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# The Outlook

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith



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"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.'  
(Judges 7:20).

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# God's Sufficiency for Inadequate Men

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.... (2 Corinthians 3:5-6a).

*[This meditation is addressed to those who have graduated from seminary and are entering the ministry, some of whom are pictured in this issue. However, it is not just for them, all ministers and officebearers can benefit from Rev. Joling's words, as can all of our readers.]*

In your first year of ministry you may make a shocking discovery: "I'm bipolar!" This diagnosis will not come from a psychiatrist. It will not even require a visit to your family doctor. This assessment will be a simple and accurate self-diagnosis.

Bipolar, not as it is often defined in medical journals, but bipolar in the sense of being prone, by the sinful nature, to crash back and forth between two polar opposites: the one, self-confidence; the other, self-degradation. Or even worse, cast between the pole of self-admiration, even self-aggrandizement and the pole of demoralization, even despair.

Ministers face a set of twin temptations. The first is a proud self-sufficiency. A sermon goes well and the preacher is surprised by how well it went. "I didn't even put so much work into that one!" he says to himself as the congregation files out expressing deep

appreciation for such a powerful and penetrating word. He goes home thinking, "I can do this; preaching is not so difficult."

Or maybe pride rears its ugly head after a pastoral visit. A troubled soul has been in anguish for weeks, but he confesses relief after a few words of godly counsel from a minister half his age. So the new pastor leaves his home patting himself on the back. Soon an arrogant self-sufficiency grows in his heart, a reliance on human strength, a self-competence which robs God of His glory and cuts Him off from His power.

The next week it will be completely different. The young minister will face the other danger, a surrender to discouragement. Instead of saying, "I can do this job, I have what it takes," he will find himself saying, "I can't do this work, what am I doing here?"

This time the sermon does not come together. Endless hours were spent studying the Scripture passage, but all the preacher has to take to the pulpit is a ball of crumbs. Or he goes to the pulpit confident he has written a fine sermon, but when it is delivered it seems as dry, dull, and as lifeless as desert sand.

The pastoral counseling does not go any better. The young pastor

is confronted by a sinful situation so messy he does not know where to begin. He tries to comfort a grieving heart, but nothing he says seems to help. He feels like throwing up his hands and giving up, "I don't know what to do. I can't do this. Why bother trying anymore?" He is paralyzed by fear and doubt and feelings of inadequacy.

Every minister is prone to be pulled back and forth by the magnetic power of these two poles. That power has a real grip on him as long as he looks to himself, for if the truth be told, the twin temptations described above flow from the very same fountainhead of self-trust, which God hates.

But good news is found in 2 Corinthians 3. Here, the apostle sets an example of looking outside of self to the One who liberates ministers from the bipolar captivity, bringing them to a steady, humble, God-ward confidence in the Lord's power.

In the confession of 2 Corinthians 3:5-6a, the wonderful truth is proclaimed that inadequate men are made competent—made competent for the new covenant ministry—through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## The Depth of Man's Inadequacy

Appreciating God's sufficiency for us begins with a realistic understanding of ourselves and a healthy appreciation of our own absolute inadequacy. We cannot learn to say with Paul that God is our sufficiency unless we see our own poverty. The apostle sees it

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very clearly and is not too proud to confess it.

As he defends his ministry to the Corinthians, he has boasted that unlike so many itinerant preachers of his day who need letters of recommendation to validate their ministries, he does not need such letters to prove his worth. He has something far greater than a letter made of paper and ink. He has a living letter, the testimony of the Spirit in the transformed lives of the Corinthians. This confirmation is the apostle's confidence before God through Christ (v.4).

But lest the apostle be misunderstood as boasting in himself as the false apostles did, he carefully qualifies his claim in verse 5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God...."

Although his ministry is fruitful, the apostle makes plain that this success comes from nothing in himself. He says he is not sufficient, not adequate. The word he uses has the sense of not being large enough for the job. But it is not just that he is slightly undersized. No, he claims he is not able of himself to do the slightest good in ministry. He cannot attribute the smallest success to his own powers.

The apostle takes a stance completely contrary to the sinful nature. The flesh always wants to boast in human strength, and seizes upon success in the ministry to do this. For that reason, when things go well in the church, office-bearers, and particularly ministers, are tempted to credit

themselves. This is especially true when they have not relied on the Lord as much as they should have, and God, in His great mercy, still gives the increase. Men are tempted to think, "Well, I guess ministry in the church isn't so difficult. I can do this." They imagine it is just a matter of human effort, human ingenuity, human skill.

Congregations can also make the same mistake as they think about their officer-bearers. They might assume, "If we just get the right

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***Christ's office-bearers are called to know their insufficiency.***

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group of men in office," or "if we just call the right preacher, then things will go well." At times a member may applaud a sermon in a way that points only to the preacher's ability.

But Christ's office-bearers are called to know their insufficiency and to confess, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves..." Yet, even as we begin to make that confession we must beware of a false humility and pretended modesty in which we utter those words without believing them.

Do you know what is the surest sign of this hypocrisy?

Prayerlessness. A failure to get down on our knees and cry out to God for His help. We can say rather loudly, "I'm not sufficient," but it is all pretension if there is not an urgent and continual pursuit of God in prayer.

The apostle Paul prayed often. His confession of his emptiness was sincere. He meant what he said because he understood the weight of his office and the smallness of his being. Back in chapter 2, a consideration of his God-given assignment brought the apostle to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (v.16).

The apostle described his task of preaching as spreading the fragrance of Christ (v.14), and he noted the eternal consequences: "To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life" (v.16).

What was true of the apostle's ministry is also true for every new covenant minister. In your preaching of the gospel people will encounter the crucified and risen Christ, and that encounter will have a lasting (everlasting) effect. Some will be saved unto eternal life; others will be hardened in resistance and condemned by the very word they have heard.

Preaching is no small task. The gates of heaven are open and shut by it. What frail and fallible man, with any sense of his own smallness and sinfulness, can fail to acknowledge that he is utterly inadequate for the task?

What man, relying on his own

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strength, would dare claim to be an ambassador for Christ, a shepherd of His flock, a guardian of His blood-bought bride, a watchman on Zion's walls? What human power will prove sufficient for the one who watches over souls and will have to give an account to the Lord of the church?

The responsibility is breathtaking! Think of the puniness of the ones who bear it. Ministers are men, mere men—flesh and blood. They do not have power in themselves to impart grace. They can not influence one heart or convert one soul or comfort one sorrowful person. They may speak the word, but they can not make it effectual. They may preach the gospel, but they can not cause anyone to see its glory.

What is more, ministers are sinful men. They do battle every day not just with sin “out there” or in the lives of God's people, but in their own hearts. We are prone to be selfish where we are called to love and sacrifice. We are subject to sinful passions like anger. We often follow in Moses' steps as he yelled at the people of God and struck the rock in his rage. We are susceptible to lust like David, who could not pull his eyes away from another man's wife. We are open to fear of men like Peter, who denied the Lord to save his own skin.

When we compare ourselves to the task of ministry, we find there is no comparison. Think of a balance. After loading one pan with a thousand pounds of rocks (all the God-given responsibilities of the ministry) place a feather on

the other side (the amount of power we have in ourselves).

When we see our task as it really is and when we see ourselves as we really are, then we are compelled to cry out with the apostle, “Who is sufficient for these things? Who is equal to such a task?” And what's the answer? The first part is unmistakable: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves...”

This answer strips man bare of

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### ***Ministerial competence is not man-made.***

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everything good, leaving him nothing at all. It declares that men are altogether useless to Christ's cause of themselves.

Clearly then, ministerial competence is not man-made. The best seminaries in the world can not impart it by themselves. As important as good professors and diligent studies are, they cannot by themselves make any man fit for the ministry.

We need to be convinced of our powerlessness in order to appreciate God's power in us. If once in a while the Lord lets us feel overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy, that is not such a bad thing. If once in a while the Lord

lets one of our works fall apart, it is not a total loss. There is something worse, you know, namely the minister who has never felt the need to ask: “Who is enough for this task?”

But for those who ask that question repeatedly, the answer is as sweet the thousandth time as it was the first time: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but *our sufficiency is from God....*”

#### **The Riches of God's Sufficiency**

Throughout the history of redemption, the servants whom God called rightly felt their own inadequacy. In each instance, the sufficiency of God was to be their confidence. Whether we think of Moses (“Who am I? I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”) or Jeremiah (“Ah, LORD God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth”) or Paul (“I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle”), the grace and power of God was to be their strength.

God's promise remains the same. He will equip and supply all those whom He calls. He never calls anyone whom He does not also supply. After all, the gospel is about Christ's saving help and deliverance for sinful, helpless people. Considering that fact, would God expect those who serve in the cause of that gospel to serve in anything other than God's own power in Christ? To attempt it would be antithetical to the message they bring.

The good news for seminarians is

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plain. If the Lord calls you, He will make you competent. The God of all power and grace, who is rich beyond measure, will give you all you need.

This is not an excuse for laziness in seminary or in the ministry, but the very foundation for enthusiastic working. Learning from Philippians 2:12, we might say, “Work out your ministerial preparation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.”

And as you look to the ministry, what joys await you! One continual source of happiness in the ministry is being surprised over and over that God uses such weak instruments for such great things. A brother who has never before said a word to you about a single sermon, may suddenly explain the turmoil he’s faced in the past year, confessing, “If it hadn’t been for the faithful preaching every week, I would not have made it.”

God is great! His Word never returns to Him void but always accomplishes the purpose for which He sent it. And this is the God who through Christ Jesus has given the new covenant, and with it, a more glorious and more powerful ministry than Moses ever knew.

If you thought there was power in the Old Testament, if you thought God’s might operated through Moses who parted the Red Sea and caused water to flow from a rock, then what 2 Corinthians 3 teaches is exhilarating. It tells us that the new covenant ministry is exceedingly more glorious and powerful than anything Moses ever saw.

The powerful Pentecost Spirit is

pleased to work through new covenant ministers. Notice, the apostle Paul does not simply say, “God is sufficient” or “God is powerful.” If that is all the Bible said we might wonder, “Why have ministers? Let God do the work.” What the apostle does say is even more amazing, not only that God is powerful and sufficient, but that He is *our* power and *our* sufficiency.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” The apostle would answer: “Ministers, called of Christ are, through the empowerment of His Spirit.” By God’s power they are made competent for the ministry. By the Spirit’s illumination, they understand the Word, and are made ready to preach it. By Christ’s presence, the word from the pulpit, in the catechism class, on the pastoral visit is made effective. By God’s grace their hearts are made tender and loving toward the flock, and their zeal is for God’s glory.

As God gives us those hearts, we will rejoice that God gets the glory by calling feeble men to such a profound work. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). So then, “If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:11).

Let us say gladly: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” Then God will be glorified, His people built up, and we will be de-

livered from bipolar roller coasters. “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.... [But] Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord.” (Jeremiah 17:5, 7).

**Rev. Todd Joling** is the Pastor of the Faith United Reformed Church in Beecher, Illinois.

# We Confess

## *An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession*

### *Article 26: Of Christ's Intercession*

Article 26 opens by summarizing everything the Confession has already said about the glorious work of our Lord, saying,

We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate Jesus Christ the righteous; who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us.

#### **The One Mediator**

The Confession begins with the basic, fundamental truths of Scripture concerning our Lord and salvation in Him. In these opening words, the Lord is first called our *Mediator*. A mediator is someone who goes between two parties, seeking to bring them together. As we have already seen throughout the Confession, we have offended God by our sin. We are therefore estranged from each other.

In Scripture, in order for sinners to come before the Lord, some sort of mediation had to take place. In the Old Testament we have the example of Moses (Exodus 32) and the priests (Leviticus 1-9). The difference between our culture and Scripture, of course, lies in the fact that this mediation is not a negotia-

tion, but an intervention on our behalf.

In the fullness of time, God the Father sent His very own Son to be the true mediator. As Jesus said, the only way to the Father is through Him (John 14:6), for He is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5). This truth is intimately related to the covenant of grace, that situation in which God has promised to take a people for Himself through Christ. Because Christ was the final sacrifice, Scripture speaks of Him as “the mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15, 12:24).

Our Lord is also our *Advocate* “with the Father” (1 John 2:1). This was used as a legal term in the ancient world for one who would plead the cause of another. This advocacy of Jesus before His Father on our behalf takes the form of intercessory prayer. Jesus’ advocacy benefits us practically when the world condemns us as narrow-minded bigots, when our flesh rises up within us and causes us to despair, and when the devil’s lies reach us and say, “How can God love a sinner like *you*?” It is then that our hearts can say, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus . . . indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34), in fact, “He always lives to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:25).

These two truths about our Lord

are intimately linked to His Incarnation (the Son of God becoming man) and His two natures (divine and human): He is our divine-human mediator and our divine-human intercessor for the purpose of granting the sinner “access to the divine Majesty.” The infinite gulf between God and man was bridged in our Lord, who is both God and man. To paraphrase the ancient fathers Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus, God became man that man might be led to God.

#### **An Approachable Mediator**

Every Christian confesses that Jesus Christ is the mediator. But He is only mediator for those who are holy. He is the mediator for the leaders of the church. He is the great mediator for lesser mediators, whom we can approach. This was the popular and official teaching of Rome when our Confession was written. It still is today.

On the one hand Rome gives lip service to Christ as the mediator, yet inserts the saints as those to whom we can go immediately. It is only after making our requests known to the saints that our prayers and needs are brought before Christ, the majestic Lord and soon Judge of the living and the dead. “But,” as the Confession continues, “this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between Him and us, ought in no wise to affright us by His majesty, or cause us to seek another according to our fancy.”

Yes, Jesus is the resurrected “Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). Nonetheless, He is still our mediator through whom we not only must approach the Father, but He is the

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only on one through whom we *can* approach the Father. This is one of the great blessings of the New Covenant. All God's people are "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4) before the open and accessible throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

And why must we not be afraid of our sinless, holy, all-powerful, and exalted Lord and Savior?

For there is no creature, either in heaven or on earth, who loves us more than Jesus Christ; who, though *existing in the form of God, yet emptied himself, being made in the likeness of man and of a servant* for us, and *in all things was made like unto his brethren*. If, then, we should seek for another mediator who would be favorably inclined towards us, whom could we find who loved us more than He who laid down His life for us, even *while we were His enemies*? And if we seek for one who has power and majesty, who is there that has so much of both as He *who sits at the right hand of God and to whom hath been given all authority in heaven and on earth*? And who will sooner be heard than the own well beloved Son of God?

Here we find, in my opinion, the most tender and comforting section in all of the Reformed catechisms and confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Who loves us more than He who said, "Come to me... and I will give you rest?" (Matthew

11:28) Who loves us more than the one who calls us friends, and said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends?" (John 15:13, cf. vv. 12, 14-15) Who loves us more than the one whose love "surpasses knowledge?" (Ephesians 3:19) And what in all creation, whether friend or foe, angel or demon, pastor or pope "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord?" (Romans 8:39)

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***The Protestants overthrew a thousand years of tradition and popular piety by upholding Jesus Christ alone as the foundation of our salvation as well as our piety in prayer.***

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After all, He left eternity for time; fellowship with the Father for the rejection of His own; kingship for service. And He did this for us, His enemies! Even if we desire to shun Christ for a more majestic mediator, who is there besides Him who has all authority in heaven and earth? (Matthew 28:18) And thus, which saint or intercessor would be more heard than the Father's very own, eternally begotten Son, whom He has loved from eternity past?

**What About the Saints?**

Our Protestant forefathers proclaimed the clear teaching of Scripture that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is

the mediator of His people. This seemed utterly radical to 16<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholics. Remember, the Protestants overthrew a thousand years of tradition and popular piety by upholding Jesus Christ alone as the foundation of our salvation as well as our piety in prayer.

As Martin Luther described his life, he wrote that he was "drowned" in the worship of the saints. Why did people turn to saints instead of their loving Savior? Article 24 of the French Confession of Faith, which corresponds to the present article of the Belgic Confession, gives a theological answer to this question by saying it was "a device of Satan to lead men from the right way of worship."

The Belgic Confession, which was based on the French Confession, gives some more practical insights into the creation of this practice. First, it was "only through distrust that this practice of dishonoring, instead of honoring, the saints was introduced." Distrust of what? Of Jesus' gospel promises about approaching the Father in prayer through Him alone. Candles, beads, confessionals, priests, indulgences all blocked the laity's view of Jesus. Thus, distrust set in and the iconography and images of Jesus in Europe at this time were of Him sitting on a throne of judgment, not calling out to His sheep.

The second reason praying to saints came about was instead of honoring Christ, the medieval church built up a false piety of "honoring" and venerating great men and women of old. Yet, this actually was a dishonoring of their names by turning to them in prayer. Why was this

dishonoring? Because Rome led people to do “that which they [i.e., the saints] never have done nor required, but have on the contrary steadfastly rejected according to their bounden duty, as appears by their writings.”

Surely the apostles would have had grounds to accept the prayers and “honor” of their hearers, especially while alive. After all, why wait until they are dead when people could have approached them while alive! For example, Peter, the supposed first pope, did not accept Cornelius’ bowing down to him, kissing his feet and ring as the pope accepts today. Rather, he said, “Stand up; I too am a man” (Acts 10:26). Paul and Barnabas were absolutely appalled that the Lystrans would think of them as “gods” by rushing out of the temple of Zeus, tearing their clothes and screaming, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you...” (Acts 14:15) Augustine says in *The City of God*, “We do not build temples, and ordain priests, rites, and sacrifices for these same martyrs; for they are not our gods, but their God is our God” (8.27).

The third factor that led to praying to saints and not the Father through Christ was by teaching the people of God that their sins disqualified them from confidence in prayer. After all, how can one pray directly to God if he or she is “unworthy.” Yet this is not true humility, which, while acknowledging that one is not worthy to approach God, accepts His invitation to come in reverence through the blood and merits of Christ. After all, “we should not offer our prayers to God on the ground of our own worthiness, but

only on the ground of the excellency and worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is become ours by faith.”

Instead of appealing to the human psyche and contriving a doctrine of honoring the saints and approaching them, rather than Christ, because of our unworthiness, the Confession strings together a long list of biblical texts that offer the promise of the gospel of Christ’s intercession on our behalf.

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***Venerating great  
men and women of  
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Hebrews 2:17-18 teaches that Jesus Christ *in all things was made like unto His brethren, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted.* The purpose of the Son of God becoming like us in every point, without sin, was to both remove our sins (propitiation) as well as to be a comforting high priest to us when we are tempted. Because he became as we are and was tempted like we are, he can care for us.

Hebrews 4:14-15 (cf. 10:19ff) exhorts us to *draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace,*

*that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.* The basis of this appeal is that we have a *great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens*, that is, a majestic mediator; but we also have a loving mediator who is a high priest and was *touched with the feeling of our infirmities and hath been in all points tempted.*

Hebrews 7:25 proclaims that because Christ’s priesthood is unchangeable, *He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.* In one sense, according to this text, the purpose of Jesus’ resurrection was that He would plead His merit before the Father on our behalf, and so bring us into His everlasting kingdom. As John Calvin says, in his comments on 1 John 2:1, “The intercession of Christ is a continual application of His death for our salvation. That God then does not impute to us our sins, this comes to us, because He has regard to Christ as intercessor.”

With these biblical words on his mind, the author of our Confession applies these promises to the hearts of us, the readers, saying, “Let us not forsake Him to take another, or rather to seek after another, without ever being able to find him; for God well knew, when He gave Him to us, that we were sinners.”

### **Christian Prayer**

Since Christ has become our high priest, intercessor, and mediator, we are enabled and freed to “call upon the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ our only Mediator, as we are taught in the Lord’s Prayer;

## Study/Application Questions for Article 26

1. How would you answer a Roman Catholic who says they do not “worship” Mary and the saints but only “honor” them? Or, that they do not ask the saints to answer their prayers but ask the saints to pray for them?
2. What does it mean to pray “in the name of Jesus?”
3. How do Jesus’ high priestly prayers for us preserve us in our salvation? (Heb. 7:25)

being assured that whatever we ask of the Father in His Name will be granted us.” Because our Lord, the mediator of the New Covenant, pleads for us, we can plead with Him. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism roots the necessity of prayer in gratitude, saying, “...it is the chief part of the thankfulness which God requires of us” (Q&A 116). Christ has won salvation for me! Christ now pleads that salvation on my behalf! I am to render to Him thankfulness for His past and continuing ministry for me.

Our Lord Jesus did not leave us in the dark as to what to pray or how to pray. He gave us the very words to use in invoking the Father in the “Our Father.” The Lord’s Prayer is both a pattern of prayer (“Pray then *like this*,” Matthew 6:9) as well as a prayer we are to pray (“When you pray, say,” Luke 11:1). As a pattern of prayer our Lord’s prayer teaches us to pray for God’s glory first (petitions 1-3) and then the good of our neighbor (petitions 4-6). It also teaches us to call upon Him as a Father for we have become His sons. We end our prayer in praise and in a doxology for His power and ability to hear and answer our feeble prayers. As an ac-

tual prayer, the Lord’s Prayer is one that we ought to memorize and teach our children from their earliest days.

Since God the Son become man, descending to us, we are enabled to go to God, ascending to Him. In prayer, then, we are lifted up into the Father’s very throne room, the true Holy of Holies in heaven (Hebrews 8). This is one of the most amazing blessings of the New Covenant. Every sinner in the camp of Israel may enter the courtyard of the tabernacle, walk up to its veil, enter the Holy Place, and then enter the Holy of Holies!

There is no longer a veil. Our Lord’s once for all sacrifice tore it in two (Matthew 27:51), from top to bottom. The mercy seat now sits in full view of the people. May we live the wonder of the New Covenant in our corporate, family, and personal prayers, approaching our gracious Father through Christ, our only mediator and advocate.

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

## Looking Out and About

- Mr. Gregg Lubbers, who graduated from Heritage Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, accepted the call to Covenant United Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan. He was ordained as Minister of the Word and Sacraments on June 24th.

- Mr. Andre Holstag was examined by the elders of the Lynwood United Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois and was granted a license to exhort.

- The Christian Counseling Centre of London, Ontario is sponsoring a Marriage, Family, and Friendship Seminar at the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario on September 16 and 17. The speaker will be Dr. Paul Tripp.

- The Faith United Reformed Church in Telkwa, British Columbia dedicated their new church building on May 20, 2005.

- Mr. Travis Grasmid was examined by the elders of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Byron center, Michigan. After the examination, Mr. Grasmid was granted a license to exhort.

*If you have church news you would like to have appear in “Looking Out and About,” please email us at [wbybkath@juno.com](mailto:wbybkath@juno.com).*

## 2005 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches

The 2005, annual synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) met for seven days, from June 14 through June 21, in Byron Center, Michigan. Ten ministers and ten elders from the two classes made up the synod. The faculty of the Protestant Reformed Seminary served as advisors. The sessions included a rare Saturday morning meeting. The Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, Michigan PRC, ably presided over the broadest assembly of the PRC.

The highlight of the synod was the oral examination over nearly two days of two graduates of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Both graduates are unusual. Mr. John Marcus has a Ph.D. in Biological Chemistry from the University of Michigan. Mr. Marcus came to the PRC several years ago from another Reformed denomination. Mr. Dennis Lee, a Singaporean, was delivered from Buddhism with his family as a child. Later, he was converted to the Reformed faith. Synod approved the examination of both men and declared them candidates for the gospel ministry.

In other decisions concerning the seminary, synod accepted two new students in the fall of 2005; appointed Rev. Ken Koole, pastor of the Grandville, Michigan PRC, to replace retiring Prof. David J. Engelsma as professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies; adopted criteria for granting tenure to professors; and adopted a budget for the seminary for the 2005/2006 school-year of \$550,000.

Synod heard encouraging reports of mission works in Northern Ireland; the Philippines; Spokane, Washington; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The mission in Northern Ireland is soon to result in

the organization of a congregation, God willing.

With regret, synod decided to close a struggling mission in Ghana, West Africa. Despite the good intentions of the denomination, as well as the expenditure of a great deal of labor and money, the PRC were, in fact, unprepared to carry out the work of the field. Synod took note of specific mistakes for the sake of future work on a foreign field of this kind.

The small, 7,000-member PRC are committed to bring up a budget of some \$350,000 in 2006 for denominational missions. This is in addition to the money that will be spent by the congregations in local evangelism.

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches, synodical committee on behalf of the ecumenical calling of the PRC, reported on fellowship with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore and on correspondence with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. The sister-church relationship of the PRC with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore is presently troubled by possible difference over the fundamental biblical doctrine of marriage. It is the stand of the PRC that marriage is, by God's ordaining, a life-long bond, expressing in the lives of

God's covenant people the unbreakable covenant of grace between Christ and His church. Remarriage after divorce is adultery. This stand is of great benefit to the Churches and to the families in these Churches. Divorce is rare. Remarriage after divorce is non-existent. This is the happy condition of the Churches with regard to the marriages of their members in the present evil hour, when the basic structure of human and covenantal life breaks down almost everywhere.

The Reformed synod is a deliberative body. The 2005 synod of the PRC showed itself a deliberative body in an interesting, profitable debate over the meaning and implementation of Article 39 of the Church Order of Dordt, the church order of the PRC. Article 39 allows for placing a group that cannot as yet be organized as a congregation "under the care of a neighboring consistory." The debate was occasioned by a question concerning the lawfulness of administering the Lord's Supper to a group gathered and developed by a mission work of the PRC. Synod affirmed the rule of Article 64 of the Church Order of Dordt: The Lord's Supper is to be administered only "where there is supervision of elders . . . in a public gathering of the congregation." Article 39, on synod's interpretation, allows a consistory to enroll a spiritually mature group, under certain conditions, in a neighboring congregation, so that the Supper may be administered to the group. Thus, Article 39 is in harmony with Article 64.

Several years ago, synod commissioned the preparation of a "Study

Edition of the Creeds.” Synod was informed that the work has been finished and that the book will soon be published. This book includes both the major creeds—the “Three Forms of Unity”—and the minor creeds, for example, the Reformed “Form for the Administration of Baptism” and the Reformed “Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper.” In addition to helpful introductions to the creeds, the handsome, hardback volume includes complete indexes of doctrines, words, and biblical texts in all the creeds. Reformed ministers, seminarians, elders, Christian schoolteachers, and church members in all denominations will benefit from this unique work. The price of the book is \$9. Copies can be ordered from The Office of the Stated Clerk, Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., S.W., Grandville, Michigan 49418.

Synod adopted a denominational budget for 2006 of \$1,406,700. This requires each of the 1,700 families that make up the PRC to give \$825 in 2006 for denominational work. Even though the families must also support their local church and virtually without exception maintain good Christian schools for the children and young people, there is never a shortfall in the synodical budget. The people have a heart for the maintenance and spread of the Reformed faith as preserved by the grace of God in the PRC.

There were no overtures pressuring the synod to depart from the “old paths” of Holy Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and the Church Order of Dordt.

At this synod, there were no protests or appeals from members at all, which is not always the case.

At present, the PRC are blessed with the peace of unity in the truth of Scripture, as this truth is set down in the Reformed confessions. For this, we are grateful to God. May it long continue.

**Professor David J. Engelsma** serves as a Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grandville, Michigan.

**Wybren H. Oord**

## 2005 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church

It’s still all about women in office.

The 2005 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church began with an opening worship service at the Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church. As the host church, Palos Heights invited elders from neighboring churches to assist in the distribution of the elements at the communion service. The Loop Christian Ministries of Chicago sent a woman elder to the service. The Palos Heights elders, exercising their CRC-given right not to have women office-bearers, asked the

woman elder to refrain from participating in the serving of the elements. The service continued as planned without any hitches. However, the matter was brought before the floor of Synod, the chairman of the Palos Heights Consistory had to apologize for the stand taken by those who were appointed to be overseers of the Sacrament.

Later in the week, Synod discussed whether or not women elders could be a part of their own body. After a lengthy discussion that opened a few more ministry doors to women,

Synod balked at the idea of having women elders serve as delegates to its body. Synod made very clear that women may distribute the body and blood of Christ to the people of God, but they are not to have an authoritative voice within the body of Christ. They may bring the means of grace as long as they have no vote as to who receives it. In spite of the fact that this is a clear violation of the CRC Church Order, which states that no elder may lord over another elder, no apology was given. It is ironic that Palos Heights Consistory had to apologize for upholding a CRC approved view of Scripture, while Synod did not.

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Don't get me wrong; I fully believe the Word of God clearly teaches that women should not be ordained—a view that the CRC, by the way, acknowledges as biblical, but for Synod to open every door but its own seems very hypocritical, to say the least. Those who have adopted an interpretation of Scripture that Synod has declared as a valid view of God's Word are called to task on the floor of Synod. However, when Synod, for the sake of unity, adopts the same strategy of excluding women it is seen as best for the church. Apparently decisions based on a desire for unity are more tolerable than those that are based on a desire to be faithful to Scripture.

Synod approved thirty-one men and seven women as candidates for the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments with a simple voice vote. In the past, candidates were voted on individually, allowing for those opposed to women's ordination to abstain from voting for female graduates of seminary. Slowly the door is being closed for those who acknowledge that women should not be ordained.

Synod also discussed First CRC of Toronto's desire to ordain practicing homosexual members to church office. Synod rightly expressed dismay and frustration with Classis Toronto which had been instructed to investigate First CRC's views on homosexuality but had failed to do so. At the end of a lengthy debate, Synod appointed a committee to investigate the position of the church council and determine if the church is in compliance with the position that the denomination has on homosexuality.

This committee should not have to work very hard to discern the council's position in this matter since they have been very clear on their views for some time. The facts are: First CRC of Toronto has practicing homosexuals in its congregation who are members in good standing. Two years ago, the council wrote a letter to the churches within Classis Toronto that they wanted to place these individuals up for nomination as elder and deacon. They also made clear that they had studied the issue and have no desire to discuss the matter any further. These facts are currently not in compliance with the denomination's view on homosexuality; they will never be in compliance with the Word of God.

Synod reaffirmed its commitment to Christian Day Schools and approved several recommendations for promoting Christian education. This affirmation came after acknowledging that there has been a decline in the CRC's support of Christian Day Schools. What Synod failed to acknowledge was that this decline has come because there is a growing concern about the direction that the Christian schools are taking. A Reformed Christian school should teach a Reformed worldview. When the word "Reformed" is taken out of the by-laws, when teachers deny various tenets of the Reformed faith, when sports and music pro-

grams are more important than Reformed dogmatics, parents become disillusioned with the school and find other ways to instruct their children.

But who can blame the schools? A recent survey revealed that over a quarter of the churches in the Christian Reformed Church no longer preach the Heidelberg Catechism. That is more than one out of every four churches! In addition, almost twenty per cent of the churches in the CRC do not have weekly catechism classes. Is it any wonder that those who grow up in these churches no longer know what the Reformed faith is? When the church no longer has the desire to defend the Reformed faith, why should the schools teach it?

Synod acknowledged the retirement of Rev. Peter Borgdorff who served the denomination as Executive Director of Ministries for thirteen years. Rev. Cal Bremer was appointed the new director. Leaving the seminary is Rev. Robert De Vries, professor of Church Education. Rev. Dave Feddes said farewell as the English language minister of The Back to God Hour. Dr. David Engelhard was given an indefinite medical leave from his duties as General Secretary of the denomination, a position he has held since 1994.

Let me conclude by saying that most of the information I received about the CRC Synod of 2005

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***Apparently decisions based on a desire for unity are more tolerable than those that are based on a desire to be faithful to Scripture.***

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## URCNA Classis Southwest U.S. Report

came from *The Banner* and from *The Grand Rapids Press*. It is interesting to note that last year synod decided to send *The Banner* to every household in the CRC. It was reported then that there would be no additional cost, no additional ministry shares used to finance this project. Now, one year later, *The Banner* is appealing to its readers to donate between \$10 to \$25 each so that they can keep getting the magazine for free.

As a former minister in the Christian Reformed Church, I continue to pray for the denomination. Yet, I must also admit that I grieve over certain trends that have developed over the last few decades. The CRC is no longer the church that I grew up in, and, in their efforts to promote diversity and unity it no longer teaches the historic Reformed faith that was once instilled in her members.

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

The 15th meeting of Classis Southwest U.S. was hosted by one of its now-organized church plants, the Pasadena URC. What turned out to be one of its longer meetings, the eighteen churches of classis assembled to examine two recent graduates for candidacy, deal with an overture, as well as several items of advice for several churches. The delegates were pleased to have in their midst for the first time delegates from the newly organized church plant, the Emmanuel URC (Lemoore, CA).

Most of the two days were taken up with the candidacy examinations of Mr. Marcelo Souza (Christ Reformed Church) and Mr. Nollie Malabuyo (Escondido URC), both graduates of Westminster Seminary California. Mr. Souza sustained his examination while Mr. Malabuyo sustained four of the seven sections of the exam, and was strongly encouraged to return to classis within one year for re-examination in three areas.

The Council of the URC of Nampa, Idaho overtured classis on the matter of candidacy sermons. Wanting to see some structured mechanism whereby classis receives reports of these sermons, the overture was brought to the floor. Partly because of the lateness of the final day of classis and partly because the delegates wanted to see more specific details, the overture was referred back to its originating Council.

The third mark of the church was also on the agenda as the delegates gave their advice to two Consistories to proceed to the sec-

ond public step of church discipline with three members, as well as to one Consistory to proceed to exclusion of two baptized members.

The work of the federation as a whole was on the agenda as classis' delegates on CERCU, CECCA, and the URCNA Website Committee reported on their work and answered questions.

Classis SWUS was also privileged to received the greetings of the Rev. Jay Fluck of the RCUS, Western Classis, who exhorted the assembly with the words of 2 John, and the Rev. Ken Orr of the RPCNA, Pacific Coast Presbytery, who encouraged the brethren in their a cappella Psalm singing!

The next meeting of classis will be hosted by the Phoenix URC from January 17-18, 2006.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Daniel R. Hyde, Clerk

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## URCNA Classis Michigan U.S. Report

Delegates to the eighteenth meeting of Classis Michigan of the URCNA met at the Faith United Reformed Church near Holland, Michigan. During their spare time they were able to walk through the construction of the new addition that Faith hopes to have completed by winter.

The dozen churches of classis met to examine two seminary graduates, one from Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, the other from Heritage Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In addition, the delegates heard reports from church visitors, several churches, and considered an overture.

Most of the day was spent listening to the Candidacy Examination of Mr. Gregg Lubbers (Covenant, Byron Center) and Mr. Talman Wagenmaker (Covenant, Kalamazoo). Both men gave a wonderful account of their knowledge of Scripture, the Confessions, and their love for the Lord. They unanimously sustained the examination and, should they receive a call within classis, the ordination exam was also waived.

An overture from Bethel United Reformed Church of Jenison was discussed and the following statement was adopted by classis: "When a professing member who is under the second or later stages of ecclesiastical discipline requests resignation of his membership, the consistory shall acquiesce to the request. This means that the member 'is excluded

from the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promises to and bestows upon his church.'"

In addition to these matters, advice was sought and given to various churches. Mr. Gary Fisher was elected to serve on the Synodical Website Committee, filling the vacancy brought about by the resignation of the previous classical delegate. The next meeting of

classis will be hosted by the Bethel URC in Jenison on October 11, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Wybren H. Oord

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## *The Graduating Class of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary 2005*

The Rev. Robert D. Decker, Rector

Having successfully sustained their oral examinations before the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America (PRC) Dennis Lee and John Marcus graduated from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary the evening of June 20. The Rev. Barrett Gritters, Professor of Practical Theology, gave the address on “Preaching and the Real Worship Wars”.

### **Dennis Lee**

Mr. Lee was born in Malaysia and raised in Singapore. While studying at the University of Illinois he was converted by God to the Christian faith by means of an outreach group. Through reading such authors as Arthur W. Pink, R.C. Sproul, and John Gerstner, the brother became convinced of the truth of the Reformed faith. He joined a Reformed Church in Singapore where he met his wife, Foong-Ling. The Lord has blessed the Lees with three sons. Mr. Lee desires to serve the Lord in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRC.

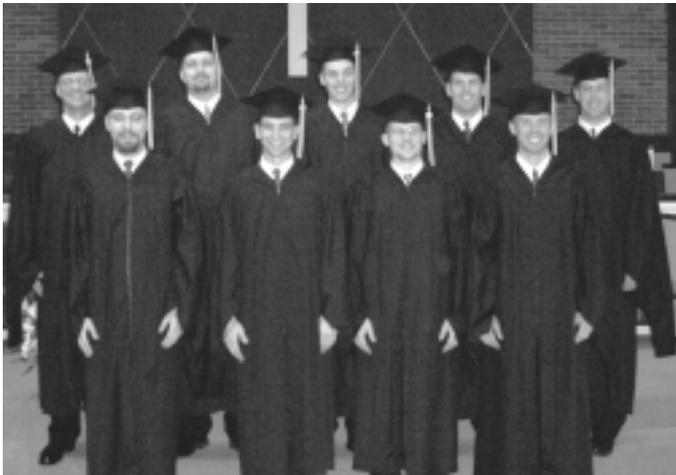


### **John Marcus**

Mr. Marcus was born to Mr. and Mrs. Abe Marcus, missionaries of the Christian Reformed Church serving for thirty years in Mexico. John received his AB from Dordt College in 1987 and his Ph.D. in Biological Chemistry from the University of Michigan in 1993. John is married to Amy Stafford (Ph.D., Pharmacology, and the mother of their seven children). John is a candidate for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRC. The brother has a special interest in foreign missions.

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## *Mid-America Reformed Seminary's 20th Annual Commencement*



by *Glenda Mathes*

May 20 marked Mid-America Reformed Seminary's 20th Annual Commencement. It also marked a couple of firsts for Mid-America. Brian Busker was the Seminary's first graduate from its new Master of Theological Studies program, and Paul Berghaus was the Seminary's first graduate to be ordained as a chaplain in the United States military. Other men receiving Master of Divinity degrees were: Spencer Aalsburg, Greg Bylsma, Christopher Folkerts, James Sinke, Jason Stewart, Matthew Timmons, and Talman Wagenmaker. Additional causes for celebration were Professor J. Mark Beach's reception of his Ph.D. the same weekend and the recent notification that the Seminary had received accreditation status from Transnational Association of Colleges and Schools (TRACS).

About 400 people attended the commencement service held at Calvary Reformed Church in South

Holland, IL. Seminary President Dr. Cornelis Venema opened the service with the invocation.

Rev. Fred E. Folkerts, pastor of Immanuel URC in Listowel, ON, was the commencement speaker. He is not only an alumnus and former Board member, but he is also the father of graduate Chris Folkerts and one of last year's graduate, James Folkerts.

Choosing Malachi 2:1-9 as his text, Rev. Folkerts spoke on the topic: "For he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts." He urged graduates to be zealous in bringing God's Word as messengers of the Lord of Hosts. "Brothers," he said, "this is to describe your commitment, your character, and your task. The law of truth must be in your mouth and the love of truth must be in your heart." Rev. Folkerts spoke about the huge responsibility these graduates face, reminding them that "the failure of a church always begins with the failure of its ministers." He added, "But we know God's grace,

and if you are committed, God will surely honor that commitment."

He encouraged graduates to "preach the whole counsel of God" since it is "the Lord who called you" and "the Lord Jesus who also died for you." He asked, "What do people really need?" and then said, "It makes no difference what their age; their deepest need is to be confronted in their heart of hearts with the majesty and the grace of the Holy God.

He went on to say that God's holy messengers must convey that message with a spirit and a heart of reverence. "You must pray much for God's grace and this reverence," he said. "If your ministry is not characterized by this humble spirit, your ministry will go off track. It will fail in terms of content, purpose, and effect. You must have the spirit of reverence that is to mark your holy calling as messengers of the Lord of Hosts." He exhorted graduates to remember "Who it is who called you" and "what He's asked you to be." Then "people will find God's law in your mouth and hear it from your lips."

Rev. Arthur Besteman, President of the Board of Trustees, presented the eight Master of Divinity degrees and the Master of Theological Studies degree.

Professor J. Mark Beach read 2 Timothy 2:1-13 and began his charge to the graduates by admitting, "All the faculty feel like papas who send their sons off to war." He noted the command to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" is striking because we don't normally talk about being strong in grace. But we must be "willing and ready" to

suffer for our Savior. Drawing a parallel between Captain Paul Berghaus' understanding of military obedience to a commanding officer, Professor Beach said, "You answer to the Lord and Savior of the Church. Work hard for your commanding officer--for your Savior--and you'll be the first to receive the blessings and the benefits."

Professor Beach also noted how it seems "funny" that the text commands us to "remember" Jesus Christ. He observed how easy it is to remember many other things, such as our failings or our inadequacies, but also how tempted we are to remember compliments and accomplishments. "But remember who you are," he urged, "how easily sin beckons. Lust is at the door; pride is like a snake ready to strike. Your very gifts are where you're most vulnerable." He reminded graduates to remember that "Jesus is the content and the center of it all" when confronted with the struggles of the ministry. "Every broken, lonely soul in your church needs Him," he said. "And I want you to understand--so do you."

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman led the audience in a commencement litany. Professor Mark Vander Hart led the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, and Professor Alan Strange asked for God's blessing as the ceremony concluded. The congregation sang, "Lead on, O King Eternal" as the graduates exited. Family and friends gathered for a time of fellowship following the ceremony.

## *The Qualities of a Good Mentor*

In 1980 Dr. Charles Krahe received and accepted the call to be pastor of Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While at Seventh, Dr. Krahe had several seminarians serve under him. As he drew near to retirement, he decided he would take one more.

The church began the process of looking for such a young man. A letter was sent to a young minister who was seeking to plant a church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This letter requested names of young men he might recommend. He could not think of such a man and threw the letter into the trash. In God's providence afterwards a name did come to his mind. He retrieved the letter and contacted that young man.

I was that young seminarian. I sent a letter to Dr. Krahe that the position interested me. At the same time I had an interview with Dr. Jack White, later President of Geneva College. Dr. White graciously offered to assist me in finding a position in the ministry. He asked me who I already contacted. Hearing Dr. Krahe's name, he responded, "I know Charles Krahe. We have served together on the Board of Trustees at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia." He wrote a kind letter of reference. A few months later I began my three and half years work with Dr. Krahe.

Based on that relationship, I share some lessons on mentoring relationships from the perspective of the father in the faith and the son.

A good place to begin is with the Heidelberg Catechism. The answer to, "What does God require in the fifth commandment" reads: "That I show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother, and to all in authority over me; submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and correction; and also bear patiently with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand."

Every young man who serves under an older man must honor him. You should see him as Timothy did the Apostle Paul: a father in the faith. You respect his years of service and his knowledge. You respect the fact that he was called of Christ to serve as a pastor. You respect that Christ in His sovereignty has placed this man over you.

In addition to honor you must love this man. Look unto Christ in whom you find life. Jesus took pleasure in doing the Father's will. He did because He loved the Father from all eternity. Through the grace of Christ, love this older man as a father in the faith. Get to know him and his family. Spend leisure time with him. Go to dinner with him. Invite him into your home. Pray with and for him. When the time comes for you to move to a new church, stay in touch. When he declines in health, visit him. Tell him how much his life has meant to you.

You must, as well, show fidelity to him. One example of that is that

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you never criticize this father in the faith privately or publicly. Years ago while serving under Dr. Krahe someone in a conversation was “fishing” to see if I would verbalize a criticism of him. By God’s grace I discerned that intent. My response was how thankful I was to learn under such a wise and godly man. From the content and tone of that remark that individual got the message. Never again did that person initiate such a conversation.

Next young men must learn submission. Paul penned to Timothy that an elder must not be “a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation by the devil” 1 Timothy 3:6 (NASB). While the seminarian may not be a recent convert, he can suffer from the same problem evidenced in the devil’s pride. Proud individuals like the devil disdain to submit to lawful authorities. Once more we fallen men must look unto Christ. By the Spirit and Word we must seek the mind of Christ who for us and our salvation took the form of a servant.

That spirit of humility requires spending more time listening than talking. This older man, in many cases, was in the ministry before you were born! He has had vast experience in preaching, counseling others, and working with consistories or sessions. Many of these men can remember starting their ministries when President Eisenhower was in the Oval Office. Those were days when churches were full and divorces were unusual. In their lifetime they have seen the decline in Church attendance. They have witnessed the breakup of many a family. You have perhaps read books about it.

Men of their generation wrote those books. They lived through those turbulent years. Sons, listen to your fathers.

One last quality I mention is patience. These mentors are not perfect. Accordingly listen to what Ursinus taught in his exposition of the Catechism. Inferiors must bear “with the faults and infirmities of parents and superiors, which may be done without any reproach to the name of God, or which are not in direct opposition to the divine law.”

What about the minister mentoring the young man? These are some qualities I recall observing in Dr. Charles Krahe. The first is: a superior is to love those under him. He showed me love in many ways. On several occasions he returned from a used bookstore with a volume for my library. In fact, when he retired he invited me into his study and offered me first choice from his library. After filling several boxes, I asked him how much he would like for the books. He smiled and remarked they were gifts.

Ministers must secondly pray for this young man. Pray for his growth in Christ, ministerial gifts, his marriage and children. Look for opportunities to pray with him. Give him the example of a man who is quick to suggest, “Let’s pray about that matter.”

During your time together continue his instruction. Make a list of good books he should read and review with you. Have him submit to you sermon manuscripts for inspection. When examining them, don’t try to correct every error in one session. Page after page of red pen markings can be a bit discouraging. Prioritize what errors need to be addressed. Fathers, you might even have to offer instruction on personal grooming habits. I recall a young minister who did pulpit supply for me on several occasions. His hair looked unkempt and his shirt was full of wrinkles.

Be available for advice. Over the years I always appreciated that Dr. Krahe was ready to listen and give sound, biblical counsel. It was especially comforting to realize he would keep our discussions private.

Fathers not only love and provide for their children; they protect them. There are going to be times when the young man makes an error. Privately correct him, but then stand with him. Acknowledge his error to his critics but remind them not blow it out of proportion. Perhaps, share with them an error you made years ago and how a patient congregation forgave and loved you.

Fathers, I urge you to be a source of encouragement to this young man. You know from experience

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***You have perhaps read books. Men of their generation wrote those books. They lived through those turbulent years. Sons, listen to your fathers.***

how it is more difficult to be in the ministry today. Do not wait for him to call you with a problem. Pick up the phone and call. If he is still in the area, make a point to get together for lunch throughout the year. Send him a letter or email to encourage him. These he can tuck away in a book you gave him. Someday after you have entered your heavenly rest, he will open that volume. He will reread that letter. Once more he will profit from your wise words. He will as well give thanks to Christ for your ministry in his life. Further, he will ask the Lord Jesus to use him as He did you to be a father in the faith.

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# Looking Above

*A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ*  
*Revelation 4:8-11*  
*“A Glorious Theater”*

Consider the scene of Revelation 4: it is a scene of glory; it is a scene of holiness; above all, it is a scene of worship.

Notice again the role of the four living creatures. Their role is that of worship. Verse 8: “They do not rest day or night, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’” They give “glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever” (verse 9). The four living creatures worship God because He is holy.

Notice also the role of the twenty four elders. Their role is that of worship. Verses 10-11, “the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.’” The twenty four elders worship God because He is worthy of worship as the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

The four living creatures and the twenty four elders join together in worship of the One who sits on the throne. This pattern repeats itself throughout the book of Revelation. In 5:8, we read, “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. And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.’”

In 5:11-12 we read, “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’”

In 5:14 we read, “Then the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.”

In 7:11 we read, “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, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving

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and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Finally, in chapter 19:4, we read, “And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne saying, ‘Amen! Alleluia!’”

Is the picture becoming clear? Again and again in the book of Revelation, the four living creatures together with the twenty four elders fall down and worship God. That theme is beyond debate; it is beyond dispute; it is set clearly before you: the role of the four living creatures together with the twenty four elders is the role of worshiping the One who sits on the throne!

### **The Call to Worship**

Now, let us bring the elements of the picture together. Do you remember what we concluded concerning the identity of the twenty four elders? The twenty four elders are exactly that: they are elders. The twenty four elders are symbolic of the ruling authority in the church.

Do you remember what we concluded concerning the identity of the four living creatures? The four living creatures are symbolic of the office of preaching. The four living creatures represent the office of the preaching of the Word. Thus the government of the church is here in Revelation 4: the office of the elder in the twenty four elders and the office of preaching in the four living creatures! The government of the church on earth is patterned after the scene in heaven. As it is in

heaven, so it is on earth.

But we may go even a step further. As the government of the church on earth is patterned after the scene in heaven, so that the worship of the church on earth is patterned after the scene in heaven. What are the twenty four elders and the four living creatures doing in heaven? They are worshiping God! What are the offices of the elder and the minister to be doing on earth? Worshiping God!

Revelation 4, then, connects the offices of the church with worship! The office of the elder is connected with worship. The office of the preaching of the word is connected with worship. Not only is the pattern for the government of the church here in Revelation 4, but the pattern for the worship of the church is here in Revelation 4!

Why are the offices of the church connected with worship? Why are the offices of the elder and the preaching of the Word connected with worship? Michael Horton gives this answer: “God has promised to save and keep His people through the means He has appointed.” He goes on to write, “to protect the ministry of the gospel and the integrity of its content, Christ the King reigns in the church through the officers whom He has commissioned.” God saves and keeps His people

through the means He has appointed. What are those means? The preaching of the Word and the Sacraments, the very things for which the elders and preachers are held responsible!

Do you see what Revelation 4 is doing? It is pushing you beyond the bare doctrine of the means of grace; it is pushing beyond the bare doctrine of the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments. It is pushing you to understand what is actually going on in the means of grace. It is pushing you to understand what is actually going on in worship.

### **God in the Worship Service**

In the worship service, it is God who acts. We do not come merely to worship God as the object of our worship, we come to be acted upon by God in worship. It is here that God acts upon us through the preaching of the Word. It is here that God acts upon us through the sacraments.

At first glance, Revelation 4 may give the impression that God is passive in worship. The four living creatures cry out “Holy! Holy! Holy!” They give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne. Similarly, the twenty four elders fall down before Him and worship Him, casting their crowns before Him and saying, “You are worthy, O Lord!” It may

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*We do not come merely to worship God as the object of our worship, we come to be acted upon by God in worship.*

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appear that God is simply passive: He sits on the throne and receives the worship.

Though God is certainly the object of our worship, do not miss the fact that He is also active in worship—profoundly active! He is the One who summons His people before His throne to worship Him (verse 1). He is the One who sends forth the lightnings, thunderings, and voices from His throne (verse 5). He is the One who was and is and is to come (verse 8). He is the One who created all things, and by whose will they exist and were created (verse 11). God is active in worship—profoundly active.

It is in the worship service, where the means of grace (the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments) are administered that God is active. Through the preaching of the Word, He creates faith in our hearts. Through the sacraments, He strengthens that faith. Thus, it is in worship, through the means of grace, that God saves and keeps His people! God is profoundly active in worship.

### **The Focus of Worship**

In worship, God sits enthroned at center stage and He acts upon us. That is the point of Revelation 4 and 5. Do you want to know what our worship should look like? Read Revelation 4 and 5. Here is the

pattern of the church's worship!

Notice how it is all oriented to *the throne*! In 4:2, John sees *a throne* set in heaven, and one sitting upon *the throne*. In 4:3, the rainbow surrounds *the throne*. In 4:4, the twenty four thrones of the twenty four elders surround *the throne*. In 4:5, lightnings, thunderings, and voices proceed from *the throne*. Again in 4:5, the seven lamps of fire burn before *the throne*. In 4:6, the sea of glass is before *the throne*. Again in 4:6, the four living creatures are around *the throne* and in the midst of *the throne*. In 4:9, the four living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on *the throne*. In 4:10, the twenty four elders fall down before Him who sits on *the throne*. Again in 4:10, the twenty four elders cast their crowns before *the throne*. And that's just chapter 4! The centrality of the throne continues in chapter 5!

Do you want to know what our worship should look like? Read Revelation 4 and 5. Here is the pattern of the church's worship, a thoroughly God-centered worship that expects Him to minister to us through the means He has ordained. Away then with that so-called worship that is conceived from the mind of man. Calvin had it right: when it comes to worship, the mind of man is an idol factory! The pattern of worship is not to

be found in the latest fads, trends, or any of the other "church-growth" methods! The pattern of worship is to be found in Scripture! We must stop trying to be wiser than God! We must not forget that He invites worship on His terms, not on ours! Revelation 4 and 5 give us the pattern of God-centered worship.

God is central in worship, because He alone saves. That is why worship is the delight of God's people. They delight in worshiping God because He has saved them. They delight in worshiping God because He continues to act upon them, strengthening them in the faith. They delight in worshiping God because He alone does wondrous things. Is worshiping God your delight? Do you long for and crave nothing more than the intimacy and fellowship you have with God in worship? Do you come thirsting and hungering, expecting to be filled? Do you leave rejoicing that because of Jesus Christ, you are under God's blessing and not His wrath? Do you leave clinging all the more to Christ? Do you leave comforted to know that Christ holds on to you? Do you leave longing for the eternal day of rest when you will be with Him in heaven?

In worship, you stand in a most glorious theater—the very throne room of God in heaven—you are summoned in to the divine drama, and here through the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you receive salvation for your soul. Here God works salvation in your heart. Here you have the privilege of standing in the heavenlies to worship the Author and Perfecter

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***It is in worship, through the means of grace, that  
God saves and keeps His people! God is  
profoundly active in worship.***

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of your faith, even the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

*Unto God Almighty, sitting on the throne, and the Lamb victorious, be the praise alone. God has wrought salvation. He did wondrous things. Who shall not extol Thee, Holy King of Kings?!*

**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.



## Book Review

Speerstra, Hylke. *Cruel Paradise*. Translated and Abridged by Henry J. Baron. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005. 224 pages. Reviewed by Rev. Wybren H. Oord

When my father was in his early thirties, he emigrated from Friesland to Louisiana, USA. There he picked cotton for several years before he, and the two other families that immigrated to the south, moved to New Jersey to become dairy farmers.

I was only two years old when we left the Netherlands. I never understood what drove my father and mother to the United States. I grew up never knowing my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Why would you leave your whole family behind with the prospect of never seeing them again? Why would anyone leave the country in which they were born to work from sun up to sundown? Why would you settle down in a place where no one spoke your language? Yes, the United States was the land of opportunity and the great American Dream, but not at \$2.00 a week.

*Cruel Paradise* weaves together a variety of stories about Dutch emigrants. It offers incredible insight as to why so many people left their land of birth and set sail to newer horizons around the globe. And it tells that story one family at a time. Hylke Speerstra invites readers to join him as he interviews transplanted Dutchmen in the United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. While recounting the trials and successes of

these emigrants in vivid detail, Speerstra does not hold back any punches. Some families made it; others did not. Some of the stories will make you laugh, while others will fill you with tears. Every story will tell of the determination and the work ethic immigrant families had when they left the Netherlands and moved to various parts of the world. One chapter tells of the effect that different waves of emigration had upon a town, giving an entirely new perspective on the exodus of immigrants.

Dr. Henry Baron, who translated this book into the English language writes: "In one lifetime, the earth changed from a huge planet full of unknown places to a well-traveled world, and thus farewell serenades went out of style. But in the life stories of old emigrants the distances were beyond imagination. They ventured into endless space and had no idea where they landed" (p. 2).

Too often we forget that, for many of the emigrants, life would have been easier had they stayed in the Netherlands. It was for the sake of their children they sought a better life. They were determined that we would have opportunities that were not available to them in the Netherlands.

If you are an immigrant, or the child

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or grandchild of those who left the Netherlands to settle elsewhere, *Cruel Paradise* is must reading. It gives the reader an understanding of the mindset of those who left family and country behind to put down roots in a land they did not know. It will give you a new insight to the people that you thought you already knew.

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