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Jesus Christ Must Rise

Christ arose! That is the holy conviction that brings joy to our hearts on Easter Day. Without that certainty, the assurance that our Lord broke the bars of death on the third day could not be real. Without that certainty, there could be no real Easter joy in our souls, for there would be no triumph over death.

The conviction, however, that Jesus did rise from the dead cannot take full possession of our hearts until we understand that Jesus *had to* rise from the dead, according to the Scriptures. John 20:9 makes very clear that Jesus had to rise from the dead: "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

The most puzzling thing in the account of the resurrection is that the disciples of Jesus did not expect their Lord to rise in triumph from the tomb. In fact, they did not even believe He had risen when the glad tidings concerning the empty grave were brought to them by the women who found the stone rolled away from its entrance.

In John 20 we read that when John entered the tomb on that memorable Sunday morning, he "saw and believed." Peter was still unbelieving. All the other apostles still disbelieved regardless of the testimony of those who found the tomb empty. Luke tells us that the report of the women

was considered to be idle talk in the ears of the disciples.

The disciples disbelieved in spite of the prophecy that Jesus gave to them three times, telling them that He would be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, be killed, and that He would rise up on the third day. The mystery of their unbelief is solved for us by John, who writes, "as yet, they knew not the Scripture that He must rise from the dead." They could not believe that Jesus *did* rise from the dead until they discovered from the Old Testament that He *must* rise from the dead.

The fact that the disciples did not understand what the Old Testament had said concerning the Messiah's resurrection explains why they did



Volume 55, No.3 (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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not believe the Master's own word that He would be raised up on the third day. It will not seem strange, however, if we consider that in the final analysis the foundation for their faith in His conquest was not in the words of the women who saw the empty tomb, but it could only be in the testimony of the Word of God. They had to understand what the Old Testament had prophesied concerning not only the fact, but also the necessity, of His resurrection.

Still today there are many who say that they believe in Christ, yet they question the reality of our Savior's physical resurrection. They do not understand with heart and mind what is taught not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament concerning God's plan for salvation. The Scriptures speak of a Christ who is much more than a great religious teacher. He is more than a shining example of faith and godliness for us to follow.

Jesus came not merely to reveal to us the love of a heavenly Father but He also came to make atonement for the sins of His people. As our great High Priest and Lamb of God, He would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Our guilt would be laid upon Him. Christ came not only to cancel our guilt and reconcile us to the Most Holy God; He came to be King. With royal might He would renew the hearts of those who had been given to Him by the Father and He would deliver them from the tragic consequences of sin, even death itself. That is why the prophets portray the Messiah as one who *had to* die and as one who *had to* rise up from the dead. He had to die to pay the wages of sin that

were against us. He had to be raised to break the bonds of death and to rob the grave of its terror.

In short, if the disciples had understood why it was necessary for Jesus to die on the accursed tree, they would also have understood why there was a divine necessity for His resurrection. It is not an accident that the modern denial of the resurrection is found among those who do not believe His death on the cross was more than an example of self-sacrifice. They do not understand that the death of Jesus was the substitution of God's perfect Lamb for sinners who deserved to be slain for their sins by the just and eternal wrath of God.

It is not so strange, therefore, that the disciples did not believe the testimony concerning the resurrection of their Lord until Jesus Himself had given them instruction in the necessity of His vicarious sufferings and His victory over death. On the afternoon of the resurrection, Jesus traveled with two companions along the road to Emmaus. We read of how their hearts burned within them when the living Christ - still unknown to them as the risen One - walked with them and instructed them "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets concerning Himself." The purpose of that instruction was precisely to explain to them the necessity of His passion, death, and resurrection. "Did not the Christ have to suffer all these things and then to enter into His glory?"

When the two men from Emmaus come to the gathering of the eleven that same evening to bring them the triumphant news that was burning on their lips, they were greeted with

the jubilant exclamation: "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon." Now they understood the Scripture; now they could believe. They knew Jesus had to suffer and rise again so they had no difficulty believing that He was truly risen from the dead.

We must examine and reexamine the Scriptures in order that our faith in the atoning sacrifice and triumphant resurrection of the Lord may not waver. We must study both the Old and the New Testaments. Then we will understand, and we, too, can exclaim: "Surely the Christ had to die the bitter death of the cross and then to enter into glory." We know God's plan for the ages concerning our redemption is moving toward its ultimate fulfillment. We know that our victory over death and sin is certain. We know that on the morning of that first Easter, the tomb of our Lord was empty; death had been cheated of its prey and vanquished by the strong Son of God. And because we know these things, we also can be assured that our tombs will be empty on the day when Jesus returns. Our Redeemer lives. He lives in our hearts by His grace and Spirit. He lives in heaven to intercede for us.

According to the Scriptures. Hallelujah!

Rev. Wybren H. Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He also serves as Editor of *The Outlook*.

The Last Word

“And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.’ And having said this, He breathed His last..”
(Luke 23:46)

The six hours on the cross are coming to a close. Death is at hand. Jesus has spoken several times while hanging on the cross. He has manifested concern for those who were around Him, and then He lays bare His own soul as he expresses the anguish He is experiencing. Now He speaks one more time. As He has done so often throughout His earthly ministry, and even now as He is hanging on the cross, He turns to the Scriptures and uses words taken from the Old Testament. This time He uses words found in Psalm 31:5 “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” Jesus adds a word that was so precious to Him for He says, “Father, ‘into your hands I commit my spirit’”

A Favorite Word

Jesus had used the name “Father” throughout His life on earth. We hear Him as a boy saying in the temple: “Did you not know that I must be about My father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Again and again in the Sermon on the mount recorded for us in Matthew’s Gospel as well as in the farewell discourse found in John’s Gospel, we hear Him using the name “Father”. In the High Priestly Prayer recorded for us in John 17 we find Jesus referring to His Father. As He agonizes in the Garden of Gethsemane He cries out, “Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from Me, nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

The use of the name “Father” speaks to us of the perfect and unbroken fellowship Jesus enjoyed with His Father in Heaven even as He was faithfully fulfilling the mission given to Him by the Father. He had come into the world not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. As He faces the suffering of the cross He declares, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?” (John 18:11). Even now, as He hangs on the cross, He turns to His Father, praying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Fellowship Broken

But then something happens. That fellowship is broken. He who came as the Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep had to bear the full wrath of God against the sin of His people. As divine justice is met, God withdraws His favor from the Son who is doing His Father’s will, and our Lord cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Fellowship Restored

But the anguish is now past. The cup has been drained. The storm of God’s wrath is past, and so the Savior prays: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” What a contrast! Earlier we hear that Jesus predicted His death as He

declared to His disciples, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him” (Matthew 17:22,23). The angel on Easter morning referred to this as he said, “He is not here, but He is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and the third day rise again’” (Luke 24:6, 7). And that is what happened. He could have called twelve legions of angels as He once reminded His disciples, but He was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Now He voluntarily commits His spirit to His Father’s care.

Earlier on the cross He had been challenged to free Himself along with those hanging with Him. Jesus declined the offer. He had come into the world to give His life a ransom for many. He had to pay the price in full for the redemption of His own, and He does. Because He paid the price, He can declare, “It is finished.” With the price paid, redemption has been accomplished and the Father’s will has been fulfilled. Now in perfect peace, the Son commits His spirit to His Father, and as the Bible says, “He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46).

Fellowship Given

Because Jesus committed His spirit to the Father, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, could say in the hour of death, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Paul boldly declares, “I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that Day” (II Timothy



1:12). May we, too, because of Christ's death and resurrection, be able to confess, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

*Safe in the arms of sovereign love
We shall ever remain.
Nor shall the rage of earth or hell
Make Thy sure counsel vain.*

*Not one of all the chosen race
But shall to heaven attain.
Here they will share
abounding love
And there with Jesus reign.*

Rev. Arthur Besteman is an emeritus pastor in the United Reformed Churches in North America. He is a member of the Beverly URC in Wyoming, Michigan.

We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 21: Of the Satisfaction of Christ for Our Sins

The teaching of Jesus being a sacrifice by being crucified and pouring out His blood to take away our sins is not very "relevant" to the world today. After all, who is a sinner? Furthermore, we need to get beyond capital punishment as a way to punish and view criminals as victims who need rehabilitation. The church, sadly, has bought into this mindset. Gone is the preaching of the law and mankind's sin. Gone is the preaching of Christ on the cross as accursed for our sins. Instead, we hear that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives, that God desires a relationship with us, and that what we need is a Friend who will help us when times are tough.

The story of Scripture is not this boring – thankfully. Instead it is a powerful drama in which God becomes a man, in which the hero is first the victim, in which the victor is the underdog. We've been tracing this plot as our Belgic Confession unfolds it. Article 20 confessed Christ as the object of the Father's justice and us as the object of His mercy, because Christ satisfied justice for us. The plot unfolds in Article 21 with the confession that God the Son has secured our salvation by becoming a High Priest to satisfy the eternal wrath of God as the basis of our salvation. As our priest He placed Himself on the altar as the sacrifice for our sins. Because of this marvelous truth, we receive

unspeakable comfort and peace to give us confidence before God.

The Order of Melchizedek

"We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek..." The writer to the Hebrews had to spend a great deal of ink to prove that Jesus was the final High Priest for the people of God. Yet, He was not of the tribe of Levi, the priestly line. How could one who was of the tribe of Judah, the kingly line, be a priest? God, in His wisdom, had already prepared a remedy for this situation. A unique king-priest had already appeared in sacred history in the person of Melchizedek. Our Lord was ordained in His order of priests, which superceded the Levitical line. This was shown in that Levi himself, in a manner of speaking, paid tithes to Melchizedek, through the person of Abraham (Hebrews 7:4-10). Thus our Lord came as priest "not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life" (Hebrews 7:16 cf. 7:3, 23, 24).

The Final Sacrifice

As our High Priest, then, in a superior order of priests, our Lord Jesus Christ was enabled to offer a better sacrifice than the Old Covenant priests – sacrifices not of bulls, goats, lambs, and rams, but Himself (Hebrews 9:12). As our Confession says, "He has presented Himself in

Our Lord satisfied the wrath of God for us by being accursed of God in our place, because we deserve that eternal wrath and curse!

our behalf before the Father.” We see the Scriptural emphasis here on the fact that our Lord laid down His life for His sheep, for their benefit, and that of His own accord (John 10:11-18).

In describing the meaning of this laying down of Himself for us, our Confession masterfully links two great biblical concepts together. By doing this, we are shown “the breadth and length and height and depth” of the love of Christ for us (Ephesians 3:18-19). This is the purpose of learning the Word of God and our Confessions! To know the depths of our salvation is the purpose of theology. The end result of theoretical knowledge is experiential knowledge. And we see these two things married together when we learn that Jesus offered Himself “to *appease* His [the Father’s] wrath by His [Christ’s] full *satisfaction*.”

To “appease” means to make peace. In our older vocabulary we spoke of pacifying or placating. Our Lord has placated the Father’s just wrath. Christ has pacified an angry God by His “full satisfaction.” To “satisfy” is to meet a demand. Christ has not only satisfied the demands of God’s justice for a time (as the typological and temporary Old Covenant sacrifices did), but He has made a *full* satisfaction to God’s justice because of our sins against that justice. This is why after over five chapters of arguing

that Christ is a greater priest, who offered a greater sacrifice in a greater tabernacle, the author of Hebrews concludes the argument, saying, “Where there is forgiveness of these [sins], there is no longer any offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:18). Let us follow the contours of Article 21 in delving deeper into the meaning of Christ’s full satisfaction, which is described as consisting in three things.

The Cross

First, Jesus satisfied for our sins “by offering Himself on the tree of the cross.” Under the Old Covenant, when a man was punished for breaking the law by being hung upon a tree, he had to be buried before sundown so as not to defile the holy land of Israel. The reason for this was that being hung upon a tree was accursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:22-23 cf. Galatians 3:10-13). Thus our Lord satisfied the wrath of God for us by being accursed of God in our place, because we deserve that eternal wrath and curse!

The Blood

Second, Jesus satisfied God’s wrath by “pouring out His precious blood to purge away our sins, as the prophets had foretold.” As the Law stated, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 17:11 cf. Hebrews 9:22). Our Lord’s blood was offered through the eternal Spirit before the Father in the heavenly tabernacle

on the heavenly altar in order to make peace between us and God (Hebrews 9:11-14).

The Judge

Third, Christ satisfied God’s wrath by being “condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared Him innocent.” This is an oft forgotten aspect of our Lord’s suffering and satisfaction. Why was He condemned by Pilate and what does this have to do with our salvation? The best answer is that found in our Catechism, which says, “That He, being innocent, might be condemned by the temporal judge, and thereby deliver us from the severe judgment of God, to which we were exposed” (Q&A 38).

As the Prophets Foretold

Our Lord’s work on our behalf is a fulfillment of the Old Testament in every respect. Paul’s words ring clear in this vein: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). The satisfaction of God’s wrath by Jesus was in perfect accord with what “the prophets had foretold.” Our Confession gives us a sampling of the prophetic outlook of the Old Covenant by quoting the words of Isaiah 53:5, 7, and 12. In many ways the clearest Old Testament passage of the death of our Lord, Isaiah’s “Servant of the LORD” is spoken of in such detail that many modern scholars believe they could not have been written by Isaiah or that they speak of Israel as a people. Yet we have the more sure prophetic word (II Peter 1:19). Peter explains that the salvation brought by Christ was prophesied by prophets, who “searched and



inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (I Peter 1:10-12).

In Body and Soul

Finally, our Confession states that the depths of Christ’s satisfaction are found in that He suffered on our behalf, in body and soul. In order to restore “that which He took not away” as “the righteous for the unrighteous,” our Lord had to suffer in both “His body and in His soul.” Remember, since we have a body and soul, our Savior had to have a body and soul (Belgic Confession, Article 18); thus, He had to suffer in body as soul in order to satisfy for the sins we commit in body and soul.

This dreadful agony of His suffering is shown in these words: “feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that *his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground*. He called out: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” What this means is that Jesus suffered hell for us, the “inexpressible anguish, pains, and terrors” of hell which we justly deserve because of our sins have merited them (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 44).

Yet, although we have merited hell, our Lord underwent hell for us to merit “the remission of our sins.” This is explained best by our Catechism, which says, “That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the

whole human race; in order that by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life” (Q&A 37).

The Benefits of Christ

How amazing is this? So much so that it also brings us immense experiential benefits. The first great benefit is the confidence that we know Christ crucified (I Corinthians 2:2); and because we know Him, we regard everything in this life as nothing (Philippians 3:8). As the praise chorus says, “You are my all in all.”

The second practical benefit is that in the wounds of Christ “we find all manner of consolation.” This means that His death for us gives us peace with God (Romans 5:1), an assured conscience before God as well as a sure foundation to lean on in times of suffering, trial, and temptation. When these things come upon us, we do not turn to our works, our failures and sins, and not even our own faith! We turn to Christ alone and His wounds for us.

The third benefit of Christ’s work is that there is no other work we need – whether our own or that of another. Thus it is not necessary “to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God than this only sacrifice, once offered.” Notice also that after our Confes-

sion says this it quotes Hebrews 10:14, saying, “by which [sacrifice] *He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.*” Christ’s once for all sacrifice “perfects” those who are “sanctified.” What does this mean?

The idea of “perfection” in Hebrews is not one of sinlessness, but that of being acceptable to God. Christ was made “perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10 cf. 5:9). This means that His offering of Himself was acceptable to God as sweet smelling incense to His Father. This is why He could say, “It is finished” (John 20:30), because His work did what God required. Hebrews also says that the priesthood and the law made nothing perfect (7:11, 18), meaning, that they could not bring to the worshippers the final state of affairs between God and man. Only the New Covenant, based on the work of Christ, could do that (Hebrews 8).

The idea of being “sanctified” in Hebrews speaks not of what we commonly understand as sanctification, that is, the daily renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit, but being cleansed of our sins by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. Thus, what Hebrews and our Confessions say is that we who have been forgiven of our sins by the blood of Christ are acceptable to God. Our acceptability to God is based in the finished, solitary work of Christ alone! For this rea-

***He could say, “It is finished” (John 20:30),
because His work did what God required.***

son Article 21 of our Confession ends, saying, “This is also the reason why He was called by the angel of God, JESUS, that is to say, SAVIOR, because He would *save his people from their sins.*”

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

Study/Application Questions for Article 21

1. Why does the book of Hebrews make such a big deal out of Jesus being a priest according to the order of Melchizedek?
2. What does it mean that Jesus Christ “appeased” God’s wrath?
3. In what ways are the Old Testament prophets fulfilled in the death of Christ?
4. How does the Confession interpret the phrase, “He descended into hell” from the Apostles’ Creed? (cf. “Celebration of the Lord’s Supper: Form Number 2”)
5. Why is it not necessary to seek or invent another means of reconciliation? (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 29-30)
6. What does Romans 5:1-5 say to us about the comfort we receive from being justified by Christ’s work and sacrifice for us?

Looking Out and About

- Rev. John Piersma, a longtime former member of the Board of Reformed Fellowship passed away on December 17, 2004 at the age of 87. The funeral service and interment took place in Pella, Iowa. See “Remembering God’s Servant” in this issue on page 31.

- Mrs. Edith Krahe, the wife of Dr. Charles Krahe who recently retired from the Board of Reformed Fellowship, passed away on December 20, 2004. Mrs. Krahe had a long, rewarding career as an educator as well as a faithful helper to her husband in the various churches served during their marriage. The funeral service was held in Hawthorne, New Jersey with burial in Fairlawn, New Jersey.

- Rev. Bernard Tol, who has served the North Street Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan since 1992, has accepted a call to the First Christian Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois whose pastor, Rev. Richard Blauw, has retired from the active ministry.

- Rev. Jason Tuinstra, who has been the pastor of the Community United Reformed Church of Schereville, Indiana since his graduation from Mid-America Reformed Seminary in 1998, has accepted a call to serve as a new church plant in Lemoore, California.

- Nineteen members of the Faith United Reformed Church of Olive

Center, Michigan recently completed a mission work assignment in Baja, Mexico.

- Fourteen members of the Bethany United Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan spent a week working on the new high school building in Tepeyac, Costa Rica. Fourteen members of the Eastmanville United Reformed Church of Coopersville, Michigan traveled to Costa Rica to continue the work that has been begun on the Tepeyac high school building.

If your church is involved in a project, or you have news and information that you would like the greater Reformed community to know about, please let us know by sending an email to editor@reformedfellowship.net



The Riches of the Reformed Faith

“The Glory of God” Part One

In Isaiah 14:12-15, we read words that are addressed historically to the King of Babylon. In this passage, he is presented as a type or figure of the arch-enemy of our faith, namely, the Devil himself: “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star (**KJV** – Lucifer), son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to the grave; to the depths of the pit.”

As many of us already know, that sin which brought about Satan’s downfall was his desire to exalt himself and to be like God. This is the very same sin with which he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden at the very dawn of history.

Interestingly enough, that same sin is at the very heart of the philosophical world-view known as humanism. “Humanism” has been defined by the late Christian philosopher, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, as “the placing of man at the center of all things and making him the measure of all things.” (*Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer, Francis A., Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1981, p.23) While we can *by no means* equate Arminianism with Humanism, and while we must remember that truly saved, believing

Arminians are indeed our brothers and sisters in the Lord, it is true that Arminianism, historically and classically understood, does have a good smattering of “humanism” woven within.

For example, in his summary of Arminianism and classic Calvinism, *The Reformed Faith*, Dr. Loraine Boettner writes:

According to Arminianism: Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of GOD, who takes the initiative, and MAN, who must respond, man’s response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who of their own free will, ‘choose’ to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man’s will plays the decisive role; thus MAN, not God, determines who will be the recipients of salvation. According to Calvinism: Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ’s death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the Gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus

GOD, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation. (*The Reformed Faith*, Boettner, Loraine, P&R Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1983, pg. 28)

If Arminianism is correct in declaring that “Man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of salvation”, is it not then true that man, not God, ultimately deserves all the glory? Ah, but “*what saith the Scriptures!*?” In Isaiah 42:8 we read, “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” So too, in Romans 11:33-36, Paul writes, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay Him?’ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.” And finally, in the words of Jude 24-25, Jude declares, “To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” You see, that is why the very First Question of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, “What is the chief and highest end of man? *Answer*: “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him for ever.”

In other words, in stark and direct

contrast to the practical profession and implications of a consistent Arminianism, the Sacred Scriptures teach, and our own Reformed Confessions repeatedly reaffirm, that even in the midst of many false and spiritually deadly and deceptive doctrines, even in the midst of ever increasing cultural decay and moral corruption, all those who have truly been saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are encouraged and exhorted and under holy obligation to give THE GLORY TO GOD ALONE for at least Two Key Reasons which Jude sets forth in verses 24 and 25. One we look at this month; the other, next month.

Faithfully Preserved

In Jude 24, Jude declares, "To Him who is able (*dunamai* – i.e., He has the power, He has the ability, He has the strength, He has the where-withal) to keep you (*phulasso*) from falling." (or, stumbling, NAS; ie. from not standing firm). This is the same term used by Luke in Luke 2:8 where we read at the time of the birth of Christ, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over (*phulasso*) their flocks at night." Consequently, in similar fashion, as the Good Shepherd of the sheep, God our heavenly Father, through the Person and power of His Son, Jesus Christ, "keeps watch over" His flock!

Interestingly enough, to the very best of my knowledge, in the original language this term translated as "falling" in Jude 24 is used only here in the entire New Testament. (Greek: *aptaistos*) It is a term that was used by Greek philosophers in reference to such things as a

surefooted horse that does not stumble, a steady falling snow, and also of a good man who does not make moral lapses. And that, says the Sacred Scriptures, is precisely what "*the only God our Savior ... through Jesus Christ our Lord*" does for us! He sovereignly and graciously "keeps us from falling."

Ah, but how so? And in what ways? Well, we are given insights into the answer to these sorts of questions by considering the context of this particular doxology of praise recorded in Jude 24-25. For example, in Jude 1 we read, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:" – that is, kept not simply in time, but also for all eternity!

This touches on that beloved Reformed doctrine known as the "Preservation" or "Perseverance of the Saints", one of the powerful and precious "Five Points of Calvinism," which posits the position that once a person is truly saved they cannot lose their salvation. This is true, not because of how "tightly" we are "holding onto God by faith", but because of how tightly God is holding onto us by grace! Indeed, as the great English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "The brightest saints on earth would fall into the lowest hell if God did not keep them from falling." (Sermons)

And that's true! That is why we rejoice to read that in John 10:27-28 our Lord Jesus Christ declares, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (see also Romans 8:35,37-39; Philippians 1:6; and II Timothy 1:12)

It is because of a myriad of texts such as these that in the Canons of Dort we read not only of a positive affirmation of the comforting doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, but we also read the Rejection of Errors of those (Paragraph 1) "Who teach: That the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his free will." (Paragraph 2) "Who teach: That God does indeed provide the believer with sufficient powers to persevere, and is ever ready to preserve these in him if he will do his duty; but that, though all things which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God will use to preserve faith are made use of, even then it ever depends on the pleasure of the will whether it will persevere or not." (Paragraph 3) "Who teach: That the true believers and regenerate not only can fall from justifying faith and likewise

The Good Shepherd of the sheep, God our heavenly Father, through the Person and power of His Son, Jesus Christ, "keeps watch over" His flock!



from grace and salvation wholly and to the end, but indeed often do fall from this and are lost forever.” (Paragraph 4) “Who teach: That true believers and regenerate can sin the sin unto death or against the Holy Spirit.” (Paragraph 5) “Who teach: That without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life.”

And so, as Jude teaches us, our ever faithful God and Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does indeed “*keep us from falling*” from our salvation. Ah, but notice: according to Jude 4 and 19, our blessed Triune God also “keeps us from falling” finally and fatally into doctrinal error. For in Jude 4 & 19 we read, “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord ... These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.”

Commenting on this particular portion of Scripture, Charles Spurgeon has so insightfully said, “The best taught man, apart from divine guidance, is not incapable of becoming the greatest fool possible. There is a strange weakness which sometimes comes over noble spirits, and which makes them infatuated with an erroneous novelty, though they fancy they have discovered some great truth. Men of enquiring and receptive minds are often decoyed from the old paths - the good old ways; and while they think they are pursuing truth, they are being led into damnable error. He only is kept,

Though he lived and ministered over 100 years ago, Spurgeon seems to have been speaking about Harold Camping when he preached.

as to his thoughts and doctrinal views, whom God keeps, for there are errors that would, if it were possible, deceive even the very elect.” (Sermons)

We would do well to be on our guard and to apply these very insightful words not simply to a whole host of sects, cults, New Age teachings and any number of false religions that are running rampant in our world today, but also to apply them to the damnable error of Mr. Harold Camping of Family Radio who is teaching and has written without qualification “that the churches are under the judgment of God, Satan is now ruling, and that the Holy Spirit has been removed and with Him, the possibility of salvation in the churches.” (*The End of the Church Age ... And After*, Camping, Harold, Family Stations Inc., 2002, p.226) And again Mr. Camping writes, “As this study will show, we are now in that time of history when the church age has come to an end. Consequently, God has commanded each and every believer to leave his local church and continue to serve God as his ambassador outside of the churches and congregations. This is the action required by God for any and all who truly tremble before the Word of God.” (Preface, XV)

Though he lived and ministered over 100 years ago, Spurgeon seems to have been speaking about Harold Camping when he

preached, “Blessed are they who are preserved from these wolves in sheep’s clothing ... God grant that the man may be forgiven who thought it to be a worthy purpose of his life to found a sect whose distinguishing characteristic should be that it would have no communion with any other Christians! The mischief that man has done is utterly incalculable, and I can only pray that, in the providence of God, some part of it may die with him.” (Sermons)

Let us not only listen to what Charles Spurgeon has to say on this score, but let us also listen to what the Apostle Paul has to say concerning false teachings and false teachers in Galatians 1:6-9 where Paul declares,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Let us both hear and heed this Holy Spirit inspired exhortation as it comes to us through Jude 24, and let us Give God Alone the Glory due to the fact that concerning the eternal security of our souls, as well as concerning His gracious ability to deliver us from fatal and final doctrinal error, “the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord”, preserves us forever!

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Looking Above

A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 4:1-2

“A Door and a Throne”

With Revelation 4:1, we begin a new section in the book of Revelation, thereby affording us the opportunity to reorient ourselves in terms of the structure of the book. Following the lead of William Hendriksen in his masterful commentary, *More Than Conquerors*, we have stated that there are seven sections in Revelation: chapters 1-3, chapters 4-7, chapters 8-11, chapters 12-14, chapters 15-16, chapters 17-19, and chapters 20-22.

Each of the seven sections are parallel with one another; each of the seven sections covers the same period of time, namely, that time period between Christ’s first coming and His second coming (in theological terms, each of the seven sections spans the millennium).

Since each of these seven sections spans that entire time period between Christ’s first coming and His second coming, we must avoid the error of the premillennialists, many of whom read into Revelation 4:1 the rapture of the church. In this view, John, the representative of the church, is commanded to “come up” to heaven. This, according to many premillennialists, is a reference to the rapture of the church prior to the tribulation. The church is taken out of the scene; she does not suffer those horrors and tribulations described in the remainder of the book. From Revelation 4 onward the church is simply not in view. Thus, the majority of the book is placed in the future, rendering it

irrelevant to the church today. Such error must be *left behind!*

Not only must we leave behind the error of the premillennialists, we must also reject the “Jewish dreams” of the postmillennialists, who are looking for a great “golden age”—an age in which the church will know great success and triumph, even to the point of ushering in the kingdom of God in an almost imperceptible passing in to the new heavens and the new earth. To such a view, the book of Revelation poses great problems. It speaks not of a golden age, but of terrible tribulation. It speaks not of triumph, but of martyrdom. It speaks not of success, but of apostasy. The postmillennialists answer such problems by placing the book of Revelation in the past; many of them contend that the majority of the events in Revelation were fulfilled in the year 70 AD, with the fall of Jerusalem. Thus, the majority of the book is placed in the past, rendering it irrelevant to the church today. Such error must be rejected as little more than “Jewish dreams”!

Over against these views, we must see that the book of Revelation is highly relevant for the church—even as it must not be put entirely in the future, neither must it be put entirely in the past. Rather, the book of Revelation records for us the history of the church in the world from the time of Christ’s first coming to the time of His second coming—it spans the millennium (and



that in each of the seven sections)! Thus, Revelation is church history. It is the history of the church. It is the story of the church. It is your story. You are not mere spectators in the arena, watching the events unfold before your eyes, you are participants in the action. You are in the book! You are in the text! John has given the church seven snapshots, as it were, each recording the history of the church as she lives in the midst of the world between Christ's first coming and His return.

Furthermore, it must be noted that these seven parallel sections are not merely repetitions of one another; there is movement from section to section. Each section records for us the same history, but with increasing detail and vividness. In comparing chapters 1-3 with chapters 4-7, we should expect that chapters 4-7 would be that much more detailed; much more vivid; and that chapters 4-7 would heighten the drama. And indeed, they do. If you thought chapters 1-3 were intense, wait till you read chapters 4-7! The progressive nature of these seven parallel sections has the effect of propelling the reader forward.

Chapter 4 begins the second section of the book (chapters 4-7). This new section opens with the words "After these things..." While these words indicate a chronology in terms of the visions (John sees the vision of chapters 4-7 only after he sees the vision of chapters 1-3), they do not indicate a chronology in terms of the events recorded in those visions (as if the events in chapters 4-7 can occur only after the events of chapters 1-3). All these words mean is that a new vision is in view, and that John sees

this vision after the vision of chapters 1-3.

There are connections between Chapters 1-3 and Chapters 4-7 indicating that they are dealing with the same reality, albeit from a different angle. There is the voice of Christ, like the sound of a trumpet in chapter 1:10; and His voice like the sound of the trumpet again in 4:1. There are the seven spirits of God in 3:1 and again in 4:5 and in

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5:6. There are the saints seated on the throne in 3:21 and they are seated on the throne again in 4:4. There are the saints with their crowns in 2:10 and 3:11 and again in 4:4. All of this imagery connects the two sections together, suggesting that indeed, they are covering the same period of time.

Note still further two other connections between these sections: first, the imagery of the door. In chapter 3:20 we read, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me." Now in chapter 4:1 that door appears once again: "After these things I looked,

and behold, a door standing open in heaven..." The imagery of the door connects these sections together.

Let me remind you of what we said concerning this door: many have taken these words as an evangelistic text in which Christ is standing at the door of the sinner, pleading and weeping that the sinner will just open the door so that Christ may come in and save him. But that misses the point altogether! In the first place this verse is not addressed to the unbeliever, it is addressed to the church. In fact, it is not even so much addressed to the church in general, but specifically to God's elect within the church. It is important to note that the verse follows on the heels of verse 3:19, where Jesus speaks of those whom He loves, and whom He chastens out of that love in order to bring them back to Himself.

But Jesus says, "If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door..." True enough. But who are the ones that hear Jesus' voice? Jesus tells us in the gospel of John, "my sheep hear my voice!" Who are the ones that hear the voice of Jesus and actually open the door? They are the elect of God, the sheep of the Good Shepherd, those whose hearts have been regenerated—those in whom God has created not only the ability to believe, but the belief itself. Far from being an evangelistic text which pictures a weak, powerless, and weeping Savior, these words are a profound statement of the communion that exists between Christ and His own, between the Good Shepherd and his sheep.

While the same door is in view here in chapter 4:1, we learn here that that door leads to the throne—that

What is set before us here in Revelation 4 is nothing less than the very throne room of the living and holy God! Heaven itself is being unveiled before us!

throne which, in turn, also connects chapters 1-3 with chapters 4-7. We read in 3:21, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” We read in 4:2, “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”

What is set before us here in Revelation 4 is nothing less than the very throne room of the living and holy God! Heaven itself is being unveiled before us! We are allowed a glimpse into the very throne room of God in heaven! The door is “in heaven.” The throne is “in heaven.” Heaven is being opened before our eyes! The skies are being rolled back like a scroll. The voice of Christ sounds forth like a trumpet. Heaven is opened, and we are allowed a glimpse into heavenly reality. There is a throne in heaven, and One sits upon that throne—the throne is not vacant—God sits upon the throne.

John is ushered up into heaven, into the very council chambers of God, even as the prophets of old. John sees the Holy and Living God sitting upon His throne. And what happens to John? He is transformed, brought from death to life, as it were! The last time we saw John was in 1:17, where, having seen the vision of the risen and glorious Christ standing in the midst of the lampstands, John fell down at His

feet as dead. And now in 4:1, Christ speaks again, and says, “Come up here!” Christ commands John to ascend into heaven. Do you see what has happened? John, appearing like a dead man in 1:17, now ascends into heaven in 4:1. Do you understand what has happened? John has been transformed. He has been transformed by the Word of Christ—that Word spoken from 1:17b through 3:22.

Significantly, that Word is connected with the Spirit in 4:2: “Immediately I was in the Spirit...” The Spirit in and through the Word transformed John, literally giving him eyes to see. John cannot see the throne unless he is given the eyes to see by the Spirit in and through the Word. John cannot see the One sitting on the throne unless he is given eyes to see by the Spirit in and through the Word. John must be transformed by the Spirit in and through the Word.

It is the same Spirit, working in and through the Word, that must transform you. Do you see how this text draws you in? John says, “I looked, and behold!” He wants you to see what he saw! Behold, a door standing open in heaven! Behold, a throne set in heaven! You are drawn into the text by the Spirit that He might transform you through the Word.

In that light we see that the symbolism of this book serves a purpose;

it is intended to draw us into the drama, that we might find our life in the text. As a case in point, consider Revelation 4:1-2, which speaks of the sovereignty of God and of Him as our inheritance. Now John could have written exactly that. He could have written, “God is sovereign, and He is your inheritance.” But that is not how the Holy Spirit communicates the truth to you. Instead, He has John write, “I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven....behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.” The very language itself, inspired as it is, draws us into the drama.

What is set before you in Revelation 4 is the throne room of the living and holy God. It is set before you as your inheritance. There is a God in the heavens—a God who sits on the throne—a God who is sovereign over all, and this God is your inheritance! The remainder of Revelation 4-7, with its throne-room scene in chapters 4-5, and its opening of the seals in chapters 6-7, will set before us, and that in the most vivid of terms, the sovereignty of God in accomplishing and securing the redemption of His people, even placing them in heaven itself ever to behold his glory!

To that glory, we’ll give our attention next time, as we begin to consider the throne room of God.

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Federation or Fragmentation

To fragment or federate? That is the question. Do we have any union as the church universal? Is there any mutual accountability in the URCNA? Are we a group constantly seeking to fragment along local church boundaries or are our local churches within actual federated borders? Are local churches seeking nothing more than counsel and advice or do we actually submit to one another? Is there any authority in the decisions of a classis or synod or is everything they do nothing more than a committee of pre-advice for the local church?

These questions become more pointed when office bearers question the legitimate authority of Synod - authority rooted in union with Christ and our common commitment to submit to one another. The practical implications of this unity are seen in our agreement with the three forms of unity and our agreement to order our ecclesiastical relations as local church in conformity with the Church Order adopted by common consent. We have federated together in these ways. Declarations made by several offices bearers on the floor of Synod and in an article in the July 12, 2004 issue of the *Christian Renewal* entitled "Reflections on URC Synod 2004" and written by Rev. John Bowers concerning the nature of a decision of the United Reformed Church's Synod 2004 threatens this unity.

The History

Classis Western Canada stated at its meeting in 2000, "The confessions exclude non-professing mem-

bers from participating in the Lord's Supper". After much discussion Classis Western Canada in 2003 defended its 2000 decision:

This decision is not an 'extra-confessional' statement that somehow has special status alongside of our confessions. It is rather an affirmation of the Confessions themselves on a specific point of their teaching. Therefore, agreement with the teaching of our Confessions as recognized and affirmed by classis has a direct bearing on Confessional subscription. Any candidates or office bearers who cannot affirm what classis has affirmed regarding the Confessions on this point cannot properly subscribe to the Three Forms of unity (minutes, Classis Western Canada, Article 34).

The response to this declaration was an appeal. "The Consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grand Prairie, Alberta, appeals to Synod Calgary 2004 to declare that Classis Western Canada Spring 2003 (Salem) erred in adopting its statement regarding the advice given to Mr. Gallant (Minutes, Art. 34) and that this statement is there-

fore not binding on the churches or office bearers" (Agenda for Synod 2004, p. 26).

Synod 2004 heard the appeal. Synod 2004 did not sustain the appeal. By not sustaining the appeal Synod affirmed the work of Classis. Synod affirmed the conclusion of Classis Western Canada that those affirming paedocommunion are outside our confessional boundaries. Synod 2004 affirmed that a profession of faith is necessary for participation in the Lord's Supper according to Scripture and our confessions. If words have any meaning, then this means that anyone holding to paedocommunion believes a teaching that is at odds with the confessions.

Sometime after Synod failed to sustain this appeal, four ministers and an elder asked for a "point of personal privilege". They said, "With respect to the adjudication of an appeal, the deliberations and conclusions of a broader assembly are to be understood as specific to the particular appeal in question. Such conclusions do not necessarily and automatically thereby become the *de facto* position of the broader assembly (Synod afternoon session, June 18, 2004).

This was not a point of personal privilege; it was a judicial declaration about the nature of Synod's decision. This "point of personal

Synod affirmed the conclusion of Classis Western Canada that those affirming paedocommunion are outside our confessional boundaries.

privilege” was “excised” from the minutes of Synod.

Church Order Article 29

I had several reasons voting in favor of the motion to excise this statement. First, it addressed the issue in an unordered manner. The men should have immediately made their point, or at least received permission from the chair to formulate a position. I have exercised the right to register my negative vote with comment several times in my years in the Christian Reformed Church. But this always took place as part of the vote. The second point is much more significant. I voted to excise this point of personal privilege because it restricted the significance of the work of Synod and our federated unity. If the URCNA adheres to this perspective in the context of an appeal about the teaching of the confessions we will fragment our federated unity. This perspective ignores and contradicts Church Order Article 29 of the URCNA.

Church Order Article 29 of the URCNA already addresses the significance of appeals and the decision of a broader assembly:

If any assembly complains of having been wronged by the decision of another assembly, it shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies. An individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly. All decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they

are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. Consistories who are convinced that they cannot comply with a decision of a broader assembly because it does not agree with the Word of God cannot be compelled to do so, provided that they state to the classis the point at which the decision of the assembly disagrees with the Word of God. If a Consis-

In the URCNA you cannot sign the form of subscription if you do not believe there must be a profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper.

tory refuses to comply with the final decision of the synod and a subsequent synod rules by majority vote that submission in the matter is essential to the unity of the churches, the congregation is no longer eligible for membership in the federation (Church Order URCNA, Article 29).

In the present case the appeal went to Synod from a consistory, not an individual. Synod is the broader assembly that has made a decision about the teaching of the confessions that is settled and binding and should be received with respect and submission. Classis Western

Canada and Synod 2004 declared that the Three Forms of Unity confessing Biblical truth require a credible profession prior to participation in the Lord's Supper. The implications are clear for the federation. No local church can submit a candidate to the ministry and no classis can give concurring advice for candidacy to a man believing in paedocommunion. In the URCNA you cannot sign the form of subscription if you do not believe there must be a profession of faith prior to participation in the Lord's Supper.

The Options

The consistory of Covenant Reformed Church, Grand Prairie, legitimately brought their appeal to Synod. They gave their reasons for disagreeing with Classis Western Canada's decision. Now, the Grand Prairie church has several options consistent with the Church Order. First, she can “receive the decision of Synod 2004 with respect and submission” (Church Order Art. 29). Second, if they are convinced they cannot comply with Synod's decision and desire to remain a part of the federation they need to openly communicate to their Classis their desire to remain and the points at which they believe the decision of Synod does not agree with the Word of God. This public statement then becomes the basis on which a subsequent synod can rule by a majority vote whether submission in this matter is either essential or not essential for the federated unity of the churches.

If Grand Prairie URC refuses to submit and a subsequent synod votes that submission is essential for the unity of the federation then



Covenant Reformed Church of Grand Prairie will no longer be eligible for membership in the federation. Third, because Covenant Reformed Church of Grand Prairie already availed herself of the avenue of appeal, she can by a decision of her consistory withdraw from the federation by submitting a written statement to Classis Western Canada (Church Order Article 30).

The Scope

However, the church order does not just address the consistory that has initially brought the appeal. It addresses all consistories when it states, "Consistories who are convinced that they cannot comply with a decision of a broader assembly". The decisions of the broadest assembly apply to the whole federation. This includes the final decision of Synod 2004 not to sustain the appeal of Grand Prairie. This is a "final decision" of Synod 2004. For a local church or minister to declare outside the ecclesiastical structure already noted that this decision of Synod does not apply to them is a breach of our federated unity. I did not personally hear any reason they must do this and hope they remain a part of our federation.

If any local church understands that a final decision of Synod misinterprets the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity her consistory must declare this to the federation. If a local church has not yet appealed the matter, they must either appeal the matter or declare their non-conformity to their classis. Again, this declaration becomes the basis for either leaving the federation or a subsequent Synod's authority to determine if

the matter is necessary to federated unity. But no local consistory or office bearer has the right to declare this final decision of Synod "non-operative." Such a declaration ignores the church order.

There is legitimate concern about the power of a denominational bureaucracy in our history. However, there is also the clear historical reality of a so-called unity of local churches that totally ignores the confessions and church order that

For a local church or minister to declare that this decision of Synod does not apply to them is a breach of our federated unity.

are the basis of true unity. In the Christian Reformed Church a church order had been adopted that local churches chose to ignore depending on what they thought was right in their own eyes. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1995 decided to allow any local church to declare inoperative the church order article relating to only males serving in office. Declaring the church order "inoperative" became an approved action by the Synod itself contrary to the church order. Local churches in many denominations choose what they will or will not follow in their supposed unity with other federated churches.

The perspective advocated by this

point of personal privilege is no different. It encourages local churches to do whatever they want. Some of us left the Christian Reformed Church for a federated union of integrity. We desire a federation that respects synodical "final decisions", has a common understanding of the Three Forms of Unity and honors the church order. To declare this appeal about the nature of the confessions as applying only to the specific situation encourages local churches to ignore the church order, redefine the confessions and do what is right in their own eyes. Federation in conformity with our present church order is what ought to be practiced, not such fragmentation.

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Presbyterian Federal Holiness

Under the Old Testament administration of the Covenant of Grace, the covenant was largely a *physical* covenant with a spiritual remnant imbibing in promises and blessings. Under the New Testament administration of the Covenant of Grace, the covenant is not primarily *physical* with a *spiritual* component, but primarily *spiritual* with a *physical* component (Hodge 130). Hebrews 8 and Jeremiah 31 are very descriptive as to the nature of the New Covenant in contrast with the *status quo*,

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and

I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Obviously there was a change of administration in the New Covenant as well as a change of emphasis. The Covenant of Grace today is so overtly *spiritual*; one can almost speak of it exclusively in ethereal terms. Indeed the Westminster Confession of Faith does so by insisting that the Covenant of Grace is made with the *elect only* (Chapter 7; LC 30, 31, 32). Yet the Westminster Standards also speak of a *secondary* and subordinate *sense* of the Covenant of Grace that is objective and physical. Larger Catechism Q & A 166 says,

Q: Unto whom is Baptism to be administered?

A: Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, *are in that respect within the covenant*, and to be baptized. [Emphasis mine] (Westminster Larger Catechism, 256).

Some have contended that the Westminster Larger Catechism holds within itself a tension regarding with whom the Covenant of Grace is made (Baldwin). It is argued that in Larger Catechism Q & A 31, the Covenant of Grace is made with the *elect only*, while Q & A 166 teaches that the Covenant of Grace is made with the members of the *Visible Church*. One can see the apparent contradiction.

But is this a valid criticism and a real tension? Or is it the case that the Larger Catechism is speaking about two different *aspects* of the Covenant of Grace, one spiritual and unbreakable, the other conditional and breakable? To answer this question we may turn to one of the greatest of all Westminster Divines, Samuel Rutherford.

In his monumental and rarely read book *The Covenant of Life Opened* (1654), Rutherford discusses the Covenant of Grace in two important ways. First he insists that the Covenant of Grace is only made with the elect in Christ, and that the Covenant is manifestly to be understood in such terms (94). After establishing this indisputable fact, Rutherford opens up the Covenant in a twofold way; first *in abstracto* by visible profession, in which the covenant is “professed, visible, and conditional,” and then *in concreto*, where the covenant is, “internal, real, and absolute” (94). It is for this

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reason Rutherford finds no tension in the Larger Catechism and has no problem saying that the unregenerate, in one way, are in the Covenant of Grace:

It is no inconvenient [sic] that the Reprobate in the Visible Church, be so under the Covenant of Grace, as some promises are made to them, and some promised to them conditionally, and some reserved special promises, of a new heart, and of perseverance belong not to them. For all the promises belong not the same way, to the parties visibly and externally, and the parties internally and personally in Covenant with God. (94)

By *in abstracto* Rutherford means, “formally, in the letter as a simple way of saving sinners”, in which contains only “*the will of precept*”. Rutherford argues for an external and breakable Covenant that is made by baptism and profession only. This is not the true *spiritual, real, and unbreakable* Covenant of Grace; it is a temporary perceptive membership that is not *savingly* covenantal (94).

Under the marginal heading, “How visible professors are really within the Covenant, & not really within it”, Rutherford Writes,

The adverb (really) relates to the real fruit of the fulfilled covenant, and so such as are only externally within the Covenant, are not really within the Covenant, for God never directed, nor intended to bestow the blessing Covenanted, nor grace to

perform the condition of the Covenant upon them. But they are really Covenanted and engaged by their confessed profession to fulfill the Covenant. And as the commands and threatenings of the Covenant of Grace lay on a real obligation, upon such as are only externally in Covenant, either to obey or suffer, so the promises of the Covenant imposes an engagement and obligation on such to believe the promise, but some times, we say the promises of the Covenant of

Federal holiness is not necessarily a saving holiness but a setting apart by covenant promise.

Grace are not *really* made to the reprobate within the Visible Church, because God intends and decrees to, and for them, neither the blessing promised, nor the saving grace to fulfill the condition to believe. (92)

In this way says Rutherford, “all within the Visible Church are in the Covenant of Grace” (94). It is in this same way Rutherford can speak of a Federal Holiness that allows for Larger Catechism 166 to remain non-contradictory with Larger Catechism 31. Federal holiness is not *necessarily* a saving holiness but a setting apart by covenant promise. Rutherford is very clear that true

holiness while set in the context of a federal promise, is truly predicated upon God’s *secret decree*. Observe:

But as touching real holiness, it is not derived from a believing father, or to make the son a believer, Scripture and experience say the contraire. Nor is internal and effectual confederacie with God, that, by which one is a son of promise. 1. For no man is chosen to life in his father, because the father is chosen. A chosen father may have a reprobate son. 2. Election to life is not of nations, or houses, or societies, but of single person. (85)

Needless to say, Rutherford believes that mere Federal Holiness is no true holiness unless regeneration has taken place. Yes, there is a physical aspect to the Covenant of Grace which has blessings and cursing; however, for it to carry any lasting benefit, it must be a *personal* work wrought by the effectual converting power of the Holy Spirit in a one-to-one correlation between election and regeneration.

James Bannerman

Another great Presbyterian who wrote extensively on the nature of the Church (and the Covenant) also found no tension in the Westminster Standard’s regarding the Covenant of Grace. In his two volume work, *The Church of Christ*, James Bannerman, taught an important contrast between the members of the Church visible and invisible. “The Church invisible stands, with respect to its members, in an inward and spiritual relationship to Christ, whereas the Church visible stands

to Him in outward relationship only” (Bannerman 29).

The visible/invisible distinction according to Bannerman cannot go unnoticed. Observe how he uses *visible Church* and *external covenant* synonymously.

The external relationship in which the members of the visible Church stand to Christ, as having been brought into a Church state from out of the world, has been often spoken of by theologians under the name of an external covenant or federal relationship. Whatever name may be given to it, there is no doubt there is a real and important relationship into which the members of the visible Church have entered... (30)

Later he reinforces this same idea when he states, “This relation of the mere formal professor and member of the visible Church to Christ may be called an *external covenant and an outward federal union*, or not. But under whatever name, *it is important to bear in mind that there is such a relationship* involving both real responsibilities and real privileges. (Emphasis mine)(32)

Bannerman is equally clear as Rutherford insisting the true, vital, saving, unbreakable nature of the Covenant of Grace as it stands in eternity, is made with the elect alone.

In so far as the Church invisible is concerned, the truth of this statement will be admitted by all. There can be no difference of opinion on this point. The proper party with

whom the covenant of grace is made, and to whom its promises and privileged belongs is the invisible Church of real believers. It is this Church for whom Christ died. (30-31)

He goes on to say, “The case is all together different for with the visible Church. It stands not in an inward and saving relationship to Christ, but in an outward relationship only, involving no more than the

The spiritual blessings and promises of the Covenant of Grace must be the dominant theme in all federalist teaching and preaching.

promise and enjoyment of outward privileges” (31).

In this regard, to suggest that the Covenant of Grace has a *works component* upon its entry is to misunderstand its function entirely. Every good Presbyterian will agree that salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from any works of the law. This *federal* and outward separation that is called “sanctified” and “holy” in 1 Corinthians 7:14, “broken off branches” in John 15:1-8, and “unwise virgins” in Matthew 25, is meant to convey how God sets aside certain people to be objects of physical, covenantal blessings. These outward bless-

ings (which *are not saving*), such as hearing the Word preached, observing or participating in the sacraments, and involvement in the fellowship of the covenant community, are the *means* by which God brings the unregenerate soul within earshot of the call of the Gospel; inviting all to come from darkness to light; from the *temporal* covenant into the Everlasting Covenant. Bannerman says, “To the external privileges of that visible society even sinners are invited,- not that they may rest there, but that they may go on to the invisible and spiritual society within.” The visible covenant blessings are meant to cause the sinner to “seek for something higher and more blessed” (33).

The spiritual blessings and promises of the Covenant of Grace must be the dominant theme in all *federalist* teaching and preaching. Bannerman reminds us that in the separation between Rome and Protestantism, the visible/invisible Church distinction, “...lies at the very foundation of the controversy between them. The strong desire and tenancy with Popish controversialists is to deny the existence of the invisible Church; or when they are not bold enough to do that, at least to give the decided precedence to the Church visible”(37).

This should be avoided at all costs. The invisible Church is the *true Church*, it is the “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

Conclusion

When we speak of Federal Holiness it should always be in light of



Classis Southwest U.S. Report

URCNA

For us Californians, it was a rare sight to see so much snow on the mountains east of Ontario, California; even rarer was the fact that Classis only took one day to finish its business. The fourteenth meeting of Classis Southwest U.S. (URCNA) was hosted by its oldest church, the Ontario URC. The seventeen churches of Classis assembled to examine a man for candidacy, deal with an overture, an appeal, as well as several items of advice for several churches, all while being chaired by the very humble and wise Rev. Mr. David Bosch of the Calvary URC of Loveland, Colorado.

Most of the day was taken up by the candidacy examination of Mr. Jody Lucero, a graduate of Westminster Seminary California and member of the Oceanside URC. Mr. Lucero has been working under the oversight of the Covenant URC in Pella, Iowa in their church plant near Des Moines. Mr. Lucero showed a mastery of all areas of the examination and is now eligible to be declared a candidate for the ministry by his consistory.

The third mark of the church was also on the agenda as the delegates gave their advice to a consistory to proceed to the second public step of church discipline, as well as dealt with an ongoing appeal and an overture related to that appeal. For this, the chairman offered prayer that the Lord would resolve this matter and bring peace to the church.

The work of the federation as a whole was on the minds of the delegates as Classis delegated the Rev. Mr. Daniel R. Hyde and the Rev. Mr. Gary Findley as its representative and alternate, respectively, to the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.

Finally, the ongoing work of church planting within the Classis was reported. The now organized High Desert URC (Apple Valley, CA) sent its delegates for the first time. The work of the Christ URC (Santee, CA), pastored by the Rev. Mr. Michael Brown and under the supervision of the Escondido URC continues to thrive. Morning attendance is around 100 as people from all over San Diego drive to hear Christ proclaimed. News that the Zion URC (Ripon, CA) has called the Rev. Mr. Jason Tuinstra as church planter for the Immanuel URC (Lemoore, CA) was given with joy, while the difficulties of church planting were relayed as the URC of the Magic Valley (Twin Falls, ID) is struggling and the Redeemer URC (Sparks, NV) is no longer meeting for worship.

The next meeting of Classis will be hosted by the Pasadena URC from June 21-22, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Daniel R. Hyde, Clerk

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Remembering God's Servant: Rev. John H. Piersma

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Phil. 1:21

by Glenda Mathes

On December 17, 2004, God called to glory Rev. John H. Piersma. His gain is great loss to his family, to his church family, and to the greater Reformed community.

Had he lived another week and a day, Rev. Piersma would have been 88 on Christmas. For 62 of those years, he was a husband to his dear wife, Genevieve; and for 57 of those years, he pastored ten different Reformed congregations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Alberta.

John Piersma and Genevieve Scholtens met while attending the Grand Rapids Christian High School. They were married on June 19, 1942, at the Alpine Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids. God brought into their home two children: John and Jane.

Rev. Piersma studied theology and philosophy at Calvin College. He received seminary training under Herman Hoeksema and Samuel Volbeda, graduating from Protestant Reformed Seminary in 1943 and from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1947.

In 1947, Rev. Piersma began his ministry in Oostburg, WI, with Cornelius Van Til participating in his ordination service. In 1949, Rev. Piersma was called to the Franklin

Street CRC of Grand Rapids, MI, and to the Oakdale Park CRC of Grand Rapids in 1953. In 1956, he accepted the call to Second CRC in Edmonton, AB. In 1960, a call from Grandville Avenue CRC brought him back to Grand Rapids.

He served the First CRC in Pella, IA, from 1964 until a 1969 call brought him to Bethany CRC in South Holland, IL. He returned to Iowa in 1977 and served First CRC in Sioux Center until 1981, when he was called to Pleasant Street CRC in Whitinsville, MA. He retired in 1984, but remained active by serving as an Industrial Chaplain for Van Com Corporation in Elmhurst, IL. In recent years, Rev. Piersma ministered to Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Pella, IA, during two vacancies and currently as an associate pastor.

His comprehensive training and life experience, combined with his natural acuteness, contributed to his ability to discourse on nearly any subject with nearly anyone. He could relate well to people of all ages, chatting about sports figures with a youth, discussing the latest theological controversy with an adult, or bringing the timeless comfort of the gospel to a shut-in.

The earthly tent of Rev. John H. Piersma was laid to rest on Tuesday, December 21, 2004. At the



funeral service, Covenant Reformed's Pastor Patrick Edouard read the doxology found in verses 28-39 of Romans 8. He noted that Rev. Piersma's interest and activity in the wider Reformed community was "truly catholic" in character, transcending denominational lines. Using Revelation 14:13, Rev. Edouard stressed the importance of living a fruitful life and dying in the Lord, as Rev. Piersma had done.

Rev. Piersma never requested to be remembered with flowery eulogies or inflated praise. His only desire was to be remembered as a servant of God.

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“**Dick Wunnink**” will explain the spiritual warfare of the Islam religion. You may recall the very popular series of articles about the Islam faith by this same author back in 2002.

Pastor Jeff Doll will contrast some current ways of looking at spiritual warfare with the approach of John Calvin.

Rev. Rich Kuiken will finish up his series of articles on *The Riches of the Reformed Faith*. These articles are being made available as a series of sermons by the church where Rev. Kuiken is pastor. Contact them at (973) 835-4784 for more details.

Rev. Russell St. John will provide a history of monasticism and why the Reformed tradition has rejected that philosophy.

Rev. Daniel Hyde and **Rev. Brian Vos** will continue their series of articles on the Belgic Confession and the Book of Revelation, respectively.

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