form of the word for gentle can be found in the well-known Beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul associates gentleness with being "peaceable...showing all humility to all men" (Tit. 3:2). What, then, is gentleness? It is an attitude of the heart which directly affects the way I see myself in relationship to



Volume 51, No. 9 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "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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others. From the “gentle” perspective the interests of others begin to become as important as my own and my own reputation increasingly fades to the background.

What Rivals Gentleness?

At this point the context of Galatians 5 forces us to pause and to ask a very pressing question: “What competes against gentleness?” Verse 17 explains that “...the flesh **lusts against** the Spirit, and the Spirit **against** the flesh; and **these are contrary to one another**, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

Notice how most of the fruit of the flesh given in Galatians 5:19-21 are just the opposite of putting God and others before ourselves. The sexual immorality of verse nineteen is the kind that insists that my pleasures can contradict God’s law and that it can be done at the expense of other people. Sexual immorality defrauds your present spouse (if you are married) or your future spouse for when you do marry. The idolatry and sorcery of verse twenty put your own ideas and loves above God. All the other vices and sins mentioned in vv.20-21 demonstrate an attitude that says, “I must be first and I will put myself first at the expense of all other people and God.”

Therefore, the great rival that competes against gentleness is selfish pride! The proud person gets defensive and must argue every petty case until he proves himself to be right. The gentle person, on the other hand, takes no pleasure in saying (or thinking), “See! I told you so!” The proud person grumbles and complains as if he

really deserves better. But one who is gentle does not feel entitled to hold pity-parties in his own honor.

How To Cultivate Gentleness?

The first thing we must do is pray. Galatians 5:22-23 can be used as a prayer list. Do you ever get stuck wondering what to pray for? More than a new car, more than new clothes, more than anything this world can offer, God would have you pray that the fruit of the Spirit be present in your life (see Ep.3:16-17 and Heidelberg Catechism

*“We must adjust
the stride of our
lives to match the
pace set by the
Holy Spirit.”*

Q&A 116). That is what Jesus taught His disciples about prayer in Luke 11:13, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!**”

We would do well to memorize Psalm 131 and meditate on it as a sample prayer for gentleness.

¹LORD, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself
with great matters,
Nor with things too profound
for me.

²Surely I have calmed and
quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his
mother;
Like a weaned child *is* my
soul within me.

³O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and
forever.

Second, God commands us to “Walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 25). This begins with a reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in us. That is why prayer was mentioned first. However, walking in the Spirit also involves the pursuit of His fruit, in this case, gentleness (see 1 Tim. 6:11).

Try to imagine stepping in the footprints of the Spirit. When I was in high-school, training for track and cross-country, I would find foot prints of other runners on my path. Some times I would adjust my stride to see if I could keep up with the steps left imprinted in the sand along side the paved roadway. In a similar way we must adjust the stride of our lives to match the pace set by the Holy Spirit.

The context of Galatians 5 gives us a practical example of what that might look like. Notice the way the Holy Spirit addresses the believer in Galatians 6:1. Through the apostle Paul He writes, “Brethren ... you who are spiritual. . .” as if to say, ‘you, who adjust your stride according to the footprints of the Holy Spirit.’ According to verse 1 the footsteps of the Holy Spirit will walk us toward a concern for those “overtaken in any trespass” and our goal will be to “restore such a one.”

The key to this whole process is the demeanor in which it is accomplished. Verse 1 cautions that it must be done “in a spirit of **gentleness.**” That means we must conduct ourselves in a spirit of esteeming others (even those who have fallen into sin!) as more important than ourselves. Why? Verse 1 explains, “considering

yourself lest you also be tempted.” You see, the genuinely “gentle” person does not just pretend that others are better than he is. He acts on that conviction.

In our case, to be gentle is to realize that by nature you and I have just as great an appetite for evil as the one trapped in sin. Listen to the echoes of the apostle Paul, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1Tim. 1:15). “I am the least of all the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle...” (1 Cor. 15:9).

If that’s what gentleness looks like doesn’t it shock you to embarrassment to hear Jesus preach the gospel in Matthew 11:29, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. . .”? In His high esteem for His Father’s will and in His high regard for the well-being of the elect, Jesus fully identified Himself with those under God’s curse of damnation. He carried our iniquities (Isa. 53:4). He became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Jesus’ gentleness is the secret to our being set-free from selfish pride in order to bear a gentle fruit.

Make It Personal

What fuels your ambitions? What propels you down the road of life? Do you have the Spirit of God in the belly of your soul? Or are you governed by your fleshly, selfish desires? Look to Jesus! Submit yourself to Him in obedience and adjust your stride to the fruitful pace of a Spirit-filled life.

Rev. Ken Anema is the pastor of The Messiah’s Independent Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

Opportunities for Christian Education in a Postmodern Age

Introduction

Colloquial jargon has a way of embodying cultural philosophy. Modern teens habitually sprinkle their conversations with liberal doses of “Y’know” and “Like, y’know.” Two rather modern linguistic space fillers are particularly revealing of the postmodern spirit of our culture. In response to any particular belief-claim or moral-imperative come the retorts: “Whatever” and “Whatever floats your boat.”

You see, postmodernism rejects any notion of universal, transcendent truth and reduces all ideas to social constructions shaped by one’s class, gender, and race. The moral outcome of postmodernism is an ethic of “whatever”—an ethic of apathy. If all ideas are equally valid, then no idea is worth our allegiance, worth living or dying for—or even arguing about. Boredom, indifference, and apathy to truth claims have made it harder than ever to witness to the truth claims of Christianity.

Areas of postmodernist challenge—answered by Christian education

Apologetics

The challenge: With its denial of rationality, of objective truth, of trans-cultural and trans-historical

value, postmodernism is nothing less than intellectual AIDS. Call it MAIDS—Mentally Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It attacks the intellectual immune system, and thereby affects everything involved with it, including epistemology, history, philosophy, ethics, and the sciences.

The opportunity: We need to teach our students those responses that arise from within Christianity as a system of truth, as a worldview, and as a covenantal relationship with God. As church educators we must recover the primacy of the mind, something the apostle teaches in Romans 12:1-2:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Our temptation is to borrow, to adapt, to “find what’s good about _____” so that we may incorporate that “purified” idea or prac-

“If all ideas are equally valid, then no idea is worth our allegiance, worth living or dying for - or even arguing about.”



tice within our Christian response. Romans 12 speaks not about transforming the external culture, but about we ourselves being inwardly, mentally, wholly transformed.

To that end, asking “Why?” is always proper and should be encouraged and taught. Above all, it should be answered. We must develop and teach answers to the questions our children and young people need to be asking. We can begin by teaching them how to ask the right questions.

When you teach the Bible’s doctrine about God, for example, you need to set it off, antithetically, against competing doctrines about God: unitarian (Judaism, Islam, Unitarianism); impersonal consciousness (Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age), and polytheism (Mormonism, Shinto, animism).

The need is critical for *indoctrination*. That has been a dirty word for more than forty years. Schools have re-written their curricula. The education industry has slidden into fuzzy thinking, and, as a result, youth are graduated to adulthood with little doctrinal backbone.

Spirituality

The challenge: Postmodernism (1) rejects the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and (2) endorses religious pluralism. Both of these lead to a new quest for spirituality.

The postmodern temptation is to create a self-styled spirituality—a kind of “whatever works for you” spirituality. Spirituality has become a commodity that can be mass marketed in a variety of packages suited to a variety of tastes.

The opportunity: Christian educators must nurture within students a biblical spirituality. A biblical spirituality emphasizes cultivating union with Christ through the use of the means of grace for the purpose of whole-life holiness within creation. So the connection between Christian education and church membership must be vital.

A study of John Calvin will reveal that he uses as the key word to

“Romans 12 speaks not about transforming the external culture, but about we ourselves being inwardly, mentally, wholly transformed.”

describe Christian holiness and sanctification the word *integrity*, which means “restoration to order.” Christian spirituality is a spirituality of integrity, where head matches heart, where the inside matches the outside, where Sunday flows into Monday.

This kind of integrity is explained in Titus 2:6-8, which, though originally written to a pastor, applies to any Christian educator—parent and school teacher included:

“Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and **in your teaching show integrity**, gravity, and sound

speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us.”

Tradition

The challenge: Postmoderns claim that all truth arises from one’s tradition and one’s community. That would make truth a human creation. Such a view relativizes truth. No tradition or community or culture is better than another, and so no truth claims can claim to be absolute. What’s true and right in New Guinea isn’t necessarily true and right in New York.

The opportunity: We need to recover the value of tradition, in the sense of that providentially guided context within which the Christian community has discerned biblical truth, refined its formulation, and applied it to life. The opportunity exists to expose to our youth the rootedness of our faith-tradition, our confessional tradition, in the objective truth of God’s Word.

In the volume edited by Michael Horton, *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), Charles P. Arand contributes an essay entitled “The Church’s Dogma and Biblical Theology.” In this essay he identifies the contribution that the church’s Confessions can provide in our contest with postmodernism.

The church’s creeds provide us the presuppositions for approaching the Bible. They provide a map for reading the Bible. They embody a method for interpreting the Bible.

Several years ago, Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Bap-

tist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, spoke in the Chicago area. In his lecture, Mohler identified the greatest need of evangelicalism today. In the face of process theology, of the openness-of-God theology, and postmodernism, there is the need for Confessions. Mohler has contributed an essay to the book edited by Michael Horton, an essay entitled “Reformist Evangelicalism: A Center Without a Circumference.” Here is his concluding plea to evangelicals to recover the boundaries, the edge, of the faith:

“The failure to draw the boundaries and to give attention to the circumference meant that the [evangelical] movement’s center was itself lost. . . . We must respectfully respect and understand the logic of the postwar evangelical coalition and yet we must give primary attention to our confessional communities. We must ensure that our confessions are faithful to Scripture, which after all is the *norma normans non normata* [the norm that governs, not the norm that is governed]” (148).

It is interesting, to see an increasing number of North American Christian leaders arriving at the very point which served as the beginning of the Christian day school movement within the Reformed community.

Popular culture, especially television, music, and the film industry

The challenge: Much of pop cul-

ture embodies the presuppositions and values of postmodernism. Ken Myers, in *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), has identified two key features of pop culture that militate against Christianity, namely, its promises of the “new” and the “now.”

“Any teaching of truly Christian ethics will want to demonstrate the Christian response to sin - sins like abortion, divorce, homosexuality, euthanasia, greed, or abuse.”

These values have infected worship in many evangelical churches, and they have also come to shape education.

In his book, *Truth Decay*, Douglas Groothuis includes an appendix, entitled “Television: Agent of Truth Decay” (281-295). Every Christian educator should read and digest Neil Postman’s trenchant assessment, entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin, 1985), where he explains how television has changed the way people know what they know, the way they perceive reality. The nature of television is that it transforms life—religion, politics, education, news—into amusement, as it elevates symbol over substance, and image over word. Years ago, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote *Christ and the*

Media [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977]:

“The one thing television can’t do is express ideas ... There is a danger in translating life into an image, and that is what television is doing. In doing it, it is falsifying life. Far from the camera’s being an accurate recorder of what is going on, it is the exact opposite. It cannot convey reality nor does it even want to.”

Television is not simply an appliance or an industry; it is a way of life and a mentality for approaching reality. Because of this, television amplifies and reinforces postmodernist themes of incoherence, fragmentation, self-saturation, and imagination as the source of reality and truth.

The opportunity: Teach self-conscious use of technology, especially television, music, and movies. Such teaching must surely be guided engagement, the kind of exposure suitable to the age and capacity of students. It must also seek to serve the home, both by honoring the home’s God-given authority in this arena and by equipping parents to nurture their children in self-conscious use of technology.

Ethics

The challenge: Given everything we’ve said, it’s not at all hard to understand why so many today endorse so-called alternative lifestyles. We dwell in a “live-and-let-live” society, the epitome of individualism and the embodiment of an individual’s “right to choose.”

The opportunity: Part of the Christian response to this cultural situa-



tion is the strong teaching of the concept of office or calling. This concept emphasizes that every person lives *under* authority, *with* others, *in* creation. People committed to postmodernism are fragmented selves, with no hierarchy of being or values to provide context for identity and direction. For the postmodern, there are no objective values, only personal sentiments. A Christian education that emphasizes office and calling provides orientation to God-ordained duties, responsibilities, and privileges. Teaching the Bible's doctrine of calling accomplishes three things: (1) it provides identity; (2) it stimulates community (other-directedness, service); and (3) it promotes a sense of history (goals, ideals, meaning, fulfillment).

Alongside an emphasis on calling is the need for a disciplined—that is: *orderly*—classroom. A Christian educator must teach the “morality” of the law in the classroom. He does so through rules for behavior, through the consistent and compassionate administration of discipline, and through a perpetual justification of order.

Any teaching of truly Christian ethics will want to demonstrate *the* Christian response to sin—sins like abortion, divorce, homosexuality, euthanasia, greed, or abuse. *The* Christian response must not be identified with the democratic response, the legal response, the “moralistic” response, not even with the “conservative” response. The Christian moral response to sin must imitate God's response to sin—a response of merciful righteousness and compassionate covenantal justice.

Conclusion

Catch, one more time, the title of this piece: “Opportunities for Christian education in a post-modern age.” The Christian community, while being confronted with an overwhelming array of challenges to long-held teaching and practice, at the same time faces numerous opportunities to defend, inculcate, and apply its shared inheritance.

Christian education is one particular venue, one special area, where these opportunities must be seized with an eye to the future of the Christian community in North America. May God be pleased to bless our efforts—as churches, homes, and schools—with the fruit of children who grow up to confess and to reflect the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman is the Professor of Ethics and New Testament at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Printer

It took us a while to figure out what happened. After coming back from vacation, several messages on my answering machine reported that our subscribers received not one, but two issues of the July/August issue of *The Outlook*.

I could say that we thought the issue was so good that we decided to rerun it. I could say that we thought you might like to have a copy to pass on to your neighbor. What I should say, though, is that it was a mistake.

After preparing the September issue for publication, our publisher, Wm. B. Eerdmans, accidentally picked up the wrong file and reprinted the July/August issue. It was the first time they had ever done anything like that in their long and illustrious history.

No one caught the mistake until most of the issues were already mailed out. After a few phone calls, Eerdmans graciously acknowledged that the mistake was theirs. They immediately went to press with the September issue.

They, along with us, apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

--The editor

Reformed Youth Services Praises God for Success of First National Convention

Approximately 370 young people and leaders attended the first-ever Reformed Youth Services National Convention held July 30-August 3 at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. A total of 37 RYS-member churches were present, representing thirteen states and provinces. About 290 students and sixty adult sponsors, plus speakers and staff, attended the weeklong event.

As you can also read from the accompanying articles, the convention's theme of "Taking Every Thought Captive," taken from II Corinthians 10:5, was ably ministered by Dr. William Dennison and Mr. Rip Pratt. Dr. Dennison opened his talks by examining the convention theme and urging the group to seek the "mind of Christ." He asked the conventioners to examine the condition of their spiritual mind.

"We need to be mentally and spiritually active to be open to the things of the Lord," said Dr. Dennison. "A mind not captive to Christ practices deceit." Dr. Dennison also said that the mind of Christ is one of "humiliation, sacrifice and denial of self, laying down your life in order to gain your life. We call this servanthood."

Mr. Pratt also pointedly challenged

the audience of teens and youth leaders. "Are you conformed to this world or are you being transformed by the Word?" he asked. "There's a warfare going on and it's for your soul and mind. Are you taking your thoughts captive? Stand firm with the Word of God and the Word will make you strong and deliver you." Both speakers emphasized the importance of daily Scripture reading and cited numerous Bible passages to support their messages.

Nine related workshops were offered to the students and adult sponsors, covering such themes as amusement, work, service, respect, relationships, sports and talents. Each student attended four workshops of their choice.

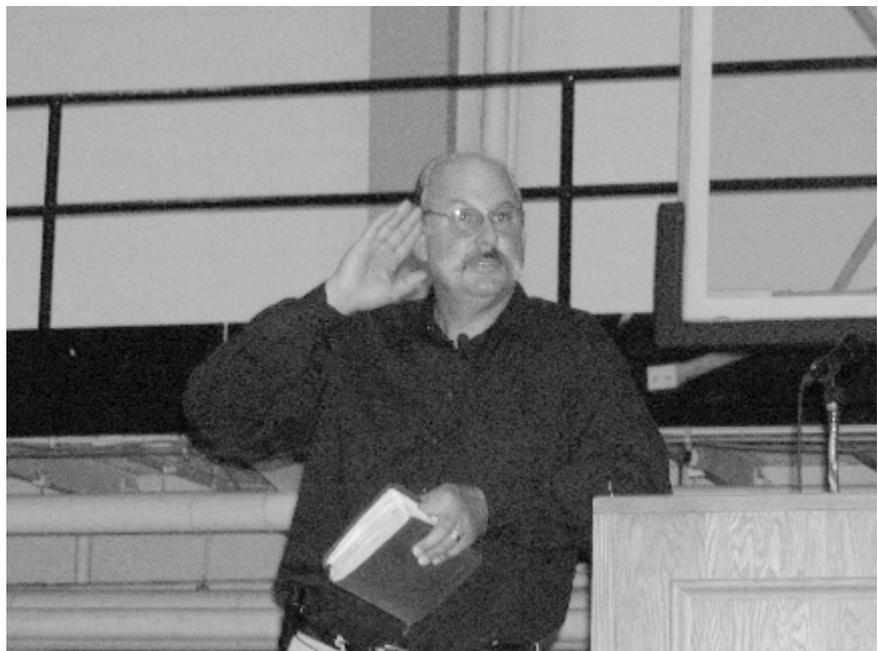
In all, conventioners participated in six main sessions, four workshops,

four morning devotional times and four evening talk downs with their own church youth groups.

Two RYS programs, STEP (Summer Teen Evangelism Project) and LOGOS (its post-high ministry) were also promoted during the week, with the adult leaders enjoying a special Tuesday evening dinner sponsored by Reformed Youth Services.

Despite the convention's packed schedule, recreation and fellowship were not neglected. There were plenty of opportunities to participate in sports, relax, or take part in non-sports activities in the Skye Lounge, a favorite evening hangout for students and leaders alike. One well-received activity was "Who Wants to Be a Bibliophile?," which tested the students Scripture knowledge. Both the winner and runnerup received new student Bibles for their accomplishment.

On behalf of the RYS board, we praise God for blessing this event with inspiring, biblical speakers,



Rip Listens - Rip Pratt interacts with conventioners at one of the main sessions at the first-ever Reformed Youth Services National Convention



teens with great attitudes and a wonderful volunteer committee that exemplified servanthood.

Lord willing, next year's national convention will be held July 15-19 at Colorado University in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The 2002 theme will be "Faith to Move Mountains." For more information, please contact RYS Director Ed DeGraaf at (616) 667-0694.

Ed DeGraaf is the Director of Reformed Youth Fellowship



Relaxing in the Skye Lounge

A Youth Sponsor Reports on Her View of the RYS Convention

I had the wonderful privilege and opportunity to go as a sponsor with the young people of my church to the first national RYS high school convention held at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Being a school teacher with my summer off, I was the perfect candidate to go. I teach junior high students, so being with 250+ high schoolers for a week was not exactly something I was accustomed to. I had gone to last year's Kyrie convention, but had not felt spiritually fed. I wrote it off as being a convention for high school kids with the sessions and workshops geared to their needs. It was with this same expectation that I departed Highland, Indiana for the weeklong convention in Pennsylvania. Boy, was I wrong!

The theme for this year's convention was "Take Every Thought Captive." This theme was reverberated in each large group session and in the individual workshops. It was a theme presented in a way that was applicable for any age group, from the high school students the convention was put together for, to the sponsors who came with them. I was very impressed to see that both the sessions and workshops were Biblically founded. We were always encouraged to have our Bibles with us and to follow along. Speakers made it a point to reference their presentations with Bible passages.

One thing that really struck me was

how Rip Pratt, one of the main session speakers, encouraged us to write things down. We cannot remember everything we hear, and we may miss something good if we do not note it. Even as I look over my notes to write this, I have come across important points I have forgotten already. This was a great challenge and reminder.

The small group sessions were offshoots on topics related to the main theme and helped to put it into perspective for daily living. Not only should our minds be held captive by Christ in church and our devotions, but also in our work and play. We cannot live on neutral ground. As Christians, we must dedicate all we do to Christ. This presents quite a challenge to our daily living. I am constantly reminded now by this simple theme to live every aspect of my life under the Lordship of Christ.

The music was incredible also. Two guitarists, a high school graduate and a college graduate, led the session singing. They helped the young people appreciate the familiar hymns and psalms of the church with their "Go blue hymnal!" slogan and singing from its pages. These gentlemen were wonderful role models to those at the convention, especially to aspiring musicians.

All good conventions are not without their fun. All kinds of sporting tournaments were set up. My personal favorite was the volleyball, even though my team lost right away. Sorry guys! The week was quite warm so when it was announced

A Teen Review of the RYS Convention

that a fire hydrant would be opened for a couple hours one afternoon, many found refreshment that way. Not only were food and drink plentiful during meals, but there were also free snacks and drinks available every night. Ed De Graaf read my mind when he scheduled a gentleman to come in and make cappuccinos two nights of the convention. Thank you, Ed! You certainly know how to keep your sponsors happy.

Our day away was a trip to Kennywood Amusement Park. My fearless cohort of sponsors hit the big rides, not to be outdone by any of the young people. I must confess, I could not be convinced to go on the Kennywood's rendition of the "Giant Drop."

I had a wonderful and fulfilling experience this year. Not only did the young people make new friends, but so did we as sponsors, especially on our late night rounds. The speakers reminded us of truths that we need to put into practice more consciously. I hope that it was as much of a spiritually nurturing event for the young people and other sponsors as it was for me. The Spirit of the Lord was there and filled my heart. I pray that all there were just as touched and will carry it with them, putting these truths into practice for a long time to come.

Wendy Gorter is junior high school science teacher who attends Community Reformed Bible Church in Highland, Indiana.

The first annual Reformed Youth Services National Convention can be hailed as a success. We, the excited teens, arrived on Monday, July 30 between 1-5 p.m. at beautiful Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Surrounded by grand mountains and spectacular old buildings we found a haven to learn about "Taking Every Thought Captive," our theme for the week. Our theme was based on II Corinthians 10:5 which reads "and we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ."

In our main sessions we were privileged to hear two well-known and influential men speak. Dr. Dennison, an ordained OPC minister and an associate professor at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia; and Mr. Rip Pratt, who is the pastor of youth and family as well as marriage and family counselor at Bethel CRC in Dallas, Texas. God used both of these men to powerfully convict and challenge us in our goal to "take every thought captive."

Under Dr. Dennison, we learned how we can know the mind of Christ through studying and sitting under the preaching of the Word every Sunday. Knowing the mind of Christ makes us wise to the ways of the world and the devil. Dr. Dennison chal-

lenged us to remember that every thought that enters into our mind should be one we would want in heaven sitting before the throne of God. Our mind must continually be on the things of God.

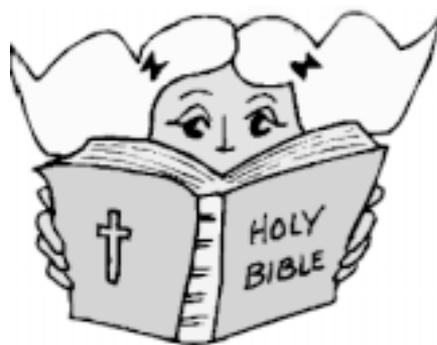
Mr. Rip Pratt expounded on the enemies we have- the world, the flesh and the devil. Each one of these "enemies" tries to take our minds off the things of Christ. We learned that it is hard work to "take every thought captive," as we are constantly in a battle to keep our minds pure before God. Mr. Pratt told us that we must know the Bible to fight our enemies, and that there is no excuse for our ignorance.

We (Reformed teens) have been blessed with a wonderful knowledge. Now we must use that knowledge to be examples to those around us.

Pastor Jeff Doll from the 1st URC of Chino, California was our emcee. He did a great job. I am going to quote something I heard about him one day while I was walking around because it describes him so well: "He is so sincere up there and he really seems to care about us.

He's really funny at the right times and serious when he needs to be." Those of you who know him realize how true this is.

Each conventioneer was also



allowed to choose four workshops (out of nine) to attend. These workshops, led by pastors and youth directors, had a wide range of topics all under the heading of our theme. Following is the list we had to choose from: “Who are You?” with Rev. Wybren Oord; “Work: Curse or Calling” with Rev. Todd Joling; “Live Long and Prosper” with Rev. Ian Wright; “The Immorality of Neutrality” with Mr. Dave VanderMeer, “The Craze for Amusement” with Rev. Jason Tuinstra, “Everyday Service” with Rev. Ken Smith, “Not a Square Inch” with Rev. Brian Vos, “Exercising Sports Control” with Rev. Steve DeBoer and “Time, Talents and Treasures” with Rev. Rich Kuiken. As you can see, the choice was not easy! I guess the convention committee knew this so they made tapes available of all the main sessions and the workshops for people like me who wanted to hear them all.

Leading us in worship to our ever-living God were some really neat men: Al Gemmen and Sam Krikke. This was their “First Big Gig.” We sang some familiar songs and they taught us some new ones. It is really amazing to hear 300 teens sing praises to their Lord and Savior in heaven. It gave me chills! I wish you could have been there and experienced that. Praise God!

By the end of the week our little minds were on overload! Six main sessions, three each with Dr. Dennison and Mr. Pratt, plus four workshops -Wow!!! The fact that there was so much knowledge to be gained in this week is fantastic. God has given us the opportunity to grow so much, but now we must

grasp that knowledge and put into practice what we have learned.

Stuffed in the middle of all this learning, the committee also planned many fun activities in the form of tournaments and games for us to participate in-if we so wished. There was 3-on-3 basketball, coed volleyball, soccer and a bump tour-

We (Reformed teens) have been blessed with a wonderful knowledge. Now we must use that knowledge to be examples to those around us.

nament. Teams were made up from either a church youth group, a bunch of friends or maybe just walking around asking others to form a team. The championship teams from the different sports received tee-shirts as a prize for winning. Some of the more athletically-challenged among us were the self-appointed cheerleaders.

One night in the Skye Lounge (a hangout place overlooking the river) we were visited by a well-known T.V. star! Guess who it was? Regis Philbin from “Who Wants to be a Millionaire!” Got ya! Actually it was an imposter and we played “Who wants to be a Biblionaire?”

To cool off one afternoon we could go to the wave pool. One day we did something quite unusual. In front of the dining hall the Fire Department came and hooked up a big

sprinkler-like thing in the street and started spraying water way up in the air! We could run through it or just stand in it, or whatever, but we sure got wet!

Our day away this year was at Kennywood Amusement Park. This is one of the oldest parks in the country, so I heard. I had a lot of fun, even though I am not a roller coaster person! Those who like roller coasters enjoyed themselves a lot!

Friday, was a day for laughter, email-address exchanging, and of course goodbyes. Just before we all departed for home we had a praise celebration. Anyone could sign up either as a solo or as a group. Many people chose to sing or do a piano solo. Then, for something new this year, the committee put together a show on the Power Point. They used the pictures they had snapped of us on digital cameras throughout the week. What a great way to end the week, although I cried. I wasn't ready to say goodbye to all my friends, but I wanted to see my family. I would just like to say thankyou to the committee members who worked so hard on this convention. It really showed! It was the best one I have been to yet, and was definitely the most challenging to me spiritually. I heard so many positive comments from everyone I talked to. So-o-o, hat's off to you committee!

To God be the glory, a conventioneer, Laura Kramer.

Laura Kramer is a member of the Cornerstone URC (MI) youth group.

THE CHURCH.. Her Life and Death Struggle

An Exposition of Revelation 2: 8-11

8. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead and lived again: 9. I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. 11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death (Rev. 2:8-11).

This entire letter is phrased in perspectives of life and death. We feel that the Church is here represented as living in so difficult a crisis that “life” and “death” are properly contrasted. But out of that crisis the Church emerges victorious: it is awarded “a crown of life.” Surely the Church is here to be seen as victorious, but only after a “life and death struggle.”

A Crucial and Intense Struggle

How may we describe life for the church in that cosmopolitan community which was Smyrna? Smyrna had become great through transit trade. Religiously, Smyrna also had its Caesar cult. The year 195 B.C. saw the erection of a temple in honor of the city of Rome, which was venerated as a goddess. This pleased Rome and resulted in privilege and benefit for Smyrna. In distinction from Ephesus, where emperor worship was integrated with the deification of the sensuous Diana, Smyrna’s religious expression was oriented to the religion of the Jews!

This is a strange fact, since the occasion which led a substantial contingent of Jews to emigrate to Smyrna after the year 70 A.D. was an outburst of conflict between the

Romans and the Jews, which resulted in the fall of Jerusalem. Into this strongly pro-Roman city Jewish emigrants entered to take up a new life. And, remarkable as it may seem, they managed to get along unusually well. The Romans made important concessions: Jews were exempt from military service; the synagogue received legal protection from Caesar; abuse of Jewish religious rites was punishable by law.

The Jews, on their part, were ready to return kindness for kindness. Prayer for the Roman emperor was an established custom in synagogue worship. Symbols of respect for Caesar were brought into many synagogues. As a result the Jews were awarded an influential place in the community. Unhindered, they entered upon the flourishing business life of this important port city. Needless to say, they prospered.

In Ephesus harmony was achieved between Diana and Caesar. But in Smyrna reconciliation was effected between Roman and Jew, between the god of the Romans and the God of the Jews, between Caesar and Jehovah! Sharp contrasts were ruled out; the things of eternal life were compromised for the sake of the things which make for death (Psalm 49).

It is in Smyrna that our Lord also had gathered a Church which confessed without compromise that he was “the first and the last.” Of none except one who is “very God” is this testimony possible. Men living today were not here yesterday; and those who live today are dead tomorrow. But with respect to the man Jesus the Church confesses that he is eternal God, that he is yesterday, today and forever the same. What is more, Jesus Christ as man possesses this attribute, for he “was dead and lived again.”

This, then, is the situation: in Smyrna we find a most vigorous example of civic life; and therein we find the Church, also very much alive, but with a life of a peculiar origin and of an altogether unique character.

I believe I hear someone saying, “Surely Smyrna was a Church of great potential. No sharp animosities, outward peace and prosperity — what more could one desire for the cause of Christ’s Church in the world?” But all of this is the foolishness of the flesh! For Smyrna is described in this passage in terms typically Scriptural and spiritual, and therefore, perhaps, surprising to us.



For the Church at Smyrna is in serious trouble: “I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty.” Life was burdensome for these Christians, not only because of injustice practiced with regard to them, but especially because they had to cope with “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14b). Here tribulation was due to the work of Satan in his efforts to destroy life. The prince of death was troubling Smyrna’s saints as he struggled to oppose Jesus Christ and his life-giving power.

Imagine the economic plight of the Christians at Smyrna! In a city of much wealth and great commercial activity, where the Jews, arriving as outcasts, had prospered in the way of compromise with the Roman world, the Church was poverty-stricken. Christians in Smyrna were in economic distress not because they lacked ambition and industry, but because of the “tribulation” and terror of death. They experienced a boycotting of their business and social life because of disapproval of the principles for which they stood. Systematic affliction of the Church took place. In the competition for appointment and advancement Christians were by-passed. Jesus Christ does indeed say to the Smyrna believers that they have a treasure in heaven, that they are “rich,” but he also recognizes the power of the Evil One who is seeking their death — “I know thy poverty.” For poverty means that the necessary means for the sustaining of human life are in short supply — and that because of the hatred and opposition of them who hated the living witness of Christ’s Church.

In addition to economic privation

the tribulation of the Smyrna Church is also religious in character. They are being persecuted. That is not unusual in the Church. Those “in” her who prefer rationalization and compromise ridicule those who, because of desire to live according to the Word, are suffering hardship and persecution. The Jews did this in Smyrna. Jesus describes them thus: “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”

In a city of much wealth and great commercial activity...the church was poverty-stricken.

These oppressors of the true Church reasoned this way: “True enough, the Lord our God is one Lord. Nevertheless, we ought to be neighborly enough to honor Caesar also in our synagogues. After all, he is the emperor of this land. The claim these Christians insist on making — that Jesus of Nazareth is ‘the first and the last’ — dishonors Caesar and jeopardizes our position in this city. Quite properly, therefore, we ought to do all we can to prevent their prosperity.” Typical of them who are “a synagogue of Satan” was their false accusation of Christians as revolutionaries and rebels undeserving of social and legal protection and privilege. And so the forces of death applied pressure to the living Body of Christ.

“Poverty” signifies that materially

the Christians in Smyrna were hindered and deprived as they struggled “to make a living.” “Blasphemy” indicates that the spiritual and moral bases of social life were removed. But this letter to the “angel of the church in Smyrna” goes on to describe the future “tribulation” of the saints in even worse terms. Even their personal freedom shall be taken away: “the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be fried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.”

This makes the story of the persecution of a faithful Church complete. Bread, position and freedom are denied them. And to intensify the fearfulness of the entire matter still more, the description is clear as to general details, but vague with respect to specific application. “Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer” Note the plural. The tribulation will assume many forms and involve many instances. But just how and how many?

Some will be cast into prison, but their identity is not given. Will they be released again? No one knows. How long will this last? “Ten days” reads the text — but this is a symbolic number, a “round” number. Really, no one knows just where things are on God’s time-piece in this situation.

Surely the “fear of death” is heavy upon the hearts and minds of Christ’s Church in Smyrna — even upon them who have received the true life and expect its everlasting glory.

Fear Not!

Only one thing is certain for the Smyrna Church, and that is that

things will get worse! It is almost irritating, therefore, and not a little puzzling to hear Christ say, "Fear not."

Indeed, one can only fear if the situation is to be understood merely in terms of that which is within the scope of our endurance. If Christ means by his "fear not" the same thing as our "don't be nervous," then his words are sheer mockery. Our composure and equilibrium can never remain undisturbed in the face of the energies of hell. Even if Christ means that we should be sure to have an immovable faith can we scarcely understand his admonition. For our human faith is not a match for demonic forces.

We can only understand the crisis at Smyrna if we see that the struggle involves super-human forces. On the surface it appears to be a part of the inevitable tension between rival religious bodies, the competitive struggle for business and wealth. Actually it is the incessant battle between the Church of Christ and the synagogue of Satan. Smyrna's residents are taken up in a spiritual struggle between the forces of life as revealed in and gained through Christ, and the powers of death, whose ruler is the devil.

The tribulation of the Church is to be seen as a beneficial chastening, therefore. But its pain and struggle is occasioned by this unspeakably important consideration apart from which the Christian life cannot be properly understood: back of our everyday experiences, back of our trials and tribulations as God's children lies always the fact of a warfare whose contestants are more than merely human, whose dimen-

sion reaches all times and places.

No wonder that we are often perplexed as we find ourselves sensing the awful reality of that struggle even in our own tribulation. No wonder that we need so much to hear Christ's miraculously consoling Word, "Fear not." For if we are to venture forth into the arena of this battle on our own we should never dare to begin, let alone succeed. But if Christ dares to wage this

If Christ means by His "fear not" the same thing as our "don't be nervous," then his words are sheer mockery.

battle in and through us as members of his Church and his disciples, then it becomes an altogether different matter. For Christ is "the first and the last, who was dead and lived again." He who has triumphed over death at Calvary will never be defeated by him who now strives so furiously to deprive the Church of a place in the earth.

*"Though flesh and heart should faint and fail,
The Lord will ever be
The strength and portion of my heart,
My God eternally."*

(Christian Reformed Psalter Hymnal, no. 147, stanza 3)

Triumph Through Tribulation

Continuing in the same vein, our Lord points to the outcome of this struggle. The Church may not know

when this period of tribulation will end, but Christ does. And not only does he know that there is an end, and what its character shall be, he is also the one who has determined the proper conclusion to this period of affliction and persecution.

It is comforting to note this fact. The duration of this period of tribulation is not determined by the opposition. Neither Roman might nor Jewish hatred, nor even Satan himself enter in to establish the length of this term of tribulation. Therefore Christ can say, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This means that the Church must always reckon herself to be completely fortunate if she only has Christ with her as Savior. Let death come, we shall wear the victor's crown of life through him.

More of this same thought is found at the close of verse 11: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

In these words the proper perspective of the wise Christian is reflected. There is a first life and a first death. Neither are the primary concern of God's faithful child in the militant Church. For the first life is temporal, and the first death has been swallowed up in the victory of the Savior's resurrection. But, there is also a second life and a second death. These are not temporal, but everlasting.

This second death is the eternal punishment of the unrepentant sinner in hell. With this fearful reality clearly in mind, the Christian gears his life now with a view to the life then, that he may escape the death from which there is no return. The



choice in Smyrna was between the first life and its reward; the second death, and the second, future life and the consequences of that choice, the opposition of the forces of hell.

Smyrna chose for the second life, and her choice was wisely made. It is ours to imitate their faith, and also to brave the forces of the Evil One in terms of Christ's might and with due regard for the greater glory of the heavenly kingdom. And it ought to be utterly impossible for us to deny that faithful Christian life and witness today does not mean real opposition from the many who are allied with Satan in his ceaseless struggle with the Christ. For this is the back-drop of New Testament history.

“He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” May we all be able to hear that the things of this present life are temporal and fleeting. We know not the day nor the hour of our death, nor of Christ's return, although their certainty is beyond question. True enough, the self-sacrificing service modeled at Smyrna is extremely difficult, and so unattractive to the flesh. And the “second death” can seem to be so far removed. Its great certainty, however, ought to jar us into sober consideration of the Gospel's demand upon our present life. Fact is, if we cannot hear what the Spirit is now saying, it is because we simply haven't the ears with which to do so. Everyone that really “hears”

these words can only respond by urging a prayer for grace and strength. Fix your eye, O Christian, upon him who is ‘the first and the last.’ For his sake the first death in all its horror is really only an occasion for the revelation of his life in us.

*To live apart from God is death,
'Tis good His face to seek;
My refuge is the living God,
His praise I long to speak.*

(Ibid, stanza 5)

Rev. Henry A. Venema
[1921-1972] was the pastor of
Second CRC in Toronto,
Ontario when this article was
published.

Reformed Evangelism: Biblical and Confessional Foundations

Election and Evangelism (Part 1)

If there is one doctrine for which the Reformed churches are known, it is the doctrine of election or predestination. Many people, who know next to nothing about the Reformed faith and the writings of John Calvin, have at least heard that Reformed believers emphasize the sovereignty of God in salvation. This emphasis upon God's sovereignty comes to its most dramatic expression in the “horrible decree” (Calvin) of God whereby He has predestined from eternity to save some people and not to save others.¹ Reformed Christians are adamant that sinners can do absolutely nothing to contribute to their own salvation. Everything depends upon

God's choice and the sovereign realization of His saving purposes in history.

So far as evangelism is concerned, this doctrine seems problematic for several reasons. According to its critics, it amounts to a kind of “fatalism” in which all things have been predetermined. No matter what we do or what choices we make in life, God's choices always prevail. As a practical matter, this encourages a passive approach to the preaching of the gospel and the work of evangelism. If our choices and actions are ultimately the fruit of God's sovereign counsel or decree, and if no one can alter or change what God has previously

determined regarding the salvation of the elect—then there seems to be no compelling reason to preach the gospel earnestly and urgently to all sinners. In the case of the elect, God will bring them to salvation without fail, irrespective of our action or inaction in seeking their salvation. And in the case of the non-elect, no strategy or means of evangelism that we might devise, holds out any prospect for success. The doctrine of election, in short, is a formula for inaction so far as the work of evangelism is concerned. Indeed, this constitutes one of the principal reasons Reformed churches are so often lacking in their evangelistic interest and activity.

Not only does the doctrine of election inhibit evangelistic activity. It also discourages an approach to gospel preaching that *genuinely offers Christ* with the promise of salvation to all sinners who choose to embrace Him in faith and repentance. Since the design of the gospel is to save the elect alone, it cannot be proclaimed to all as *good news*. Furthermore, inasmuch as God has no sovereign intention to save the non-elect, He cannot possibly express any goodwill or desire for the salvation of all sinners in the gospel's presentation. What is true of God must surely be as true for those who speak in His name. If it is inconsistent with God's sovereign purpose to express any divine benevolence or compassion toward the non-elect, then it is equally inconsistent for a faithful gospel preacher to entreat sinners with a heartfelt compassion that desires the salvation of all. Viewed from the vantage point of God's sovereign decrees of election and non-election, the preaching of the gospel becomes an indifferent affair. The gospel promise is announced, but this promise is, strictly speaking, only addressed to the elect. Since the bearer of the gospel does not know, as God alone knows, who are the elect, he may not seek equally the salvation of all to whom the gospel is extended. This can only make the work of evangelism a dispassionate one, absent the kind of motivating love for sinners that is necessary to vigorous evangelistic effort.

No doubt other, related objections to the doctrine of election could be mentioned. These, however, are the most common and principal objections voiced by critics of the Re-

formed understanding of sovereign election. I mention them here to set a context for the following exposition, in summary form, of the main lines of the Reformed view. For I will argue in this and subsequent articles that, far from constituting a discouragement or hindrance to the work of evangelism, *the biblical teaching of election discloses the source, effectiveness, and measure of proper evangelism*. There would be no gospel, as a matter of fact, were it not for God's electing grace in Christ. Nor would there be any reasonable expectation of evangelism's success, were it not for God's faithfulness in bringing His saving purposes to effect. Moreover, as the Author and Effector of the gospel unto the salvation of His people, God's glory must be the measure of any biblically responsible evangelistic effort.

The confession of election in the Reformed confessions is consistent and clear. One of the finest statements is found in Article 16 of the Belgic Confession:

We believe that, all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just; *merciful*, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; *just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

Similar statements are found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*,² and in the *Canons of Dort*, which are an extended exposition and elucidation of Article 16 of the Belgic Confession in answer to the errors of Arminius and the Remonstrants.³ The Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, says that “[b]y the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death” (Chap. III, iii). In its definition of election, the Canons of Dort affirm that “[b]efore the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the good pleasure of His will, [God] ... chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin” (I, 7).

Though these statements in the Reformed confessions are set within the context of a more full and comprehensive summary of the teaching of Scripture, we will only isolate several of the key elements of the doctrine of election. To do so risks oversimplifying matters, but for our purpose we need only treat those aspects of the doctrine that are of particular significance to the work of evangelism.

One of the most striking features of the biblical teaching regarding election is its stress upon God's determination “from before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4; compare 1 Cor. 2:7; Rev. 13:8) to save His people in Christ. The gospel has, quite literally, its roots in eternity. The good news of God's good pleasure to save His elect people is



not a kind of “emergency measure,” a backup or secondary plan, which He only introduced after the first one failed. However mysterious and unfathomable it may be to us, the Triune God’s love for His people is not a temporary or newfound love. Rather, at the first of all of God’s purposes and intentions for His creatures stands His intention to save His people in and through Christ, His beloved Son. Though God’s electing purpose presupposes human sinfulness—the confessions speak of God’s election “out of” all those who had fallen in Adam—it finds its ultimate source in the eternal counsel and purpose of the Triune God.⁴ God alone from all eternity is the Author of the gospel that biblical evangelism assumes and proclaims.

Furthermore, God’s eternal purpose to save His people in Christ is grounded upon His own free love and mercy. Election is sovereign and therefore unconditional. God does not choose to save those whose faith He foresees, as though His choice were conditional upon the sinner’s believing response to the gospel. Faith itself is a free gift of God’s grace to those whom He draws into fellowship with himself (Eph. 2:8). Nor does God choose to save those whose holiness or obedience distinguishes them from others and makes them worthy of His favor. The believer’s election is “unto” holiness and blamelessness, not on account of His holiness or blamelessness (Eph. 1:4). No human works, whether good or bad, distinguish the elect from the nonelect. Only God’s purpose of election accounts for the salvation of the one and not the other (Rom. 9:11). Thus, election is nothing if it

is not free. Sovereign election compels the recognition that, far from our choosing God and thereby obtaining salvation, God has chosen us and thereby secured our salvation. The doctrine of election completely strips away any pretense that the salvation of sinners rests upon their own willing or running (Rom. 9:16).

Lest this sovereign or free election of God be misunderstood as an arbitrary and groundless act of God’s freedom, it must also be understood

“No human works, whether good or bad, distinguish the elect from the nonelect.”

to be an act that springs from God’s love and mercy. In God’s free decision to grant salvation to His people in Christ, He gloriously displays His overflowing goodness and compassion. Though God could have justly left sinners in their sins, He chooses to do otherwise. He loves His own *in Christ, His beloved Son* (Eph. 1:4-6). The love with which the Father eternally embraces His own dear Son is a love that He determines to share with and communicate to His elect people. Those who are the elect of God are therefore properly called the “beloved of God,” chosen and precious to him (Col. 3:12).

God’s electing love is also deeply personal. He knows those whom

He chooses by name (John 10:27; Rev. 13:8). In His immutable and unwavering purpose (Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:9b,10; Eph. 1:11), He determines to grant salvation to a particular people. Just as a bridegroom sets His affection upon His bride in faithfulness and exclusive devotion, so God sets His affection upon His peculiar people. God’s electing love, therefore, is a distinguishing and special affection for those whom He chooses to save. Though it remains a mystery to us why God should be pleased to save the elect, and not the nonelect, God’s ways are just and good. No mere creature has the right to contest God’s ways, which are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8-9). Nor is there any basis for challenging the justice of God, who owes the creature nothing and who could justly punish all sinners on account of their disobedience and unfaithfulness (Rom. 9:14-23). The doctrine of particular election, therefore, summons us to praise God for His mercy and compassion toward His people, rather than complaining against or questioning His purposes.

The evangel, accordingly, that forms the heart of the work of evangelism, finds its source and vitality in the free and electing love of the Triune God. Apart from God’s sovereign counsel to save His people, there would be no gospel to preach, nor any reason to believe that gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

Human Inability

A necessary corollary of the doctrine of sovereign and merciful election is the biblical teaching of human inability. Apart from God’s

electing determination to save fallen sinners, no one would be saved. Consequently, in the historic dispute with the teaching of Arminius and his followers, the Reformed churches confessed not only the doctrine of unconditional election but also the doctrine of (what has come to be known as) total depravity.⁵ The good news of God's electing love answers to the predicament in which all fallen sons and daughters of Adam find themselves. Or, to state the matter negatively, the denial of sovereign election always correlates with an attenuated view of human sinfulness and inability. If we are able to do some saving good, whether in our own native ability (Pelagianism) or with the assistance of God's grace (semi-Pelagianism), then our salvation rests in part upon our willing and running. The denial of sovereign election invariably requires the denial of the radical implications of human sinfulness.

The Scriptures are clear in their teaching that fallen sinners have no spiritual ability to contribute anything to their salvation. They do this in two ways. On the one hand, the Scriptures teach that God alone can grant the rebirth, spiritual renewal and sanctification necessary to the salvation of any sinner. And on the other hand, the Scriptures teach that fallen sinners are slaves to sin (Rom. 6:22), blind to the truth (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:17-19), and dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-3).

By virtue of the sin of Adam and its consequences for the human race, all men and women are born in sin, and are by nature in a circumstance of spiritual death (Gen. 2:16,17; Rom. 5:12; Ps. 51:5). Nothing less,

therefore, than a new birth by the mighty working of the Holy Spirit is necessary to enable sinners to see and enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5-7). Perhaps one of the most remarkable statements of this truth is found in Ephesians 2: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, made us alive together with Christ (by

"The good news of God's electing love answers to the predicament in which all fallen sons and daughters of Adam find themselves."

grace you have been saved)" (vv. 1-2,4-5). Similarly, in Colossians 2:13 we read, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with [Christ]" When God saves His people, He acts in a way that can only be compared to His work of creation—He calls into existence things that otherwise would not be (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 4:4). When the Spirit breathes new life into dead sinners, it is comparable to a valley of dried up bones being given new flesh and life (Ezek. 37).

This Scriptural understanding of the spiritual inability of fallen sinners is

of great importance to the work of evangelism. If salvation ultimately depends upon human ability, then the prospects for success in the preaching of the gospel would be dismal indeed. If, however, salvation ultimately depends upon God's ability to realize His electing purpose, then there is every reason to be confident that otherwise helpless sinners will be brought to faith and repentance.

Endnotes

¹The language is John Calvin's in his *Institutes* (ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.xxiii.7: "The decree is dreadful [*decretum horribile*] indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before He created him, and consequently foreknew because He so ordained by his decree." Regrettably, the term Calvin uses has the connotation in our usage of something terrible, even repugnant. This, of course, serves well the purpose of those who oppose the biblical teaching regarding God's decree. For Calvin the term suggests something "awesome" and divinely holy, inapprehensible and above anything creaturely.

²Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III, "Of God's Eternal Decree."

³For an exposition of the historical background and content of the Canons of Dort, see my *But for the Grace of God* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1994); and De Jong, Peter Y., ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618/1619* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968).

⁴In the history of reflection upon the decree of God, a long debate has been carried on between those who take an "infra-lapsarian" and a "supra-



Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1955

lapsarian” position on the order of the various aspects of God’s decree. According to the supralapsarian (lit. “before the fall”) position, the election and nonelection of individuals are logically prior to or before the divine purpose to create the world and to permit the fall. In this position, the “first” purpose of God is the revelation of his glory in the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the nonelect; the purposes of God in creation and the fall are “secondary” as “means” to effect this primary purpose. According to the infralapsarian (lit., “after the fall”) position, the order of God’s decree parallels the historical order of creation, fall and redemption. The infralapsarian position teaches that God’s decree to create the world and to permit the fall is prior to the decree to save the elect. For our purpose, it is only necessary to recognize that God’s decree to elect, whether understood in an infra- or supra-lapsarian manner, is pretemporal; it concerns God’s eternal purpose in Christ to save his people.

⁵The so-called “five points of Calvinism,” which are the five Heads of doctrine set forth in the Canons of Dort, stand or fall together. The confession of human inability, for example, demands the confession of unconditional election, limited atonement (particular redemption), irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. What is sometimes called “four point” Calvinism (all points but that of particular redemption) is an incoherent position.

Dr. Cornel Venema serves as President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana where he teaches Doctrinal Studies. He is also a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

December 1954 - January 1955

“[I]f God’s people must bear witness of God, how did they come to be equipped for the task? The answer is that they have been “formed” by God for this purpose. They have not chosen this task. They have been chosen for it.”

* * * * *

“As God was favorably disposed to the human race before the fall and offered the race as a whole eternal life, so even after the fall God gives His good gifts to men everywhere, thereby calling them to repentance and to performance of the task.”

*Common Grace
and Witness-Bearing*
Cornelius Van Til

“The true church cannot be maintained in an atmosphere of secularism. Many Christians of our times have fallen into the deadly sin of loving pleasure more than God. They have not taken the Christian life seriously. They have not seen the smoke of battle, the blood of the dead, the hatred of the mortal enemy - Satan.”

* * * * *

“The tendency of the modern church is to hush things up, smooth things over, and silently to tolerate an unholy condition.”

* * * * *

“[W]herever God may call you, I beg you never be clothed with the cloak of mediating compromise. Keep your teaching clear. Keep it

sharp. Keep it biblical. Keep it close to the Word of God.”

*Scriptural Separation as
Illustrated by Events in the Recent
History of the Christian Church in
Korea*

Park Yune Sun,
President of the Theological
Seminary in Pusan, Korea

“Indifference to the Truth, the faith once delivered to the saints, was for Dr. Machen the great sin of his church and he inveighed against it sharply and powerfully. To be wrong about a detail of doctrine was not nearly as heinous, in his opinion, as not to be concerned about the rightness or wrongness of a doctrinal position at all!”

*Stonehouse’s Biography of J.
Gresham Machen*
Henry R. Van Til

“[T]he young person should be firmly decided that he will wait and prepare for his marriage. On the negative side, that will mean that he will flee from youthful lusts. On the positive side, however, it will mean that he will actively engage in preparing himself, making sure that he has something to offer his beloved. He should see that he is healthy, both physically and spiritually.”

* * * * *

“Selection of a marriage partner should take place with prayerful supplication, that God will provide here as elsewhere. If we pray for our food and for our clothes, shall

we not also pray for this important thing?"

Marriage and the Family
Robert S. Knudsen

February - March 1955

"Though in unity there is strength, uniformity is the death of any church."

* * * * *

"[T]here are many people who do not seem to worry very much about the final outcome of this battle. They reason this way, 'Has not the Lord promised that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church?' As *they* see it, this means, 'The forces of hell will never prevail against *my denomination.*' ...I call that interpretation a wicked interpretation. If it were true, then all those denominations which were at one time sound and pure would still be sound and pure. But we know that this is definitely not the case. Surely the worst enemy of any denomination is the man who is constantly saying, 'What happened elsewhere cannot happen in my church.'"

Today's Battle
William Hendriksen

April 1955

"To the sinner standing in the brightest light of the glory of a perfect holiness there is every reason to fear! But to those who make humble acknowledgment of sin in confessions there comes the blessed word of assurance and comfort."

"I was Dead...I am Alive for Evermore"
Rein Leestma

"Strange though it may seem, there is something sweet in the out-

pouring of our hearts before God. For the Spirit who works true repentance and confession of sin, testifies in our hearts that in the acknowledging of sins we are dear and pleasing to God."

The Place of Contrition in Public Worship
William Kok

"The notion now prevails that the church's welfare depends solely on the pastor. If he's a friendly fellow, a smooth talker, and preferably the possessor of a Pepsodent smile, the church will get on. Elders and deacons, if they still count, should content themselves with being pastoral cheerleaders or congregational errand-boys. This is a far cry from the teaching of Scripture which insists on a full complement of officers 'for perfecting the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.'"

Fathers and Brethren
Peter Y. De Jong

May 1955

"The reason given by Paul for condemning the wearing of an alien yoke with one who is basically alien to our mode of life is simply that there can be no real fellowship between a believer and an unbeliever anymore than there is fellowship between light and darkness."

* * * * *

"Our being together with unbelievers as members of a common humanity, eating and drinking and working, is not the same as entering upon such a work-communion, so that we are yoke-fellows, mates with them. If there is a working agreement, a concerted action of any kind, Paul teaches that it must

be on the basis of a yoke that fits the Christian. And the unbeliever's yoke does not fit the professing Christian!"

Bearing an Alien Yoke
Henry R. Van Til

"Both principally and practically mission work is to be conducted by the local congregation as the manifestation of Christ's Body on earth. Indeed, this may and should be done in close cooperation and conference with sister-congregations. Yet the work must be related as intimately as possible to the local organization."

Review of J. H. Bavinck's Introduction to the Science of Missions
Henry R. Van Til

"Many members seem to resent an authoritative proclamation of the Word. When admonished concerning doctrine or conduct by the officers, some will even speak boldly of curtailing their Christian liberties and the unwarranted prying into what they consider to be their private affairs. As a result, some who have been clothed with Christ's ruling power hesitate to carry out their commission. The danger of closing our eyes to weaknesses and sins in the congregation is not imaginary. The sin of hesitating to rebuke the wayward does not seem to be infrequent. And by such neglect heresy and worldliness threaten to sweep the church from its spiritual moorings."

* * * * *

"Our only weapon against these defections is the daily, prayerful reminder that Christ wills to rule his people through the lawfully appointed and elected of-



ficers. This authority with which ministers, elders and deacons are clothed is not their own but his.”

To Whom the Church Belongs
Peter Y. De Jong

July 1955

“If we continue our easy-going ways, our tendency to loosen the lines which hold us fast in the Word, if we are unwilling to break with the world, if we no more war against sin within and without the church, if we, be it ever so profoundly, merely talk about love but are not unwilling to perform works of love, we can receive no comfort.”

The Church - Light Bearer in a Dark World
Henry A. Venema

September 1955

“Freedom must be a spiritual discipline which recognizes the limits imposed by law and accepts them voluntarily.”

On Freedom
Henry R. Van Til

November 1955

“If we bear our cross without finding joy therein, we have never understood the suffering of Jesus.”

The Case of the Muzzled Ox
Lambertus Mulder

Like Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver (Part 1)

The following article is the beginning of an inspirational message given by the Rev. Paul Murphy at the 2000 Reformed Fellowship Annual Meeting. It is a celebration of the advancement of the Reformed faith.

The topic for my lecture this evening is “Like Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver.” That is a citation of the book of Proverbs 25:11. There, Proverbs says, “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” An encouraging word is like apples of gold in settings of silver. An encouraging word here is likened by the author of Proverbs to a picture of aesthetic pleasure: apples of gold in settings of silver. Like a great work of art or a magnificently melodious and harmonious symphony, the aesthetic pleasure gained from an encouraging word thrills the heart, it delights the soul and senses, and it brings joy to man. Proverbs speaks often of the power of encouraging words. A few chapters earlier, in chapter 16 verse 24, it says, “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to my soul and healing to the bones.” We are told that encouraging words are spiritually therapeutic, beneficial, and valuable. Elsewhere in the book of Proverbs, chapter 15 verse 4, we are told that, “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life.” In verse 23 of that same chapter, we are told that a man finds joy in giving an apt reply, and how good is a timely word. And perhaps most significant, in chapter 12 verse 25 of Proverbs, we are told that a kind word cheers a man up.

My intention is not to preach a sermon on encouragement from Prov-

erbs or other passages of Scripture. But I come tonight to encourage you about the state of the Reformed faith because it is an exciting time to be Reformed. It is an exciting and thrilling time to be a Calvinist, to see what God is doing in His church and among His people, and particularly amongst those of us who call ourselves Reformed. I want you to see and appreciate and give thanks and praise to God for what He is doing to and for and with the Reformed faith in our day. So, like apples of gold in settings of silver, I want to bring you a word of encouragement, hoping that with God’s blessing it will thrill your heart, it will delight your soul, it will bring you great joy and instill in you as a result of that encouragement, the courage to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labors are not in vain.

I come also with a word of encouragement because we together, and I speak of us as a group, have come through some very discouraging times of declension. We have come through, most of us at least, times of ecclesiastical declension. We have had to leave the denomination in which most of us were born, baptized, and bred. It was a painful and difficult time to have to go through with that Church which to many of us was a mother. We have come through discouraging times of de-

clension spiritually in which we have seen the faith and its once strong, glowing substance wane, almost to an indescribable flicker. We have come through discouraging times of declension morally, as can be understood when the church is weak. When people are spiritually weak, it will be reflected in their morality as well as in discipline cases increasing in the church. And the church takes less and less interest in pursuing wayward sheep for their restoration, for the glory of God, and for the purification of the church. We have come through discouraging times of declension, not only ecclesiastically, spiritually, morally, but also theologically. It seems that the Reformed faith is often under attack and for all too many, it seems just so inconsequential. Who cares?

Brothers and sisters, it is inescapable and we should not seek to avoid the fact that the last 40 years have been a low ebb for the church in general and for the Reformed faith in particular. However, you and I need to look beyond our parochial borders and boundaries and we need to lift up our eyes to see what God is doing in the Reformed world today. I am going to limit my observations and comments just to what God is doing in the Reformed world today in our own country.

I come to you, not with any exegetical insight or even instruction, but merely what would be encouraging observations of what God is doing in our midst today. I relate that to you by means of stories and statistics about congregations, denominations, ministries, magazines, book publishing, conferences, seminaries, and education.

Congregations

I will begin with one that is particularly dear to my heart. This week I had the pleasure of being involved in an ordination ceremony for Mr. Rick Miller and, just the week prior, I was involved in the ordination ceremony of Mr. Tom Trowborst in Brooklyn, New York. The latter took place in King's Highway Church in Brooklyn. I stayed with the pastor of that church during my stay in New York City. His name is

*We need to lift up
our eyes to see
what God is doing
in the Reformed
world today.*

Ron Weinbaum. He is a converted Jew from the Bronx, New York City. I also was raised in the Bronx. I was raised Roman Catholic and he an orthodox observing Jew. After being converted from Judaism, he pursued studies at Philadelphia College of the Bible, a bastion of Dispensational theology. He graduated from there and went on to pursue ministry.

If you will indulge me in just a personal moment of reflection, I think you will find it interesting. Pastor Ron Weinbaum was the first Christian pastor that I ever came into contact with about six months before I ever became a Christian. I had been witnessed to by somebody in a luncheonette in my home town and they, along with some other Christians, invited me to a Bible

study at Franklin Square Baptist Church. Ron Weinbaum was the College & Career Group pastor there. I went to that Bible study, met him, heard him speak, and thought of him as I did most Christians then: what nonsense and foolishness these people are propagating. But it left a lasting impression on me nonetheless.

Suffice it to say, many years had transpired. I had become a Christian. I had gone off to seminary at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, had returned to New York City having been ordained to the ministry of the word and the sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church, only to once again meet Pastor Ron Weinbaum. He was pastoring King's Highway Baptist Church in Brooklyn. He was still a Baptist, still a dispensationalist, and yet, having been exposed to some Reformed teachings, he began to seek after what it meant to be Reformed. We met in Brooklyn and he was inquiring about this strange theology called the Reformed faith. Well, we talked, as you may well imagine, about many things for many hours that evening. Last week was the next occasion I had to meet him, to stay as a guest in his home, to participate in the ordination of a man to the ministry of Word and sacraments. What is the point you may be asking by now?

The point is simply this. That though he *was* a graduate of the Philadelphia College of the Bible, and though he had for years since his conversion to the Baptist and Dispensationalist theology, he had in his ministry, along with the elders of his church, managed to convert



the entire congregation from being Baptists and Dispensationalists to rock-ribbed Reformed believers.

When I was there and stayed with him, I was thrilled in my soul by his encouragement to me about what God had done in that particular congregation. Through his patient, careful, pastoral instruction and persevering, and over a period of a couple of years, the entire church became Reformed. All the families brought their children of various ages to be baptized into the covenant of God.

He told me about what was going on in that particular congregation. He told me how the whole church just loves the Reformed faith. They can't get enough of it. They study the confessions. They have gone through the Westminster Confession, the Larger and Shorter Catechism, and now they are working on the Continental standards. He teaches a class as the pastor of that congregation, not only of adults where they are going through the continental standards, but of young children, ages six to 11, in which he teaches them the Heidelberg Catechism. These are six- to 11-year-olds. He said over the course of the last year, they had memorized the first 30 questions of the Heidelberg Catechism. Not the compendium, not an abbreviated version like the Children's Catechism of the Westminster, but the whole first 30 questions and answers. Six- to 11-year-olds! And he told me, it's not just that they can begin at Q&A 1 and go through to Q&A 30, but I can call on them and say what is question and answer 15? Question and answer 10, 6, or 25? And they are able to do it. I went away from

that weekend enormously blessed.

Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that is not unique by any stretch of the imagination. The congregation of which I was first a member and subsequently an elder, Messiah's Congregation, underwent the very same process. In Texarkana, Texas, Pastor Randy Booth, similarly a Dispensationalist and Baptist, pastors a whole congregation that has come around to loving and embracing the Reformed

Through his patient, careful, pastoral instruction and persevering ... the entire church became Reformed.

faith. In Moscow, Idaho, where Doug Wilson serves, the very same thing happened. A bunch of former Jesus freaks were meeting in a garage to worship the Lord, and someone came and challenged Doug Wilson to study the Reformed faith. He laid a pile of books on his table. He studied them and became Reformed.

This is being duplicated, indeed multiplied, around the country, and it ought to be an occasion for us to be thrilled and give thanksgiving and praise to God about what He is doing. One evening last year, Doctors Kim Riddlebarger and Mike Horton were telling me about what was going on in their local congregation. Young people in their 20s and teens were coming to that congregation, tired of the shallowness

they had found in evangelicalism... the shallowness of so many churches at which they had worshipped, where they got nothing but entertainment, where they were fed nothing but experientialism or emotionalism. Tired of that, they came looking for some substance and some meat, only to find the preaching of the Word of God as summarized in the Reformed standards to which they now cling tenaciously.

When they were in the Christian Reformed Church, a member of the Home Missions bureaucracy came out to visit that congregation and tried to encourage them to engage in some of the practices of which Home Missions is notorious, only to be reproved by one of these young adults. The man from Home Missions said to him, "Well, you can't want any of this, you must want this, and that, and praise bands, and praise themes." The young man just stood and said to him, "You don't know what I want and like. You don't know what I have been through. This is exactly what I want. And this is exactly what the church needs." Not surprisingly, soon after that, that congregation left the CRC to join the URCNA.

Rev. Paul Murphy is the pastor of the Dutton, Michigan United Reformed Church.

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Rev. Jason Tuinstra will explain the place of amusement and entertainment in the life of the Christian.

Dr. Cornel Venema continues his series of articles on the subject of evangelism in light of the Reformed Confessions

Rev. Paul Murphy celebrates the advancements of the Reformed faith in the areas of Denominations, Ministries, and Publications.

In Addition....

In the July/August edition of The Outlook the summary of the 2001 Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, it was reported that we moved into a new phase of fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States [RCUS] and the Canadian Reformed Churches [CanRC]. It should be noted that the URCNA also entered into fellowship with the Gereformeerda Kerke in Suid Afrika [GKSA].

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