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The Kingdom Demands Complete Devotion

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. – Matthew 13:44-46 (ESV)

Have you ever had a Bible text reach out and smack you? If you have, you know what I mean: you are reading along, peaceful and quiet, when it hits you – WHACK! A passage you never really pondered, or that you thought you understood perfectly, suddenly presents itself in an entirely new light.

That happened to me a few months ago. (OK, it happens quite often, but this time was really memorable.)

I was preaching a series on the parables recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew devoted whole sections to recording these unique stories, and with good cause. It was by means of these parables that Jesus taught the precious secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven in a way that those chosen to know might understand, while the rest would hear the words yet lose the message (see Matthew 13:10-17).

Preaching through these parables was a great delight. The treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven are rich indeed! The series of sermons gave me the opportunity to explore those treasures one at a time – bringing them out to marvel at them, one by one. Some of the parables were quite a task to interpret; others offered relatively minor challenges. But the text that gave me the greatest surprise comprised the pair of parables recorded in Matthew 13:44-46.

I had done due diligence with the text. I started with the Greek, scrutinized the grammar, examined the time and environment. I wrote my theme and points, pondered the applications, outlined my sermon, revised it – the works. For all in-



Volume 55, No.7 (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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tents and purposes, the sermon was ready to go.

I turned to the text after supper on Saturday evening. Our family generally reads and discusses the Scripture reading for our devotional Saturday evening as a way of preparing our hearts to hear God's Word and to rightly respond to it on the Lord's Day. I opened to Matthew 13, started reading at verse 44, and then – WHACK! It hit me. Half of my sermon was wrong. I knew it before I finished reading the text. It sent me back to the study – where I remained until the wee hours of Sunday morning re-thinking and re-writing (and drinking copious quantities of coffee!).

I had gotten the first half of the sermon mostly right. Even my theme was appropriate. In this text, Jesus uses the idea of *priceless treasure* to teach His disciples that *The Treasure of the Kingdom Demands Complete Devotion*.

The First Parable

The first of these two parables, found in Matthew 13:44, shows that the treasure of the Kingdom demands complete devotion *By Those Who Find It*.

That is a pretty clear lesson from the text, isn't it? Jesus does not even let us get bogged down with unnecessary details.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up.”

What sort of man? A farmer? A drifter? A shepherd? A craftsman? Dunno – not important. Well, what was he doing out in the field? Was he plowing, or looking for lost live-

stock, or just poking around his neighbor's business? Dunno – not important.

OK, what sort of treasure was it? How was it hidden? Who buried it, and when? Was it in the open, or did he have to really dig around to find it? Again – not important enough for Jesus to tell us.

Jesus did not want His disciples getting bogged down in those unimportant details, because the message was not *in* those details. The message was right up on the surface, for all to see.

This man finds *treasure* – unexpected riches. Whatever it was, it was precious – precious enough to lead the man to sell, literally, “as much as he had” in order to buy the field. You do not do that lightly! It is not something one does with the expectation of receiving back only what was sold, or just a 10 or 15 percent return. One does not divest himself of all he possesses unless the return is *immense* and *certain*.

And it must be, for the man's joy is irrepressible. The sight of that treasure has *enraptured* the man – and he is willing to do *whatever it takes* to obtain that treasure for himself.

It is pretty easy to see the message that parable has for us, isn't it? The Kingdom of Heaven is like that treasure – an amazing find that is hidden from most of the world. It is not something for which we natu-

rally go looking. But when we *do* find it – I mean, truly *find* it, recognizing it for what it *is* – we can not help but be *enraptured*. It ought to fill us with such joy that we are willing to do *anything* to obtain that Kingdom as our own inheritance.

In Luke 14:26, Jesus tells the crowds, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Our devotion to Him must be so great that our love for even those nearest and dearest to us must be as *hatred* compared to our love for Him.

And again, He says in Luke 14:33, “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

For those who have not seen the treasure, these demands are far too great. The price is too high! But for those who have stumbled upon the treasure, the Holy Spirit allowing them to recognize it for what it is ... why, their joy is so great that they will renounce *everything* – as much as they have! – to obtain that great treasure for themselves. They *must*. They *cannot do otherwise!!*

The Second Parable

And then we come to the second parable; the second half of the text. When I first looked to this second parable, the similarities were so ...

I opened to Matthew 13, started reading at verse 44, and then – WHACK! It hit me. Half of my sermon was wrong.

well, *similar*, that I presumed that the message must lie in the *differences*. After all, both parables feature a *man* who finds *treasure* which leads him to *sell all* in order to *obtain* the treasure. In these elements, they appear to be essentially identical.

So I sought out the significance of the differences: what was found (a treasure, versus a pearl) and who was the finder (a man unexpectedly stumbling upon a treasure, versus a man seeking out a pearl). This, it seemed to me, might represent the difference between those from outside the Covenant community and those from within the Covenant community. Those outside do not seek, while those inside have more knowledge of what is needful. But that is not what Jesus is trying to teach us here!

Look again at verses 45-46: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

In the first parable, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a *treasure*. In the second parable, the Kingdom of Heaven is like ... a pearl? *No!* The Kingdom of Heaven is like the *merchant!* In this second parable, the point of contact is entirely different.

Here we have a merchant – literally, “one who travels about” seeking sellable goods. In this case, he is seeking out pearls, which in those days, before pearl farming and SCUBA gear, were among the most precious of all the gems. He was looking not just for pearls, but for *fine* pearls – truly high-quality merchandise. And he who seeks, finds.

But he does not find *pearls*; he finds *a* pearl. It is described as having “great value” – a gem of truly rare excellence. And like the finder of the treasure in the field, he sells “all – as much as he had” to purchase the pearl.

Now, this is *not* common business practice. A seasoned merchant would go to such lengths to purchase a single pearl only if it was a specimen of indescribable value.

But that pearl is *not* the Kingdom, nor are *we* the merchant! Are we to think ourselves *seekers* after the Kingdom – eager to seek what is

***On our own, we
wouldn't know a
pearl from a
peanut.***

good, or even *able*, on our own, to discern the good from the bad? Of course not! On our own, we wouldn't know a pearl from a peanut.

Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like the *merchant*. It is the *Kingdom* that seeks and finds. It is the Kingdom that, having found, sacrifices and buys. It is the *Kingdom* that discerns and desires.

And we are the *pearl!*

But surely not. Surely we could never be described as a pearl of great price. We are not pearls, but *worms*, pulled graciously and undeservingly from the slime of our

sins. How could we be likened to pearls? Unthinkable.

Except that God has said otherwise. In fact, “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And so, Peter tells us, we “were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [our] forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Do we grasp the *weight* of what God has told us? Jesus, who is in very nature *God*, humbled Himself to be born of a woman – yes, and even to be born in a *stable!* He who is by nature holy, lowered Himself to eating and drinking with sinners – tax collectors and prostitutes! He who lived perfectly suffered unspeakable indignity and then submitted Himself to the death that constituted a *curse*.

And He did it to redeem *us!*

He did it to purchase His treasure – selling all, as much as He had, that He who *brings* the Kingdom might *purchase* the rich treasure of the Kingdom's inhabitants: you and me, and all who call on God through faith in Christ.

Complete Devotion

The Treasure of the Kingdom demands the complete devotion of those who *find* it. Though it was unseen & unsought, their eyes miraculously and suddenly are opened, and their joy at finding such a rich treasure is so great that they are willing – they *must* be willing – to sell all in order to obtain it!

But the treasure of the Kingdom also demands the complete devotion of Him who *brought* it. For He regarded the inhabitants of the Kingdom as being of such worth that they were worthy of *complete* sacrifice – even death on the cross.

Amazing grace – amazing grace indeed!

The treasure of the Kingdom demands complete devotion. Let us pray that He would create in us that joy-filled devotion to which He calls us – for such is the only right response of those who have received the gift of *Christ's* devotion on our behalf.

Rev. Doug Barnes is the Pastor of the Hills United Reformed Church in Hills, Minnesota.

The House of Herod

The New Testament is replete with references to various men called Herod. A king named Herod was ruling in Jerusalem when Jesus was born. This Herod ordered the murder of the baby boys of Bethlehem in an attempt to snuff out the life of the Christ child. Matthew makes a cryptic reference also to this Herod's son, Archelaus. Who was he? Luke records the machinations of a man called Herod Antipas, who imprisoned and beheaded John the Baptist. Moreover, another Herod, who also was called a king, arrested and murdered the apostle James, and also tried to murder Peter.

Who were these men, and how many Herods are spoken of in Scripture? Why were some of them kings and others tetrarchs? How could anyone serve as king in Judea when Roman governors ruled Judea during Jesus' earthly ministry and during Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea? The answer to these questions begins at the close of the Old Testament, and traces the lives of the men who comprised the house of Herod.

Between the Books

When the Jews returned from exile, they settled in Judea under the authority of the Persian Empire. After the close of the Old Testament, but before the coming of John the Baptist, four hundred years passed. During that time Alexander the Great and his army of Greeks and Macedonians swept over much of the known world. When Alexander died, his kingdom was divided under the rule of four

of his generals. After years of fighting with each other, two empires emerged, the Ptolemaic in Egypt and the Seleucid in Syria. Judea came under Seleucid dominion.

In the second century before Christ, a particularly ruthless Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, desecrated the Temple at Jerusalem and enacted a series of laws that forbade the practice of Judaism. Led by a family called the Hasmoneans, the Jews revolted. A Hasmonean named Judas proved to be a brilliant general and, being skilled at guerilla warfare, earned the nickname, Maccabee, which means, the Hammer. Several Hasmonean brothers led the Jews through decades of conflict, and Judea ultimately won independence.

Antipater & the Rise of Rome

Nearly eighty years after Judea succeeded in casting off Seleucid rule, the remains of the Seleucid Empire finally crumbled. The Roman Empire, which was expanding eastward, occupied Syria, reorganizing it into a Roman province.

At the same time, struggles for power were consuming the Judean kingdom. A crafty Idumean named Antipater manipulated one of the young princes contending for the Jewish throne. Antipater realized that the future lay with Rome and invited the Roman general Pompey, who had just completed the conquest of Syria, to come to Judea to mediate a dispute between

Herod the Great was a crafty political figure who, through good sense and loyalty, had won the confidence of the Romans.

two factions within the Judean royal house. After failing to win Pompey's support, the losing faction revolted, initiating the beginnings of a civil war. Pompey intervened and, much to Antipater's delight, forcibly occupied Judea in 63BC, adding it to the Roman province of Syria. The brief Hasmonean Kingdom was ended and Rome controlled Judea.

Antipater worked diligently to prove himself a useful ally of Rome. Rome rewarded him with citizenship, gave him the title, procurator, which was an office roughly equivalent to that of a regional governor. Rome granted Antipater permission to begin rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which Pompey had torn down.

Years of political intrigue finally caught up to him, however, and in 43 BC Antipater was assassinated. He had, nevertheless, trained his sons well, and thus Phasael and Herod continued their father's policies and cooperated with Rome.

In 40 BC armies of the Parthian Empire overran Judea and Syria. Phasael was captured and executed. Herod fled to Rome. In Rome, Herod appealed to the Senate which, upon recognizing his loyalty and usefulness, declared him King of Judea and Samaria. Supported by the armies of Rome, Herod set out to reconquer Jerusalem. After three years the task was done and Herod began to reign

as king in 37 BC. This is the Herod who is known as Herod the Great.

Herod the Great

Herod the Great was a crafty political figure who, through good sense and loyalty, had won the confidence of the Romans. Of half-Jewish Idumean lineage, Herod was familiar with Judea's political landscape and ruled effectively for Rome as a satellite king for over thirty years.

Herod the Great helped rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem; created the artificial harbor at Caesarea, which was an architectural wonder of the ancient world; and helped to secure reduced taxes and freedom of religion for his Jewish subjects. It was, however, this same Herod who attempted to murder the Christ child by ordering the execution of the sons of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16). Herod's career of building and murdering and scheming came to an end when he died in 4 BC.

Not unlike many other kings, Herod the Great had wed many women over the course of his reign and had fathered several sons from which to choose an heir. He was, however, a brutal and paranoid man, and murdered more than one of his own children. Three sons ultimately escaped Herod's paranoia and inherited a piece of his kingdom.

Herod Archelaus

Herod Archelaus, whom Matthew mentions in Matthew 2:22, became ethnarch of Judea and Samaria,

which granted him a dignity higher than that of a provincial governor, but less than a king. Archelaus was politically crass, and alienated his subjects rapidly. By AD 6 Judea was near revolt. Envoys to Emperor Augustus assured him that if Archelaus were not removed from power, rebellion would soon begin. Augustus agreed, banishing Archelaus to Germany, while Judea and Samaria were reorganized into a Roman province, which was administered by a Roman governor. Among these governors was Pontius Pilate, who ruled Judea for ten years, from AD 26-36, before being recalled to Rome.

Philip the Tetrarch

Philip ruled over the regions north and east of the Promised Land, called Trachonitis and Iturea, carrying the title, tetrarch, which conferred a dignity lower than that of ethnarch. Philip was far more affable than his half-brother Archelaus, and ruled for thirty-seven uneventful years.

For his wife, Philip took Salome, the daughter of his half-brother, Herod Philip. As a child in the court of her stepfather, Herod Antipas, Salome so delighted Antipas that at her request he beheaded John the Baptist.

Philip the Tetrarch died without an heir in AD 34. Upon his death his tetrarchy was subsumed into the Roman province of Syria.

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea as tetrarch. Antipas, whom Jesus, in Luke 13:32, referred to as "that fox," ruled for forty-two years.



It was this Herod who married his niece, Herodias. Herodias had previously married her uncle, Herod Philip, who was half-brother to the Philip the Tetrarch. She left him in order to marry her uncle, Herod Antipas, who was half-brother to Herod Philip. Herodias' daughter with Herod Philip, Salome, who delighted Herod Antipas with her dancing, ultimately married her great uncle, Philip the Tetrarch. These brazenly incestuous marriages, divorces, and remarriages brought a stern rebuke from John the Baptist, whom Herod Antipas subsequently arrested and beheaded (Mark 6:17-29). Herod Antipas also sought miracles from Jesus, who, much to Antipas' chagrin, remained silent during his interrogation. Antipas therefore ordered his soldiers to mock Jesus before sending Him back to Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:6-12).

Whereas Herod Archelaus was quickly banished to Germany, and Philip the Tetrarch lived out his long reign in peace, Herod Antipas experienced both a long reign and a swift banishment. The later event was bred in the mind of Antipas' nephew, Herod Agrippa.

Herod Agrippa

Shortly after he had become King of Judea, Herod the Great married a Jewish princess of the Hasmonean line named Miriamme. She bore him two sons, Aristobulus and Alexander, whom Herod later murdered. Prior to his death, Aristobulus married his cousin Bernice and fathered a son, Herod Agrippa.

Agrippa was sent to Rome and educated in the royal court. Al-

though a gifted politician, Agrippa was not blessed with his grandfather's financial sense. He ran up enormous debts and, after the death of his patron in Rome, retired to Idumea. Unhappy in Idumea, Agrippa contemplated suicide, but Herodias, the wife of Herod Antipas, who was also Herod Agrippa's sister, dissuaded him from taking his life.

Herodias appealed to her husband, Antipas, asking him to help her brother, Herod Agrippa. This he did. Agrippa was given a house, a stipend, and a minor position in Antipas' court. But the two men did not get along. Their troubles came to a head at a feast one evening when Antipas, in a drunken speech, made known publicly the nature of Agrippa's debts. Disgraced and enraged, Agrippa left for Syria, eventually making his way back to Rome.

After securing new loans in order to pay off old debts, Herod Agrippa was appointed the guardian of Emperor Tiberius' grandson, Tiberius Gemellus. It was at this time also that Agrippa befriended Caligula, the emperor's grandnephew. Either Gemellus or Caligula would succeed Tiberius as emperor and therefore Agrippa regularly flattered them both. After declaring a bit too loudly, however, that Caligula would make an even better emperor than Tiberius currently was, Tiberius imprisoned Agrippa. Fortunately for Agrippa,

Tiberius died six months later, in AD 36.

After Tiberius' death the Roman Senate chose Caligula as his successor. Caligula released Agrippa from prison, and gave him the tetrarchy his uncle Philip had ruled prior to his death two years earlier. Rather than bestowing on him the inferior title of tetrarch, however, Caligula made Herod Agrippa a king.

After hearing that Agrippa would be a king, his sister, Herodias, was terribly jealous. Although her husband, Herod Antipas, had ruled his tetrarchy for over forty years, ably serving the interests of Rome, he was only a tetrarch. She therefore pleaded with Antipas to go to Rome in order to seek the title she felt he had earned. Antipas believed it best to leave well enough alone, but after continued prodding from Herodias, he agreed to try. They departed for Rome.

Herod Agrippa still harbored an angry grudge against Antipas for the drunken insult issued years before. He therefore wrote to Caligula, accusing Antipas of fomenting rebellion against Rome. When Herod Antipas arrived in Rome, Caligula was reading Herod Agrippa's letter, the vast majority of which was false. Caligula's eyes, however, were fixed upon the number, seventy thousand. That, he read, was the number of men Antipas could equip for war from

After hearing that Agrippa would be a king, his sister, Herodias, was terribly jealous.

his armory. Although true in and of itself, Antipas had never thought of using those weapons against Rome. Caligula asked Antipas if the number were true. Given no reason to fear the truth, Antipas replied that, indeed, it was true. Caligula immediately banished him to France. To Herodias, Herod Agrippa's sister, Caligula offered asylum. She declined and went into exile with her husband Antipas. For his "loyalty" in providing information about Antipas' supposed rebellion, Caligula added Antipas' tetrarchy to Herod Agrippa's kingdom.

Caligula was, however, rapidly going insane. When he was assassinated by his own guards in AD 41, the leadership of the Roman Empire passed into the hands of Claudius. Claudius and Agrippa were born the same year and had grown up childhood friends. Agrippa happened to be in Rome when Caligula was killed, and argued on Claudius' behalf before the Roman Senate in order to secure Claudius' path to the throne.

The new emperor was grateful and also wise. Claudius had seen the troubles Roman governors had caused while ruling over Jewish subjects and believed that a Jewish king would rule the Jews better than a Roman governor. He therefore added Judea and Samaria to Herod Agrippa's kingdom in AD 41. Agrippa then ruled almost the identical area that his grandfather Herod the Great had governed at his death nearly fifty years earlier.

King Herod Agrippa

The Jews rejoiced. Herod Agrippa's father was Aristobulus, the son of Miriamme, of true

Hasmonean blood. Agrippa's Jewish subjects therefore considered Agrippa a Jewish king. Unfortunately, he was a Jew in name only. Although Agrippa routinely performed the ceremonial functions of a Jewish head of state, even participating in Temple sacrifice, he was no son of Abraham. In his Gentile territories Herod Agrippa acted like a pagan, issuing coinage with his

Although Agrippa routinely performed the ceremonial functions of a Jewish head of state, even participating in Temple sacrifice, he was no son of Abraham.

own image, and erecting statues to himself and his family in Greek cities. Luke records that, after murdering the apostle James, Agrippa arrested, and was attempting to murder Peter simply because these actions pleased his Jewish subjects (Acts 12:1-3).

In August of AD 44 Herod Agrippa was presiding over the athletic games at Caesarea. The people of Tyre and Sidon attended as his guests, having recently been reconciled to the king after a brief spat. Herod Agrippa sat upon his throne, the setting sun shining brilliantly off his robe, which was woven with threads of pure silver. Standing to address those gathered, his image and words were so magnificent that

the Gentiles present declared him a god. Luke records in Acts 12:22, "And the people were shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!'"

As he basked in the glow of their words, Agrippa was struck with a sudden pain in his abdomen. Luke writes, "Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last" (Acts 12:23). The Jewish historian, Josephus, records that Agrippa was taken away in anguish, suffered for five days, and died. Luke expressly says that this event took place as punishment from God because Agrippa had not rebuked his subjects when they called him a god.

Herod Agrippa's kingdom was reorganized into a Roman province, which Roman governors ruled until the eve of the Jewish War in AD 66.

Herod Agrippa II

Herod Agrippa's brother, who, not surprisingly, was named Herod, ruled a small kingdom in present day Lebanon, called Chalcis. This other Herod died in AD 48, and Herod Agrippa's son, Herod Agrippa II, inherited his uncle's kingdom two years later.

The younger Agrippa followed his father in serving the interests of Rome, and in AD 53 Claudius made him king over the former tetrarchy of his great uncle Philip, which was a larger and more influential position than Agrippa held at Chalcis. Upon coming into power in AD 54, Nero added to Agrippa's kingdom parts of the tetrarchy his great uncle Antipas previously had ruled.



Herod Agrippa II never came to rule over Judea or Samaria, but nevertheless reigned longer than any other member of his family, dying in AD 100.

It was this younger Herod Agrippa before whom the Apostle Paul testified while he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Arrogantly, Agrippa said to Paul, in Acts 26:28, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

The End of an Age

Herod Agrippa II was the last of the house of Herod to exercise real political authority in and around Judea during the New Testament era. From the back room maneuvering of Antipater, to the kingdom of Herod the Great, to the brief reign of Archelaus, to the peaceful rule of Philip the Tetrarch, to the wicked marriage and power struggles of Herod Antipas, to the arrogant death of Herod Agrippa and the arrogant unbelief of Herod Agrippa II, the house of Herod was a family born and bred of wickedness and unbelief.

Biblical References

Each Herod that is mentioned in the New Testament, along with his reign or role, is listed below. Every verse or passage in the Bible that mentions a member of the house of Herod is listed with the particular man to whom that text is referring.

- *Herod the Great*, King of Judea and Samaria (37 BC-4 BC)
Matthew 2:1-23; Luke 1:5
- *Herod Archelaus*, Ethnarch of Judea and Samaria (3BC-AD6)
Matthew 2:22
- *Herod Antipas*, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (3 BC-AD 39)
Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29, 8:15; Luke 3:1, 19-20, 9:7-9, 13:31-32, 23:6-12; Acts 4:27, 13:1
- *Philip the Tetrarch*, Tetrarch of Trachonitis and Iturea (3 BC-AD 34)
Luke 3:1
- *Herod Philip*, (private citizen)
Matthew 14:3; Mark 6:17-18
- *Herod Agrippa*, King of Trachonitis and Iturea (AD36-41)
and of Judea and Samaria (AD41-44)
Acts 12:1-23

- *Herod Agrippa II*, King of Chalcis (AD50-53)
and of Trachonitis and Iturea, with parts of Galilee (AD53-100)
Acts 25:13-26:32

Note: Revelation 2:13 also refers to a man named Antipas. He was not, however, of the house of Herod.

Rev. Russell St. John is the pastor of the Grace United Reformed Church in Kennewick, Washington.

Looking Out and About

• Mid-America Reformed Seminary held its twentieth commencement exercise on Friday, May 20. Rev. Fred Folkerts, a 1992 graduate of the seminary presently serving the Immanuel United Reformed Church of Listowel, Ontario, Canada and father of one of the 2005 graduates, was the speaker.

• Mr. Paul Berghaus, a recent graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary will be serving as a chaplain in the United States Army. He will be ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

• Mr. Brian Busker was granted the Master of Theological Studies Degree from Mid-America

Reformed Seminary, the first to receive such a degree from the institution. He has accepted an appointment to teach at Southwest Minnesota Christian High School in Edgerton, Minnesota.

• On May 21, 2005, Rev. Mark Beach, Professor of Ministerial Studies and the Dean of Students at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, was granted the PhD degree by Calvin Theological Seminary of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

• Mr. Jason Stewart, a 2005 graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, has accepted a call extended to him by the Christ Community Church in Bethlehem,

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We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 25: Of Sanctification and the Law

As we saw last month, the Christian is perpetually brought back to justification and the work of Christ alone, even when discussing sanctification. Here is our confidence and help in time of need.

The Use of the Law in Sanctification

The question remains, how do we know what to do that is pleasing to God as those given a new life? Our faith in Christ “excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word,” according to Article 24, but where exactly in the Word do we find those works commanded? Article 25 briefly mentions that as Reformed Protestants we believe that the Law, especially the Ten Commandment, is a guide for the Christian life.

What is interesting is how this article explains this belief. The Latin title of the article states that the Law is both abrogated and continued in the New Covenant. The Law of God is abrogated, as the Confession says:

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians...

This is clearly taught in Hebrews

8:13, which says that the entire system of the Old Covenant was abolished by Christ, when it says, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Then in Hebrews 10:1 we read, “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come...”

On the other hand, there is an aspect in which the law continues among us. Article 25 continues when it says, “...yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion.” Here we hear an echo of Colossians 2:16-17, which speaks of Jewish festivals, new moon celebrations, and Sabbaths: “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” So the law is thoroughly Christ-centered, both in its abrogation and continuation.

But how exactly is this principle applied? What does it mean that the law continues among us in some fashion? The answer is twofold:

In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to regulate our life in all honorableness to the glory of God, according to His will.

We still use the Law in its first and third use. What does this mean? In classic Reformed terminology we speak of the Law of God having three uses: to show us our sin and drive us to Christ (Latin, *usus pedagogicus*), to restrain sin in society as a whole (Latin, *usus civilis*), and to be a guide for the Christian life of gratitude (Latin, *usus didacticus*). And since the Confession is speaking of the first and third uses, we will focus on those here.

The First Use

The Christian is still formed by both Law and Gospel. Even as those justified, we still need to be killed by the Law continually, in order to be given life by the Gospel. Because of our ongoing struggle with sin (Romans 7), we need to be shaken out of self-righteousness and selfishness, shown the holiness and perfections of God, and brought to our knees in humility and confession. Thus anything in the Old Covenant law which does this is legitimately used among us.

Liturgically speaking, this has always been a feature of Reformed worship towards the beginning of the service. Confession of sin and absolution is a liturgical nonnegotiable as it marked the classic Reformed liturgies of Strasbourg, Heidelberg, Geneva, and England (through the *Book of Common Prayer*).

Unfortunately, even in many of our Reformed churches this has fallen out of use because it is too “Catholic.” If this is your attitude, keep in mind that corporate prayers of confession and public absolution was



part of the reformation of worship. Prior to the Reformers, the priest alone would pray a confession of his own sins (called the *confiteor*) before the Mass, and the faithful would only receive absolution after *private* confession of all known sins. The Reformers moved this practice to the public worship of God such as found in Nehemiah 9.

Notice also that the Confession speaks of “testimonies taken out of the law *and the prophets*.” This means that more than the Ten Commandments express God’s Law to His people. In fact, like the words of our Lord in His Sermon on the Mount, the threats of the prophets are usually more hard-hitting and specific than the Ten Commandments. We need to use the Law wherever it is found.

The Third Use

As the Christian needs to be killed continually by the Law and given life by the Gospel, so too, we need to be continually challenged to live out this new life in gratitude. The Ten Commandments, of course, are the basic text of the parameters of the Christian life, as they teach us to love God and our neighbor.

This emphasis on the life of gratitude and thankful obedience is a hallmark of the Reformed Christian life. We seek to live as prophets, priests, and kings in this world. This is why our forefathers used the Ten Commandments in all their catechetical preaching and instruction in the Faith.

The summary of Articles 24 and 25 is that the Christian’s life of sanctification is to be one of love for God, humble service, and devotion to pleasing God by continually falling on our knees but also getting up and living for Christ.

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

Looking out and About

(continued from page 8)

Pennsylvania. He will seek ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church this fall.

- Rev. Daryl Kats of the Cloverdale United Reformed Church in Boise, Idaho, declined the call to Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville.

- Effective immediately, the new phone number for the Phoenix United Reformed Church and the study of Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer is (602) 324-7190. The FAX number is (602) 324-3508. Please update your address books accordingly.

- An organizing committee of pastors and elders announced formation of The Evangelical Reformed Presbyterian Church (ERPC). The new denomination is being established in response to conservative Presbyterians’ increasing concern over the acceptance of the teaching of justification by faith plus works, and water baptism as an instrument of salvation.

- Classis Michigan Missions Committee invites you to the Fall Public Meeting at Cornerstone URC at 7:30 PM, on September 22, 2005. Speaker: Rev. Blauw on Reformed Theological Education in the Ukraine.

The Outlook *invites contributions to Looking Out and About. Please email news to wymbkath@juno.com*

Study/Application Questions for Article 25

1. How do the Canons of Dort describe the inward work of the Holy Spirit through preaching? (Canons of Dort III/IV, 10)
2. What does it mean to be “regenerated?” (Canons of Dort III/IV, 12, 16)
3. What does the analogy of the tree and its roots have to do with sanctification?

Supra, Infra, and Biblical Theology

The debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism has caused many a sound theologian to throw up his hands in bewilderment and utter words akin to R.L. Dabney's reaction: "In my opinion this is a question which never ought to have been raised." But whether or not Dabney was right is beside the point at the present time, since more than 400 years of theologizing has stamped the ordering of the decrees upon the Reformed tradition. Positions have been taken, schemes have been developed, consequences have occurred. Thus, if we are going to *do* theology in the twenty-first century, we must be able to give an answer to such things and work out the most biblically consistent system.

This article will argue that of the two systems traditionally espoused (i.e. supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism), supralapsarianism is less consistent with the vital biblical-theological eschatology principle since it essentially makes creation a means to redemption. In order to unpack and defend this thesis, several brief observations will be made. First, comment must be made of the legitimacy of our inquiry. Second, the biblical-theological eschatology principle will be concisely explained from Scripture. Third, supralapsarianism's failure to adhere to this principle will be examined.

Fourth, infra-lapsarianism as a more viable option will be presented. Finally, a reformulation of infralapsarianism will be offered in order to maintain its adherence to the eschatology principle while addressing valid supralapsarian concerns.

The Legitimacy of the Inquiry

Is it legitimate to speak of the decrees in the plural? The whole notion of ordering the decrees is often dismissed as an illegitimate argument since it seeks to separate and categorize hypothetical events that take place in the mind of God. Because God has archetypal knowledge of all things and His eternal decrees are ultimately one, arranging a plurality of decrees is seen by many as unjustifiable. But while it is clear that God's archetypal knowledge conceives of only one decree, His ectypal revelation, with which our finite minds must do theology, compels us to speak of the decrees as if they are many. The same is true of God's attributes: archetypally, God has one simple attribute (i.e. His perfection), but ectypally, we speak of many. As Louis Berkhof points out, we must understand this distinction while still embracing our necessary ectypal language:

There is, therefore, no series of decrees in God, but simply one comprehensive plan, embracing all that comes to pass. Our finite comprehen-

sion, however, constrains us to make distinctions, and this accounts for the fact that we often speak of the decrees of God in the plural. The manner of speaking is perfectly legitimate, provided we do not lose sight of the unity of the divine decree, and of the inseparable connection of the various decrees as we conceive of them.

The Creator/creature distinction is what drives our ordering of the decrees and our systematizing of theology in general. The following analysis, therefore, is legitimate and in no way "off limits."

The Eschatology Principle

The biblical-theological principle of eschatology, in its most basic form, simply means that Adam was not created in order to fall and be redeemed, but was created in order to enjoy eschatological life. When Adam breached the Covenant of Works, he destroyed the possibility of entering in to the glory of God's consummate kingdom with all of his progeny. Redemption by the second Adam, who fulfilled the Covenant of Works (and the *Pactum Salutis*), was introduced in order to bring all of God's elect to their eschatological goal of resurrection life in the eschaton.

While no explicit promise of the consummation is given in the opening chapters of Genesis, it is nevertheless entailed by the presence of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9; 3:22; cf. Revelation 22:14) and clearly implied in the rest of Scripture. We read in Romans 3:23, for example, that, "all



have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The sin and fall that Paul has in mind here is *Adam’s* sin and consequent fall, of which all humanity is guilty because Adam was our federal head and representative. This is clear from Paul’s use of the clause “glory to God”, which are the same words he uses in 5:12 to explain the effects of original sin in Adam’s covenantal headship. Thus, had man (i.e. Adam and all those he represented) *not* sinned, man would have attained the glory of God. This “glory of God” Paul explains in 8:18ff, as eschatological glory, viz., the glory of resurrection life in the age to come. Falling short of the consummation, the elect are brought to their blessed end only through faith in the perfect obedience of Christ.

Another crucial text to observe is I Corinthians 15:45-49. In his breathtaking explanation and defense of bodily resurrection in I Corinthians 15, Paul brings his readers face to face with the eschatological goal of creation. In verses 45-49, which is the center of his cosmological argument, Paul explains that God’s revealed order of life is *first* the natural (*yucikon*), *then* the spiritual (*pneumatikon*). Paul deliberately cites Genesis 2:7 to highlight Adam’s sinless, prelapsarian state in comparison to Christ’s resurrected, glorified state. By asserting such, Paul is showing that the Fall is not condoned by God as the necessary “first” episode. As Peter Jones points out, “[I]n Paul’s thinking, sin is not the ‘first’ event. The good creation is. So it is not Adam as the ‘first’ sinner, but Adam as the ‘first’ created human being that Paul has in mind in v.45.”

Furthermore, Paul’s analogy of Adam and Christ in 15:21-22 gives added weight to 15:45b; the basis of the last Adam *becoming* a life-giving spirit is His fulfillment of that which the first Adam failed to accomplish, viz., the Covenant of Works. Thus, Paul is developing the eschatological implications that he finds in Genesis 2:7, thereby showing that the spiritual, resurrected body is *not* the fulfillment of the body of sin, but the eschatological fulfillment of the natural, created body in the garden.

***The decree to permit
the Fall is thereby
executed in order to
obtain the goal of
election and
reprobation.***

**Supralapsarianism’s
Inconsistency**

While God’s revelation in redemptive history reveals that Adam was not created for the purpose of sin and redemption, supralapsarianism ultimately affirms such by ordering the decrees in the following manner:

1. The glory of God in Christ and His church.
2. The election of Christ as the Head of the church.
3. The elect church in Christ. (and reprobation)
4. The fall of all men.
5. The creation of the world and man.

By placing the decree to save and damn rational creatures *before* (or “above,” hence the Latin “supra”) the decree to permit the Fall, reprobation and election become equally absolute. The decree to permit the Fall is thereby executed in order to obtain the goal of election and reprobation. Likewise, the decree to create is necessary in order to save and damn for the glory of God. In other words, election and reprobation is what it’s all about. The *Fall* and *creation* are mere means to accomplish that end.

By rigidly applying this teleological principle to the divine decrees, however, supralapsarianism cannot do justice to the biblical-theological eschatology principle. Considering I Corinthians 15:45-49, supralapsarianism finds itself at odds with the Pauline eschatology. While Paul establishes the *spiritual* to be the eschatological fulfillment of the *natural*, supralapsarianism on the other hand, seems to affirm the *spiritual* to be the eschatological fulfillment of the *Fall*. This cannot be escaped by the supralapsarians since their system asserts the objective of the divine decrees as God’s glory in election and reprobation.

**Infralapsarianism: A More
Biblical Solution?**

The classic alternative to supralapsarianism is infralapsarianism (also known as “sublapsarianism”), which typically runs as follows:

God, with the design to reveal His own glory, that is, the perfections of His own nature, determined to:

1. Create the world.

2. Permit the fall of man.
3. Elect from the mass of fallen men a multitude whom no man could number as “vessels of mercy.”
4. Send His Son for their redemption.
5. Leave the residue of mankind, as He left the fallen angels, to suffer the just punishment of their sins.

Infralapsarianism, which is favored by the language of most Reformed confessions, is generally accepted because it does a better job of avoiding the problem of making God the active author of sin. Whereas the supralapsarian scheme posits sin as a necessary means to effect election and reprobation, infralapsarianism sees the opposite; election and reprobation are decrees of God in response to His permitting the Fall of man. Consequently, in the supralapsarian view, God reprobates by electing rational creatures to damnation without the consideration of sin or justice. On the other hand, infralapsarians believe God reprobates by electing His chosen ones for salvation from a common mass of sinners and leaving the rest in their sins to face their rightful judgment. The former views sin and reprobation positively; the latter views sin and reprobation negatively.

There is considerable biblical evidence for infralapsarianism. Jesus told His disciples: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you ... I chose you *out of the world*”

(John 15:16, 19; italics mine). Here we see that it is a larger mass of individuals from which Christ chose His own. Likewise, Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “He chose us *in Him* [that is, Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4; italics mine). Our election is *in Christ*. This clearly shows that we are conceived as fallen and in need of a redeemer.

In Romans 9, a passage often cited by supralapsarians in support of their view, Paul uses

***Sin is not on account
of damnation;
rather, damnation is
on account of sin.***

infralapsarian language: “Does not the potter have power over the clay, *from the same lump* to make one vessel for honor and one for dishonor?” (Romans 9:21; italics mine). We should not understand this “same lump” as one universal group of human beings in a common state of neutrality; rather, we should understand this “same lump” as one universal group of human beings in a common state of sin and misery. This should be clear from the fact that Paul calls these vessels, “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (9:22) and “vessels of mercy ... prepared beforehand for glory” (9:23). While both vessels are described as “prepared,” “mercy” and “wrath” imply that the elected objects are first con-

ceived as sinful and deserving judgment. As Dabney rightly points out, “[T]hose virtues (mercy and justice) are relative, they pre-suppose their object, do not make it.” Sin is not on account of damnation; rather, damnation is on account of sin.

Infralapsarianism does not claim to have a comprehensive answer for *why* God permitted sin to enter the cosmos. Ultimately, infralapsarians must concede that God decreed the Fall (an objection readily made by supralapsarians). Nevertheless, because it views reprobation and election as God’s response to the Fall (instead of vice-versa), infralapsarianism offers a system which more carefully protects the justice of God. But more to the point of our thesis, infralapsarianism also upholds the integrity of creation to a degree that supralapsarianism cannot. Infralapsarians do not posit creation as a means to redemption in the way that supralapsarians do.

For this reason, it must be accepted that infralapsarianism is more consistent with the eschatology principle. If the eschatological fulfillment of *good* creation is consummated re-creation, then redemption is not a necessary means to achieve that end. Redemption, rather, is God’s response to the Fall in order that creation will reach its eschatological goal. This is the point that supralapsarianism seems to miss altogether.

A Reformulation of Infralapsarianism

Of course, supralapsarians often



protest that infralapsarianism fails to do justice to the teleological principle of the divine decrees and, consequently, the glory and sovereignty of God. The fact that Romans 5:14 testifies of Adam as a “type of the one who was to come” may add weight to their objection.

For this reason, a reformulation of infralapsarianism is offered below in order to answer this objection and still uphold the integrity of creation and its eschatological goal. In other words, it must be affirmed that while creation is not merely a means to the end of redemption, and while there would have been a glorious eschatological consummation if Adam had kept the covenant of works, nevertheless, God in His infinite wisdom foreordained Adam’s covenant breach in order to magnify the glory of His grace by achieving the eschatological goal of creation via the redemption in Christ the second Adam.

A possible modification might look something like this:

1. God, for the sake of His glory, decreed that human beings would attain eternal glory with Him by means of a federal covenant of works.
2. Decree to create all things.
3. Decree to subsume the human race under the federal headship of Adam in a covenant of works.
4. Decree to permit the Fall and thus allow the covenant

with Adam not to be consummated.

5. Decree to elect from the mass of fallen humanity a countless multitude to possession of eternal glory through the covenant of works with Christ (His execution of the *pactum salutis*); and to reprobate the rest of fallen humanity to eternal perdition by leaving them, as He left the fallen angels, to suffer the just punishment of their sins.

There are several viable advantages to this scheme. First, it incorporates the best argument of the supralapsarians (i.e. the teleological principle) and of the infralapsarians (God elects and reprobates *sinner*s rather than neutral human beings). In this way, both God’s sovereignty and justice are most protected. Second, it gives integrity to the original creation and the covenant of works. Third, the first Adam, while in a covenant with God, was from the very beginning a type of the One to come (Romans 5:14). Fourth, it remedies the typical covenant-less character of most traditional treatments of the order of the decrees.

Conclusion

In many ways, finding the perfect method of ordering the decrees is like finding the perfect analogy to describe the Trinity. It is impossible. The ectypal theology of the pilgrim can only go so far. The Creator/creature distinction must not be pressed. Yet, as we must

responsibly systematize our understanding of the revelation given to us, infralapsarianism (and/or its posited reformulation) seems to offer the most biblically consistent scheme of such a profound subject. Among the number of its attractive advantages over *supralapsarianism*, infralapsarianism has the benefit of more readily adhering to the biblical-theological eschatology principle and, consequently, upholding the integrity of God’s good creation.

Rev. Michael Brown is the Pastor of the Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, California.

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the United Reformed Psalter Hymnal Committee and the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise Committee

This meeting was the fourth combined meeting of the two committees. Previous meetings were held in London Ontario, Ancaster Ontario and Jenison Michigan, the role of host alternating between the committees.

Rev. G. Ph. Van Popta, convener of the Book of Praise committee, led us in opening devotions. The participants reintroduced themselves, and Rev. Allen Vander Pol was introduced as a newly appointed member of the URCNA committee, attending for the first time. The meeting schedule was established and the proposed agenda was adopted. The previous combined meeting's minutes were accepted as an accurate reflection of that meeting. It was noted that Dr. Peter Wallace, pastor of the OPC at South Bend, Indiana, was present as an observer. Dr. Wallace is involved in preparing a Scriptural Psalter as mandated by his Session.

Each committee had an opportunity to report on their respective progress.

The URCNA committee's mandate was changed by Synod Calgary (at the committee's request) in that the 'non musical' section of the Song Book was assigned to a separate committee. In the past year, work was done in evaluating a number of Psalters and Hymnals in use by Reformed and Presbyterian

churches in England, Scotland, Ireland and North America. A number of Hymns, from various sources, were tentatively selected for potential inclusion in the new SongBook. The Principles and Guidelines, as adopted by Synod Calgary, were used in the selection process. Although good progress has been made, this work will continue.

The Canadian Reformed (CanRC) committee reports that Synod Neerlandia gave this committee the mandate to expand the current hymnary of the Book of Praise as well as to work together with the URCNA Psalter-Hymnal committee to work towards a common Song Book. It has been a challenge to work through these two mandates. The committee has been busy considering and provisionally selecting hymns using the Principles and Guidelines, as adopted by Synod Chatham. The hymns selected are available for potential inclusion in the new Song Book. Much thought has been given on an index for the Song Book. Often we need to deal with copyright issues as we receive many requests for permission to reprint songs or prose sections. In the past year a central archive was established at the Theological College in Hamilton. It is a challenge to make such an archive complete after some 50 years of existence of the committee.

To date, all joint efforts between our

committees have been on the hymnary part of the new Song Book. At this meeting, time was devoted to a discussion on inclusion of the 150 Genevan Psalms. A frank discussion was held about a number of issues ranging from complete unfamiliarity of many URCNA brothers and sisters with the Genevan tunes, coupled with the apparent difficulty of a number of the tunes, having only the melody line (not harmony) as well as the physical size of the new SongBook when potentially two versions of each Psalm, Hymns, Confessions and liturgical forms are to be included.

After the discussion, the committees did agree that it will be helpful if the URCNA committee clearly outlines their views, thoughts and concerns about including the 150 Genevan Psalms, and the CanRC committee outlines the motivation of the Canadian Reformed Churches for maintaining all 150 Genevan Psalms. These documents will be of immense benefit in gaining greater appreciation of each other's views and will be of great benefit in preparing reports to our respective Synods.

Reports of studies by the two committees were presented:

1. A list of Reformed Psalters and Hymnals and information about the Songbooks that are in use by different churches. (URCNA report)
2. Possibility of adding harmony and /or meter (adding bar lines) to the Genevan Melodies. Conclusion was that adding harmony is possible, and we resolved to recommend that harmonies for these



melodies be included in the new Song Book; however, adding bar lines is not recommended as this would require frequent alternation between 4/4 and 6/4 time and would make for a untidy presentation. (CanRC report)

3. Evaluation of the 65 Hymns of the Book of Praise. Great appreciation was expressed for the faithfulness of the text. A number of hymns are very long; many of the hymns originate from the 17th century; other hymns appear to have a mismatch between the words and the music, for example: a song of praise set to music in a ‘minor’ key. (URCNA report)

4. The structure in which to organize the hymnary of the Song Book. As a starting point, it was suggested to have a Trinitarian structure, much along the lines of the Apostles Creed with additions for special occasions such as Holy Baptism, The Lord’s Supper, Marriage and Ordination. (CanRC report)

We agreed that this would form a good starting point and would be a good guide as to where to place the potential hymns, and would be an aid to compile a ‘balanced’ hymnary. A number of indices, such as a confessional index (keyed on the Three Forms of Unity), a textual index and a topical index would be helpful for the end users.

The URCNA committee reported on the progress of evaluating the hymns of the “Blue Psalter Hymnal”. Approximately 100 potential hymns passed the initial scrutiny of the URCNA committee using the accepted Principles and Guidelines.

More work is required in that some of these were done before these Guidelines were in place.

There was a mutual understanding that the functioning as a joint committee would be greatly enhanced by meeting more than once a year. Therefore, we agreed to meet again in the fall of 2005, the URCNA committee acting as host. In this context, the decision was made that all the potential hymns, as selected by each committee to date, will be collected and duplicated for each committee member. It is expected that this will enhance the possibility to present a concept hymnary for the common Song Book to our next respective Synods. The Book of Praise committee realizes that the good progress being made on the mandate for a common SongBook may well render the mandate to produce a new Book of Praise redundant.

This meeting was a very productive one and showed a unity of purpose. Much ground was covered and a lot was accomplished including a better appreciation of each other. It was acknowledged and understood by all that we are working on a common goal, a common book of worship, that will benefit the unity that the Lord demands of His believers. With that in mind, we adjourned.

On behalf of the joint committee,
C.J. Nobels.

URCNA Theological Education Committee

The United Reformed Church of North America’s Theological Education Committee met by conference call on April 21, 2004. At this meeting the following motion was adopted:

The committee’s position is that a federation of churches may have a federational seminary, but it is not necessary to have one. The committee believes that it is not prudent to have a federational seminary at this time for the following reasons:

a) In the North American context a number of reliable Reformed seminaries exist.

b) While these Reformed seminaries are independent of synodical control, they are accountable in a variety of ways to the churches (e.g., board members and faculty members subscribe to the Reformed confessions; such members are under the supervision of local elders).

c) We do not want to undermine the responsibility of the consistories and classes to supervise the theological education of their members by handing that education over to a theological college.

d) There is benefit to the federation in having its ministers educated in diverse, Reformed theological settings.

e) Having a federational seminary gives it an undue advantage over

other Reformed seminaries to which the churches of the URCNA have been close.

We met together with the Canadian Reformed committee on the morning of June 15, 2004, in the Bethel United Reformed Church in Calgary, Alberta, prior to the opening of the URC Synod meeting. In attendance were the Reverends John Barach, Bradd Nymeyer, Calvin Tuininga, and Mark Vander Hart, from the URCNA. The Canadian Reformed committee members present were Dr. James Visscher, Dr. Cornelis van Dam, and elder Karl Veldkamp.

The discussion at the June 15 meeting was both amiable and frank. The suggestion that our two committees merge and function as one committee has not been acceptable to the URC committee because the two committees operate with different mandates from their respective synods. The Canadian Reformed committee's mandate says, in part, that the "new federation should retain at least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod..." (Synod Chatham, 2004, article 75). The URCNA committee has no such mandate.

The Canadian Reformed delegates indicated that they were prepared to go where the biblical evidence should take them with regard to a federationally-controlled seminary. To that end, they have challenged the URC committee to respond to and critique in some detail the Canadian Reformed position paper, "Why do the Canadian Reformed

Churches have their own Seminary?"

Our committee met again by telephone conference on January 12, 2005. It was agreed that our two committees cannot merge at this time, but this would be reviewed after the next joint meeting. The proposed meeting date of February 14-16, 2005, was set aside in favor of a May 9-11 meeting. This will give our committee more time to prepare a more thorough report that responds to the Canadian Reformed position paper. Bradd Nymeyer, assisted by Robert Godfrey, and with input from all committee members, is preparing that report.

Our committee also believes that it should address the URC Synod with advice concerning the principal but especially the practical dimensions of the question of theological education. To that end, we need to review what the current United Reformed Church order and its appendices prescribe by way of the churches' expectations for the theological competence and training that prospective ministers should have.

By way of reminder of where we have articulated points of agreement, at the joint January 13, 2004, meeting, we agreed on the following:

- a) It is the task of the churches to train ministers.
- b) Ministers of the churches must receive sound reformed theological training.
- c) As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers.

d) Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education.

e) It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training; and

f) The churches, i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC, should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

At this point in time, it appears that a main difference between the two committees is the question of whether a synodically-controlled, federational seminary is necessary.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark D. Vander Hart, Secretary
Theological Education Committee
United Reformed Churches in
North America



This Is My Outlook

Dismiss the Psalter Hymnal Committee

I really think we should disband the Psalter Hymnal Committee. I think it is unnecessary and a waste of time and money.

One of the main incentives for this Committee was the fact that the blue Psalter Hymnal was out of print with little likelihood of it being reprinted. That is no longer the case. Because of a demand for this Psalter from the URCs, and also due to a continued interest for this Psalter in the CRC, the CRC Board of Publication decided to reprint the “blue book.” Several URCs have purchased this Psalter

and if I am not mistaken, this book will continue to be available. Though I would like to see some improvements in the hymn section, the Psalm section remains unsurpassed. I see no need for the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise when we have such a great Psalm book available. Besides, any imposition of the Book of Praise upon the URCs would go over like a lead balloon. Besides, there are a number of other song books available which could do good service. Why carry coals to Newcastle? I also believe the URC contingent of the Committee should resist pressure

from the Can. Ref. to impose the Book of Praise. The URC should suggest to the Can. Ref. brothers that they familiarize themselves with the psalm section of the Psalter. Once they get used to singing from the blue Psalter they wouldn't want to go back to the Book of Praise – believe me. Let's dismiss the committee! We don't need it.

Rev. Jelle Tuininga is Pastor emeritus in the United Reformed Churches of North America. He is a member of the Lethbridge URC in Alberta.

Jean Taffin

The movement of the *Nadere Reformatie* had certain principles in mind when they sought to bring about changes within the church. These principles included the exclusive headship of Jesus Christ over His church; independence of magisterial authority; the supreme and ultimate authority of God's Word in the church; and the subjection of all nations to God and church. Emphasis was placed on the marks of true faith, encouraging the believer to distinguish between true and false faith. Every matter of faith, worship, discipline, and government was brought to the test of the divine Word, applying these measures to the church and changing long standing practices that were in conflict to that Word. Supreme regard was

paid to “the law and testimony” in faith, worship, and testimony.

While not recognized as one of the participants in the *Nadere Reformatie* movement, Jean Taffin is often considered a frontrunner to it. Although records are sketchy, Taffin is thought to be born between July 1529 and July 1530 in Doornick (Tournai) in what is now Belgium. His father, Dennis Taffin, was a lawyer whose position made it possible for his six children to receive solid training from a private religious teacher. It is well possible that Jean Taffin studied beyond the education provided by his private teacher at different Italian universities; his doctor's title, however is doubtful.

In 1554, Taffin began working as secretary and librarian with Antoine Perrenot, the Bishop of Atrecht, who later became Cardinal Granvelle. Taffin's task was to review heretical books. In this way he came into contact with important political and religious personalities. Through his reading, he was won for the Reformation.

Surprisingly, Taffin quit his position with Granvelle in 1558, and for a short time established himself in Antwerp. As pursuits against the Calvinists in that city increased, he moved on to Aachen and Strasbourg and then to Geneva. In Geneva he studied under Calvin and Beza. Between the years of 1560 and 1574, Taffin served as pastor in Aachen, Metz, Antwerp, and Heidelberg. In 1574, he became the Court Chaplain to Prince William

of Orange, the chief founder of Dutch independence. Taffin served in this position for ten years until the Prince of Orange was murdered by a French catholic fanatic in Delft in 1584. Taffin continued ministering to congregations in Antwerp, Haarlem, and Amsterdam, where he died from the plague in 1602.

Taffin was opposed to the Anabaptist movement, yet appreciated critically their challenge for sanctification. He was not an extremist, but a warm advocate for Protestant unity. Taffin was the assessor of the Synod of Emden (1571) where the signing of the Dutch and French Confession of Faith took place. He went on to organize the Synods of Dortrect (1574 and 1578) and Middleburg (1581). He also attended the Synod of Middleburg as a representative of the Walloon churches.

Taffin is one of several frontrunners to the Nadere Reformatie whose influence among the English Puritans is difficult to determine. His influence rests more with German pietism (Johann Gerhard). His conceptions of one *theologica practica* can be found clearly in his writings. Most of his writings are in French and were later translated into the Dutch language. He saw as the major task of his pastoral activity the practical instruction for questions of the faith and expression of that faith in the individual's moral lifestyle. He represented a moderate, mediating position in discussions about the structure of the church and church discipline.

Along with others, Taffin protested against a worship which focused

only on precise form and prescribed text. He also spoke against the continuation of medieval lawlessness. Taffin was determined that the revealed will of Christ was the immediate, authoritative, and ultimate reason for the church's faith and its ordinances.

In church history, the first Reformation was a reformation of Papery and the second was a reformation from Prelacy. May this and future articles about the *Nadere Reformatie* encourage the readers to be more interested in this important movement within the church. Many of the books written by the

“old writers” are in the Dutch language. The Dutch Reformed Translation Society in Grand Rapids, Michigan has begun to translate some of the volumes into the English language in the series *Classics of Reformed Spirituality*. Two that are currently available are “The Marks of God's Children” by Jean Taffin and “The Path of True Godliness” by Willem Teellinck.

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



From the Book Shelf

What We Believe:
An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed
By Cornelis P. Venema

There have been and always will be fresh resources to explain the Apostles' Creed. What distinguishes Dr. Venema's volume is a timeless and less sectarian approach. This birds' eye view of the faith presents the reader with a brief panorama of our beliefs and how they have been presented, preserved and promoted through history. Venema would have us see that the Reformed faith, by and large, fits well with all streams of Christian history faithful to God's word. That makes this book an excellent resource for high school study (such as a catechism class), new members in the church, and a first doctrinal guide for teachers. Don't hesitate to give this book to your pastor: he will read it and enjoy handing it out to those with basic questions about our faith. Don't hesitate to give it to a teenager: especially if you hope that such a one will find confidence that our faith isn't just a culture or tradition. One suggestion I have for reading this work: start with reading the study questions, then read the chapters. Christians ought to know the answer to each of these questions! If you don't yet, you will when you are done.

Rev. Zachary Anderson
Seventh Reformed Church

See the back page for ordering information.



Jesus, Master of the Free

In our last study, we saw the necessity of acknowledging Jesus of Nazareth as the only begotten Son of God. We saw how we receive freedom from sin because Christ, the Son of God, has set us free. This month we consider how we can enjoy that freedom that the Son of God has granted us because He is also our Lord.

There are some Christian churches that do not want to stress the Lordship role of Jesus Christ. They focus on Jesus as Savior and how you must have Jesus as your Savior. That certainly is true. I certainly do not want to diminish that in any way. But did you ever notice that in those churches you can do pretty much anything you want to do on the Lord's Day; their schools have dances where the music is sexually charged; and their focus is more on sports than Scripture.

A reformed worldview must not only stress Jesus as Savior but also acknowledges Christ as Lord. Ultimately, it is the Father who, as our Creator, is our Owner and our Lord. He is the Sovereign Ruler over all things. We, however, in our sin rebelled against Him. One might well say that we ran away from our Lord and subjected ourselves to another lord. We became slaves to sin - slaves to whatever addiction controls us; slaves to whatever besetting sin we find ourselves yielding to again and again. In our imperfect state we cannot come before the Most Holy God. We will forever be slaves, imprisoned by our own evil desires and held captive by Satan.

Delivered From Satan

Christ, the Son of God, liberated us from our slavery in order to give us back into the hands of the Father. Because Christ has done so, the Father entrusted Him with sovereign control over all things, including us.

Although the devil is a defeated enemy, he still has great power to tempt us and seduce us. He constantly approaches us with ways for us to betray God and to return to the devil as our master. He uses every possible means he can think of to make us unfaithful to the God whom we confess to serve. He wants us to serve him, not God, and he will work to sway us away from God. And we would fall away, too, if it were possible for the elect to do so - that is, if Jesus as our Lord did not have such a tight grasp upon our souls.

In Jesus Christ we have a Lord in whose strength we can resist temptation and overcome the devil. In Him we are more than conquerors. He owns us and He will take care of us. We are safe in His hands. That is what the catechism teaches us when it says that Jesus, as Lord, "has delivered us from all the power of the devil."

Possessed By Christ

But the name "Lord" includes more than that, and the Heidelberg Catechism does not stop with those words. It also teaches us that Jesus Christ, as Lord, has made us His own possession. Jesus has a claim on our lives. He is our owner and we are His servants.

The apostles used even stronger language than that. They often would introduce their epistles by claiming themselves to be slaves of Jesus Christ. In Romans 1:1, for example, Paul writes: "Paul ... a bond-servant of Christ Jesus...", that is, a slave of Christ. Paul begins Philippians and Titus that same way. James begins his epistle with those same words, as does Peter in his second epistle and Jude in his brief letter to the church. John begins the book of Revelation with these words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants..." That is, to show to His slaves!

SLAVES!! Now, that is not a very pleasant sounding word. So unpleasant that translators avoid it like the plague and use the word "bond-servant" instead. It is not as harsh, not as abrasive as the word "slave." And we have to wonder if there is no better way to express the freedom that we may enjoy after our liberation. After all, using the word "slave," even using the word "bond-servant," makes it look as if there is only an exchange of masters for us. Instead of being slaves to the devil, now we are slaves to Christ.

There are many people who feel that way. They are offended by that idea that we would be slaves to Christ. In fact, they will go on to say that Christ is much more demanding, and therefore, a much heavier taskmaster than the devil. After all, the devil lets you do all kinds of things. He has all kinds of alluring promises and entices you with all kinds of worldly goods. He

Q Why do you call Him “our Lord”?

A *Because He has redeemed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood, and has delivered us from all the power of the devil, and has made us His own possession.*

promises the satisfaction of all kinds of human desires. And, let’s face it, he can deliver.

If you make yourself a slave to Satan and not be wishy-washy about it, really seeking to follow him, living a hedonistic, self-centered, self-gratifying life; the devil will give you what you want. For a time the devil will deliver and you will think you are on top of the world.

Having Jesus as your Master is not at all like that. He wants us to obey many strict rules and ordinances. He wants us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Look at all the things the devil will let us do that Christ will not let us do. Because of this, many people think that the Christian life is a dull life where all the real pleasures are denied us. Moreover, Christ wants us to walk the narrow path. He speaks about oppression in the world, self-denial, sacrifices, bearing the cross, facing persecution, and so on. No wonder so many people prefer the devil as their taskmaster to Christ as their Lord.

In spite of all these apparent disadvantages, there is a huge difference between true freedom and miserable slavery. Serving the devil may look enjoyable; the aftermath, however, is self-reproach, remorse, unhappiness, and death. The devil can make sin look very delightful and enjoyable before we fall into it. However, as soon as we have committed the sinful act he drags us into, the miserable consequences of our sin will attack us without any mercy. For example, the devil will give you all the drugs you want until you are hooked on them and have to trade your body for another dose. You will get all the smut and filth your eyes can take in until you have ruined your marriage, your career, and your life.

And it is not just those obvious, big sins, either. There is not one homeless person at the mission who, when he went out drinking with his buddies in high school, said: “I really want to grow up an alcoholic on skid row.” There’s not one person who visited the casino for the first time and won some big bucks who said: “I want to lose my car, my house, and everything I own in

bankruptcy.” There’s not one bride who walked down the aisle who said “I do” who thought, “In ten years I’m going to leave you.” or groom who said, “One day, I’m going to beat this woman to a pulp.” But serving the devil will bring you there.

Serving Christ, on the other hand, fills a person’s life with lasting joy, and it most certainly is always rewarding. It is an act of liberty and love. In Exodus 21 you can read that according to Mosaic law, slaves in Israel were to be freed after six years. There were, however, times when the slaves knew they had it pretty good. They had clothes on their backs, food on the table, and a place to call home where they could raise a family.

When their term expired, suddenly all those things would disappear. If you had no marketable skills, what were you to do? You would sell yourself as a slave to someone else. What if you happened to like the master you were now serving? Your present master did not beat you or overwork you. Instead, he treated you rather well. He was a



better master than maybe the next master might be. Or, maybe there was another master out there who knew you were a hard worker and could not wait for your time with your current Master to be over. But you did not want to go there. You knew he was mean. You knew he would beat you if you did not get the work done on time.

If that were the case, the slave could volunteer to stay with his master. If the master agreed, then the master of the slave would pierce the slave's ear-lobe. Either the piercing would leave a permanent scar or some type of ear-ring would be placed in the ear. Either way, it was a mark that would indicate that this former slave wanted to belong to this particular master for his whole life.

We have to understand that we are slaves. You may like the word "servant" better, but the simple truth is that whatever word you want to put there, you either serve the devil or you serve Jesus Christ. One or the other. Those are the two Masters. There are no other plantation owners. Heaven or hell. Where do you want to work?

Made Free to Serve

If you read through the Gospels at all, you will notice that Jesus knew how to draw a crowd. Multitudes would gather to hear Him speak. Sometimes the streets would be so crowded that people would climb the trees to be able to see Him. Sometimes the crowds were so big that the disciples of Jesus thought He was asking an absurd question when He asked: "Who touched Me?"

Not only could Jesus draw huge crowds, but He would often preach the crowd away. They did not like what He was saying. They did not like what He was demanding of them so they would leave. In John 6 we read of one of those occasions. The people leave as a result of Christ teaching them that He is the bread of life. Afterwards Jesus turns to His disciples and says: "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Peter saw the difference: one master - the devil - leads to eternal death; the other Master - Jesus - leads to eternal life. Peter realized that because of sin he was a slave to the devil, the Master that leads to eternal death.

That taskmaster brings guilt, terror, sickness, pain, and guilt. He is our master. And what does he do with us? Basically he keeps us in his dungeon chained to the wall where we can never escape. Through God's grace, the Son of God came into this world and broke those shackles that bound us to Satan. We have been set free!

Paul asked the Galatians church: "But now that you have come to know God or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" (Galatians 4:9). In other words: Were you set free that you might be slaves again?

No! You have been made free. Jesus has taken you out of the bondage that you were in and released you. Where will you go? Will you

return to the hard taskmaster who promises you nothing but pain and suffering or will you go to the one who has the way to eternal life? Will you return to the one who wants nothing more than for you to destroy your life or to the One who cares for you and gives you every blessing?

How we need to run as a people freed by Christ to Christ to have Him pierce our ears. How our longing must be to have Him freely place His mark upon us so that our desire is to serve Him, not because we are slaves, but because we are now free to serve him in love; free to live in thanksgiving to Him for the love that He has shown us. This is true freedom. It is the realization of the words Jesus spoke in John 8:36: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

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Looking Above

*A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ
Revelation 4:6b-8
“The Four Living Creatures”*

In a recent article, we turned our attention to Revelation 4:4, where John described the twenty four elders who surround the throne of God: “Around the throne were twenty four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.”

It was our contention that the twenty-four elders are exactly that: they are elders! They are symbolic of the ruling authority in the church; the office of the elder. The pattern for the government of the church is found in heaven. As it is in heaven, so it is on earth.

Now, in Revelation 4:6b-8, we come to something a bit more difficult, something much more enigmatic. We come to the four living creatures. Who, or what, are the four living creatures?

The Gospels

Many suggestions have been made. The early church fathers thought that the four living creatures were symbolic of the four gospels: Matthew was compared to a man, because he begins with the generation of Christ; Mark to a lion, because he begins at the preaching of John; Luke to an ox, because he begins his narrative by mentioning the priesthood; and John to an eagle, because he penetrates, as it were, to the secrets of heaven.

The problem was that even the church fathers could not agree as to which creature represented which gospel (Origen said that Matthew is the man, Mark the eagle, Luke the ox, and John the lion; Victorinus had Matthew as the man, Mark as the lion, Luke as the ox, and John as the eagle; Athanasius had Matthew as the lion, Mark as the man, Luke as the ox, and John as the eagle). While the early church fathers thought the four living creatures were symbolic of the gospels or the gospel writers, the astrologers have their view: they identify the four living creatures with the symbols in the four quarters of the zodiac. The view to which most commentators hold is the view that sees the four living creatures as representative of the whole created order of animate life. None of these views is ultimately satisfying.

Cherubim and Seraphim

And so we come back to the question: who, or what, are the four living creatures? There are a couple of leads given in the text that help us in identifying the four living creatures.

The first lead is the song they sing, verse 8: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” The song should sound familiar to you, for it echoes the song of Isaiah 6: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). Do you remember who sang that song in

Isaiah 6? It was the seraphim, described in verse 2 of Isaiah 6, as follows: “Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.” The four living creatures sing the song of the seraphim! There is a correspondence, then, between the seraphim of Isaiah 6 and the four living creatures of Revelation 4. They sing the same song.

The other lead provided in Revelation 4 concerning the four living creatures is their description: “full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle” (4:6b-7). The description should be familiar, as well. We read a similar description in that profound and difficult chapter of the Bible, Ezekiel 1. William Hendriksen summarizes the similarities between Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 as follows: “There is a very close connection between this entire throne vision and the first and tenth chapters of Ezekiel ... Notice the following striking resemblances. In both cases these beings are called ‘living ones’ (cf. Ezekiel 1:5 with Rev. 4:6). In both cases the symbolic number is the same, namely, four (cf. Ezekiel 1:5 with Rev. 4:6). In both cases the appearance of their faces is compared to that of man, lion, ox, and eagle (cf. Ezekiel 1:10 with Rev. 4:7). In both cases they are closely associated with the throne (cf. Ezekiel 1:26 with Rev. 4:6). In both cases fire moves



to and fro among the ‘living ones’ (cf. Ezekiel 1:13 with Rev. 4:5: ‘Out of the fire went lightning.’). In both cases these ‘living ones’ are said to be studded all over with eyes (cf. Ezekiel 1:18; 10:12 with Rev. 4:8). In both cases a rainbow encircles the throne with which the ‘living ones’ are associated (cf. Ezekiel 1:28 with Rev. 4:3).”

Ezekiel actually goes on to identify the living creatures as cherubim in 10:20. The cherubim, of course, are those who creatures who guard the presence of God. Remember Genesis 3? God banishes Adam and Eve from the garden and places cherubim on the East with flaming swords flashing back and forth to guard the presence of God. Remember the tabernacle and temple? Woven on the curtains facing east, were cherubim, guarding the presence of God. Remember the Ark of the Covenant? On the top of the mercy seat sat cherubim facing one another, the tips of their wings touching one another, guarding the presence of God. Remember Psalm 99? God sits enthroned between the cherubim. There is a correspondence, then, between the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and the four living creatures of Revelation 4. Their description is nearly the same.

The four living creatures of Revelation 4 have as their background the seraphim of Isaiah 6, as well as the cherubim of Ezekiel 1. It would seem then that the four living creatures are either seraphim or cherubim, or a blending of the two.

Though such a view may appear to be tenable and even attractive, it falls short. To begin with, though

the four living creatures sing the song of the seraphim of Isaiah 6, they are not called seraphim; and though the description of the four living creatures may be similar to that of Ezekiel 1, they are not called cherubim. Moreover, these Old Testament passages seem to draw a distinction between the seraphim and the cherubim, so that to blend them here in Revelation 4 would seem to do an injustice to the angelic order.

Furthermore, there are also differences between these Old Testament passages and Revelation 4. The song of the four living creatures in Revelation 4 is not identical with the song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6; it is close, but it is not identical. You can compare the songs and see the differences for yourself. Neither is the description of the four living creatures in Revelation 4 identical with the description of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1; again it is close, but it is not identical. Each of the four living creatures in Ezekiel’s vision had four faces, in Revelation; each creature has one face. The four living creatures in Ezekiel’s vision had four wings, in Revelation, each creature has six wings.

All of this leads us to conclude that while the four living creatures have their background in the seraphim of Isaiah 6 as well as the cherubim of Ezekiel 1, they are not to be identi-

fied as seraphim, nor are they to be identified as cherubim, nor are they to be identified as a blending of the two. John has in view something else.

Proclaiming of the Word

What, then, does John have in view? Who, or what, are the four living creatures? The four living creatures are symbolic of the proclamation of the Word. The four living creatures are symbolic of the office of the Minister of the Word and Sacraments. The four living creatures are symbolic of the preaching office.

Though the early church fathers were incorrect in seeing the four living creatures as the gospels, they were on to something in connecting the four living creatures to the Word. Though the commentators who see in the four living creatures the seraphim of Isaiah 6 or the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 or a blending of the two may fall short of the proper interpretation, they are on to something. After all, the Scriptures themselves draw the closest parallel between the angelic ministry and the ministry of the Word. Consider Psalm 103:20-21, “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.” The Psalmist brings the angelic

It would seem then that the four living creatures are either seraphim or cherubim, or a blending of the two. Though such a view may appear to be tenable and even attractive, it falls short.

ministry into the closest connection with the ministry of the Word.

But what is it that seals the argument? What is it that leads us to conclude that the four living creatures are symbolic of the office of the preaching of the Word? It is the number “four”. Even as the number twenty-four confirmed that the twenty-four elders are symbolic of the ruling office in the church, so the number four confirms that the four living creatures are symbolic of the preaching office in the church.

What is the significance of the number four? Think of the four corners of the earth, the four points of the compass, the four winds. Where must the gospel be proclaimed? To the ends of the earth! The four living creatures are representative of the preaching office, and the proclamation of that Word that must go forth to the ends of the earth.

Leading in Worship

The role of the four living creatures—symbolic as they are of the office of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments—then, is certainly that of leading in worship. Consider the following verses. Revelation 4:8: “The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” Revelation 5:8: “Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are

the prayers of the saints.” Revelation 5:14: “Then the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.” Revelation 7:11: “All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.” Revelation 14:3: “They sang as it were a new song be-

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fore the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders.” Revelation 19:4: “And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, ‘Amen! Alleluia!’” Together with the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures are responsible for guarding the worship of the One who sits on the throne. To the elders and the ministers, then, belongs the responsibility of guarding the true worship of the living God.

Heralding the Judgment

But the role of the four living creatures extends beyond that of worship, and in extending beyond that of worship, it extends beyond that of the elders. The four living

creatures, symbolic of the preaching office, are also responsible for heralding the judgment to come.

Consider Revelation 6:1-8, where you read of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. In each case it is the four living creatures who are connected with the riding forth of the horsemen—those horsemen that ride forth in judgment. The four living creatures, then, are connected to the opening of the seven seals, those seals that represent the unfolding plan of redemption: judgment upon the sinful world, salvation for the church.

Consider also Revelation 15:7, where one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels the seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God. Again, the four living creatures are connected to the pouring out of the bowls; they are connected with judgment. There is also an implied connection with the trumpets of chapters 8-11. What do trumpets do? They sound forth! What does the proclamation of the Word do? It sounds forth. The four living creatures then are connected directly with the opening of the seals; they are connected directly with the pouring out of the bowls; they are connected indirectly with the sounding forth of the trumpets. As they herald God’s Word, judgment is proclaimed.

Is the picture becoming clear? Do you begin to understand why the four living creatures, symbolic of the office of preaching, are described in terms that draw upon the seraphim, who sing of the Holiness of God, and the cherubim, who guard the presence of



God? In the preaching of the Word, the holiness of God is proclaimed, but also the judgment that comes upon those who presume to approach Him.

Remember the cherubim standing on the East of Eden, flaming swords in their hands flashing back and forth? Adam and Eve learned that the only way back to life is through death; the only way back to the presence of God is to go through the sword of the cherubim! What is the proclamation of the Word, but the proclamation of God's holiness, and the proclamation that the only way back into the holy presence of God is through the sword of the cherubim? What is the proclamation of the Word but the proclamation that Christ has gone through death to bring us life? What is the proclamation of the Word but the proclamation that Christ has gone through the sword of the cherubim to bring us into the Holy presence of God?

It is the preaching of the Word that guards the presence of God! Here is the significance of the eyes: those eyes search, they judge the thoughts and intents of the heart. Is not the proclamation of the Word precisely that? Does not the Word penetrate your heart? Does not the Word judge the thoughts of your heart; the intents of your heart; and lay open your heart before the penetrating, burning, and healing light of God's holiness?

It is the preaching of the Word that guards the presence of God. Here is the significance of Hebrews 4:12-13, "For the word of

God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." The Word of God guards the place of His rest; Hebrews 4 speaks of the rest of God, and it concludes with the Word that guards it. Note also as the Word is living, so the four creatures are living, the proclamation of the Word is living!

It is the preaching of the Word that guards the holy presence of God. Here is the understanding of the Word of God as one of the Keys of the Kingdom: it opens the kingdom to some, even as it closes it to others (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31, Questions and Answers 83-84).

In that connection, do you begin to understand why the office of preaching is set before us in such enigmatic terms? Because the preaching of the Word is itself enigmatic; we do not understand how it works! *I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart, nor how believing in His Word wrought peace within my heart...I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through the Word, creating faith in Him.* We may not understand how it works, but praise God that it does!

Do you see, then, the brilliance of Revelation 4? The office of the elders is represented in the

twenty-four elders, the office of preaching is represented in the four living creatures! The government of the church is right there in Revelation 4, oriented to the throne of God. As it is in heaven, so it is on earth.

More on the role of the four living creatures, the office of the preaching of the Word, next time...

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

The Lady is Not for Burning

(with apologies to Christopher Frye)

or

Is Cremation Permissible for the Christian?

More and more Christians are saying, "It doesn't make any difference what we do with that old, worn out body. Bury it, burn it, make soap out of it. It is all worthless. However, on the basis of a ten year study, I am prepared to say that cremation is

1. Psychologically unsound
2. It does not follow the Biblical example
3. It is pagan in its origin

Psychologically Unsound

Dr. David Van Gelder of Bethesda Christian Counseling Services in Denver, Colorado writes, "Death and disposal have many psychological implications. Most psychologists agree. John McCoy, in a half page article in the November 9, 1985 edition of Seattle, Washington's newspaper, wrote, "The funeral is to help the living." He went on to relate how it is very much a part of the grieving process. McCoy went on to tell the story of Rev. Fred Towne, who found himself sobbing uncontrollably during a counseling workshop. Towne, a pastor in Seattle, realized that he had never grieved for his younger brother, lost in the war as a pilot fighter over China. The clergyman, now 68 and a specialist in grief counseling, was surprised by the depth of his emotions, buried for years. Because the body of his brother had never been recovered, no fu-

neral was ever held. His brother had never been memorialized. He was never properly mourned.

Another father wrote of how he had lost a son in the Battle of Coral Sea. Because the body had never been found, the father was convinced his son had survived the conflict. Often when he saw a newsreel, he was convinced that he saw his son. He would fly to Tokyo or London and wander aimlessly down the streets for a few weeks in these cities looking for his lost son. The family did not put a death date on the son's gravestone until after the father had passed away.

Clergy, counselors, and funeral directors agree that there is a growing trend toward disposing of the dead with no ceremony whatsoever. Most view such a practice as unfortunate and psychologically unsound.

Clifton Anderson of the Washington Funeral Director's Association writes, "One out of every four bodies handled by Seattle area funeral homes is either cremated or buried without a service." He goes on to write that "no service, no ceremony, no notice in the paper occurs about half the time." One funeral home offers to remove the body, cremate it, and scatter the ashes without involving the survivors at all. You can even sign the forms by mail.

Most funeral directors contend

that forgoing even a simple memorial service cheats the living, not the dead. Anderson continues, "The function of the funeral is to bring the family back to life, not only to pay respects to the deceased. A funeral service occurs when the family and community get together and say a life has been lived and now are different because this life has ended. We need to relate to each other and accept that difference."

Robert Fulton, a University of Minnesota sociologist who specializes in the study of death, attributes many hallucinations and attempts to communicate with the dead to the strong psychological temptation to insist that the deceased is still alive.

Such knowledgeable men believe that the tendency to deny death partially accounts for tens of thousands of unclaimed ashes that sit in Seattle funeral homes. It is reported that more than a quarter go unclaimed. Freud wrote, "Everyone tends to deny his own mortality,"

The practice of cremation seems to be on the increase. Agreement among Denver funeral homes states that there are forty five to fifty cremations for every hundred funerals. Rev. Jim Kok, formerly of Pine Rest Christian Hospital of Grand Rapids, Michigan, now working at the Crystal Cathedral, says in response to a question about cremation:

If you are part of a tradition that buries the dead, it is advisable to continue that



practice. Traditions we tamper with at our own peril. The rituals and activities that have evolved in our funeral practices have meaning and serve purposes beyond our usual realization. Cremation may disrupt those grief-assisting rituals unless it is your traditional way of disposing of the dead.

Funeral practices serve us best when they meet the emotional needs. Emotionally it is not possible to detach oneself quickly from the body of a deceased loved one. It takes time. No human being can switch abruptly to thinking of their dear one exclusively in the spiritual state. The body has been the person and is the person for a long time until gradually a transition is made and the buried body assumes a place of unimportance, the person being treasured now recognized as being in a heavenly place.

For this reason, I believe, those who have long traditions of burying the dead, after a few days of acute mourning along with all the meeting of friends and colleagues, etc., are far better off to stick with this way of doing things. It provides the time and rituals that are extremely valuable in doing the necessary grief work.

Kok continues,

In those groups where cremation and instant disposal has been common for generations you will find elaborate traditions following the disposal that aid the grieving in their mourning

process. Without these there is bound to be trouble from unfinished grieving.”

The practice of cremation tends to minimize death. Hence, cremation without a proper memorial service is not to be advised. Visitors from the Netherlands report that hardly anyone attends cremation services anymore, short-circuiting the grief process for the survivors.

The Biblical Example

Even though the Bible does not explicitly condemn or permit cremation, we do know that Achan was burned with his family for taking gold from Jericho (Joshua 7). The Philistines found King Saul's body and men of Jabesh later burned it (I Samuel 31). In Leviticus 20:14, God commands cremation for a man who marries both a woman and her mother. And in Amos 1:2, destruction by fire is meted out to Tyre and Teman.

The thought seems warranted that cremation is carried out in the Scriptures only on those cursed by God. Certainly those in hell are cursed and bearing the punishment of the eternal fires. Why would someone want to dispose of their body by using the method of implementing God's curse, for those receiving God's blessing?

The long four thousand year example of the Jewish patriarchs and prophets from Abraham to David, to Jesus and Stephen is interment. Moses was buried by God Himself. God did it that way! Jesus, according to Old Testament prophesy, was buried. Jewish history must mean something. Why wasn't Moses cremated and his ashes scattered to the winds that would blow over the beloved Promised Land? If Jesus had been publicly cremated and then suddenly appeared reconstituted from the ashes resurrected alive and well, thousands would have believed. But God chose burial for Jesus, Jews, and Christians. The owner of Feldman Mortuary of Denver writes, "We are Jewish; is it any wonder that cremation is nil here?"

What is the non-believer saying when he is cremated? What is behind the words: "Take my ashes and sprinkle them out of an airplane along the snowy slopes of Mt. Ranier; into the verdant valleys of the Rockies, or the blue waters of Puget Sound"? Often it is pure naturalism. The individual is saying that this is the end of life and there is no other. There is no God, no grave, no resurrection of the dead, no judgment. There is no such thing as the transcendental. He is going home to the everlasting hills and back to his god of mother nature.

The thought seems warranted that cremation is carried out in the Scriptures only on those cursed by God.

It is not too much to say that the Bible's example is burial. God, of course, knows what is good for His people. Vented grief is "good grief." Hence, the Bible gives many examples of grief: sorrow is described at the death of Jacob (Genesis 50), Moses (Deuteronomy 34), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), and the son of the Nain widow (Luke 7), to name a few. In each case it was meant to be psychologically beneficial. God even caused the New Testament Jews to hire mourners to evoke feelings of sorrow.

Grief expressed is usually grief released. The ecclesiastical community, in some areas, observes grief properly: open casket; body on display at a visitation; an hour service with a well exegeted text; flowers; a reception (potluck/sandwiches) with a large attendance at the interment and full participation by many. The funeral is an event. And a tape; by all means, a tape to be shared by those who could not attend. This is all to the good. It helps mourners to listen and to grieve.

Good grief is vented grief. After thirty years of observation at funerals, I looked on with a bit of apprehension when I would see the bereaved bearing up so bravely. Tears are normal. The Jewish request of God "...put thou my tears in thy bottle..." (Psalm 56:8), asks God to do what the Jews practiced. Barnes writes of how he saw the catacombs littered with tiny glass tear bottles. If grief is felt and displayed the it becomes true what God originally intended: "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Pagan in Origin

In addition, cremation is pagan in its origin. The Encyclopedia Americana says, "Cremation was the ... mode of the Caesars. Christianity opposed (it) because of the ... resurrection." Buddha was cremated in India in 483 B.C. and the practice spread quickly throughout eastern Asia.

It is very clear that burial of the body was by divine example and instruction and should be continued.

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The Funeral Service

It has been correctly stated that we are only a breath away from death. Newspaper obituaries and funerals are a constant reminder of death. To be reminded of the reality of death is not a pleasant thought, yet funeral services occur daily throughout the land.

Just as we are surrounded by death, so also we see cultural changes around us in the way that death is treated. Many of those changes are reflected in the way funeral services are conducted. There is a recent development at funerals called a “Celebration of Living” in which the deceased is given all kinds of accolades, as if the demised can somehow hear what is being said about them. In many of these funerals, it seems as if the minister is trying to preach the individual into heaven. I recall one funeral service in which the deceased was an elderly, active mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. During her lifetime she had made many different craft items including afghans, quilts, needlepoint, and a huge crocheted rendition of the Lord’s Prayer. All of these had been strategically placed around the pulpit area of the sanctuary. It almost looked as if there was going to be an auction after the funeral.

No doubt many readers have been to so-called Christian funerals where the name of Christ was never mentioned. How sad when a person has gone to church all his life and all the minister can talk about is “Joe never went anywhere without

his cigar” or “George played one mean game of poker.”

It is not our intention to impugn or besmirch the reputation of the dead. Rather, we wish to call upon Ministers of the Word to be exactly that - Ministers of the Word. Funeral services are not for the dead. They are for the living. The living are to hear words from the Holy Scriptures. The minister’s task at a funeral is three-fold: He is to comfort the grieving; reassure the believer; and warn the unbeliever. These can only be done by faithfully proclaiming the Word of God. It brings no comfort whatsoever to the grieving family to list the accomplishments of the deceased. They would rather hear about the accomplishment of the One who came to save His people from their sin. They would rather hear about the grace of God shown to a person who they know was a sinner just like them, and who, by the grace of God, is now in heaven because of Christ.

It offers no assurance to the believer to be reminded about the past of a friend whom they have known for many more years than the minister presiding over the funeral. Believers need to be reminded that their hope, too, rests in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. That because of Christ’s once for all

sacrifice on the cross, we have the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. They need to hear again how death is not the enemy of those who trust in Jesus Christ. Rather, death is a putting away of our sinful bodies and entering into the eternal city prepared for us by our glorious Savior.

And finally, the minister who does not mention Christ in his message is derelict of his responsibility to the unbeliever. Many people who come to pay their last respects (both family and friends) to the deceased may never darken the door of a church on the Lord’s Day. How necessary it is for the minister to lay before the listeners the fact that death comes to all and that all must turn away from sin and look to Christ for their salvation.

I know a young minister who conducted the funeral service of a homosexual man who died from AIDS. As difficult as it was, this pastor spoke of the need for repentance, turning from sin, and coming to Christ. He tells of how during the message several of those attending the service got up and walked out.

The Word of God is a two-edged sword. The calling of the minister is to wield that sword so that those hearing are without excuse. And also, so that the seed may be

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Believers need to be reminded that their hope, too, rests in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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planted. No unbeliever will ever come to Christ hearing how Uncle Charlie loved his garden or how Grandma made the best apple pie in the county. They need to hear that the dear Christian is in heaven not by her own works, but because she belonged body and soul, in life and death, to her faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Mr. Peter Sluys is a member of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan where **Rev. Wybren Oord** serves as the pastor.

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