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Public Schools are Cheaper

This is My Outlook

The title of this editorial is often given as an excuse by parents for passing up Christian education for their children. It seems to be a self-evident statement of truth and the very essence of common sense. After all, public education is free while Christian Schools are very expensive.

The truth of the matter is that the statement "public schools are cheaper" is a very deceptive one. It is both true and false. It is like saying that a volcano eruption is a beautiful sight. It is incredible to watch the smoke billowing from the top of the mountain and the bright colored lava flowing down the mountain.

Beautiful, that is, to watch on television. I dare say, however, if your house was anywhere near the mountain you would find a volcanic eruption more terrifying than beautiful. Only when you shut your eyes to the terrible can you see the beauty.

Likewise, I would argue public education is more terrifying than beautiful when it involves your own covenant children. Such an education is only cheaper when you close your eyes to the awful cost in other and higher aspects than a person's pocketbook.

Short-Sighted

First of all, the idea that public

schools are cheaper is a short-sighted statement. The results of education are not short; they do not last for only a brief time, but for life, yes, even for eternity. By education we shape the life for the future. No one can tell the ultimate result for good or evil of youthful training and educational associations. Here nothing may be left uncertain. Positive Christian training alone is permissible.

It may be possible to get by with a cheap foundation when building a temporary structure, but a faulty foundation is folly and ruin when erecting a building that will stand for generations to come. The best is then none to good. Likewise, when we are laying the foundation for the lives of our children [and our children's children] as citizens of



Volume 54, No. 8 (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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the kingdom of heaven, no cheap foundation should be laid. The education they receive will affect them for the rest of their lives. And it will affect their children and their children's children, as well. Yes, the public school is cheaper; but because we are building for time and eternity we can not afford to use such woefully inadequate building material as the foundation for our children's worldview.

Expensive

The public school is cheaper. Yes, but it is likely to prove too expensive. Cheap is not always less expensive. I know of a house that was built with an eye to cheapness. The bait of the lowest bidder was taken. A dollar was saved here, a dollar was saved there. That house is now a little over twenty years old and it has already proven to be a very expensive house. The new furnace, the new roof, the new electrical work have all been a painful reminder of the fact that whatever is cheap to begin with is likely to be expensive in the end. A poor but wise man once told me that he bought a good furnace for his house because he could not afford a cheap one. Would that all parents were just as wise as this man when the education of their children is considered.

I know parents who took their children out of the Christian school and placed them in the public school because it was cheaper. They saved lots of money. With that money they bought a new van, an in-ground swimming pool, a new camper. Every year they seemed to spend the money they thought they were saving. But the boys came under the influence of unbelieving

teachers and unbelieving friends. They lost their covenant consciousness and began to live like unbelievers. Soon, they married unbelieving wives. What an awful price to pay for a cheaper education!

This is not to say that every child who attends a public school will automatically renounce his faith, nor does it imply that every child in the Christian school will automatically grow up to be a leader in the church. It is only logical, however, that the three legged stool (home, church, and school) will be stronger when each leg works to support the other, rather than having one leg that is diametrically opposed to the other two. Parents should never place their priorities on the cost of education rather than the quality of it.

Dangerous

The public school is cheaper. Yes, but cheapness is often a mark of danger. Suppose you were suddenly taken with a dreadful brain tumor and to save your life you had to submit to surgery. Would you choose doctors based on cost or on efficiency and expertise? Would you want the equipment that he used to be the best money can buy or something that he picked up at a garage sale? When a life is at stake you cannot afford anything but the best.

Likewise, when training your child a worldview is at stake, you cannot leave it up to those who have a wrong worldview. I never cease to be amazed by parents who place their children in certain schools because of its sports program or its music program, but they give little thought to its religious program. Let the demands of the economy take

every luxury and convenience away, but let it never interfere with the Christian training of your child. Too much is at stake to yield to the overworked argument of cheapness.

Folly

The public school is cheaper. True, but to the conscientious Christian parent this is reducible to absurdity. As little as you can measure character by money and spiritual values by dollars and cents, so little can you measure the value of Christian schooling and Christian education for your covenant children. There are some values which money cannot buy. And they are the greatest values of all. On the surface of things it is cheaper to have no grass and no flowers, no parks and no playgrounds. It is cheaper to let your child go without an overcoat in the winter and to give your baby water instead of milk. It is cheaper to get along without churches and libraries and schools. But who wants to pay the price?

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Praising God

“Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord. Praise the Name of the Lord.” Psalm 113:1

Psalm 113 occupies a special place in the Psalter, the book of worship for the nation of Israel. It is the first part of what is called the “Hallel” the Book of Praise, which runs from Psalm 113 – 118. These psalms constituted a song book that was used during many of the festivals of Israel and particularly in the celebration of the Passover. There were several places in the celebration of the Passover when a song was to be sung. It was one of these Psalms that Jesus and the disciples sang in upper room.

A Call to Praise

Psalm 113 is appropriate as the beginning psalm of this section because it begins in the Hebrew with the word “hallelujah” translated “praise the Lord”. When we think of the term today, we think of it as an exclamation. Even when we see it in our passage, we tend to think of it as an outburst of joyful exuberance. When we are happy about something we are led to exclaim, “Praise the Lord.”

However, it is used both at the beginning and the end of this psalm as a command, an imperative: “You! Praise the Lord.” It is a command for us to do something. The command is for the people to “Praise.”

Praise seems to us to be the most natural thing to expect from Christians. Here it is laid out as a specific command. Psalm 113 begins with this Call to Praise:

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised.

The Psalmist declares that it is the “Servants of the Lord” who are to praise the Lord. In the narrow sense, this refers to those who labor in the temple, that is, the Levites. Calvin enlarges it to include all of the community of faith. This is the task of all Christians who all share in the general offices of Christ. All who call upon the Lord are the servants of the Lord, and therefore we are all called to praise God.

A second thing to notice is to whom the praise is addressed. It is the name of the Lord that is to be praised. “Praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised” and at the end of verse 3 “the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

A third (and fourth) point that is pertinent here is the bounds set to this task, or rather, the *lack* of bounds. The command “praise the Lord” is without limits. It is without limit in regards to location: “from this time forth and forever.” The psalmist is saying that there is no *time* in which we are not to praise God’s name. This is a common theme throughout the Scriptures.

The name of the Lord is blessed and to be praised forever and ever.

As there is no *time* that we should not praise the Lord, there is also no *place* where we are excused from this holy task. “From the rising of the sun to it’s setting,” was a Hebrew colloquialism to indicate everywhere. As there is no place where the psalmist can hide from the Lord, so there is no place from where the Lord who is exalted above heaven and earth should not expect to hear the rising of praise to His name.

The command is very simple and all inclusive, “Praise the Lord!” Period.

A Cause for Praise

The Psalmist does not end by giving us the command. He could have stopped right after verse 4 and we would have sufficient reason to praise the name of the Lord. But he continues. He takes us on from the call to praise to give us a cause for praise. In fact, he gives to us two major reasons to praise the name of God.

The first cause that we are given for praising God is His **greatness in Himself**. We are commanded to praise God *first* simply for who He is.

He is the LORD – Yawheh. This is God’s covenant name, and it is this one who we are to praise, because it is Him that we serve. He is the “I am”, the eternally existent one. The one who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, and told Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on Holy Ground.



We should praise Him because He is *exalted above the nations*. He is high and lifted up. Think of the most glorious king or prince or president or prime minister in the history of the world. Think of the richest, most lavishly treated person in the world. Think of the most powerful, the most influential, and know that our Lord is exalted far and away above them. Even the greatest human king that has ever lived, is just that, a human king. A creature. And our God is the Creator, and as such He is exalted over all the nations.

He is exalted over them because He created them. Whether nation or ruler, it owes its existence and status to the Lord God of Israel.

We should praise Him because He is not only exalted above the nations, but even above the heavens! A contemplation of this should cause our hearts to soar with praise. The heavens and the highest heaven cannot contain Him. In recognizing all of this the psalmist asks, "Who is like the Lord our God?" This should also be our question, and our response should be, as the psalmist suggests, to praise the Lord!

We praise Him because He not only is exalted above the nations, not only above the heavens, not only is He over them in glory, but He is over them in authority. Verse 5 says, "*He sits enthroned on high*." The command to us this day and every day is to give praise to God because He is "the One who sits enthroned on high."

The poor state of the church today can be traced directly to the fact that it has to a large degree lost its

understanding of the holiness of God. It is God's holiness that is shown in His authority as God. Another reason to praise God is that He is sovereign, that He is enthroned as the great King above all kings.

Even as we are at the height of considering the exaltation of Yahweh, even as we are told that He is worthy of praise because He is exalted and because His glory is above the nations and even above the heavens, verse 6 brings us a most marked contrast. It brings us to the second main reason why God is to be praised: "*Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?*"

This is, first of all, a description of who God, but it is also a picture of what He does, specifically in His stooping down. This is the wonder of the work of God, this is the exalted King of the universe stooping to earth. And this is the second thing that the Psalmist sets before us which gives to us a cause to praise our God, not only God's **greatness in Himself**, but now we see His **graciousness to us**.

Although God's greatness exceeds the world, and although His throne is exalted above all things, and although He has to stoop to even look upon the heavens, so exalted is He; it is praiseworthy to know that we are not neglected by Him.

It is important to remember that this

stooping is a humble, gracious act of God. As much as it is for Him to condescend to consider the heavens, much more so the earth, to visit the sons of men and to regard them, to order and overrule in their affairs. It is a great condescension of God to take notice of what those on the earth say and do, so that He might fill the earth with His goodness.

The psalmist says that the LORD lifts the needy from the ash heap. This was an emblem of the deepest poverty and desertion. In Palestine and Syria the man who is shut out from society would often lie upon a thing called a *mezbele*, which is a dung heap or a pile of ashes. The person would, during the day, call on the bystanders for alms, and by night he would hide himself in the ashes that have been warmed by the sun.

These are the despised; these are the lowly and the destitute. Even these are not beyond the help of our condescending, gracious God. Even these are not beyond the eye of the Lord. Just as Hannah, who had been barren was looked upon with favor by God in the same way that Sarah had been when God opened her womb and brought forth from it the son of promise. The Psalmist says, "*He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children*." God is gracious in reaching down to a woman, and giving to her a home full of

The poor state of the church today can be traced directly to the fact that it has to a large degree lost its understanding of the holiness of God.

children. It is the same God who lifted Rachel from the same ash heap of barrenness and gave to her Joseph, who quite literally was seated with princes and through whom God was praised.

This God, who is exalted above all things, who is, as we say, *transcendent*, separate from His creation. This God is at the same time immanent, He is the God who does not forsake His people, He is the God who watches over His people, He is praiseworthy because of this. He reaches down to give natural blessings to those who need it. Is there anything more praiseworthy than that?

However, if you only see this in the psalm you are greatly impoverished. If you see God as gracious only in the physical sphere, and see this as the extent of His stooping, you have missed the psalmists point entirely. Yes, God is a God who is to be praised for humbling Himself by looking to the poor and the needy in the physical realm, but He is the God who is with His people. He is God with us.

The Christ to Praise

Some 500 years later, when Mary's baby is born, she named Him Emmanuel, "God with us."

Here is the most glorious, most excellent reason to praise the Lord. Here is the ultimate condescension. Here is God Himself, Jesus Christ, "being in very nature God . . . [making] Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in likeness of human flesh."

Do you not yet recognize the one who is poor, the one who is needy and who lies on the ash heap beg-

ging alms, seeking to be kept warm by dung. Do you not see who the barren woman is. They are all the same person. You saw them in the mirror when you were getting up this morning. You must recognize your voice in their cries, because it is your voice.

Then do you see the God of all the universe, Who in His greatness, has shown grace to you? Do you see that the one who is exalted above all things has Himself reached down to you and lifted you up from the dust, He has condescended to lift you off the ash heap. To *set you with princes*. To place you in the company of Hannah and Samuel, and David, and David's greater son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has seen our low estate and raised us up and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ. And do you know how? He did it by becoming poor, "that through his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). He did it by taking your place on the ash heap, by becoming barren Himself, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The application of this text is most simple. We have it laid out in the most plain language. The Psalmist ends the psalm as he began it, with the word of command, "Hallelujah" "Praise the Lord."

Recall that this psalm is addressed to, and these wondrous truths are given for, those who are "the servants of the Lord." If that is you, then heed the command of God, Praise the Lord! Praise Him for His greatness. Sing praises to Yahweh forever. "Let the name of the Lord

be praised." For there is no other that is worthy of it. And praise Him for His graciousness. Praise Him for your salvation. Praise Him for lifting you off the ash heap and standing you on the solid ground of the heavenly Zion. Praise Him for all of these reasons. Lift your hearts! Lift your hearts and your voices and your lives to the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 15: Of Original Sin

“I’ll show you all the beauty you possess, if you only let yourself believe that we born innocent...” I can hear my radio now, as Sarah McLachlan catechizes American culture with her mantra that we are inherently beautiful and born innocent. Then again, we already believed that anyway. One of the problems of our culture is that we just do not want to be honest with ourselves and face the facts about who – and what - we are. We would rather delude ourselves with upbeat, positive self-help and pop psychology then look at ourselves in the proverbial mirror and acknowledge that we are a sinful people.

We still think of ourselves as at the heights of glory, as we learned we were created in Article 14 of the Belgic Confession. But the reality is that Adam and the rest of humanity was plunged into depravity when he willfully sinned. “Houston, we have a problem” is an understatement. So what has happened to us? Here in Article 15 we confess to believe that the result of our first father’s sin is that we are now born in sin. We call this the doctrine of original sin. This original sin causes us to be sinners not only by nature but also by imitation.

The Doctrine of Sin...Again?

Our Confession devotes two full articles to the topic of humanity’s sin. Instead of “getting on with it” and moving to more positive things, or moving on to the good news, the

Confession intends us to face who we are by nature – and meditate upon that fact. Just as we must know what bad news is before we know what good news is, so too we need to understand the bad news about our spiritual state so that we can understand the good news of Christ’s remedy.

So why do we call Adam’s sin in the Garden, “original sin?” Because it was the first, or original, sin that Adam committed as our representative. This has relevance for us because, as our Confession says, “We believe that through the disobedience of Adam original sin is extended to all mankind.”

As with all choices in life, sin never only affects the isolated person in which it works. It has consequences for the broader community. Adam’s original sin has been passed down to us and it has its consequences in us. But why and how has it been passed are the key questions. To answer these questions we turn to the *locus classicus* of original sin, Romans 5:12-21.

Here we learn that Adam and Christ are representatives of others. This is why we call them “covenant heads.” What they do/did affects others. In the beginning God placed Adam under a covenant (cf. Hosea 6:7), saying, in effect, “Do this, and live” (Genesis 2:16-17 cf. Luke 10:28). And as a covenant head, what Adam did or did not do

would have blessed or tragic consequences on all to follow. This is why Paul says again and again that the curses of eternal death come through “one man”:

sin came into the world through one man (v. 12)

many died through one man’s trespass (v. 15)

the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation (v. 16)

because of one man’s trespass death reigned through that one man (v. 17)

one trespass led to condemnation for all men (v. 18)

by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners (v. 19)

“Ok, so I see that Adam’s original sin is passed down to us, but how?” This is a common question. The answer is in the word “imputation”. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb “impute” as “attribute (something, especially something bad) to someone.” It comes from the Latin, *imputare*, “enter in the account.” To impute something is to give, to credit, to reckon something. In our culture the illustration of a credit card seems to work best. When you swipe your Visa® or Mastercard® the bank gives you the money to make that purchase. They impute to you \$100 for your groceries, even though you may not actually have \$100. In the context of Romans 4-5, Paul uses the verb for impute seven times (4:6, 8, 11,

22, 23, 24, 5:13) in his discussion of justification by faith alone. Just as Christ's righteousness is imputed to us apart from anything we have done, so too Adam's sin has been imputed to us apart from our actually committing the same sin. That's how Adam's sin has been "extended" to us.

It is not a matter of us following Adam's sin or making the same mistake he made. Paul makes this point in Romans 5:14 where he says, "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who sinning was not like the transgression of Adam." We are born sinful by imputation, not imitation. And thus, this short little article in our Confession follows these words of Paul in saying, "Wherefore we reject the error of the Pelagians, who assert that sin proceeds only from imitation."

The Canons of Dort in III/IV, 2, says this about original sin and Pelagius:

Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature, in consequence of the just judgment of God.

The Results of Original Sin

But if Adam's sin was imputed to us apart from our actual sinning, why do we sin? This question gets to the heart of the relationship between original and actual sin. Just

as we are justified by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and that act of imputation causes and results in the process of sanctification, so too the one sin of Adam imputed to us causes and results in our actual sins. So as we look into the mirror of Scripture we see the accursed results of Adam's disobedience are

a corruption of the whole nature and a hereditary disease, wherewith even infants in their mother's womb are infected, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as

***Original sin is
our root, and our
daily sin is the
fruit.***

a root thereof, and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind.

Our "whole nature" has been corrupted by the hereditary disease of the human family, namely, original sin. In our theological terms this means that we are totally depraved. Our minds, wills, affections, inclinations, heart, soul, and even body are fallen and corrupt. There is not one part of us untainted by sin.

Does this include little, helpless babies? God help us – yes! To use the words of Scripture, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm

51:5). This is why our *Baptism of Infants: Form Number 1* says "they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam."

So we are born corrupt, and even before that, were conceived corrupt; and it continues in that we then begin and continue to commit actual sins. The imagery the Confession uses is of the roots of a tree. When the roots go bad, the branches, leaves, and fruit go bad as well. The roots are the source of the life and health of the tree. And with us it is the same. Original sin is our root, and our daily sin is the fruit.

The Remedy for Original Sin

How is our original sin taken away? Our Confession goes on to say

Nor is it altogether abolished or wholly eradicated even by baptism; since sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain; notwithstanding it is not imputed to the children of God unto condemnation, but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them.

We are forgiven not by water but by grace! Do you see the marvelous truth of this sentence of our Confession? It is in the fact that even though the holy sacrament of baptism does not wash away our sins, we are not left to despair as the grace and mercy of God remove from us this condemning stain. This is exactly what our Catechism says in question and answer 72: "Is, then, the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sins? No, for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin."



Study/Application Questions for Article 15

1. Having seen that Romans 5 parallels the disobedience of the first Adam and the obedience of the second Adam, what would be the consequence of rejecting the imputation of Adam's sin?
2. Who was Pelagius, and what is the danger of what he taught?
3. How do the images of a tree and its roots and a water fountain and its source vividly portray what has happened to us because of Adam's sin?
4. How do we as Christians, who experience the "sense of this corruption," turn from it, mortify it, and seek deliverance from it?
5. If the guilt of original sin is forgiven, why do we still sin? (see Romans 7)

Of this mercy and grace of our Savior, Paul, in Romans 5:12-21, parallels the grace of the second man, Jesus Christ, with the condemnation of the first man, Adam, when he says

much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded for many the free gift following many trespasses brought justification much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:15-19)

The Response to Original Sin

By the mercy and grace of God we

have been forgiven all our transgressions past, present, and future as well as the guilt of original sin. Nevertheless, God has not "altogether abolished or wholly eradicated" the stain and taint of this sin. We do not know why God, in His good pleasure, has seen fit to do this. But what we do know is that we are still sinners, as forgiven and justified Christians. Simultaneously saint and sinner. What should our response to this be? Should we "sin that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1) Should we "let go and let God" as the bumper sticker theology says? Our response is simple:

Not that they should rest securely in sin, but that a sense of this corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death.

Sensing, experiencing, suffering with this "body of death" (Romans

7:24) should cause us to "sigh" or "groan," as other translations say. We should be joining the fallen creation in as those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit" in groaning "inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons" (Romans 8:23). When we understand who we are and from where we have come we are able to put our fingers on what is wrong with us. We sense that something is off, something isn't quite right about us. That something is that we are sinful by nature. And because we are sinful by nature we are sinful in thought, word, and deed and may we always pray, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. And there is no health in us."

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The Anointed Savior [I]

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.” (Deuteronomy 18:18)

Many people may think that the name “Christ” is a nickname, or that it is perhaps the last name Jesus of Nazareth. It is neither of them. Last month, in Lord’s Day 11 we learned that the name “Jesus” is the personal name of the Savior chosen by God Himself for His Son. This month, we will see that “Christ” is the official title given to the One who is, who was, and who is to come.

When we say, “George W. Bush, the President,” “George W. Bush” is a personal name, “the President” is his official title. It describes the office that Mr. Bush holds and the job that is assigned to him. Likewise, “Christ” describes the office held by our Savior, Jesus, and the tasks assigned to Him. “Christ” is the Greek word and “Messiah” is the Hebrew word. The English for both of these words is “Anointed.”

But anointed to what? What is the office that Jesus holds and what are the tasks to which He is assigned? According to the Bible, and explained in q/a 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Jesus was anointed to be our chief prophet and teacher; our only high priest; and our eternal king. These are the three offices held by the Anointed One: Prophet, Priest, and King.

This month, we look at what the Heidelberg Catechism teaches concerning Jesus’ role as our Prophet.

The Role of the Prophet

The catechism teaches that a prophet is one who fully reveals the secret council of God to the people. In other words, the prophet represents God to the people.

Deuteronomy 18 makes very clear that in order for the prophet to know the council of God, it is necessary for God to reveal it to him. Deuteronomy 18 tells us that if God does not speak there can be no prophecy but a false prophecy, there can be no prophet but a false prophet.

The words of the true prophet must be the words of God. Through the prophet, God reveals His gracious plan of redemption; the prophet calls the people to serve God in all righteousness; and he challenges God’s people to depart from sin and turn to God. Through the prophet, God threatens to punish disobedience and He promises to reward the faithful. In all these things, the prophet is the mouth of God to the people of God.

We have a great need for a great prophet! When God created Adam

and Eve in His image, He gave them knowledge of their Creator. At first, Adam and Eve were happy in concentrating their thoughts upon God. Then sin entered the world and true knowledge of God was lost. Mankind became spiritually blind and ignorant of God’s will. Separated from God, the sinful human race looked for spiritual and physical satisfaction apart from God in a way which leads to further ruin and greater sin.

Knowing our need, the Lord supplies us with that which only a true prophet can give. He comes with the Word of God. Because this prophet lives among his people, there is no need for God’s people to follow the evil practices followed by other nations. There is no need for wizardry, sorcery, or witchcraft. There is no need for calling forth spirits or consulting horoscopes to find out what God’s will is for us.

Deuteronomy 18 teaches us that the prophet spoke for Jehovah. Everything the people of God needed to know about God and everything they needed to know about the will of God for their lives would come to them through the prophet. This is still true today.

The Bible tells us that the answer to our need for a prophet has been graciously provided for us by God Himself. The catechism teaches us

Q
A

Why is He called ‘Christ’?

Because He is ordained of God the Father to be our chief Prophet and Teacher.



that Jesus “fully revealed to us the secret council and will of God concerning our redemption.” When Moses was approaching the end of his life, he told the people in Deuteronomy 18:15 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to Him.” Peter said in his Pentecost sermon that Jesus was the very prophet of whom Moses spoke (Acts 3:22). Peter went on to add: “Anyone who does not listen to Him will be completely cut off from among His people.”

Unless we listen to Jesus we will remain ignorant. He is the eternal Word who became flesh. He communicates to us the will of God. The promise of the eternal prophet has found fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. Not listening to Jesus of Nazareth will lead to your destruction because Jesus is the anointed

of God. He is the Christ, anointed by God to reveal God’s will to us.

The Chief Prophet

As our chief prophet and teacher, Christ is not merely one of the powerful and great personalities who have lived in history. He is not just a great teacher like Aristotle or Augustine. No! Christ is infinitely more than this! He is in a class all by Himself. All other prophets and teachers find their reason for existence in Jesus Christ. All must point to Him as *the* prophet.

Israel had in her day great prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and John the Baptist. Yet, even the greatest of these was heard to say, “He must increase and I must decrease.” Who but the Christ could ever say, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”? Jesus, the prophet, was greater than

Moses; greater than Isaiah, greater than Daniel; greater than John the Baptist.

Whatever men may teach, if it does not conform to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, then it stands condemned. Any teaching from the pulpit; any teaching in the catechism room; any teaching in the Christian school, or anywhere else; if it does not seek to glorify Jesus the Christ, the great prophet then it is hopelessly out of line with the will of God. It is the teaching of a false prophet and it stands condemned.

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Sound Bites - 1987

January 1987

“Pro-life voters are often criticized for being single issue voters. But, is there any issue more basic than life itself?”

Needed: Christian Activists
Laurie Vanden Heuvel

February 1987

“Matthew 18 applies to private sins and personal grievances. It does not apply to ecclesiastical decisions of a public nature nor writings in the church press which are by their very nature public.”

Misusing Matthew 18
Jelle Tuininga

March 1987

“The set of doctrines which express the Reformed faith are an intricate and interdependent package. It is impossible to alter any significant doctrines or practice without affecting all. There is no domino theory to doctrine.”

The Duty of Being Concerned
Stephen M. Arrick

May 1987

“The GKN representative to the Synod of ‘86 told me: We read the Bible differently than you do. I responded by saying that it is not so much a matter of reading the Bible

differently, but a matter of believing or not believing what it clearly teaches.”

“Common-Law” Marriage
Jelle Tuininga

September 1987

“Christians must be involved in political action based on their faith conviction. In the name of the Lord the hungry must be fed and justice must be sought.”

A Critical Evaluation
Johan D. Tangelder

“I want my children taught in school what I teach them at home and in the church - and that is the unalloyed Biblical faith which we know as the Reformed faith. Why

so many among us are willing to trade this in for something inferior I cannot understand.”

Reformed Christian Schools
Jelle Tuininga

October 1987

“What will happen with God’s blessing when the Word is preached as summarized in the catechism? I believe you will see growth in grace and knowledge beyond the present levels, and people will be challenged with the need for conversion as the demands or challenges of the Word are presented. As far as the minister himself is concerned, he will have to focus on the whole gamut of revealed truths when he follows the subjects as the Catechism deals with them.”

The Necessity and Importance of Catechism Preaching
Jay A. Wesseling

November 1987

“As other denominational experiences suggest, there is little hope for the restoration of a lost theological unity among us. Between the ‘Bible prohibits women in church office’ interpretation of the Word, and the ‘Bible does not prohibit women in church office’ there is no middle ground. ‘Did God say?’ offers but two exclusive alternatives: Yes or No. While something like, ‘You take your interpretation and I’ll take mine’ opens the way to the loss of biblical authority altogether.”

The Right to Renewal
Lester De Koster

December 1987

“It is ironic that whereas the public schools claim to be neutral, liberal and unidiomatic, in the

Continued on page 32

Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (14)

“Justification and a Final Judgment According to Works” (Part One)

In the course of our exposition of the new perspective on Paul, we noted the important role played by E. P. Sanders’ treatment of Second Temple Judaism. According to Sanders, the Judaism of the apostle Paul’s day taught and practiced a pattern of religion that he terms “covenantal nomism.” Covenantal nomism regards the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people, Israel, to be one based upon sovereign election and grace. Contrary to the assumptions of traditional Protestantism regarding the occasion for the apostle Paul’s teaching on justification, the new perspective argues that Second Temple Judaism did not teach a kind of Pelagian moralism or works righteousness religion. Not only did the Judaism of Paul’s day teach that entrance into covenant with the Lord depends upon His gracious initiative and promise, but it also acknowledged the need for the Lord’s continued gracious provision of forgiveness and atonement for sin. Works performed in obedience to the law were necessary to “maintain” a covenant member’s place within the covenant community. But they were never thought to “merit” the Lord’s favor or to serve as the basis for the covenant relationship itself. Works performed in obedience to the law of God were indispensable to “maintain” the covenant relationship, but were not

viewed as the basis for “entrance” into the covenant.

One interesting question that this understanding of covenantal nomism poses is that of the role of works in the present maintenance as well as future or eschatological vindication of those who belong to the covenant community. Though Sanders, as we acknowledged previously, may have demonstrated that Second Temple Judaism was not “Pelagian” (to speak anachronistically) in its view of how one enters into the covenant, his assessment of Second Temple Judaism still leaves unanswered the question whether it was not “semi-Pelagian” in its understanding of how the covenant is maintained.

If works play an indispensable role in the maintenance of the covenant relationship and in the final vindication of those who belong to the covenant community, the specter of a doctrine of justification by works still remains. As we have seen, according to writers of the new perspective, the doctrine of justification is principally an answer to the question, who belongs to the covenant family of God? However, God’s gracious initiative in establishing the covenant does not secure or guarantee the covenant member’s maintenance or future inheritance



of the covenant's promises. The pattern of religion characteristic of Second Temple Judaism is one of "entrance" by grace and "maintenance" by works. Put in terms of the language of justification, this means that belonging to the covenant people of God is partly by grace and partly by works. Justification, which according to the new perspective means belonging to the covenant community, remains an unfinished matter, since continued membership in the covenant community requires that members of the covenant persevere in the way of obedience to the law. Such obedience to the law, accordingly, would not only maintain but also finally constitute the ground for the covenant member's future justification or acquittal.

It is not surprising to find, therefore, that among proponents of the new perspective, there are those who draw a connection between Paul's doctrine of justification and a future or "final" justification. This future or final phase in the justification of those who believe in Christ is related to the apostle Paul's understanding of the final judgment. Since this final judgment clearly is a judgment "according to works," it seems that the justification of believers has at least three distinct phases, a past, a present, and a future. N. T. Wright, for example, argues that justification in Paul's perspective occurs in three tenses or stages. The present justification of the covenant community is founded upon "God's past accomplishment in Christ, and anticipates the final verdict." In the past event of Christ's cross and

resurrection, God has accomplished in history something that anticipates what He will do at the end of history, namely, vindicate or justify His people for whom Christ acted as the "representative Messiah of Israel." Through faith believers are united with Christ and become participants and beneficiaries of this past event. Baptism, which is the event in the present that incorporates believers into the covenant community, effects this present justification or participation in Christ, and at the same time anticipates the resurrection of believers in the future. According to Wright, the future justification of believers, which will occur in the context of the final judgment, represents the ultimate completion of the believer's justification. This future justification will be on the basis of the whole life of faith.

These features of the new perspective's view of justification in relation to the final judgment and vindication of those who belong to the covenant community require our consideration of the question of the relation between justification and the final judgment. Since the final judgment is closely linked to the works performed by those who are judged, it naturally raises the question of what this means for our understanding of justification. This is not a new question, of course, since it played an important role in the context of sixteenth century debates regarding justification. One of the principal objections of the Roman Catholic Church to the reformational view of justification by faith alone was that it failed to do justice to the biblical theme of

a final acquittal before God that would be based upon works. Since justification and final judgment are judicial acts, which involve the pronouncement of a verdict by God as Judge, the place of works in the setting of the final judgment inescapably compels the question whether the doctrine of justification "by faith alone" adequately summarizes the apostle Paul's teaching. Does the justification of believers require a final phase or "completion," which will be determined by the works of those who are justified? And, does this mean that the justification of believers is, in the final analysis, based upon faith *plus works*? We will seek to answer these questions next month.

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Report on the URCNA (Part 2)

The Overtures

It seems best to continue by dealing with the overtures in the order in which they appeared in the agenda. Overtures 1 and 2 were brought with the intention of changing the church order in very specific ways.

Overture #1, coming from classis Western Canada, asked to add two words to the text of Article #3 of the Church Order. Both the committee of pre-advice and the whole body of delegates agreed with this overture, while making some slight modifications. The last line of Church Order Article #3 was the sentence in question, and synod by a two-thirds vote agreed to change that line so that it would now read as follows: *The council of his church should help ensure that his financial needs are met.* In accordance with church order Article #66, the decision of synod must now be ratified by two-thirds of the consistories. Two other decisions of synod will also await consistorial ratification. One as a result of the approval of Overture #2, while the other comes from synod's approval of a move to establishing Phase 2 Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS (more on this below).

Overture #2 sought to amend some wording in the "procedure" section of Appendix 1 of the Church Order. Four times in that section the word *council* appears, and Classis Southwest U.S. asked to have each of those referents changed to *Consistory*. As with

Overture #1, the pre-advice committee and the delegates agreed with the overture, and changed the language. As mentioned, this action also requires ratification by the consistories.

In **Overture #3** Classis Western Canada was seeking a standardized calling procedure. The classis noted that such a procedure would protect the relationship between the Minister and his council. The classis also had some concerns that "the questionnaires that are now used by calling committees resemble secular job applications" and they said that "we believe that the initial contact by a calling committee should not be directed to the Minister." The synodical committee of pre-advice tasked to study this overture brought back to the delegates a recommendation that "synod not accede to overture #3." This committee listed as grounds the following: *a. Church Order articles 6-8 address these concerns. b. Though the overture raises a perceived issue, it does not offer a solution.* The delegates of synod did not accede to the overture.

Classis Southwest U.S. brought a very noteworthy **overture** in #4. This overture asked to have the 1976 edition of the Psalter Hymnal reprinted again. The needs as listed in the overture (amount of time since it was last reprinted; a new hymnal is still several years from completion; the 1976 Psalter is

known among our churches) were agreed to by both the pre-advice committee and delegates. Synod acceded to the overture. Responsibility for implementation of republication was placed by synod into the hands of the Psalter Hymnal committee.

In related matters, the Psalter Hymnal Committee brought a report to the meeting of synod, covering much detail, and making four recommendations. The first recommendation was that synod approve the "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church." It was noted by this committee that the Canadian Reformed Churches have approved these "Principles and Guidelines..." Synod adopted this first recommendation with a slight amendment to one of the guidelines.

The second recommendation coming from the Psalter Hymnal Committee was somewhat more amended by the pre-advice committee and then adopted by the delegates. The amended second recommendation reads as follows: *That synod recommend that our churches familiarize themselves with the Book of Praise (Anglo-Genevan Psalter).*

The committee's third recommendation adopted by synod led to the formation of another standing committee. The recommendation was as follows: *That synod relieve our (Psalter Hymnal) committee of the non-musical section (liturgical forms, creeds and confessions, prayers, etc.) of the new book and appoint another committee to accomplish this task.* In advising



synod to approve this recommendation, the pre-advice committee suggested that *...synod appoint no more than five members to the committee assigned the “non-musical section” of the new book.*

One final recommendation brought by the Psalter Hymnal committee sought to increase the size of the committee working on the “musical” section of the new book. Since that committee has lost some members, it felt that more members may make the work go more smoothly (as in a higher percentage of the members could be at more of the meetings, etc.). Synod also acceded to this request by adding five individuals to the committee.

Overture #5 was adopted by synod. In accordance with this overture, Covenant Pella URC was chosen to gather information from all of the synodically-appointed committees and the federation treasurers to *“...discover how monies are gathered and authorized for disbursement.”* They are also charged to *“Determine whether there are concerns with how monies are gathered and authorized for disbursement; Determine ways that the concerns might best be addressed...”* Pella is also to bring recommendations to the next synod *“...concerning the establishments of budgets, authorization, procedures and principals for disbursement based upon the information received.”*

The concern behind this overture was the nature of *“...various standing and ad hoc committees...”* for which there is currently *“...no quota, neither is there a budget amount set-funds that*

must be collected so that the various legitimate costs incurred can be paid. Neither, for that matter, are there any guidelines in place as to what may be spent, who may authorize committee and committee members’ expenditures, etc” If the URCNA through its various committees is going to continue the work the Lord is giving us to do this will necessitate some kind of procedural direction based upon current and foreseeable situations.

Overture #6 took a rather steep roller-coaster ride on the floor of synod. This overture came to synod from Classis Southwest with the request to *“...authorize the formation of Classis Pacific Northwest...”* In the original overture ten churches were named that could make up this new classis. However as events developed the pre-advice committee brought to the floor a recommendation amending the overture by allowing the two Canadian churches of the original ten mentioned to remain within classis Western Canada. This change was requested by those two Canadian congregations for a variety of practical reasons, including international border issues, financial issues and cooperative venture concerns (in terms of mission outreach, youth ministries, etc.). Since the current classis Southwest U.S. includes 19 churches ranging from Phoenix, AZ. to Loveland, CO. and

from Lynden, WA. to Escondido, CA. it was thought that this classis was too large and too far separated for good order.

The pre-advice committee brought a motion to create a new classis consisting of eight US congregations. The motion was initially adopted by the delegates. However, a short while later a motion to reconsider was successful. The result was that the original decision to create a new classis was tabled indefinitely. This decision by synod was the answer to both overture #6 and overture #14.

The delegates received one more opportunity to address the issue of young children coming to the Lord’s table in the form of **Overture #7**. It was very obvious to the delegates that this issue is one of immediate importance to many of the churches of the URCNA. Finding an easy answer to this problem would prove to be impossible, for two separate questions within the one larger consideration needed to be sorted out: First was the matter of age. Should a child have to reach some “bench-mark” age before the consistory should begin the profession-of-faith interview process unto granting them access to the table? Second, and to the substance of this overture was the more basic question, *“does Scripture, as summarized in our Confessions, declare that a public*

If the URCNA is going to continue the work the Lord is giving us to do this will necessitate some kind of procedural direction based upon current and foreseeable situations.

profession of faith is necessary before one partake of the Lord's supper?"

The history of this overture, coming from a congregation within classis Western Canada (the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton) is vitally connected to the appeals #'s 2 and 3 and the examination of a man for candidacy as previously mentioned. Synod did make a clear pronouncement about this second "branch" of the young children at the Lord's table issue. After a little "tweaking" on the floor of synod, the final wording adopted was:

The confessions to which the URCNA subscribe (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort) accurately summarize the teaching of Scripture, for example, 1st Corinthians 11.24-25; 28. Thus our confessions, in harmony with the Scripture, require that the Lord's Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church.

There need be no question as to where the URCNA stands on this aspect of the young children at the Lord's table issue. A profession of faith is required in our churches. However, to the more complicated question, namely, "at what age shall children be admitted to the Lord's table", it seemed as though synod felt unable to specifically answer this concern of the churches, or even to give advice to the churches. This is probably due to the fact that the appeals which ad-

ressed this question more basically put before synod a concern about the relationship of the authority of a consistory to her classis.

In answering that question of authority (IE. Whose right is it to declare at what age the consistory may begin to interview children), synod did not answer the more broad question swirling in some of our churches about appropriate age to make profession of faith and thus be granted access to the

Synod did not answer the more broad question swirling in some of our churches about appropriate age to make profession of faith and thus be granted access to the Lord's table.

Lord's table. This fact is seen in what synod ultimately decided in regards to one congregation that was provisionally accepted by her classis for membership in the URCNA. Remember the Tacoma church? The ratification of their membership was finally tabled indefinitely, due in large part to the remaining uncertainty about their practice of interviewing young children (perhaps as young as 8) and granting them access to the table after a profession of faith. At the same time, synod encouraged the Tacoma congregation to continue to

assess it's practice and to continue pursuing membership with the URCNA.

Related **Overtures 8,9,10,11**, though differing significantly in the exact issues to which they were addressed, were dealt with in very similar ways by synod. Each of these overtures sought to have the synod of the URCNA **declare** or **affirm** an explicit position in relation to a current theological or moral/ethical issue. In all four cases synod demurred and did not accede to any of the overtures. Thus, in regard to an attempt to have synod affirm a specific statement about the interpretation of Genesis chapters 1&2 (**Overture #8**), and in regard to a request to have synod declare a specific position regarding "...death before the Fall in Paradise..." (**Overture #9**) the response from the delegates in both cases was the same "1. *The overtures do not demonstrate that expanded statements are needed.* 2. *Where the churches believe the confessions are being violated they should be encouraged to address these matters in church orderly manner (Cf. Church Order Articles 51-62)"*

There was also agreement from the delegates as to how to answer **Overture #10** - a request by Classis Michigan to have synod declare that "*All homosexual desires and actions are sins that are condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC*". In stead Synod answered this overture by saying that "1. *Scripture is clear with respect to the sinfulness of Homosexuality: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Romans 1:26,27, Matthew 5:27,28.*



2. *Our Three Forms of Unity sufficiently address our federative beliefs about homosexuality (HC Q/A 108).*”

This is virtually the same language, just with different Scripture and confessional references employed to answer overture #11, also from Michigan concerning abortion. It is interesting to note that in giving the grounds for not acceding to these last two overtures (10,11) that the pre-advice committee sent three grounds to the floor of synod, and in each case the third ground (*The status and authority of extra-confessional synodical declarations is unclear, and should be defined before any such declaration is made.*) was amended out of the final answer. That this ground was not included undoubtedly bespeaks a broader concern within our churches as to the status of “extra-confessional” statements.

In considering **overtures #12 and 13** synod also needed to deal with the reports of both the ‘Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity’ (CERCU) and the ‘Committee for Ecumenical Contacts with Churches Abroad’ (CECCA). Responsibility to advise synod in relations to these materials was again placed in the hands of a pre-advice committee. In studying the overtures together with the reports of these two standing committees, the pre-advice committee was able to proffer several recommendations to the delegates: First, in regard to placing members on the committees, synod decided “*that nominations be given by the churches to their classis, which will appoint one member and an*

alternate member per classis to each committee”. This decision holds for both CERCU and CECCA. The next recommendation was adopted in respect to CERCU, but was rejected for CECCA. It says: “*That synod appoint three members at large and one alternate.*” Term of service was also designated by synod for members of both committees by adopting this recommendation: “*All committee members serve for a term of three years. Each member is eligible for reappointment*

That this ground was not included undoubtedly bespeaks a broader concern within our churches as to the status of “extra-confessional” statements.

for up to two more terms of service (total of three terms).”

The same committee of pre-advice was tasked with recommending to synod the groups with which to pursue church union. These recommendations would flow out of information and recommendations placed before synod from CERCU.

Before it could present such recommendations, the committee of pre-advice had to bring to procedural matters relating to church union before the delegates. The first of these was the substance of overture #13 and was a proposed change in

the Church Order seeking to impact how we proceed in Ecumenicity and church union considerations. The motion asked “*That synod define majority in this situation (Article 36) as two thirds of the consistories.*” However, this motion was ruled out of order by Rev. Ron Scheuers, synod’s Chairman. Another procedural matter that was considered, and this time adopted by synod, changes how we proceed in the steps/phases of Church Union by amending Phase 3 to now read “*Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories.*”

Having dealt with the procedural matters, synod was now ready to speak in respect levels of church union with various groups. Here is what was decided:

- **Phase 2** with the RCUS-*Reformed Church in the United States*- (as was mentioned above this will require a ratification vote by the consistories)
- **Phase 1** with both the ERQ- [as translated] *Reformed Church of Quebec*, and the RPCNA-*Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*.
- Synod also agreed that our federation will apply for membership in NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council).
- Finally, synod, with regret, removed the name of the PRC (Protestant Reformed Churches) from the federations with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations.

Fraternal Greetings

Perhaps it would be well to mention briefly here that synod joyously re-

***Entering into Phase 3 of Church Unity now
requires ratification by a majority of the
consistories.***

ceived warm fraternal greetings from churches in our own country, outside our borders, and from across many miles. These included representatives of the RCUS, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), the Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Reformed Church in New Zealand, the PCA, the OPC, the FRCNA, and the OCRC. Each of these men, along with Rev. Hans Uitenbosch of Seafearer's ministry were granted time to address synod. Synod also received correspondence from various other groups.

New Committees

Synod's work was not limited to the theological, pastoral, and ecclesiastical realms. The delegates also had to make it to the top of mountains of technical questions in financial, synodical rules, and internet areas. The committee of pre-advice told to deal with the question of the Federation's web site brought back advice that synod adopted, yet with slight but telling modification. That committee recommended the Federation shall maintain a web site

"...with the following purposes:

a) to provide an introduction to and information regarding URCNA (history, confessional statements, church order, etc.)

b) to act as a current directory for the churches; c) to publish minutes and/or reports of classis and synod;

d) to act as an interactive communications tool for the Federation, including the Stated Clerk, Convening Church and Synodical committees;

e) to include such other information that is for the benefit of the churches and the federation

On the floor of synod the last recommendation (letter "e") was deleted. The discussion regarding its deletion revolved around concerns about publishing "extra-confessional" statements on the Federation's website. To facilitate the maintaining of this Federation web site a synodical committee was created. The members of this committee will consist of the Stated Clerk along with one representative from each Classis. Each Classis will need to appoint their representative to the service of this committee. To facilitate the funding of the Federation web site the committee of pre-advice recommended that each classis contribute \$500.00 by December 31, 2004, and \$500.00 annually thereafter. The delegates to synod also agreed with this recommendation and handed the task managing the funds to the treasurers of the

URCNA U.S. and Canadian corporations.

At the request of the stated clerk, synod agreed to establish an *ad hoc* committee (whose members will consist of the members of the URCNA Church Order committee) to recommend *URCNA Synodical Rules*. It was generally agreed by the delegates that a sufficient lack of clarity existed within the congregations to warrant establishing yet another committee. The lack of clarity to which this committee will speak was noticed in four general areas: First, a need for a common standard of parliamentary law; Second, a lack of standardization in the wording and structure of appeals, as well as with standards of admissibility; Third, questions as to both the authority and responsibilities of both the Stated Clerk and the convening Consistory of synod meetings; and Fourth the responsibilities of the Stated Clerk between synod meetings. This *ad hoc* committee is to make their report available to the churches at least nine months before the next synod and then bring its recommendations to that next meeting of synod.

Financial Matters

In financial matters synod did slightly tighten the purse strings on one of its committees, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA). The exchange of official observers from the URCNA (from the CECCA committee?) to the major assemblies of churches abroad was limited by a motion from the floor of synod such that "*...one visit be made to one assembly/*



church per year of churches with whom ecumenical relations are being established.”

In another financial matter a pre-advice committee recommended to the delegates that each Classis work to establish a “*Classical Ministers Assistance Fund*” to be drawn upon if and when needed to aid churches in providing pension help to its minister. Such a fund would be managed by a church in each Classis and the church visitors would query each Council if it needed assistance from the fund. However, this fund was proposed as a “safety net” measure. As such it was the second recommendation offered by the pre-advice committee. The first recommendation and in principal the first source of contributions to the Minister’s retirement (other than the Minister’s own contributions) was still recognized to be the local congregation.

To that end, the first recommendation of the committee was that “*Each Classis be responsible for overseeing that each church in the Classis is contributing to their Pastor’s retirement plan.*” Then if the church visitors discern from the local Council that a church is in need of help in carrying out this responsibility, they would direct the church to make application to the Classical fund. These guidelines are meant to give clarification to the wording of Church Order Article 10, and would guide the local council in applying that article to the local situation.

Finally, let it be known that your new stated clerk is Mr. Bill Konyonenbelt of the Bethel URC

of Calgary, and synod will meet again, Lord willing, July 9-13 2007 at the Community United Reformed Church in Schereville, Indiana.

In Job we read that the Lord moves mountains without mortals knowing it (Chapter 9) and it seemed that way to most of the delegates of synod. Almost with realizing it the work given to synod was finished. Friday afternoon around 3:30 the work was all but completed. When the work was finished the delegates could have rightly mused that “*The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.*” (Psalm 97.5) The work, efforts, actions, decisions, plans, and many prayers of the delegates of synod and of all the members, family, and friends of the United Reformed Churches in North America all add up to this final sum: *the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life...indeed, As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people both now and forever more.*

Rev. Harold Miller is the pastor of the United Reformed Church in Wellsburg, Iowa.

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A Review of the 2004 Canadian Reformed Churches Synod (Chatham)

General Synod Chatham 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches existed for two weeks (Feb. 10 – 21, 2004). The delegates had been chosen by regional Synods East and West, but most certainly felt themselves appointed by God to deliberate and decide on all the issues put before them. Surely each individual member felt themselves inadequate to deal with such weighty matters but yet the Lord gave them collectively the strength and wisdom to observe, consider, and make recommendations for adoption concerning many matters of interest and concern to the whole federation of churches in Canada and the United States.

Based on the interim Acts that were provided on the internet we want to provide our readers with a general overview of the decisions taken at this synod and provide some editorial comment at the same time.

Modis Operandi

To start off with we want to deal with the *modis operandi* (the method of operation) of synods in general and thus also the most recent one. As already mentioned above, Canadian Reformed synods operate by observing incoming material, considering the material and by making recommendations about the material. After this process has been completed a vote is held and the recommendations are

either adopted or defeated. By using this method it is not always clear on what basis a decision has been made.

It is of particular importance that decisions taken at a major assembly should be based on solid grounds, on God's holy Word. Often it is also helpful to use the Confessions and the Church Order and/or even the Forms adopted by the Churches, to provide grounds for decisions. In that way the Churches and their members can be informed and even educated about the matter(s) being dealt with.

In a time when much emphasis is placed on Ecclesiastical Fellowship and its benefits, the Canadian Reformed churches could do well to learn from two federations with which it has had the longest relationships (the Dutch and Australian Churches) where the *modis operandi* is specifically used to provide grounds for all decisions.

One of the first decisions made by Synod Chatham was to reverse a decision of the previous synod, Synod Neerlandia. The matter at hand was the relatively minor matter concerning the number of delegates that should make up a General Synod. In the past the rule has been that each regional synod would delegate four ministers and four elders to synod, thus producing a general synod of sixteen (16) delegates. At Synod Neerlandia the

overture of Regional Synod – East to increase the number of delegates to six ministers and six elders from each regional synod was defeated. As a result the church at Guelph appealed this decision to Synod Chatham.

It is interesting to note how Synod Chatham dealt with this appeal in its considerations. Having first 'observed' the content of the appeal from Guelph it 'considered' five aspects.

- 1 First synod considered that "...Guelph is correct in asserting that there is an 'indirect representation' of churches to a general synod..."
- 2 Next it considered that Synod Neerlandia was correct when it considered that "an increase of delegates cannot ensure proportionate representation." But in the same consideration it includes, "On the other hand, the church at Guelph is also correct in stating that the likelihood of proportionate representation from the various classes and churches could result. However, the argument for proportionate representation is not a relevant consideration within Reformed church polity."
- 3 The third 'consideration' reads, "The argument of Synod Neerlandia 'that General Synods are not representative assemblies ...but that Reformed Church Polity works with the principle of delegation does not exclude the possible increase in



numbers of delegates.”

- 4 At the same time Synod ‘considered’ that the Church at Guelph did not prove that a major shift in direction can be avoided by increasing the number of delegates to such an assembly.
- 5 Finally it was ‘considered’ that Guelph was correct in observing that it is unlikely that more regional synods will be added to the two that presently exist. Thus, the number of delegates to synods will not increase in that manner.

After these five Considerations, Synod made two recommendations. The first was to rescind the decision of Neerlandia to leave the number of delegates as they were and the second was to increase the number of delegates to six ministers and six elders from each regional synod.

We have very little argument with the end result of this decision as it is a minor matter in our view, but the point of this detailed review is to point out the failure of the *modus operandi*. For who can say why the number of delegates was changed? Was it because it is unlikely that there will be more regional synods in the foreseeable future? Was it because there is an ‘indirect’ proportional representation when delegates are chosen regionally? But that consideration was contrasted by the following one. In fact, if one reads through the considerations the opposite conclusion from what was finally decided could easily be expected.

If someone wanted to appeal this

decision what would they appeal? They cannot really appeal the recommendation as it is merely a statement, a decision without reasons. An appeal could be launched against one of the considerations, but how is one to know that it was the basis for the decision. Perhaps a following synod might agree with an appeal against a consideration but not overturn the recommendation or the decision to adopt the recommendation because there is no proof that the decision was based on any one or all of the considerations.

It would be far better and much more edifying if the decision was based on certain grounds. Perhaps the real reason the decision was made to increase the number of delegates is that at least half of the federation was in favor of doing so. Perhaps delegates felt that since the federation has grown in membership that the request to increase the delegates to synod was reasonable and acceptable. It is certainly not clear from the Considerations why the decision was made to increase the number of delegates.

We hope that the regulations for synods will soon be changed to fall in line with those of the churches in Australia and the Netherlands so that the Biblical/Church Orderly grounds are provided along with the decisions.

A New Professor

Due to the illness of Dr. J. de Jong

Synod needed to appoint a professor to the Theological College. Although technically it is correct to say that Synod, upon the advice of the Board of Governors, who propose a name on the advice of the Senate of the Theological College, appoint a minister to the position of professor at the Theological College, the process for these appointments leaves much to be desired. We hope to elaborate more about this at another time.

At Synod Chatham, Dr. A. J. de Visser was appointed to and accepted the position of Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology. Together with all the churches we pray that the Lord will bless this brother as he takes up this new position with weighty responsibility in the midst of the Church of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Appeals

As a result of the statement by Synod Neerlandia that, “individuals who wish to interact with decisions of Synod should begin by addressing their consistories (Articles 30 & 31)” two churches sent in an appeal. These appeals were denied by Synod Chatham. As part of the deliberations about this matter the following quote will indicate the direction synod wants to provide to the churches. “Individual members must follow the way of the Church Order by addressing their concerns to their local consistory that, should it concur with the concerns, direct

We hope that the regulations for synods will soon be changed to fall in line with those of the churches in Australia and the Netherlands.

an appeal to general synod. Consistory, unlike individual members, has the right to deal directly with the matters that belong to the churches in common. Consistory may do so because these decisions are to be considered settled and binding by the consistory. A consistory cannot appeal a decision of a major assembly to a minor assembly. If the local consistory does not take over the individual's appeal, he can appeal the local consistory's decision to classis and thus begin the appeal process in accordance with Article 31 of the Church Order."

Appeals against a Decision of Synod Neerlandia re: the OPC

Five churches and an individual member sent in appeals against the decision of Synod Neerlandia to the establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. [The appeal of the individual member was denied based on the rule that a member should address his/her consistory about an appeal about a synod's decision.] The focus of this review does not allow for a detailed review of the appeals and the considerations pertaining to them. Suffice to report that Synod Chatham decided that Synod Neerlandia 2001 did not err when it took the decision to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.

Appeal Against a Decision of Synod Neerlandia re: Phase Two with URCNA

One church appealed two components of Phase Two [adopted by Synod Neerlandia] of the unity efforts with the URCNA. The two components under appeal were the requirement to accept one another's attestations and the openness of the pulpit to ministers from

one another's federations. This church also noted the confusion between the terms Ecclesiastical Fellowship, 'sister churches' and Phase Two. For some these terms are synonymous and for others they are not.

Synod 'considered' that if Synod Neerlandia would have used the term Ecclesiastical Fellowship in place of Phase Two, the appealing church would not have had any dif-

***One church
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ficulties. Therefore it decided to declare that Phase Two is the equivalent of Ecclesiastical Fellowship as it is maintained under the adopted rules (*Acts of Synod Lincoln 1992, Art. 50, IV.B.1-7*). At the same time, Phase Two clearly includes the purpose that the churches involved move forward from Phase Two (Ecclesiastical Fellowship) to Phase Three (federative union). Hence the appeal was denied.

We empathize with the appealing church with regard to the confusion in terminology. Some time ago an article has appeared in Reformed Polemics (Vol.8, No.5) that deals with the terms Ecclesiastical Fel-

lowship and sister churches.

*Appeal Against a Articles 22,
34, 36, & 45 of Synod
Neerlandia*

In essence this appeal deals with the contention that "some formulations in the Westminster Standards are not in agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, 'and therefore should be reckoned as divergencies that must be resolved outside the bounds of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.'" The example of the Scriptural understanding of the covenant was given as an example. It was felt that Ecclesiastical Fellowship opens the door to false preaching on this topic.

Synod decided that this was more correctly an appeal against a decision made by synod Lincoln and pointed out that both synod Abbotsford and synod Fergus denied appeals concerning the same matter.

*Appeal Against Regional Synod
West: re Status of Rev.
Boersema*

The appealing church provided a history of correspondence that indicates that they properly took the Church Orderly way in dealing with the fact that the Church at Surrey maintained the status of Rev. Boersema while he became a member of the OPC. This event took place prior to the churches having established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.

Synod decided that the appealing church is technically correct but that the Church at Surrey was justified in providing an exception in Rev. Boersema's case.



Ecclesiastical Fellowship

A large portion of Synod's time was taken up with correspondence, appeals, speeches and reports regarding federations with which the Canadian Reformed churches have Ecclesiastical Fellowship. At this time we will not go into detail about any of the specific federations with which Ecclesiastical Fellowship has been established but merely give a quick overview of the decisions made with regard to each.

In every case Synod Chatham expressed appreciation for the fact that the federations with which the Canadian Reformed Churches have Ecclesiastical Fellowship continue to uphold Scripture and that Ecclesiastical Fellowship ought to be maintained.

Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

Thankfulness was expressed regarding the positive developments within our contact with the RCUS. At the same time the churches were encouraged to pursue actively our Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS via pulpit exchanges, visiting RCUS churches, and via invitations to youth camps and conferences held in the various church communities.

L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec

Contact with this federation has been ongoing for some years. From time to time an overture has been sent by one or other church to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with this federation. At this synod there was also a letter from a church with such a recommendation. Synod, however decided not to do so, but rather to continue the mandate provided by Synod

Neerlandia. In short, that mandate is to work towards the establishment of Ecclesiastical Fellowship by discussing the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards as found in the "Evaluation of Divergences" received by Synod 1986.

The ERQ is a very small federation and thus has limited human resources for this kind of work. For this reason both Neerlandia and now Chatham prioritized the mandate by indicating that pulpit super-

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vision, fencing of the Lord's table and confessional accountability should receive the highest priority.

Korean Presbyterian Churches in North America (KPCNA)

Seeing that the Canadian Reformed Churches already have contact with the Korean Presbyterian Churches (Kosin) in Korea, Synod Neerlandia considered it logical and wise to agree with an overture to seek contact with that same federation in Canada and the United States. The Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas

(CCCA) had difficulty establishing contact with representatives of this church federation and recommended that their mandate be discontinued. Synod, however, was of a different mind and adopted the recommendation that it decide to mandate the CCCA to contact the North American Kosin federation with the help of the churches in Korea.

The Independent Presbyterian Churches in Mexico (IPCM)

Synod declared that at this time there is no reason to pursue actively an ecclesiastical relationship with the IPCM as the committee was unable to establish meaningful contact.

The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council

As Synod Neerlandia had mandated the CCCA to send (at their own discretion) an observer to future meetings of NAPARC to investigate its usefulness and possible membership in it, the committee provided a report. It presented history, membership, basis, purpose and function of NAPARC. The Committee suggested to Synod that membership might be useful to provide support to the OPC and the RCUS who are already members of NAPARC. At the same time it would also help to express greater unity with the ERQ.

Synod, however, agreed with one of the churches who sent a letter with regard to the Committee's report. They considered their submission to be correct when it questioned the need for another organization beside the ICRC as there is significant duplication in the pur-

Concerning NAPARC, Synod questioned the need for another organization beside the ICRC as there is significant duplication in the purposes, function and membership of both groups.

poses, function and membership of both groups.

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

In addition to continuing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with this federation Synod recommended these churches as worthy of financial assistance to aid them with their extensive mission work and in their labors among the concerned in other church federations.

The Board of Governors of the Theological College in Hamilton was also invited to seek ways to offer assistance for theological training. The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) was also mandated to request the reasons why the FRCSA have revoked their relationship with the Korean Presbyterian Churches (Kosin).

The Free Church of Scotland

The CRCA recommended to Synod that contact with the Free Church Continuing be discontinued and that the mandate to discuss divergences with the Scottish churches should be rescinded. However Synod adopted its own recommendation to decide that due to the lack of clarity about the division between the Free Church and the Free Church Continuing the CRCA ought to be mandated to continue to monitor the situation in the hope of gaining greater clarity. Synod also man-

dated the committee to continue the discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity.

As part of the considerations about the recommendations of the CRCA the following was noted: "The CRCA is correct that Synod Neerlandia brought something new into the contact with the FCS. Synod Neerlandia did consider, however, that previous synods have consistently declared that the differences between the Westminster Confessions and the Three Forms of Unity need to be discussed within the bounds of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (GKN)

Rule # 1 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship requires churches in such a relationship to watch out for one another to see if they stray from Biblical teachings. In this case the CRCA requested that the mandate for their committee would include:

1. The suggestion that the proportion of Psalms and hymns in the Gereformeerde Kerkboek should reflect the importance – and even the priority – of the Psalms.
2. The consideration that the decisions of Leusden and Zuidhorn about the fourth commandment are based on unconvincing argumentation.

- 3 An address to the next Synod of the Dutch churches to the effect that their recent decisions pertaining to the Marriage Form weakens the Scriptural teaching about marriage.

Synod agreed with the CRCA about concerns regarding the proportion of Psalms and Hymns and mandated the committee to convey these concerns to the Dutch churches. The CRCA was also mandated to study the results of the deputyship "Fourth Commandment and the Sunday" and report to the churches.

In addition, the discussion with the Dutch churches regarding the new Marriage Form is to continue. In its considerations, Synod Chatham did leave open the possibility that some change in wording does not necessarily have to mean a diminishing of the Scriptural teaching. At the same time it warned about the wording used to describe the propagating of children.

The committee was also urged to seek clarity into the legitimacy of the recent "Vrijmaking" and to monitor further developments. At the same time the committee is to inform the Dutch churches as well as those who have liberated themselves that they have our prayerful support. The Canadian Reformed churches were also urged to remember both groups in their public prayers.

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

It was decided to maintain membership in the ICRC and to send delegates to the next conference scheduled for 2005 in South Africa.



In addition the CRCA is to inform the Secretary of the ICRC that the Constitution Art. IV.1.a. should be left unchanged since there are no new grounds.

Orthodox Christian Reformed Church (OCRC)

As not much new has developed in the contact with this federation Synod included in the mandate of the Committee for Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) to specifically address with the OCRC whether it shares a mutual desire for federative unity with the CanRC.

United Reformed Churches of North America

A sub-committee of the CPEU was established at the previous synod to pursue theological training for the ministry in a proposed united federation with the URCNA. This sub-committee was called the Theological Education Committee. The committee and its mandate were extended, but with the reminder that at least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod should be maintained.

A second sub-committee of the CPEU was established at the previous synod to deal with a proposed revised Church Order of a united federation. Synod continued its mandate for another three years and made specific mention of the need to continue in the evaluation of the differences between the current church orders of the federations in light of the Scriptural and Confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort; to propose a com-

mon church order in the line of the Church Order of Dort; to formulate a draft proposal of regulations for General Synod; and, to provide the CPEU with a report in sufficient time for them to produce the comprehensive report for Synod in a timely fashion.

A third committee involved with the CPEU in contact toward federative unity is the Common Songbook committee. Our Committee for the Book of Praise serves in this capacity. Synod received a progress report of the work of this committee. In one of its 'considerations' synod encouraged the churches to address this committee directly with suggestions, etc. In the renewed mandate for this committee Synod made particular note of the need to continue to produce a songbook that contains the complete Anglo-Genevan Psalter and other suitable metrical versions of the Psalms, including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.

Synod mandated the CPEU to work closely with its sub-committees and to present a single comprehensive report that has been prepared jointly with the CERCU of the URNCA to the next Synod. They are to include a recommendation for a definite time frame for federative unity.

A discussion on the 'Framework Hypothesis' and the support that

this theory has within the URCNA have been added to the mandate for the CPEU.

Free Reformed Church of North America (FRCNA)

The mandate for the CPEU with regard to this federation is to continue meeting with them with a view to pursuing Ecclesiastical Fellowship, while at the same time promoting and maintaining the desire for federative unity, discussing whatever obstacles there may be on this path. A suggestion was made to make use of a document entitled "Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government". This is the same document that is being used as a working document in the unity discussions with the URCNA.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

In addition to the report of the CCCA, Synod also received letters from seven churches in the federation. In summary, the report of the committee indicated that they had met only one time since the last Synod. Further the committee expressed the opinion that many of the issues it was mandated to discuss with the OPC had already been dealt with.

The churches that sent in letters, on the other hand, felt that they had not received much about the issues being discussed. At most they recall the Acts of Synod Burlington 1986.

At least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod should be maintained.

They are also disappointed about the lack of meetings between our committee and the one from the OPC. They ask that the committee receive a more specific mandate regarding goals and items for discussion.

Synod decided to be more specific in its mandate to the CCCA when it decided to refer to its ‘considerations’ in its decision. Specifically it referred to the consideration that the goal of the discussions should be to determine whether the unity of the faith regarding the church, the covenant and the sacraments is adequately and faithfully expressed in our confessional standards. The focus of the discussions should be two-fold: on the one hand, the scriptural faithfulness in the confessions and, on the other hand, the actual application in the reality of church-life, i.e. how the principles are put into practice, or should be put into practice.

*Indonesian Churches,
Reformed Church in New
Zealand, and the General
Mandate of the CRCA*

With respect to the Greja-Greja Reformasi di Indonesia and the Greja-Greja Reformasi Calvinis in East Nusa Tenggara, synod decided to mandate the CRCA to continue correspondence to make more information available to the churches and to report to the next synod in the hope that Ecclesiastical Fellowship can be established. Synod also decided not to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the New Zealand Reformed Churches at this time.

Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise

The committee is encouraged to continue in its various mandates including a printing of the Book of Praise in 2006. Synod also decided, upon the request of minor assemblies and a number of churches, to mandate the committee to present a proposal with the inclusion of the Apostle’s Creed in the baptismal forms to the next General Synod. The committee was also mandated to submit a final proposal for a Form of Subscription, one for the local congregation and one for

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that contains the
complete Anglo-*

Classis, to the next General Synod.

The mandate of synod Fergus to the committee to prepare the prose section of the Book of Praise with the NIV Bible references but not to proceed with the requested changes to the Psalm and hymn section at this time was extended by this synod.

Synod instructed the committee to deal with submissions regarding the hymn section by maintaining the current structure of hymn section; propose changes, additions or improvements where deficiencies and/or weaknesses are found; select suitable hymns using the Guide-

lines and Principles agreed upon by the committee and the representatives of the URCNA.; limit the number of hymns to 100; and, publish a revised hymn section for testing by the churches.

Finally, the Committee was recommended to proceed with the Overleaf Musical Notation Edition.

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The Riches Of The Reformed Faith (I)

Introduction

As we begin this series of studies entitled, “*The Riches of the Reformed Faith*”, I would like to share two preliminary principles with you.

First of all, please know that throughout this series it is by no means my intention to “bash” or to in any way “disrespectfully denigrate” any other Christian faith tradition. I mean that sincerely.

Secondly, that having been said, please know that a major motivation for my so deeply desiring to prepare this series of studies on the Reformed faith arises out of a growing burden that I have as I scan the “ecclesiastical landscape” in northern New Jersey and elsewhere.

It has been my observation and experience over the past several years that more and more of our “traditionally Reformed Church families” – and by that I mean those younger or older, married or single, with or without children – who have grown up in the Reformed Faith, seem to be increasingly forsaking “*the faith of their fathers*”. Indeed, I believe that I can sincerely say, therefore, forsaking “*the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3). Such are increasingly beginning to worship at or are becoming members of basically Baptist or Arminian churches apparently without realizing or being concerned about the many pro-

found implications of making such a move – personally and practically, biblically and theologically, both for themselves as well as for their children and their children’s children.

Arminianism

Now, in case you are not all that familiar with the term “Arminian”, please allow me to define that term for you because of its profound and pervasive implications for so much of what we hope to study throughout this entire series.

Back in the 5th Century AD, there were two very renowned theologians, each representing two distinctively different schools of “theological thought”, each in effect representing two distinctively different religious systems. Their names were Augustine and Pelagius. Augustine (whose teachings had a profound influence on the theological formulations of the great Reformer John Calvin) developed a body of biblical doctrine which strongly emphasized faith and the Sovereignty of God – not completely negating human responsibility or going to the erroneous extreme of “fatalism” or to what some have termed “hyper-Calvinism”, but a body of belief which did indeed emphasize faith and the Sovereignty of God, none-the-less.

Pelagius, on the other hand, developed a system of belief which strongly emphasized good works

and man’s free will and the inherent ability of man to do all that God commanded him to do.

It is and will be my contention throughout this series of articles that Arminianism – historically and classically understood – the kind of Arminianism which our Reformed Creeds and Confessions repeatedly defy and deny – the kind of Arminianism which is being taught and practiced and preached in any number of Independent and basically Baptist Churches throughout North America and the world – represents an unbiblical, unholy, and unhealthy compromise between Augustinianism (or classic Calvinism - that which focuses on the 5 *Doctrines of Sovereign Grace*) and Pelagianism.

Now again, please remember both of those preliminary principles and please do not misunderstand what I am saying! In fact, when I was growing up in Wayne, New Jersey, every so often my parents would take me as a young boy to various Arminian churches in order to hear gospel quartets or certain evangelistic speakers. I was often tremendously blessed and my spiritual life enriched by them! In fact I am a graduate of The King’s College which was then located in Briar Cliff Manor, New York. King’s is basically a Baptist/Arminian school – and yet, I was tremendously blessed by, and am extremely grateful for, the training which I received at King’s.

Finally, on this score, by God’s grace, both my wife, Margaret, and

I served for a number of years in both part-time and full-time capacities on staff with Youth For Christ/ Campus Life in the North Jersey area under the direction of Mr. Ron Hutchcraft. In its basic philosophy and theology, Youth For Christ is an Arminian ministry ... and yet, again, Margaret and I both learned much and would like to think that we were used of God during those years of ministry.

But my burden is that the biblical, spiritual, theological state of so many Christians in our modern day ... and indeed, so many Reformed Christians ... nice people, sincere people, well-meaning people, seemingly have come to the spiritually careless conclusion which might be well characterized by their asking such questions as, “*Oh, what difference does it make? What does it matter what I know? What does it matter what I believe? What does it matter where or how I worship? I just want to serve the Lord!*” Let us make no mistake about it: it makes a world of difference ... in fact, it can make an eternity of difference for ourselves, as well as for our children and our children’s children.

In the August/September 2003 issue of *New Horizons* magazine, the General Secretary for the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Dr. Larry Wilson, writes:

We believe that the Reformed faith is the most consistent and comprehensive understanding of biblical truth. It’s really nothing more or less than the gospel and its implications

– the teachings of the Bible. As such, the Reformed faith embodies an entire life-system or worldview. (p.8)

In perhaps even more forceful language, the late Dr. Loraine Boettner, writing in a booklet which he entitled simply, *The Reformed Faith*, (P&R Publishing Co. Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1983, pg. 2) states:

We are living in a day in which practically all of the historical churches are being attacked from within by unbelief. Many of them have already succumbed. And almost invariably the line of descent has been from Calvinism to Arminianism, from Arminianism to Liberalism, and then to Unitarianism. And the history of Liberalism and Unitarianism shows that they deteriorate into a social gospel that is too weak to sustain itself. We are convinced that the future of Christianity is bound up with that system of theology historically called Calvinism. Where the God-centered principals of Calvinism have been abandoned, there has been a strong tendency downward into the depths of man-centered naturalism or secularism. Some have declared – rightly, we believe – that there is no consistent stopping place between Calvinism and atheism.

With those words of introduction we will begin a series of articles next month on *The Riches of the Reformed Faith*. Next month we hope to consider, *The Sovereignty of God*

Rev. Richard J. Kuiken is the pastor of the Reformed Bible Church in Pompton Plains, New Jersey.



Looking Above

A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ

“The Church in the Midst of the World: In Danger of Being Led Astray”

Revelation 2:18-29

Given the many warnings found in the New Testament concerning heresy creeping into the church (Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 1:6; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:25; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 4), we should not be surprised to find such a warning here among the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. What we have here in these letters to the seven churches, after all, is a composite picture of the church in the world from the time of Christ’s first coming to the time of His return. The warning of Revelation 2:18-29, then, is most appropriate.

The church in the world is under the attacks of the evil one. Satan, that great deceiver, is at pains to deceive the church and to lead her astray. Revelation 12:17 sets the grim reality before us: “The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Welcome to your history, dear church of Jesus Christ! Welcome to your story, children of God! You are the target of Satan’s attacks. Knowing that he cannot win the victory over Christ, Satan wants nothing more than to claim the victory over those who bear the name of Christ. Even now

Satan is attacking the church; even now Satan is amassing his army. His kingdom grows in strength and number, and the church is not immune from his attacks. We see that clearly in the letter to the church in Thyatira.

The City of Thyatira

Thyatira was located East of Pergamum. Because of its location, peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation would travel through the city; consequently, Thyatira became a trading city. You might recall Lydia, the first Christian convert in Philippi. She was a seller of purple, and she was from the city of Thyatira. Archeological excavations have revealed the presence of workers in wool, linen, leather, and bronze, potters, bakers, dyers, and slavers. Each of these different trades had its own guild, and each guild had its own guardian god. These guilds required participation in periodic feasts in which they worshiped their guardian god.

You begin to get something of the precarious situation of the Christians in Thyatira. William Hendriksen describes the situation as follows: “If you wish to get ahead in this world, you must belong to a guild; if you belong to a guild, your very membership

implies that you worship its god. You will be expected to attend the guild-festivals and to eat food, part of which is offered to the deity, and which you receive on your table as a gift from the god. And then, when the feast ends, and the real - grossly immoral - fun begins, you must not walk out unless you desire to become the object of ridicule and persecution!” You see the temptation: if you are not involved in the guilds, you will be ostracized; if you do participate, you will be guilty of denying the Lord.

The New Testament Jezebel

Such was the situation in Thyatira. And though the Lord commends the church in verse 19, “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first”, He also issues a stern rebuke and warning, verse 20: “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”

Evidently there was a woman in the church of Thyatira who held great influence over the people. She called herself a prophetess. Through her teaching she seduced the members of the church to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. This so-called prophetess taught that it was acceptable for the members of the church to compromise and belong to the various trade guilds. She taught that it was acceptable to compromise

and participate in the festivals of the guilds. She taught that it was acceptable to compromise and participate in the sexual immorality that inevitably went with such festivals. A little compromise here, a little compromise there, certainly such little compromises cannot hurt the church!

How do we know that this is what she was teaching? Consider verse 24, "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden." Evidently those who held to the doctrine of this woman - this prophetess - were saying that it was necessary to know the deep things of Satan. It was necessary to participate in the trade guilds, with all of their immorality and corruption, in order to have an influence in this world. But what is the result of such compromising rationalization? It is not the church that influences the world, it is the world that influences the church; and ever so slowly, the church becomes like the world.

It is fitting, then, that Christ would call such a woman "Jezebel." Remember the Jezebel of old? Her marriage to Ahab was a political marriage; it sealed the alliance between Israel and Tyre. Ahab did not influence Jezebel for good, Jezebel influenced Ahab for evil. She was indeed a powerful figure; she deceived the people of God and led them astray.

This is what the so-called prophetess in Thyatira was doing as well. She was deceiving the

people. She was leading them astray. She had become hardened in her sin. She had rationalized her sin. She had justified her participation in the trade guilds, and she sought to impress this heresy upon others as well. The fact that she had become hardened in her sin, is evident from verse 21, "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent." How did God give her time to repent? Well, she was a member of the church. She heard the proclamation of God's Word. She heard the commands to repent and believe. But she would not. Thus Jezebel showed herself for what she was.

The Condemnation

And now the rebuke is given to the church, for the church in Thyatira has allowed this woman in their midst; in fact, they have even allowed her to teach and to seduce the flock of God. Christ seeks to open their eyes to the reality of what is going on. For who is this Jezebel, but an agent of Satan, an instrument of hell itself?!

Do you see the danger?! By allowing this false prophetess in the church, they were allowing Satan himself access to devour God's people through deceptive doctrine. We think heresy and false doctrines are little games for the theologians to play! We think that heresy and false doctrine ought to

be tolerated in the church, forgetting that the bringers of heresy are false prophets, the very agents of Satan himself?! This passage unveils for us something of the nature of demonic activity. How has Satan worked in the churches of our land?! By false doctrine! By heresy! By subtly leading the church astray!

Is it any wonder that Christ's judgment against the false prophets is so very great?! Look at verses 22-23 of our passage: "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."

Christ Himself will come as Judge. That is the significance of the way in which He reveals Himself in verse 18, "These things says the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass." He will judge. He will cast this Jezebel of Thyatira into a sickbed, along with those who commit adultery with her. He will cast them into great tribulation. He will kill her children.

Those Who Overcome

The judgment upon the world is

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great; it is even greater upon the false church. But the promise to those who overcome is greater still: “But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ - as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star” (vv. 25-28).

Those who overcome will be given power over the nations. Recall the setting of Thyatira. Peoples from every tribe, tongue and nation traveled through. Now the people of God are told they will have power over all nations - power described in terms of Psalm 2. The nations of the world may have exalted themselves against the throne of God. The agents of Satan may do their best (or worst!) until Christ comes again. But God sits in the heavens and laughs them to scorn! He has authority! And He will rule with a rod of iron! He will dash the wicked to pieces like the potter’s vessel! This is the power that is given to the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, that doesn’t mean that we are to go out and take control of the social and political realms and re-establish the theocracy of Israel of old. Such a view is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of Old Testament Israel. It means, rather, that we live by faith, knowing that Christ sits upon the throne, knowing that He is sovereign over the events of history, knowing that He shall work all things to the consummation, knowing that even though the church may appear small and unimpressive, she

is powerful in Christ. For we are given the very power of Christ, and that power is to be exercised, as He exercised it on earth, in meekness and humility.

Furthermore, we are given the morning star. Jesus identifies Himself in 22:16 as the Bright Morning Star. Do you see what He promises His own? Nothing less than conformity to Christ Himself. Though He is King of kings and Lord of lords, He presently rules as a meek and humble Child (cf. Revelation 12:5). Though He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, He presently rules as a Lamb that was slain (cf. Revelation 5:5-6). The church, in conformity to Christ, is called to exercise her power in meekness and humility.

What happened to Christ? He was persecuted, even as the church is now persecuted. He suffered, even as the church now suffers. He was rejected of the world, even as the church is now rejected. Satan leveled his attacks against Him, even as he now levels his attacks against the church. He was put to death, even as many Christians today are put to death. But He was also raised up from the dead. He also ascended into heaven. He also sits at the right hand of the glory of God. Beloved Church of Jesus Christ - that is your identity!! Suffering now, glory to come!!

The church in the world is under the attacks of Satan, and in constant danger of being led astray. Let us, then, take these words seriously. Let us never underestimate the power or the attacks of the evil one. But let us neither forget our identity: we belong to One who is more powerful, and His name is

Jesus Christ! With Him we shall reign forever and ever! In that confidence, let us hold fast what we have till He comes.

May Christ give us ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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area of origins they are in fact one-sided and dogmatic.”

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