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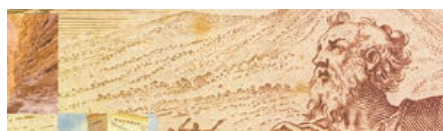
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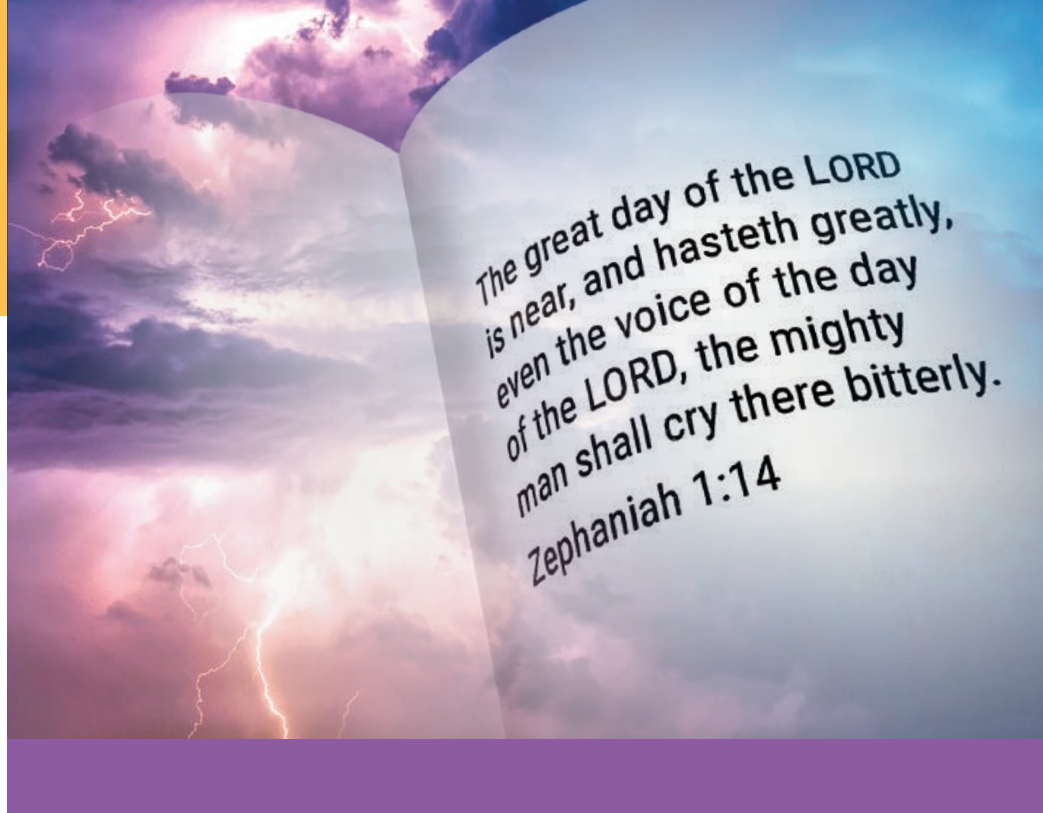
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The Great Day of the Lord

This theme, “The great day of the Lord,” is used much in the Bible. Why? What is God’s purpose? Man by nature continues on day by day as if his days will never end. We are dependent on the Lord, our Creator, for every breath. Yes, without His strength we cannot move so much as one muscle. Death and judgment stand at the door and should be expected any moment. “Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Ps. 39:5). The great day of the Lord could be any day for us! “LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. . . . Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them” (Ps. 39:4, 6). The world goes on as if there is no God. People think they shall live forever, and by nature we are of the world. “Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before



the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (Mal. 3:14–15). Many times God’s Word warns of the great day when Christ will come on the clouds to judge the quick and the dead, but there are other great days spoken of. For God’s people their greatest day is the day of salvation, the day when God reveals Himself unto them in and through Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. This is a resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life. Perfect holiness, of which they have none, is the requirement for access to God. They are lost sinners before this glorious, holy, and all-knowing Lord.

We are brought to see the need for a righteousness outside of ourselves, Jesus Christ the righteous. The God we have offended is the One we need. God, who is angry with the wicked every day, sent His Son to be the propitiation or sin bearer for His hell-worthy people. This is for them the great day of the Lord. “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of

persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:11–12, 14). What a contrast that great day shall be! Eternal woe for the unrepentant but eternal glory for those who learned here in the world to repent and love the Lord.

The Lord’s right hand is high exalted, Jehovah’s strong and mighty hand;

The vaunting enemy He halted, and made His chosen ones to stand.

I shall not die but live before Him, and all His mighty works declare,

That all may joyfully adore Him who in His lovingkindness share.

Psalter 427:3 (Ps. 118)



Mr. Cornelius VanKempen

known as Case, has been married to Susan for fifty-eight blessed years. They attend and are members of Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI.

The Glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1 (1)



Dr. R. Andrew Compton



The book of Ezekiel has a bad reputation. Some dislike its seemingly unceasing tone of judgment (especially chapters 6–32). Some dislike the seemingly callous instructions God gives Ezekiel, such as abstaining from mourning the death of his wife (24:15–18). Some dislike its lurid and lewd imagery that seemingly approves violence against women (16:15–58).

I intentionally used the word “seemingly” in this list of items because there are key qualifications to make about each of these items and many more. We will look at many of these difficult issues in coming articles. But as we begin our tour of this prophetic book, we face head-on the imagery that has caused the most trouble for interpreters over the millennia: the vivid but weird vision in the book’s introductory chapter.

A Baffling Beginning

Already among the Dead Sea Scrolls we find evidence of struggling to understand Ezekiel 1. A scroll fragment named “Pseudo-Ezekiel” (4Q385) shows an effort to make sense of the imagery by associating it with God’s chariot (*merkevah* in Hebrew) from Isaiah 66:15, Jeremiah 4:13, and Psalm 104:3. Because of mention of “wheels within wheels” (1:15–21), this early Jewish writer at Qumran thought it was a visible description of God’s chariot which was elsewhere left undescribed or portrayed metaphorically as a cloud.

From that point on, early interpreters wrestled with the book. The Babylonian Talmud viewed Ezekiel 1 as so mysterious and sacred that it could not even be studied or discussed without great care.

One section from the Talmud claims a small child accidentally started to read the chapter and was consumed by fire as he read the Hebrew word *chashmal* (usually translated as “amber” or “gleaming metal”) in 1:4. Incidentally, the ambiguity of this word, coupled with the power of this vision, is part of why modern Hebrew uses the word *chashmal* for electricity.

In more recent history, conspiracy theorists have suggested that Ezekiel encountered an unidentified flying object. The 1980s television show, *Project UFO*, popularized this claim. Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan, leaders of the Nation of Islam, looked to Ezekiel 1 to defend their belief in “mother plane.” They believed that Allah is seated in the pilot seat and flies around—invisible, of course, to all without eyes to see—preparing to rain down mother plane’s arsenal upon white people. Even the Israeli army named its fast battle tank the *merkevah*; clearly indebted to the power and danger that is perceived in Ezekiel 1.

While it is sad that Ezekiel is viewed with anxiety or at least Leviticus-like bewilderment, it is understandable. After all, when a book opens with such a sustained and symbolic picture in a mode that is uncommon today, it makes sense that a reader might assume the rest will be about the same and decide to skip ahead to the exciting narrative adventures of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the next book of the Bible. “I’ll try to give it a read some other time,” they might tell themselves.

Ezekiel 1 as Impressive, not Incomprehensible

Our God is not a God of chaos or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), and the prophets of the Old Testament knew that God was using them to tell future generations of His salvation in the Messiah (1 Pet. 1:10–12; 2

Pet. 1:19–21). So, our goal as Bible readers is to seek out the meaning of this passage in light of who God is as the inspirer and revealer of Ezekiel 1. I am confident that as we do this, we will be not only equipped but also excited to read on through Ezekiel.

Several years ago, I wrote an article for *The Outlook* about strategies to use when interpreting the imagery of Ezekiel 1: “The Bible in Hi Def: Learning to Interpret Prophetic Imagery.” Readers should find that article helpful for understanding some of the strange and unexpected imagery found in Ezekiel 1.¹ But what I will focus on in this article is the glory of the Lord, which in Hebrew is called the *kavod* of the Lord. We will see how God presents Himself to Ezekiel in ways that echo His earlier manifestations of Himself to His people. By appearing to Ezekiel in a stormy wind, a great cloud flashing with lightning, and in fire (see Ezek. 1:4), God shows Ezekiel that He is the same God to Judah exiled in Babylon that He was to Israel in Egypt at the time of the exodus.

God’s Glory Manifestation

At the end of the vision of chapter 1 we get this summary: “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory [*kavod*] of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking” (Ezek. 1:28b).² There are several things to which the word “such” refers, and we will note them below. But before we do so, we need to consider the biblical history of this term *kavod*.

Its most basic meaning is “to be heavy” or “to be weighty.” This is why Genesis 12:10 says “the famine was severe [*kaved*] in the land” and why Genesis 13:2 says, “Abram was very rich [*kaved*] in livestock, in silver, and in gold.” Note that a single Hebrew word can use different vowels for different parts of speech. *Kavod* and *kaved* are the same

word and many passages in the Old Testament use this word in this way.

That is why it is significant in Exodus 14:4 that the word *kavod* suddenly takes on a new association. Whereas earlier chapters said that Pharaoh’s heart was “hard” (*kaved*; Exod. 7:14; 8:14, 32; 9:7) and that the plagues were “severe” or “heavy” (*kaved*; Exod. 8:20; 9:3, 18, 24; 10:14), God tells Moses immediately before leading Israel through the Red Sea: “And I will harden [*chazaq*] Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory [*kavad*] over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD” (Exod. 14:4).

In order to disconnect the word *kavod* from Pharaoh, God uses a different word to describe Pharaoh’s hardened heart, and now applies *kavod* to Himself as the glory or honor the Egyptians will pay the Lord when they cry uncle in the face of His miraculous deliverance of His people. God repeats this sentiment two more times in Exodus 14 (see vv. 17–18). It is also no accident that God says they “shall know that I am the LORD,” a phrase we find throughout Ezekiel, which scholars have dubbed “the recognition formula.”

In just two chapters, Israel is told that they will see the glory/*kavod* of the Lord (Exod. 16:7) and the result begins a new way that God manifests His presence among His people: “And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory [*kavod*] of the LORD appeared in the cloud” (v. 10).

During the wilderness wandering, Israel encounters God in His *kavod* form on several occasions. In Exodus 24:16–17, the glory settles on the mountain with Moses as God gives him the law (cf. Deut. 5:24). In Exodus 40:34–35, the glory settles,

fills, and covers the tabernacle. This is particularly significant as the glory/*kavod* will chiefly manifest the Lord in His tabernacle presence (e.g., Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6). One of the most striking occurrences of the Lord's glory/*kavod* appearing is in Exodus 33:12–23 where God hides Moses in the cleft of the rock, covers him with His hand, and then lets Moses see His back since he is unable to see the Lord's face. (These features are directly relevant to Ezekiel 1.)

But what does the *kavod* look like? In the passages just cited, several phenomena occur with God's glory/*kavod*. Most frequently we see the Lord manifesting Himself as cloud, fire, or both. In Deuteronomy 5:22–27, the *kavod* is seen also in darkness and so-called “thick-cloud” or “thick-darkness.” This has led to some scholars using the term “glory-cloud” to describe God's *kavod* manifestation.³ While this is not wrong, it does not capture the anthropomorphic, bodily imagery that also attends the glory/*kavod* in Exodus 33.

Vern Poythress's book *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* exhaustively details the ways in which the Lord manifests Himself in Scripture and history and reflects on the significance of particular imagery. For God to appear in fire can symbolize purification and/or destruction. (These two ideas are not incompatible.) Fire also accompanies God's covenant-making actions, expressing not only His holiness that consumes impurity and destroys His enemies, but also “the fierceness of God's commitment to his covenant.”⁴

Poythress also notes the significance of cloud which plays a paradoxical role: “Sometimes a cloud has the primary function of *concealing* God. But he also *appears* in the cloud.” That is, God manifests Himself even as He conceals Himself. But Poythress explains how this paradox

matches the character of God: “Human beings never master God or know him exhaustively. So the cloud is a reminder of human limits. At the same time, God does draw near and establish communion with mankind. So the cloud represents his drawing near. Because ordinary clouds are in the sky, the use of cloud symbolism also reminds us that God's dwelling is especially in heaven. A cloud symbolizes his coming near to us from heaven.”⁵

What Does All This Tell Us about Ezekiel 1?

I will never leave you nor forsake you . . .

Ezekiel was a priest. His father, Buzi, was also a priest, as were Ezekiel's ancestors before him. And yet on his thirtieth birthday—the year he would have ordinarily begun his service in the temple in Jerusalem (see Num. 4)—Ezekiel found himself sitting next to an irrigation canal in Babylon. He was one of those Judeans who sang Psalm 137: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’” (Ps. 137:1–3).

And yet whereas the exiles feared forgetting God's temple presence on Mount Zion (Ps. 137:5–6), God would not let Ezekiel lose sight of His covenant faithfulness. For that matter, God would not let Ezekiel view his life of preparation for the priesthood as a waste. Though Ezekiel could not come to the temple there by the Chebar canal, God brought His temple presence to Ezekiel.

We saw above that God's glory/*kavod* regularly appeared at the tabernacle, but it is important that we see how that same manifestation continued

after the building of the temple. Kings and Chronicles give the temple version of the events that happened at the tabernacle in Exodus 40:34–35:

As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory [*kavod*] of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory [*kavod*] of the LORD filled the LORD's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory [*kavod*] of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (2 Chron 7:1–3; see too 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron. 5:14)

The God who hardened (*kaved*) the heart of Pharaoh and manifested His glory (*kavad*) in Exodus 14:4 by delivering His people from their Egyptian enemies now appears again in the same way. The Babylonians are the new Egyptians. Ezekiel is the new Moses. And because of this, Israel can expect a new and better exodus. All appearances aside, the Lord was not far from Ezekiel, tied to a building in Jerusalem. In fact, Ezekiel 1 shows that God's temple presence does not even require the building—something that would have offended many of the Judeans just as it did the Jews of Jesus' day (see John 2:19–21; Matt. 26:60–62; Mark 14:58).

Visions of God's glory/*kavod* occur in three places in Ezekiel. We have just looked at chapter 1, but we find that the vision of Ezekiel 8–11, though it occurs later in the book, depicts events that took place prior to Ezekiel 1. Ezekiel 10–11 shows the Lord's glory departing Jerusalem where the corrupt priests were

practicing paganism in the temple. Accompanied by the same angelic beings Ezekiel witnessed in chapter 1, the glory begins a journey east—away from Jerusalem and toward His faithful remnant in Babylon.

The third place God's glory/*kavod* occurs is in Ezekiel 43:1–9, a vision that depicts an event in the future. Now Ezekiel sees a monumental temple complex, an almost supernatural temple due to its size, scope, and new creation imagery. We will consider this new temple in a future article. But for now, it suffices to see that the glory—which exited the temple to the east in chapters 10–11—now returns from the east. It enters the new temple and fills it as before as God says through His angelic messenger: “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever” (Ezek. 43:7a).

Ezekiel may have felt that God's promises were lost—indeed, that all hope was lost—when the Babylonians defeated Jerusalem and exiles endured the arduous and deadly journey away from the holy land. And yet he saw that this was not the case. God appeared once again as He did to His people Israel, accompanied by the stunning cherubim, showing that God was still with His people and that their circumstances were not evidence of His power being diminished or defeated.

One Like a Son of Man

Above we recounted Moses' encounter with the Lord's glory/*kavod* where he was covered with the Lord's hand and saw His back rather than His face. Ezekiel 1:26–27 uses the same anthropomorphic imagery we saw there:

And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in

appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal [*chashmal*], like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.

Did you catch those descriptors—human appearance, His waist, seated posture? In several Old Testament passages, God revealed Himself in human form (e.g., Gen. 18:1–33; 32:22–32; Josh. 5:13–15). But Exodus 33 and Ezekiel 1 now connect God's glory manifestation with His appearance in human form, fluidly morphing back and forth between the two without any hint of change or difficulty or incompatibility. (C. S. Lewis tried to capture something of this in the final paragraph of *The Chronicles of Narnia* when he wrote of Aslan: “And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.”)

Ezekiel 1 tells us of Ezekiel's encounter with the glory/*kavod* of God in human appearance, preparing us to encounter the consummate expression of God's glory in human flesh in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

God's appearance in glory will orient the entire ministry of the prophet Ezekiel. And while there are several implications of God's *kavod* appearance for Ezekiel and for us today,⁶ there is something particularly sweet for us to remember

as we consider God's presence in our own lives as “sojourners and exiles” (1 Pet. 2:11). John Mackay says of our glorious God: “When he condescends to draw close to his people, no geographical frontier, or even spiritual boundary, can inhibit him (Rom. 8:38–39). No matter where his people find themselves, they may dismiss the taunts of their adversaries. ‘Why should the nations say, “So where is their God?” But our God is in the heavens; whatever he pleases, he does’ (Ps. 115:2–3).”⁷

In Jesus Christ, the one in whom we have beheld the Father's glory, heaven has come to earth. And in our union with Christ, the Holy Spirit forever keeps us in Christ's heavenly presence.

1. See *The Outlook* 65, no. 5 (September/October 2015): 10–13; available at <https://outlook.reformedfellowship.net/sermons/the-bible-in-hi-def-learning-to-interpret-prophetic-imagery/>.

2. All citations are from the English Standard Version.

3. Meredith G. Kline has popularized this view in several of his writings, even suggesting that the *kavod* is chiefly a manifestation or endoxation of the third person of the Trinity, something intended to invoke incarnation of the second person of the Trinity.

4. Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 43.

5. *Ibid.*, 49.

6. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 51–53; Landon Dowden, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ezekiel* (Brentwood, TN: Holman, 2015), 11–12.

7. John L. Mackay, *Ezekiel: A Mentor Commentary*, vol. 1, chapters 1–24 (Nairobi, Kenya: Mentor, 2018), 104.

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FROM

MAINTENANCE

TO

MISSIONAL

A Plea for Reformation (2)



Rev. Paul T. **Murphy**

Conversion growth in Presbyterian and Reformed churches is virtually nonexistent. In the opinion of this writer that should, can, and must change. Hence, this call for reformation in the mission of the church.

In the last issue I defined the terms “maintenance” and “missional,” and that mission, not missions, is the identity of the church.¹ Hence, we cannot and should not relegate evangelism and outreach to a subordinate or obscure place in the life of the local church.

Does God have a mission for His church in the world, or does God have the church for His mission in the world? I favor the latter. Why? Because God is on a mission. Mission and evangelism do not begin in Matthew 28 with the Great Commission. Rather, they begin with the character of God and His heart for lost sinners in a sin-soaked world. God is a missionary God, and this truth is clear from Genesis to Revelation.

The original intention for creation was to dwell on the earth together with man. God’s first command was

to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”² Adam and Eve, created in the image and likeness of God, to glorify and to enjoy Him, were to fill the earth with similar glory bearers so that the whole earth would be filled with God’s glory. This was never intended to be static as if the garden was the end goal. Adam was to be productive in the work of tending and cultivating the garden, but that was not all. Four rivers flow out from the garden into the earth (Gen. 2:10–14) implying an outward, expansive orientation.

The trauma of sin cursed the perfect creation and all of mankind. No sooner did Adam fall than God intervened to rescue and to redeem. The promise of a Savior was given in Genesis 3:15 and the future is assured by the name of the woman, Eve, the mother of all living.³

In Genesis 3–11, the “curse” is repeatedly mentioned within the stories of the flood and the tower of Babel. Will judgment for sin be the final word? No. In Genesis 12, when God calls Abraham, the word “bless” is repeated and the promise given: “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁴ This promise is repeated six times in Genesis alone declaring God’s mission.

Israel’s mission was to be something, not to go somewhere. They were to be an attractional people centripetally,⁵ drawing the nations to their light (Deut. 4:5–8). However, Israel failed in their missionary

calling as they repeatedly sinned in becoming more like the nations around them than different from them. This dramatically changed with the coming of Jesus, the true Israel, who in His life does what Adam and Israel failed to do. He was obedient and faithful, even unto death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

As a missionary God, He sent His Son to save: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). The Son is a missionary Son who came to seek and save that which was lost.

Jesus enlists and instructs His church as a new Israel, filled with the Spirit to be the “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14),⁶ by whose “good works” the Father will be glorified.

Then, upon Jesus’ ascension, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33, the day of Pentecost).

Jesus commissions His church to be the means by which the promise to Abraham of Psalm 2 will be fulfilled.⁷

All this was done in order to equip, enable, and empower the church in its mission. The orientation is now universalized or centrifugal.⁸

The Lord completes His mission in Revelation. Revelation 7:9 reads, “Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Additionally, these who are saved dwell with the Lord on the earth in a new creation wherein righteousness dwells. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3). The sovereign king of the universe will in the fullness of time be successful.

Our churches exist for God’s mission in the world. Will you be part of it where you live, work, study, and play? Every church is to flourish and grow as a missionary church. Is that the identity of your congregation, or is the atmosphere to maintain the status quo? Let us all begin to dispense with the concept of maintenance churches. *Ecclesia Reformata, semper reformanda.*

1 The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28). Missions, by contrast, are various ministries that carry out that mission.

2 Genesis 1:28, English Standard Version. Significantly it is also the first blessing.

3 Eve sounds like the Hebrew for “life giver” and resembles the word for “living.” Matthew Henry comments, “God had not reversed that blessing wherewith he had blessed them: *Be fruitful and multiply*. It was likewise a confirmation of the promise now made, that the seed of the woman, of this woman, should break the serpent’s head.”

4 Paul declares this “the gospel in advance” in Galatians 3:8. The promise of Genesis 12:3 is thus basic to God’s mission agenda.

5 Centripetal means proceeding in a direction toward a center.

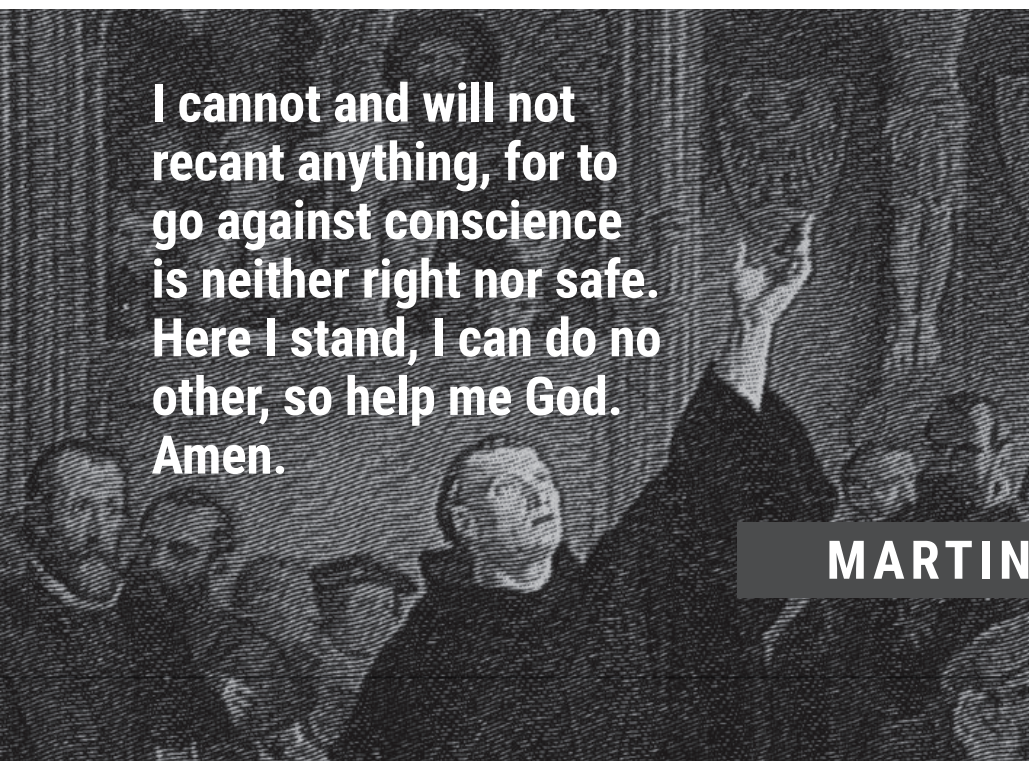
6 The “you” in the text is plural (i.e., the church).

7 In Psalm 2:8 God the Father promises the Son to “make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession” (New International Version).

8 Centrifugal means proceeding in a direction away from a center.

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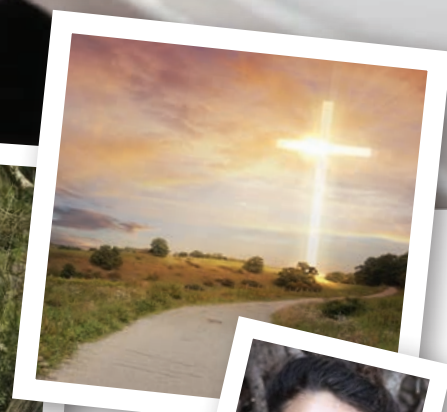
**I cannot and will not
recant anything, for to
go against conscience
is neither right nor safe.
Here I stand, I can do no
other, so help me God.
Amen.**

MARTIN LUTHER



**My conscience
is captive to the
Word of God.**

Saying Good-bye Well



Mrs. Elisabeth **Bloechl**

Falling in Love

“Let me hold baby Norma.” Her mom smiles broadly at me, a gap-toothed smile. I take Norma, encircling her with my arms and kissing her soft baby curls. Her rich brown eyes look up at me inquisitively, her black eyebrows high. My olive arms look pale next to her ebony ones. I will miss this little girl. I will miss her mamma.

When I first met Rebecca, I little thought how many hours I would spend on her couch, how many conversations we would have, how dear she would become.

Rebecca, tall, thin, and dark, is always friendly. I wanted to get to

know her, to ask hard questions and have meaningful conversations. However, among the first things I learned about her was that she had recently lost her firstborn (stillborn at eight months gestation), and she was newly pregnant. Among the first things I learned about Ugandan

culture: you don't talk about pregnancy. Trouble was, all I could think to talk about when I was with her was her pregnancy or terrible loss. So, our tête-à-têtes remained polite but distant. However, I prayed often for her, her husband (Okuch), and their unborn baby. In this way, though still strangers in many ways, I began to love their little family. When their baby was born, I felt as proud as if she were my own niece.

From the time of Norma's birth my relationship with Rebecca changed. I no longer had to avoid certain subjects. I started to ask questions

about herself: her growing up, meeting her husband, her various sin struggles. She opened up to me. We started to meet regularly, going through a study on motherhood. Our families had one another over for dinners and movie nights. I started editing Okuch's autobiography, which fueled deeper discussions between Rebecca and me. She was someone I could see myself having as a friend for life—and we were leaving in two months.

While I would love to return to Uganda, I know that may never happen. I may never again see Rebecca, Okuch, Norma, the many other friends I have made during our brief tenure. Knowing this, I find myself often asking: how can I say good-bye well?

Good-byes Throughout the Bible

The Bible is replete with stories of farewells. Some are formal, as when a leader is about to die. Some are less formal, as when a woman says good-bye to her family on the eve of her wedding or at the sudden and unexpected departure of a friend. Developing a biblical understanding of good-byes can help us say good-bye well. As the examples are far too numerous for me to cover here, I will focus on just a few: Paul's farewell to the Ephesians, and Rebekah's farewell to her family and later her son.

In Acts 20, Paul is visiting various churches he had planted around Macedonia encouraging them and teaching. From Macedonia he travels to Ephesus, where he had previously ministered for two years. He intends from there to travel to Jerusalem and ultimately, Rome. Though Paul lived in places for brief intervals and is accustomed to good-byes (sometimes whispering a hasty farewell while escaping a hostile city via basket), his good-bye to the Ephesians is different. He does not know exactly what awaits him in Jerusalem, but the Holy Spirit has revealed that

afflictions and imprisonment are part of the plan (Acts 20:23). Who knows but that he will die in Jerusalem. In other words, he is poignantly aware that he may never see the Ephesians again. In light of that, how does he say good-bye?

One Bible dictionary summarizes the parting meeting well. "Paul summons the elders to Miletus, declares his integrity, predicts his and their future ordeals and the fact that he will not see them again, exhorts them to keep watch over themselves and the flock, warns them against false teachers who will come, and prays with them."¹ After weeping with them, he boards the ship. It turns out that Paul's farewell discourse shares the characteristics of many other farewells throughout the Bible. Whenever a prophetic leader knows his departure is near (think Jacob's farewell to his sons, Moses' address to the Israelites before his death on the mountain, Jesus on the night of His betrayal) he also gathers the people and says much of what Paul said.

Of course, not all good-byes are as formal or involved as these. Rebekah's farewell to her family and later her son are examples of everyday kinds of farewells. In Genesis 24, before sending Rebekah with Abraham's servant, her family made sure she was going to a good place (vv. 35, 50–51). After they expressed their reluctance to part with her, they sent her away with both her nurse and a blessing (vv. 55–61). Later, Rebekah sent away her own son to find a wife—and for his own safety. Esau, enraged by Jacob's trickery, was plotting to kill his brother. Hearing word, Rebekah sorrowfully urged Jacob to flee to her brother Laban. Yet, he does not leave too quickly to receive a blessing from his father and a charge to walk uprightly (Gen. 27:41–28:5).

Though these good-byes "omit the formal farewell discourse . . . [they] have the same flavor and emotional

effect" as the formal farewell of a spiritual leader.² And they add to the substantial genre of good-byes found throughout Scripture. Time would fail to recount Elijah's farewell to Elisha (2 Kings 2), David and Johnathan's tearful parting (1 Sam. 20:35–42), Ruth's departing from her family (Ruth 1:6–8), Jesus' extended farewell to His disciples (John 14), and many more.

So What?

What does all of this have to do with my saying good-bye to my friends in Uganda or the many good-byes before you? While we cannot read every farewell in Scripture as a blueprint, we can glean three general truths which guide our good-byes.

First, expect good-byes. If we learn anything from the quantity of good-byes in the Bible, it is that, in this life, we will see no end to them. This is true whether we move often or stay in the same place for years; we will have to say good-bye—we cannot escape good-byes. Knowing this makes good-byes—while not less painful—less surprising. Knowing this, we can arm ourselves with Scripture. We can saturate ourselves in passages about grief and suffering before an inevitable parting comes (the Psalms are a great place to start). That way, when good-byes come, we have words with which to cry out to God in our pain and with which to encourage others going through the same sorrow. Preparing our heart in this way also allows us, like Paul, to continue investing in and loving others despite the reality of eventual or impending departure.

Second, we must not let the reality of an impending parting keep us from loving and investing in those from whom we will depart. Paul did not get up at dawn to slip away from the Ephesians or avoid passing through Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem. Rather, he pushed into the relationship, despite knowing

he would soon leave his dear friends for good. He blessed, encouraged, exhorted them. So too, as we see our departure date, we can look for ways to bless and encourage those who are leaving or from whom we are departing. This is especially important for a spiritual leader. Throughout Scripture, we see these leaders, on the eve of their departure, encouraging, praying with, exhorting, and preparing those under their leadership. Notably, part of the preparation is assigning a new leader: a replacement. What if you are not a pastor, elder, or ministry leader? The Scripture gives us many examples of friends and family encouraging, praying with, and blessing one another at their departure; and doing so with hope that one day they will see each other again.

Third, let good-byes help us live in the reality of the already/not yet. The reason we have to say good-bye on earth is because of the curse of sin—because we will all die. But in heaven, we will never say good-bye again. Let the bitterness of good-byes make you long for the sweetness of heaven. Indeed, let the bitterness of good-byes bring you to the bitterness of the cross. On the eve of His death and departure to heaven, Jesus encouraged, prayed for, and sang with His disciples (John 14). He told them again and again that He was leaving them not with despair and confusion but with peace and hope because He was sending the Helper—the Holy Spirit—who would never leave them, forever. He was leaving them His peace and hope because He was going on ahead of them to prepare a place for them. He was leaving them with peace and hope because one day there would be no more tearful good-byes. These were not mere empty words; Christ sealed them on the cross. It is because of the cross that, for the Christian, no good-bye is ever forever. It is because of Christ's good-bye to us at His ascension that we will one day say good-bye no more.

So, whether we are facing an impending good-bye or are still reeling from an unexpected farewell, we must saturate

in the Word and look for ways to continue loving knowing that because of the cross, all our good-byes will soon be over—forever. May the words of this hymn give us hope and courage in the face of farewell.

Though our Lord is taken from us,
Present but in spirit now,
This his faithful word of promise
Made while sojourning below;
“Where I enter
Thither shall my servant come.”
We shall soon in bliss adore thee,
Gain the realms of endless day;
Soon be gathered home to glory,
All our tears be wiped away:
There, forever,
Sing the Lamb's new song of love.³

1. Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 268–69

2. Ibid.

3. Augustus M. Toplady, *The Works of Augustus M. Toplady*, vol. 6 (London; Edinburgh: William Baynes and Son; H. S. Baynes, 1825), 344–45.

Mrs. Elisabeth Bloechl

while a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hammond, WI, is currently living in Mbale, Uganda, where her husband is completing a year-long pastoral internship through the OPC. She and her husband have three children four and under.



REFORMED FELLOWSHIP's annual budget for prison ministry is about \$11,000 for just over 350 subscriptions, all of which is paid for through donations. These donations come from many sources. Most recently, the Evangelism Committee at Bethany URC put out a signup sheet to donate subscriptions for prisoners. Generous congregants donated 64 subscriptions, almost \$2,000. We so appreciate this congregation coming alongside us and ministering to those in prison in this way. Our prison ministry fund now has a shortfall of less than \$1,000 for this year. We praise God for His provision, and continue to pray *The Outlook* will be a great encouragement to those behind bars.

Fading Beauty



Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Meditation Text: Genesis 3:1–7

Suggested Reading: Revelation 12; Matthew 4:1–11

What happened to Paradise? We might be wondering about that for as we came to the end of Genesis 2 we found our first parents getting to know each other as husband and wife in the splendid garden of Eden. They were naked and not ashamed. There was beauty and harmony everywhere: between the man and the woman, between humans and animals, and among the animals themselves. The garden was well-watered and lush with growth. God had pronounced His creation to be “very good,” and everywhere you looked the works of His hands were flourishing in health and peace under His blessing. But when we look around today, peace and harmony are rare commodities. Shame and sadness are rampant. Poverty, sickness, crime, and death are constantly with us. Where has all the beauty gone?

It turns out that the beauty was shattered by us.

Darkening Shadow

We get a sense that something is amiss in the first verse of our text, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made” (English Standard Version). On the one hand this is just an ordinary serpent, one of God’s many created animals. On the other hand it is said to be “crafty.” The Hebrew word can be meant in the positive sense of “prudence” (e.g., Prov. 14:15), and since no sin had yet been committed on earth, we should take this to mean that it was the snake’s nature to have a good sense of prudence, having an eye for the best advantage in a given situation. Still, we’re left with the feeling that the snake is about to do something, and we’re not sure what.

The “what” comes quickly as the serpent begins to speak with the woman and with his first words begins to question God. Instantly this makes us wonder what’s really going on. Aside from the fact that the snake speaks (which may be alarming to us but apparently not so to the woman), it is what the beast says and how he says it that makes us realize that this is not a simple serpent. Here is one of God’s creations, a beast of the field, not only questioning the intentions of the Creator but also doing so to the face of the woman who, together with her husband, had received dominion over all creatures (Gen. 1:28). In other words, the upstart snake is challenging both God and God’s vicegerent, which shows that something more than a beast is present here. Later on in Scripture this is made clear in Revelation 12:9, “And the great dragon was thrown

down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” Satan had entered the serpent and now speaks through its mouth.

And the devil’s words are ever so sly: “Did God actually say . . . ?” He approaches softly, with crafty prudence, “Did God really say . . . ?” That’s not an innocent question. The devil knows exactly what God said. He’s not looking for information but planting a seed of doubt in the woman’s mind about God: God isn’t so harsh and cruel as to prevent you from eating from all the trees in the garden, is He? The serpent calls into question both God’s word and His character.

It’s a method that still pays dividends for Satan today. Since virtually everyone has access to the Bible, the question is not, “Is that what God said?” but more often, “Did God really mean what he said?” For instance, many think that homosexuality can’t be evil and so what Paul says against it in Romans 1 and elsewhere must be limited to the culture of that day, and not be a permanent command. The Bible says that women aren’t supposed to teach or have authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:11–12), but it can’t really mean that, can it? That’s so archaic, so draconian—surely that no longer applies to us today, does it? Such subtle questions easily sow doubts in the hearts of believers. The only way to stand firm is to ground yourself in the true Word of God, study it, and know it thoroughly. How will you know truth from lie if you don’t root yourself in Scripture, knowing precisely what it says and what it means?

Sneak Attack

Notice that Satan addresses himself to the woman. Again, he is very careful, very clever. He’s looking for an edge, and so he doesn’t go to the head of the family, but to his wife. He

doesn’t approach the one who heard God’s command directly (2:16) but rather she who heard it second-hand, from her husband. Though Eve is not spiritually weaker than Adam yet her position as helper makes her just a little more vulnerable, for she does not have the same authority or level of responsibility as Adam.

And Satan is successful. He asks, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” We might think, of course the Lord didn’t say that. But Satan’s point is not the obvious answer but the sinister suggestion that perhaps God isn’t so good and so generous as you think he is, Eve. If the answer to the question were indeed yes, then God would be made out to be a cruel tyrant who expects man to work the soil but not enjoy eating of the luscious trees in the garden. The wicked implication in the devil’s words is that maybe the Lord isn’t the loving God He pretends to be—a blasphemous allegation!

And yet the woman receives the question without protest. She doesn’t use her authority over animals to denounce the serpent’s foul insinuation. Nor does she turn to her husband to lead the defense against this rebellious beast. Instead, she chooses to carry on conversing and even dignifies the question by giving a reply, and so begins the fatal transgression.

For what would have been the godly response? Should she not have reprimanded the animal and immediately have involved her husband to deal further with this treacherous serpent? Adam had been charged with working and keeping the garden (2:15). Included in that verb is the sense of guarding against danger. God knew that Satan would try to tempt His children and destroy His creation, and so Adam was charged to guard against threats. As helper to her husband, Eve should have turned to Adam to deal

decisively with this soft-speaking menace.

Leadership Failure

And Adam should have stepped in. While Eve falters in her role as helper and submits to the directives of an animal, her husband fails in his headship by watching passively. We know he is there, for when the woman eventually eats the fruit we read, “she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate” (v. 6). All along Adam was standing next to Eve, observing the interchange between the serpent and his wife, and he neither says nor does anything. He allows his wife to take over his duties and allows a beast of the field to exercise dominion over his wife and even himself. For both husband and wife the whole scene is a colossal failure to live up to both their own marriage covenant as well as the covenant God had with them from the start. The taking of the fruit is what finalizes the deed, but in neglecting their responsibilities mankind’s faithfulness to God is already unraveling, and the beauty of God’s creation is beginning to fade.

It’s a vivid reminder for Christian husbands and wives to be intentional about assisting each other in the fight against sin. They stand together or they fall together. The two are one flesh (2:24) and must work as a team to guard against the flaming arrows of the devil. Wives, when confronted by temptation, seek the guidance and help of your husbands. Husbands, strengthen your wives especially in those situations, and be sure to step up and lead so that the enemy does not get the upper hand in your family. Don’t fight the battle as individuals on your own but pray together and assist each other.

Eve’s answer to the snake’s evil question shows that she’s on a downward trajectory into rebellion: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You

shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die” (v. 2). Eve is selective in her answer, choosing to stay with the devil’s focus. She refers to the garden’s trees in general and the tree in the midst of the garden, but she does not name the tree whose fruit was forbidden, nor does she say anything of its counterpart standing next to it, the tree of life. This obscures the original context and God’s clear provision and encouragement to choose life over death. She also adds to the Lord’s original words, claiming He said, “neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” The Lord never said that. Eve is making the Lord out to be more severe and strict than he was.

It’s easy for us to do that too, isn’t it? You can take away from God’s Word by questioning its true meaning, or you can add to it, making God out to

be something He is not. Either way you twist and pervert what the Lord really said. The woman and the man were falling into the devil’s snare, all the while dimming the brilliance of God’s image in them.

Gracious Provision

Thank God, then, for sending us another Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. He too faced powerful and seductive temptations from the devil himself, and yet every time Satan twisted God’s Word the Lord Jesus stood His ground, countering it with the clear teaching of other Scripture passages. Jesus knew what God had said and what it truly meant. Christ was true to His Father and true to the Bible in every thought, word, and deed, casting down every temptation until He finally cast out the devil himself by way of His own death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven as our Savior and King. The first Adam failed to protect the

garden by maintaining faithfulness to the Lord, but the last Adam redeemed the garden and indeed the whole earth by maintaining spotless integrity as our substitute, even unto death on a cross.

And now, as believers in Christ, cleansed of our guilt and filled with His Spirit, we may follow in His footsteps and stand firm on the Word of God. Let’s work together as believers—doubly so as married Christians—to know the Scriptures truly and accurately, and to live according to them in full covenant loyalty to our God. Then we’ll see beauty shining again, the beauty of Christ in us.

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GOOD QUESTION

120

WHAT IS MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD?

The whole Bible answers that question. But Kevin De Young sees **15 key answers** in the Bible’s first three worldview-forming chapters.

- 1 God made men and women in his image, equal in worth and dignity.
- 2 “Man” has both singularity and plurality; mankind is male and female.
- 3 God made both the man and woman to jointly rule over creation.
- 4 Man and woman were given different tasks and created in different realms.
- 5 The man alone was given the task of maintaining the garden’s holiness.
- 6 Man was created before the woman (see 1 Tim. 2:12-13).
- 7 The woman was given as a helper to the man.
- 8 The man alone had to name every living creature.
- 9 The man and woman were created in different ways.
- 10 The names “man” [ish] and “woman” [ishah] suggest interdependence.
- 11 In marriage the man leaves his family and cleaves to his wife.
- 12 The two came from one flesh and became one flesh.
- 13 The man is reckoned as the head and representative of the couple.
- 14 The man and the woman experience the curse in different, and telling ways.
- 15 The curse interrupted the relational wholeness between man and woman.



Meditation: Resurrection Power



Rev. George van Popta

If ever there were a question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism that was set up for a three-point sermon, Q&A 45 could well be it. It even has a “first” . . . “second” . . . and “third.” Despite it being very friendly to the homiletician, it summarizes the great comfort we have in knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ arose from the dead.

If the Heidelberg Catechism were written today rather than 461 years ago, likely there would have been some discussion about the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; however, in 1563 there was no dispute about it. The catechism breathes the time from which it emerges, and thus we have only one Q&A on the resurrection of Christ, whereas there are eighteen on the sacraments—which were hot-button topics in the time of the Reformation.

Q&A 45 jumps right into a discussion on the comfort the gospel of the resurrection gives. The question is, “How does Christ’s resurrection benefit us?” Answer: “First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he could make us share in the righteousness which he had obtained for us by his death.”

The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of our faith. By our sin we made ourselves guilty before God. We stand under the original indictment against sin: “The day you eat of it, you will die.” There is only one way to be released from that judgment and be again received into God’s favor: by faith in Christ.

“Second, by his power we too are raised up to a new life.” Not only are we declared to be righteous, but also we begin to turn away from our inclination toward sin. The power of Christ begins coursing through us, and we begin living a new and obedient life.

“Third, Christ’s resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection.” Because Christ arose, you too will arise. Your loved ones who died in the Lord will arise. If you should die before Christ returns, you will arise on the Great Day to live with Christ forever.

So, dear reader, as you meditate on Lord’s Day 17 of our beloved catechism, be filled with gratitude for the resurrection of Christ. Let it inspire hope, assure you of your salvation, and fill you with anticipation for your own resurrection. Let it guide you in your daily walk with Christ, reminding you of His love, power, and the promise of eternal life.

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Allelulia! When Christ Was Raised

Apostles' Creed Article 5

1. Al - le - lu - lia! When Christ was raised
2. And by his power we too are raised
3. His res - ur - rec - tion prom - is - es

he con - quered death. Let him be praised!
un - to new lives by which he's praised.
and is a stead - fast pledge to us

He lets us share the right - eous - ness
No long - er in dead but now a - live!
that we in glo - ry will be raised.

which he, in death, ob - tained for us.
For god - li - ness we'll al - ways strive.
Al - le - lu - ia! Let Christ be praised.

George van Popta, 2019
Based on Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 17.

LM
DAAR JUCHT EEN TOON

Considering Zion with Jodocus van Lodenstein: A Spirit of Prayer



Dr. Michael R. **Kearney**

As we continue examining Jodocus van Lodenstein's work *Beschouwinge van Zion* (*Consideration of Zion*), it is easy to be overwhelmed by the predominantly negative tone of the book. Van Lodenstein felt it his duty to uncover the grave errors in the Reformed churches of his day. The most longwinded and the most sour character in his dialogues is also the person with the longest experience in church leadership, the minister Urbanus. At the beginning of the fourth dialogue, the other two characters, Ahikam and Stephanus, are trying to evaluate Urbanus's

negativity. They worry that it tends to discourage the church and lead to schism. We'll come back to the question of schism, but the bulk of this fourth dialogue is concerned with another particular evil of Reformed churches: the presence of self-will.

It's as true as it was in the seventeenth century: complaining about church can become quite a pious activity. We fall into faultfinding with sermons we find mediocre, officers we find incompetent, or parents whose children we find a little too squirmy during the service, and we can clothe all of these complaints in a garb of devotion that proclaims

our own zeal and reverence for the house of the Lord. If we are to avoid this kind of self-righteousness (which Van Lodenstein repeatedly warns against), we need to read *Consideration of Zion* in a positive light—a light that reveals our heavenly Father's love and grace in drawing sinners together to worship Him.

When read with a soft and attentive heart, this fourth dialogue offers wonderful encouragement for struggling Christians. The Lord knows our tendency toward self-will, and so He has given us a mighty means of grace to help us grow in

Ecclesia reformatata semper reformanda



Van Lodenstein notes that self-will is also wrong when we want good things apart from God's will. In other words, we are called to renounce our own will itself in order to enjoy blessed fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

holiness: prayer led by the Holy Spirit.

The Sin of Self-Will

In the previous dialogue, Van Lodenstein observed that Christians misunderstand self-denial as a means to an end rather than the living, beating heart of a believer who loves Christ. A similar misunderstanding of means and ends can happen with the sin of self-will. We may think self-will is problematic simply because our sinful nature desires bad things. That's true, of course. But Van Lodenstein notes that self-will is also wrong when we want good things apart from God's will. In other words, we are called to renounce our own will itself in order to enjoy blessed fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

A high calling, isn't it? But Van Lodenstein is merely affirming and rearticulating the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states that we are to "renounce our own wills and without any back talk to obey [God's] will . . . as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven."¹ And note that this renouncement must happen willingly—not like unbelievers or demons, who submit to God's sovereignty with clenched teeth, but with a cheerful and childlike heart. As Urbanus puts it, this virtue is "a forsaking of our will, sprouting up from love for the Lord God's will, by which a person wants God's will, and readily desires that it should happen in everything, whether for or against us" (109).²

How can we tell whether we are in bondage to self-will? Van Lodenstein cites James 4:13 about those who constantly talk about their plans for commerce and profit (111). We can see this attitude at work in the care that we take for the agenda items (*zaken*) that matter to us. How much mindshare do these earthly tasks occupy? How aggrieved are we when one of our plans gets interrupted or destroyed? Our preoccupation with our own earthly situation reveals a heart still bent on its own will.

Van Lodenstein cuts even deeper: what about when we really desire something God calls us to pursue but choose the wrong means to pursue it? He offers an interesting interpretation of Peter's treatment of Jews and Gentiles recorded by Paul in Galatians 2 (112). According to him, Peter's goal of preventing offense to the Jewish Christians was noble, but he erred in choosing a sinful means to that end. Perhaps the same applies when, for example, we react to a real injustice in a business or a church but do so with a scathing email or an irate phone call. Van Lodenstein certainly did not believe that the ends justify the means.

But we're not perfect yet, are we? Surely self-will remains to some extent even in the most seasoned believers. Van Lodenstein considers this objection too, but he directs our attention back to the fundamental orientation of the believer's heart (124). Yes, self-will remains in the Christian, but its power over the soul has been broken. We are now on a lifelong quest to extinguish and

to kill our old self, not to nurture it covertly. Our imperfection in the area of self-will should drive us to sorrow, not toward an "oh well" attitude.

Van Lodenstein exposes self-will as a deep-rooted sin among Reformed Christians. Is there any hope for us? Indeed there is, and that hope emerges in his rich and wonderful discussion of the practice of prayer.

The Purpose of Prayer

Now, the biblical teaching concerning prayer might itself seem to pose another objection to Van Lodenstein's severe condemnation of self-will. Didn't the Lord command us to pray for everything we need? Didn't He promise that He would answer our prayers and give us whatever we ask for? How, then, can we ask for anything good for ourselves without the presence of at least some self-will?

Van Lodenstein challenges a common view of prayer in which someone thinks that "God must be his servant and prayer must be his call" (113). Instead, he avers that "prayer is a spiritual work of the Christian who is truly born again, whereby he presents to God the desires that the Holy Spirit has wrought and works in him" (113–14). The purpose of prayer is not to express a list of wishes to our omniscient Father, since He "knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8, English Standard Version). Rather, the purpose of prayer is to transform our own hearts to love what God loves and desire what He desires.

Van Lodenstein offers three key assertions about prayer:

"The Holy Spirit is a spirit of sanctification [*heiligmaking*] and teaches us to pray to God or according to God's will, and the Lord's will is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3)" (114). Genuine

God's abundant earthly care pales in comparison with the heavenly mansions He is preparing for us. Prayer teaches us a lifelong lesson of trust as we learn to "withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it in [God] alone."

prayer happens through the indwelling of the Spirit, whose aim is to make us grow in holiness. Yes, the Lord is pleased to protect and bless us in this life, but the greatest blessing of all is that we are being prepared for an eternity of pure fellowship with Him.

The Spirit and the Christian cooperate in prayer. Both, in their very essence, point to God and have their life in God. The Christian's genuine desire is that the Holy Spirit's secret work would be accomplished in him more and more, leading to the fulfillment of the request, "Your will be done." The desire of the true believer is for his will to be at one with God's will.

For a true Christian, praying necessarily involves a renouncement of one's own might and will and fleeing for refuge to another's might, in order to receive for oneself a new will. We do present our requests to God, but we do so in a spirit of meekness, actually wishing to "lose" our requests rather than to have them fulfilled literally (116).

Following this, Van Lodenstein devotes an extensive discussion to the request "Give us this day our daily bread." Of course, this request communicates the importance of our earthly needs. I do not believe Van Lodenstein is shunning any mention of praying for practical, ordinary things, whether that be a job, a

spouse, or even material prosperity. Rather, he reminds us that our requests must always be rooted in an awareness of our relationship with our heavenly Father. Again, in the words of the catechism, our prayer for daily needs is ultimately a matter of trust, as we confess that "neither our care and work nor your gifts can do us any good without your blessing."³ God's abundant earthly care pales in comparison with the heavenly mansions He is preparing for us. Prayer teaches us a lifelong lesson of trust as we learn to "withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it in [God] alone."⁴

A Note of Caution

I feel compelled to reflect on Van Lodenstein's critique of self-will with two reservations or clarifications. First, we must be cautious not to take Van Lodenstein as teaching that we need something more than the free offer of the gospel in order to be saved. For instance, he writes at one point that the promise that those who seek the Lord will find Him is only for "believers or those enlightened by the Spirit, who, wishing to follow the Lord, have had to forsake themselves for their first lesson" (121). Consequently, he says that true believers "seek the Lord, but leave entirely to his direction how, when, where, and in what degree to find him, and that grace or suitability of the heart is enough for them" (121). If we took these quotes by themselves, we could develop a view of Christianity in which seekers

must wait resignedly for special enlightenment from the Spirit before they embrace Christ's promises and profess their faith. If our hope of salvation hung upon accomplishing perfect self-denial and waiting indefinitely for assurance, we would be lost. The work is all Christ's, and we can joyfully approach Him *now*, knowing that He will lead us to forsake our own wills throughout our lives.

Second, regarding the discussion of schism that began this dialogue, I believe that the robust view of prayer discussed here should protect us from rash reactions to the inadequacies of any local church. Our trust in our heavenly Father should extend to His church as well. He knows that any group of believers will struggle with hypocrisy, apathy, and worldliness. Yes, He calls us to separate from groups that explicitly deny Him and embrace Belial (2 Cor. 6). But I do not believe it is up to us to discern which persons are genuine Christians based on their display of self-will or self-denial. The primary application point of this work is not for others, but for our own hearts. Careful self-examination, combined with unshakeable comfort that Jesus saves helpless sinners, should be the center of our consideration of Zion.

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1. Lord's Day 49, Question & Answer 124.
 2. *Beschouwinge van Zion, of Aandachten en opmerkingen over den tegenwoordigen toestand van het gereformeerde christenvolk, gesteld in eenige zamenspraken*, rev. ed., ed. H. P. Scholte, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: H. Höveker, 1837). All page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.
 3. Lord's Day 50, Question & Answer 125.
 4. Lord's Day 50, Question & Answer 125.

Dr. Michael R. Kearney

is a board member of Reformed Fellowship.

King Jesus Will Return (Lord's Day 19)

Rev. William **Boekestein**



50Q. Why the next words “and sits at the right hand of God”?

A. Christ ascended to heaven, there to show that he is head of his church, the one through whom the Father governs all things.

51Q. How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us?

A. First, through his Holy Spirit he pours out gifts from heaven upon us his members. Second, by his power he defends us and preserves us from all enemies.

52Q. How does Christ's return “to judge the living and the dead” comfort you?

A. In all distress and persecution, with uplifted head, I confidently await the very judge who has already offered himself to the judgment of God in my place and removed the whole curse from me. Christ will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but will take me and all his chosen ones to himself into the joy and glory of heaven.

Where is God in my pain? Does my struggle against sin matter when no one seems to care? Why does God allow injustice to go unpunished? Why doesn't God come to us when we need Him most? If you aren't asking these questions now, some of your friends are. And you might be someday. These questions get to the essence of the human relationship to God in a fallen world. And they can be answered—not with guesses or theories, but with divine revelation.

Our troubled lives need the unshifting truth of two key doctrines that can be immensely comforting when we ask hard questions. These

doctrines track Christ's state of exaltation beyond His completed resurrection and ascension, into the age to come.

Christ's Session

Christ presently “sits at the right hand of God.” Perhaps the word “session” (from the Latin for “seated”) reminds us of a legislative or judicial body. When congress is in session, lawmakers are seated in their chambers for the purpose of doing their work. Christ too is “in session” in the chambers of heaven. After purging our sins “he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on

high” (Heb. 1:3, English Standard Version; cf. Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). His sitting down answers His announcement from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). But Jesus is not on recess. He is actively fulfilling His calling as our redeemer.

Christ's session is good news for believers. But because we sometimes forget why doctrine matters, the catechism spells out two benefits of Christ's present reign.

Christ Pours Out Gifts through His Spirit

Since the Spirit had not yet been fully

poured out on all God's people, Old Testament ministry was primarily performed by "professional" prophets, priests, and kings. When Christ ascended into heaven and sat down at God's right hand, having fulfilled His threefold ministry, He gave the Holy Spirit to His people to discharge His callings on earth and to use their spiritual gifts to bless His body, the church (Eph. 4:8). To answer an earlier question, God is with us in our pain: the Spirit comforts our hearts and helps us care for our brothers and sisters (2 Thess. 1:3).

Christ Rules from Heaven as Our King

Christ is seated not in an easy chair but on a throne (Matt. 25:31). Our brother is King even now over every inch of creation. We have no reason to fear the world. We are valuable to the God who numbers the hairs of our heads (Luke 12:7) and will ultimately defend and preserve us from all enemies—neither tribulation, distress, persecution, nor danger shall "be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 39). This is true even if our enemies "kill the body." Because of Christ's hold on us, "after that" they "have nothing more that they can do" (Luke 12:4). Despite our pain, frustration, and unanswered questions, we can know that Christ the victor is fulfilling a plan to fix everything at just the right time.

Christ has finished His work. He has poured out His gifts. The King is seated in heaven, governing all things and preparing a place for us. When that place is ready and God's plan for this earth is complete, Christ will come again.

Christ's Second Coming

Just as Jesus came to earth once as a child, and then ascended into heaven after His death and resurrection, He will also descend again. He came

first as a peacemaker. He will come again as a judge. So the day of Christ's return is known as judgment day, the day when the history of this age will finish, heaven and earth will be remade, and everyone will be judged and begin experiencing their eternal destinies.

No one but God knows the day of Christ's return (Matt. 24:36). But He gives us signs to remind us that the day is coming. The good news will be preached to every people group (Matt. 24:14), and many, including Jewish people, will be converted (Rom. 11:25–29). Before the end, many professing Christians will fall away (2 Thess. 2:3). Those who remain true will be persecuted (Matt. 24:21) under the leadership of the incarnation of wickedness called antichrist, who will finally be destroyed by the breath of Christ's mouth (2 Thess. 2:3–8).

How can the truth of Jesus' powerful return comfort you?

Christ's Return Gives Believers Needed Perspective

Relief is coming! Scoffers doubt Jesus' return, claiming that "all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." Not so! In the flood God sent a clear warning of the final judgment (2 Peter 3:1–7). Continuous aftershocks of judgment repeat His warning to the ungodly and comfort God's children who presently suffer "distress and persecution."

Christ's Return Assures Believers of Vindication

Being perfectly just, God cannot leave sin unpunished. On judgment day God will grant unbelievers their wish to be free from Him, and cancel even the ordinary kindness everyone experiences in this age. But He will respect the punishment Christ bore on the cross for the elect. Believers cannot be condemned (Rom. 8:1); the judge has already removed our curse.

Christ's Return Marks God's Victory over Evil

Critics scorn the Bible's motif of judgment which is said to oppose love. But critics don't reject judgment, only God's standard of judgment. Only evil people oppose God's judgment of those committed to sins like murder, sexual immorality, sorcery, idolatry, and lies (Rev. 20:8; 22:15).

Christ's Return Begins Believers' Reign with God

Christ promised His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3). Following Christ's return believers "will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17), forever protected from pain, tears, and death (Rev. 21:4).

It's not wrong to ask God hard questions. It makes sense for us to cry out for His presence, especially in our pain. But because we like quick fixes to our problems, we need to know that some of our hurts—even during Christ's present reign—will be healed only by the return of King Jesus. We ask hard questions believing that God is actively working for our good and is coming again. And only on that day will the hard questions of believers give way to perfect happiness and worship.

This article is part of a series, "Our Life's Comfort," which was first published at corechristianity.com on May 12, 2022, <https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/king-jesus-will-return-lords-day-19>

Rev. William Boekstein

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The Holy Spirit, God's Greatest Gift (Lord's Day 20)

Rev. William Boekestein



53Q. What do you believe concerning “the Holy Spirit”?

A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is eternal God. Second, that he is given also to me, so that, through true faith, he makes me share in Christ and all his benefits, comforts me, and will remain with me forever.

In the days after Jesus' physical return to heaven, the disciples were waiting. Jesus had commissioned them to be His witnesses in a hostile world. But they lacked the power to take the first step. What was missing from their lives? The Holy Spirit. But the disciples weren't waiting for the energy of an impersonal force. They were waiting for Jesus to answer His promise to always be with them (Matt. 28:20).

The Holy Spirit's ministry is truly the difference between knowing about God and knowing God. He alone can transform us from natural to spiritual people. He's the other comforter (John 14:16) who can bring joy into seemingly hopeless situations. Unless we experience the Spirit's comfort, we'll seek consolation in the wrong places. Unsatisfied, we'll be half-

hearted in worship and in kingdom work. Knowing the Holy Spirit is a matter of spiritual life or death.

Who Is the Spirit?

Some people say that the Holy Spirit isn't a distinct person of the Trinity; they think of the Spirit as God's energy or the way of describing God's presence. But Scripture reveals the Spirit as a unique divine person. He can be lied to (Acts 5:3) and grieved (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30). Jesus described the Spirit as a personal being like Himself (John 14:26). Here's how Jesus previewed the coming of the Spirit: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me” (John 15:26, English Standard Version). Put more briefly, the Spirit “proceeds

from the Father and the Son.”¹ So the Holy Spirit is clearly distinct from the first and second persons of the Trinity.

At the same time, the Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son in divinity, glory, majesty, eternity, and immensity. The Athanasian Creed summarizes Scripture's teaching: “We worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confounding their persons nor dividing their essence.”² We may not collapse the three persons into one or split the divine essence into three. With the Father (Mal. 2:10) and the Son (John 1:3), the Spirit created the world; at the beginning “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). And while the three persons of the Trinity are never separated in their perfect works, the Father can be called creator, the Son

deliverer, and the Spirit sanctifier—the Holy Spirit works to make the unholy more holy.

The Spirit has had a two-phase ministry among God's people. From the creation of the world until the completion of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Spirit helped God's people perform special tasks. He moved prophets to speak (Num. 11:26), leaders to rule (Judg. 3:10), and craftsmen to design and build with excellence (Exod. 31:3). But God's people were still waiting for the Spirit to be "poured upon" them "from on high" (Isa. 32:15). Jesus' incarnation began to fulfill the people's expectations of the Spirit's powerful ministry. The Spirit anointed Jesus as prophet, priest, and king (Isa. 42:1). And Jesus promised to leave the Spirit with His people following His death and departure. He said, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). This helper is the "Spirit of truth," the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). At Pentecost, Christ poured out His Spirit so God would always be with all His people, supplying their every need according to God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

How Does the Spirit Benefit Believers?

The Holy Spirit is the agent who carries out God's work of bringing the elect from death to life, changing who they are by working from the inside (John 3:5–8). As He regenerates His people, He grants true faith. Faith restores the lost bond of trust between God and His people. It connects us to Christ in a way that our meager attempts to fulfill the law never could. Every benefit of salvation comes from God's Spirit-worked gift of faith. The catechism's threefold, trinitarian

division of the creed shows how all the remaining benefits of God's gracious salvation—community, forgiveness, resurrection, and eternal life—flow from the Spirit. So how can we summarize the Spirit's blessed ministry?

The Spirit Makes Believers Share in Christ and All His Blessings

Christianity isn't just about believing in Jesus; it is about being united to Him, connected to Him, belonging to Him. The Spirit who lives within us is our link to God (1 Cor. 6:17). Being spiritually united with Christ, God's children also share all of His benefits. Christ gains for us new life through His death and resurrection. But we're born into this new life through the work of the Spirit. Through sanctification, the Spirit constantly causes us to die to sin and come alive to righteousness (1 Peter 1:2). He teaches us the rule of purity (1 Cor. 3:16). He convicts us of sin and our lack of righteousness (John 16:8). He frees "us of doubts, anxieties, and temptations," and continues to work his "sanctifying grace in us even as we sleep."³

The Spirit Comforts Believers

"Comforter" is His name (John 15:26, King James Version)! And as our comforter, He coaches our spirits to confidently trust God in the midst of heartache and uncertainty (Acts 9:31). Believers are children of God (1 John 3:1). But we so easily forget, or fail to believe that it's true. So the Spirit testifies to our adoption (Rom. 8:16), convincing us that we're accepted by God, belong to God, and have an inheritance from God. The Spirit comforts believers by guaranteeing to us all of God's promises (2 Cor. 1:20–22), including the gospel's ultimate promise of perfect fellowship with God. Because the Spirit works through the word,

the best way to experience His comforting work is to be committed to hearing God's Word.

The Spirit Remains with Believers Forever

When the disciples learned that Christ would be going back to heaven, they feared they'd be left alone. But Christ assures them that He wouldn't leave them orphans but would come to them (John 14:18). In the flesh He couldn't be with all believers at once. He fulfilled this promise when He sent His Spirit. Christians have, and can never lose, the same Spirit that hovered over the face of the waters in creation and who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 8:11). The Spirit will go with us even through death as He recreates us. Even in our darkest hour, we can never be alone. God's children can't lose God's grace because the Spirit will never leave.

Rest in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Trust that, by the Spirit, Christ will never leave us or forsake us. Submit to the Spirit's sanctifying work in your life. And thank God for His life-saving gift.

This article is part of a series, "Our Life's Comfort," which was first published at corechristianity.com on May 19, 2022, <https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/the-holy-spirit-gods-greatest-gift-lords-day-20>

1. Athanasian Creed, 23.
2. Athanasian Creed, 3, 4.
3. https://formsandprayers.com/prayers-meditations/#part_iv-2.

Rev. William Boekstein

is the pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, MI. He has written several books and numerous articles. He and his wife, Amy, have four children.

Membership Meeting of Reformed Fellowship

Reformed Fellowship is pleased to announce that we will be holding our membership meeting on November 14, 2024, 7:00 pm at Bethany URC in Wyoming Michigan. We welcome all our members to join us either in person or via live video on Zoom. Members can also vote by proxy. If you wish to participate via the internet please send us your email address so we can send you an invite. For those voting via proxy, we will also need your email address so we can send you a ballot. We look forward to meeting with our membership. May the Lord richly bless the work of Reformed Fellowship as we together defend and disseminate the truths of His Word in the Reformed tradition. Following is the agenda.

Art 1 Opening devotions

Art 2 Count of proxies sent in, those present in person, and those joining via live stream.

Art 3 Annual report on the state of Reformed Fellowship.

Art 4 Voting:

- a. Ratification of previously elected 2024 board members.

Art 5 Closing devotions

We need your perspective!

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP is planning for the future, and we need your help.

Please give a few minutes of your time to share your insights via an assessment survey. Your perspectives are so very valuable to us. The survey can be accessed via the QR code below, or email us at office@reformedfellowship.com to receive a link.

Remember, due date is Saturday, September 7

TAKE OUR SURVEY!



Needed: Your Prayers

Please join us in praising God for the work of CLIR in Latin America, and for the blessing He has granted on their translation work of Reformed Fellowship titles.

As Reformed Fellowship begins distributing CLIR's Spanish translations in North America, please pray that these works will be helpful in evangelizing, in building up God's church, and in encouraging our Hispanic brothers and sisters around the world.

In anticipation of the educational season, hundreds of catechism and Bible study books have been shipped this summer to churches, informal study groups, and homeschools. Please pray the Lord will bless these materials and cause His gospel truth to grow deep roots in the heart of each student of every age.



Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Church Order

Article 23: The Council
Article 24: Equality and Unity of Congregation



Rev. Greg Lubbers

URCNA

*Let all things be done decently and in order.
—1 Cor. 14:40, NKJV*

ARTICLE 23: The Council

When the deacons meet together with the Consistory, the body is referred to as the council. The council shall exercise such duties described in the Church Order or such duties delegated to it by the Consistory. The council shall operate under the authority of the Consistory. (Article 23)

The Members of the Council

While the three formal assemblies of the church are the consistory, the classis, and the synod (Church Order, Article 16), the Church Order also recognizes the gathering of what is designated as “the council.” This term and the body it represents has a long history in Reformed churches, as is evident in the Belgic Confession’s statement that in the church “there should also be elders and deacons, along with the pastors, to make up the council of the church” (Belgic Confession, Article 30).

(Continued on next page)

ARTICLE 24: Equality and Unity of Congregation

Although congregations are distinct and equal and do not have dominion over each other, they ought to preserve fellowship with each other because they are all united with Christ, the spiritual and governing Head of the church. Congregations manifest this unity when they meet together in the broader assemblies. (Article 24)

The Autonomy of the Local Congregations

While the inclusion and wording of this article is unique to the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America, the principal truths it expresses are those long held to be important among Reformed churches. With commitment to and appreciation for the unity of the one church, Reformed theology and church polity

(Continued on next page)

(Continuation of article 23)

All of the office bearers within the local church, ministers of the Word and sacraments, elders, and deacons, comprise the council of that church. While each of these offices has its distinctive duties, they all labor together within and for the church. While elders and deacons have their own separate meetings, it is also beneficial for them to meet collectively.

The Work of the Council

The work of the council has a twofold origin, “duties prescribed in the Church Order or such duties delegated to it by the Consistory.” Elders do well to recognize the involvement of the deacons in these matters, and deacons do well to assist in the fulfillment of these responsibilities.

The Church Order identifies several

tasks that belong to the council, including ensuring the financial needs of seminarians are met (Article 3), the calling of a minister (Articles 6 and 7), the emeritation of a minister (Article 10), the “exceptional release of a minister” (Article 11), the nomination of elders and deacons (Article 12), and the exercise of mutual censure (Article 63).

In addition to these delineated actions, the consistory of a local congregation may also delegate additional functions to the council. Examples of work often delegated to the council of a church include the general administration of finances, the establishment and maintenance of church facilities, and the processing of general communication.¹

Often committees are also formed by the council of a church to assist in the work in these areas. These committees

are extremely helpful but only when they faithfully attend to and focus on the work assigned to them. Meetings of the council provide suitable occasions for the elders, deacons, and committees to report on their respective labors.

The Authority over the Council

In light of the fact that the “Consistory is the only assembly in the church(es) whose decisions possess direct authority within the congregation” (Article 21), the council is “under the authority of the Consistory.” Orderly church government within the local church makes prudent use of the council without compromising the principle and practice of the governing oversight of the consistory.

1. Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), 254–55.

(Continuation of article 24)

have also recognized that each local congregation is a complete church that is autonomous, or self-governing, within itself. Throughout the history of the United Reformed Churches in North America, this truth has been re-emphasized as an antidote to and preventative against the ecclesiastical hierarchy of denominational boards and agencies.

Individual, local congregations are not just a part of a composite whole of a church. They are churches. This truth is revealed throughout the New Testament where the apostles address local congregations as “church” (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 2:1). Regardless of size, wealth, age, or other factors, each local congregation is a particular congregation, and no one local church has governing authority over any other local church.

The Unity of the Local Congregations

Truth must always be held in balance. The truth of the autonomy of the local church does not eliminate nor should it minimize the truth of the spiritual unity among local congregations. All true congregations or local churches have a spiritual unity through their common relationship to the Head of the church, Jesus Christ, for “[t]here is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4, 5). In their most basic expression of the apostolic faith, the churches profess to believe in “the holy catholic church.”

The Fellowship of the Local Congregations

This unity evidences itself in a common adherence to essential doctrines and practices. The spiritual unity of the churches is especially manifested when churches that have

voluntarily covenanted together as a federation meet together in their broader assemblies.

While such events as occasional joint worship services or pulpit exchanges also give evidence to the unity of the congregations, it is especially when the congregations, through their respective consistories, meet together as classis and synod that the unity of the federation of the churches is witnessed. This should have an impact on how the members of the churches view the broader assemblies. Rather than viewing classis and synod as undesirable nuisances, these assemblies should be seen as beautiful and necessary displays of the unity of the churches.

Rev. Greg Lubbers

is currently serving as Minister of the Word and Sacraments at Covenant Reformed Church (URCNA) in Pella, IA.

Reformed Youth Services National Convention

July 15–19, 2024
George Fox University
Newberg, OR



Mr. Dylan **Leep**

July 19 was a bittersweet day for every conventioneer including me, as this was my fourth and final RYS convention (July 15–19, 2024). We were singing the last few songs and saying goodbye to everyone we'd met at the RYS convention before going back home. While it seems sad in

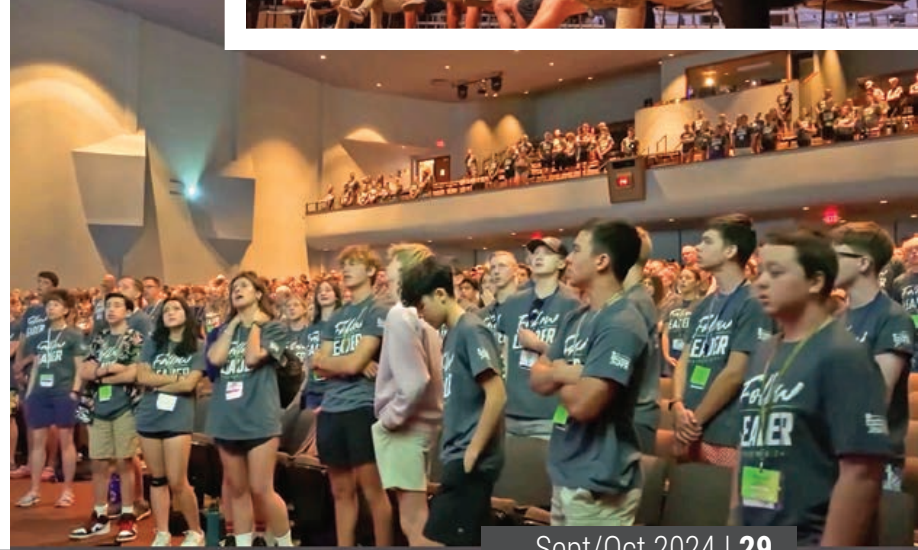
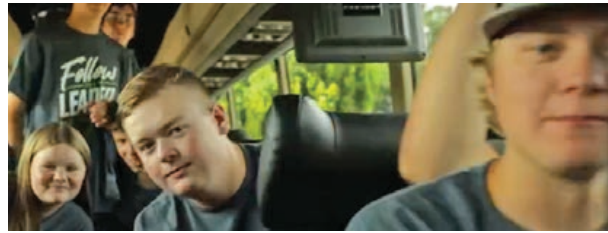
the moment, as soon as you leave you gain a sense of fullness leaving you content with the week at the RYS convention. As we sat in the airport waiting for our redeye flight from Portland back to Michigan, I thought about what convention was about. Convention is more than

making friends. It is God working through the speakers and other conventioners to help build and strengthen your faith.

The theme this year was “Follow the Leader,” and this theme was developed from Matthew 16:24.

(Continued on page 30)







(Continued from page 28)

Every year at RYS convention there are two main speakers. This year they were Rev. Angelo Contreas and Rev. Greg Lubbers. Both speakers did an amazing job speaking about following the leader, and every session lined up with the previous one. Both Rev. Contreas and Rev. Lubbers emphasized that following the leader is more than just telling God that you will follow Him. Instead, truly following God involves denying every single worldly aspect of your life and dedicating everything to God.

Throughout the week I also attended five workshops. These workshops focus on different areas of life and how to biblically approach them. The first workshop I had in the week was “Broken but Blessed” led by Dr. Breno Macedo. The topic of this workshop was suffering and how it

benefits us as Christians. One thing Dr. Macedo talked about was during our times of troubles if we turn to God, we will not be crushed beyond what we can take, and that God will spare us. My second workshop was “Show God the Money” led by Rev. C. J. den Dulk. This workshop was all about money and how we should be stewards of it because everything including our jobs come from God. My third workshop was “Detour Ahead” led by Rev. Bob Van Manen. The topic of this workshop is our lives and why things aren’t perfect. He taught that everything in our lives doesn’t go according to our own plans but according to God’s plan. My fourth workshop was “Love ‘em or Leave ‘em” led by Rev Russell Herman. This workshop focused on how to biblically approach friendships. My last workshop was “Role Call” led by Rev. Daniel

Ragusa. This workshop was about our roles as Christians in the world through being prophets, priests, and kings.

Every year there is a day away; this year was whitewater rafting. The day away was great, especially rafting down the river looking at all the beautiful trees and the crisp clear water. Overall RYS Convention 2024 was great and helped build me spiritually. Thank you for providing some of the funds to go to RYS Convention and for your thoughts and prayers. If there are any young people unsure about RYS Convention, simply attend it and you will see why it is a beloved event.

Mr. Dylan Leep

is a member of the Covenant URC in Kalamazoo, MI.

Mental Health and Soul Care Biblically, Pastorally, and Practically



Mrs. Annemarieke **Ryskamp**

Review of *Mental Health and Soul Care: Considered Biblically, Pastorally, and Practically*, edited by Brian G. Najapfour and Paul W. Wagenaar. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2024. 284 pages. Paperback. \$18.00.

Reviewed by Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp

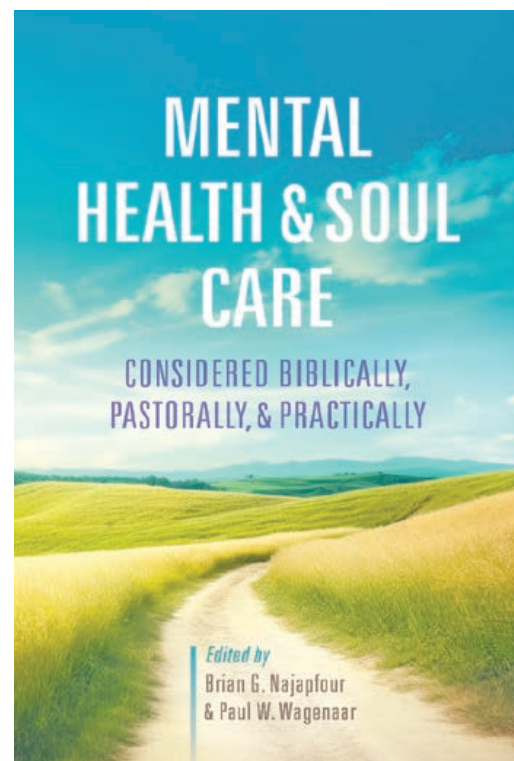
Quoting from the introduction: “This book was born out of two separate conferences on mental health, held in the Spring (April 23) and Fall (October 14–15) of 2022 at Heritage Reformed Congregation in Jordan, Ontario, Canada. . . . This work is a compilation of subjects about mental health by various authors— theologians, pastors, counsellors, and laypersons—who often speak from first-hand experience on a variety of issues and who collectively call for holistic body and soul care as it relates to mental health.”

As everyone speaking in this book has experienced a growth in faith through their troubles, it is a beautifully biblically sound book on prevalent health problems like anxiety, depression, burnout, PTSD, and bipolar depression, but I missed a chapter on dementia.

There are also chapters specifically on helping your child with fear and anxiety and helping women through mental health challenges, all from a biblical perspective that is itself explained in the two chapters by Dr. Brian Najapfour (see *The Outlook*, July/August 2024, 29). All thirteen chapters are followed by a number of discussion questions, which makes the book also useful for reading and discussing in (mentor) groups.

Every chapter is informative *and* practical, the latter because most of the authors went through these problems personally and can therefore distinguish what works well under their circumstances. They are also honest in acknowledging that the underlying problem can sometimes be a sin, albeit often an unconscious one, mostly stemming from being neglectful of the good directives our Creator gave us to stay healthy (e.g., getting enough rest, or sharing your troubles with Jesus and with others who love you).

The great thing about their honesty is that we have a book that is a treasure trove of good ideas and good advice both for ourselves and for friends who suffer from these problems. It’s not an academic textbook, which makes it useful for layperson, man or woman, who is concerned about a friend, a fellow church member, or even yourself.



This book can be used as a reference book, because the chapter titles are clear about the subject discussed, and the questions are useful to think about the subject or to discuss with others.

With mental health issues on the rise even in our churches, I think every concerned member of the church should have a copy available for good advice when needed.

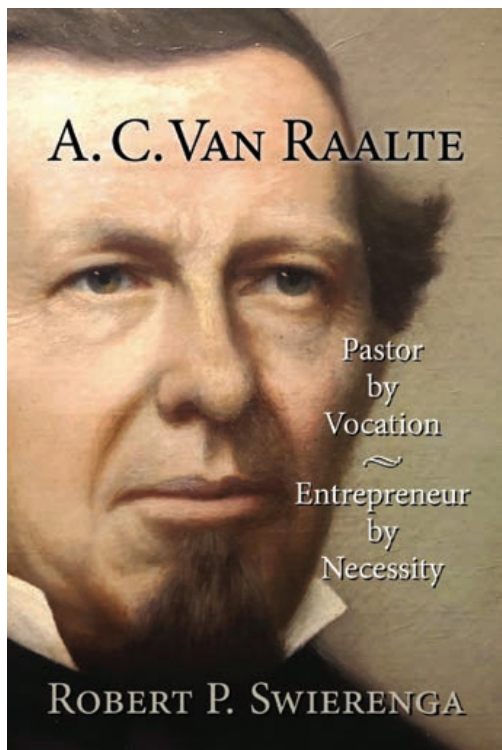
Mrs. Annemarieke Ryskamp

was born and raised in the Netherlands. She graduated with a master’s degree in Dutch Language and Literature from Utrecht University and worked for the Dutch l’Abri and as a secondary school teacher at United World College in Singapore. She attends Dutton United Reformed Church (MI).

A. C. Van Raalte: Pastor by Vocation, Entrepreneur by Necessity



Rev. Jerome **Julien**



Review of A. C. Van Raalte: Pastor by Vocation, Entrepreneur by Necessity, Robert P. Swierenga. Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2023. 680 pages. Paperback. \$50.00.

Reviewed by Rev. Jerome Julien

It is exciting to have this new volume about Rev. Albertus Van Raalte on our shelves. True, other books have been produced through the years, such as those by Hyma, Schoolland, and Bruins, all of them of great value. This newest volume is full to overflowing with material about the founder of the Holland Colony and his background in the Netherlands. This book, along with recent publications on Revs.

Hendrik DeCock and Simon Van Velzen by other authors, would be good reading for us so that we know something of our ecclesiastical background. After almost two hundred years this history is not as well-known as it should be. We do not know what our spiritual forefathers experienced for the Reformed faith.

The author, Robert Swierenga, has contributed many shorter and longer publications which have given insights into this history. Having spent many years on the faculty of Kent State University in Ohio, and teaching at various schools (Calvin University, Hope College, the University of Iowa, and elsewhere), being knighted by Queen Beatrix in the Order of the Netherlands Lion, he now serves at Hope College's Van Raalte Institute. He has written a worthwhile volume on the history of the Dutch people in Chicago, and a three-volume history of Holland, Michigan.

Do not get the idea that this volume and those on Chicago and Holland, as well as shorter volumes on church history, will put the reader to sleep. He knows how to write, and the content is always interesting and enlightening. This volume on Van Raalte is interesting and complete. The bibliography and index cover almost one hundred pages, and the many footnotes give the interested reader the sources for what he writes. Included are many pictures, maps, and some diagrams that illustrate this work.

Swierenga lays out the reasons for the Secession of 1834 (*de Afscheiding*)

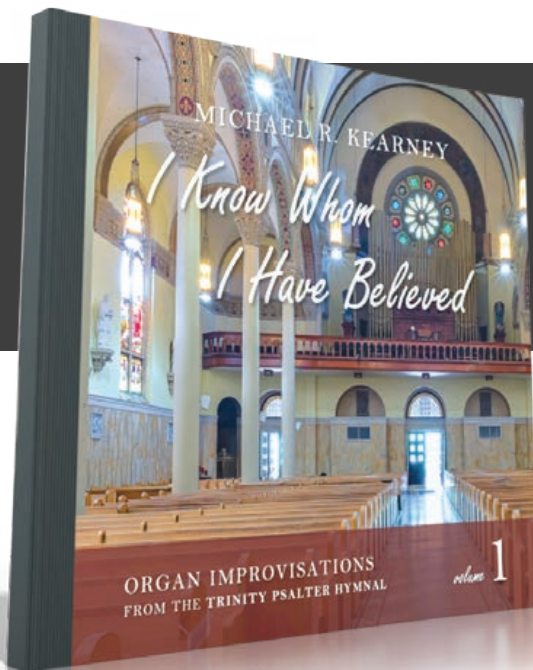
already from the late 1700s and the need and reasons for what took place in the Netherlands. Next, many pages are devoted to the pilgrimage from the Netherlands to Michigan. Even more pages are allotted to the settlement in Holland Colony. The days and years beyond the settlement necessitated Van Raalte to be more than the Minister of the Word. He had to be involved in the development of the town and therefore its business. As the subtitle puts it, he was "pastor by vocation; entrepreneur by necessity." Besides, he also tried to establish church work in Virginia.

This reviewer found this book to be a very good read. Some of the questions I had about Van Raalte and his views were answered for me. It is apparent that within the Secession of 1834, there were differing doctrinal views or emphases. This became clear when Van Raalte worked for the union of the Classis Holland churches and the Reformed Church in America in the Union of 1850.

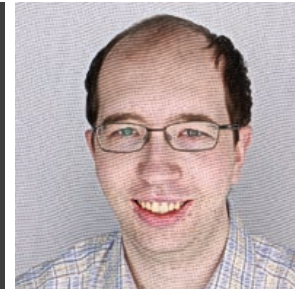
Though it was published in paperback, perhaps someday it will be republished in hard cover. It is high time we learn about our foundational history. This worthwhile book is a very good read. It is highly recommended.

Rev. Jerome Julien

is a retired pastor and a member of Walker United Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI.



I Know Whom I Have Believed



Mr. Tom **Ryskamp**

Review of *I Know Whom I Have Believed*, Michael Kearney. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2024. Compact disc. \$13.00 (introductory offer).

Reviewed by Mr. Tom Ryskamp

As twenty-first-century Protestants, we have no shortage of Christian music recordings at our disposal, but most of them, if they are not modern worship songs, are renditions of a relative handful of ecumenical hymns. Beyond those, recordings of other hymns and psalms from our Reformed tradition are rare. In a previous generation, the late Dale Grotenhuis recorded *Be Thou Exalted, Lord*, a multi-volume collection of psalms from the 1959 *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* performed by the ensembles of Dordt College. Now to succeed him we have Michael Kearney, who has recorded an excellent set of twenty-one organ recordings based on psalms and hymns from the recent *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (TPH), under the title *I Know Whom I Have Believed*.

On his URC Psalmody blog, Kearney described his repertoire selection as “a mixture of old and new favorites.” Several selections will be deeply familiar from previous Reformed songbooks (e.g., “Amid the Thronging Worshipers”; “God,

Be Merciful to Me”; “God Himself Is with Us”). Others are based on songs that are new to the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* but memorable enough to remain popular for many years. For those less familiar with the newer hymnal, the tracks in the latter category will be an excellent way to become acquainted with some of these new songs. The selections on the album are distinctive enough to be most edifying for those using the TPH and its predecessor books, but listeners from any tradition can recognize some of the tunes and appreciate the beauty and artistry on this CD.

Kearney, being a skilled organist, is able to show the extent of both his own talent and the capabilities of the organ he performs on. Though the term “improvisation” may have different connotations in other musical contexts, these pieces fit in the Dutch organ tradition of well-ordered extemporizations of psalm and hymn tunes. On the album, he showcases a full range of musical textures and sounds, always fitting to each song’s text, while avoiding bare showmanship and gratuitous bombast. Kearney maintains a perfect balance between sophisticated artistry and stylistic conservatism, so the music will gratify the focused listener just as well as it can serve as spiritually nourishing background music.

Though this is his first CD, Kearney has previously published six short volumes of sheet music for organ titled *Hymn Meditations*. And like the first of those editions, this CD includes the optimistic label of “Volume 1,” which we can hope to be an indication that this series will continue as well.

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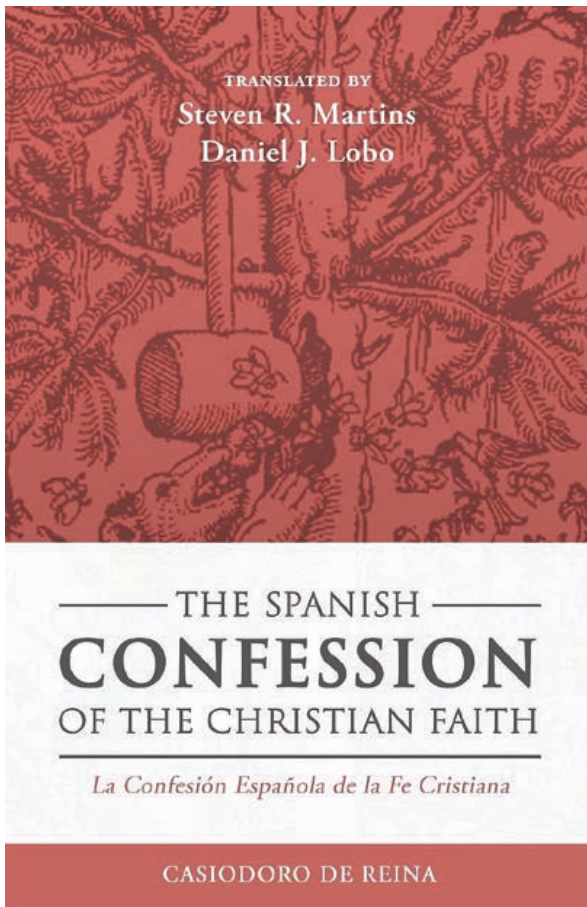
Mr. Thomas Ryskamp

Thomas Ryskamp is a pianist and organist and a member of Dutton United Reformed Church. He currently works at Hillsdale College as Staff Pianist and Adjunct Instructor of Music.

The Spanish Confession of the Christian Faith



Dr. Daniel Ragusa



Review of *The Spanish Confession of the Christian Faith*, Casiodoro de Reina. Translated and edited by Steven R. Martins and Daniel J. Lobo. Jordan Station, ON: Cantaro Publications, 2023. 166 pages. Paperback. \$14.99.

Reviewed by Dr. Daniel Ragusa

The Spanish Inquisition began in 1478 under the orders of the Catholic monarchs to eradicate heretics who pretended to convert from Judaism or Islam. But when the Reformation later spread into Spain, the Inquisition's ire was directed in full force against the Protestants. In

a monastery in Seville, Reformed Protestants gathered under the leadership of Casiodoro de Reina. But before being found out, they fled Spain and settled in London, where Protestant refugees were welcomed. For them to be recognized as a church, they had to present a confession of faith to the other consistories in London to demonstrate their doctrinal agreement. So, from the heart of another pilgrim people who forsook everything for the sake of the truth of God's Word, the Spanish Confession of the Christian Faith (SC) was issued by Reina in 1560/61.

The saints of the SC lived out what they confessed: "We also confess that this holy and blessed people do not have a designated place here but are pilgrims scattered throughout the world" (XVIII.I) and "God has ordained that His Church be continually subject to this cross in the world" (XIX. XII). Still, "we confess that we live in hope of a glorious resurrection of all things" (XXI.I). Their confession not only helped them not to lose heart in their exile but also encouraged them to stand fast for the truth of God's Word, come what may.

The story behind the SC also reminds us that confessions, far from dividing or isolating churches from one another, help to unite believers around a shared understanding of the revealed truths of God's Word. As the SC states, "Through this Confession, we claim to be members of the universal Church and have no connection with any ancient or modern sect or heresy" (I.V). In its conclusion, it adds, "We have suffered here to declare and confess its main articles so that through this confession, we may be recognized as members of the true Church of the Lord and admitted among those who are as well." Confessions serve the communion of the saints by making plain and public what exactly a church believes the Scriptures to teach.

Confessions enable us, then, to move beyond superficial or even suspicious relations to deep and charitable friendships that honor the only head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:21). For this reason, we can be thankful for this translation of the SC that brings to our attention another group of believers in church history with whom we share a common theological heritage and understanding of God's Word.

The teaching of the SC is distinctly Reformed and predominately agrees with the Belgic Confession (BC), though it less clear and developed in comparison. For one, the BC clearly teaches that faith is first kindled in the heart by the Holy Spirit and embraces Jesus Christ (article 22) and from this union with Christ the double grace of justification (article 23) and sanctification (article 24) is received. The SC trends toward Lutheranism by speaking not of justification and sanctification flowing from union with Christ but of sanctification flowing from justification. So, the SC states in a rather imprecise way, “Therefore, we believe and confess that it is a necessary condition for all who are truly justified by true repentance and faith to receive the Holy Spirit, by whose power they are sanctified” (XVII.II).

The SC also places its teaching on the sacraments before the ministry of the word in its exposition of the external means of our justification. And with respect to the Lord’s Supper it states, “[Believers] are incorporated into Him and become part of His very being” (XIII.II). The rest of the confession does not blur the Creator-creature distinction, so this statement is unclear at best.

Finally, the SC teaches that the church is a “Christian civil order” and “therefore, if the political magistrate is a believer, he is the head of church discipline and holds supreme authority to execute all that pertains to the Kingdom of the Lord and the advancement of His glory, not only in matters of human civil order but also, and primarily, in matters related to divine worship” (XVI.III). The BC originally taught a similar establishmentarian view of church and state in article 36 but was later revised as the implications of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church were more fully worked out.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the SC is filled with God-centered, Christ-honoring, and church-building truth for Reformed doctrine and life. The bilingual edition of the confession with English on one side and Spanish on the other makes it a useful tool for ESL classes or sharing the Reformed faith with Spanish-speaking family members, friends, and neighbors.

Dr. Daniel Ragusa

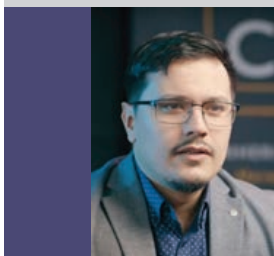
is pastor of Messiah’s Reformed Fellowship in New York City.



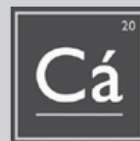
The Protestant Reformation is rarely linked with Spain, and is often overshadowed by the Spanish Inquisition. Yet, the Reformation did take root in Spain, albeit with a more modest impact than in other regions. Contrary to popular belief, the Reformation movement in Spain was not non-existent. The 1923 *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada* incorrectly dismissed its influence, attributing its failure to Roman Catholic reforms, deep-rooted Catholicism, and the Inquisition’s suppression of Protestantism, including in early centers like Sevilla and Valladolid.

Scholar Arthur Gordon Kindle, however, noted that the Spanish Reformation began in the 1540s and remained active until the early 1560s, fueled by both native evangelical thought and ideas from Erasmus and northern Reformers. Although the Inquisition quashed the movement within Spain, the Reformation of the Spanish-speaking church continued in exile, adhering to the principle of *semper reformanda*—always reforming according to God’s Word.

Today, a faithful remnant of Reformed Spanish Protestants persists, with the Reformation’s principles—the five *solas*—gaining momentum across Latin America and Spain. The seeds of the Reformation, once thought extinguished, are beginning to bloom anew. Where the Reformed faith was once dismissed, Christians are now eagerly translating and reading works by figures such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, Herman Bavinck, and Geerhardus Vos, discovering a Protestant heritage they can truly call their own.



Steven R. Martins is President and Founder at the Cántaro Institute.



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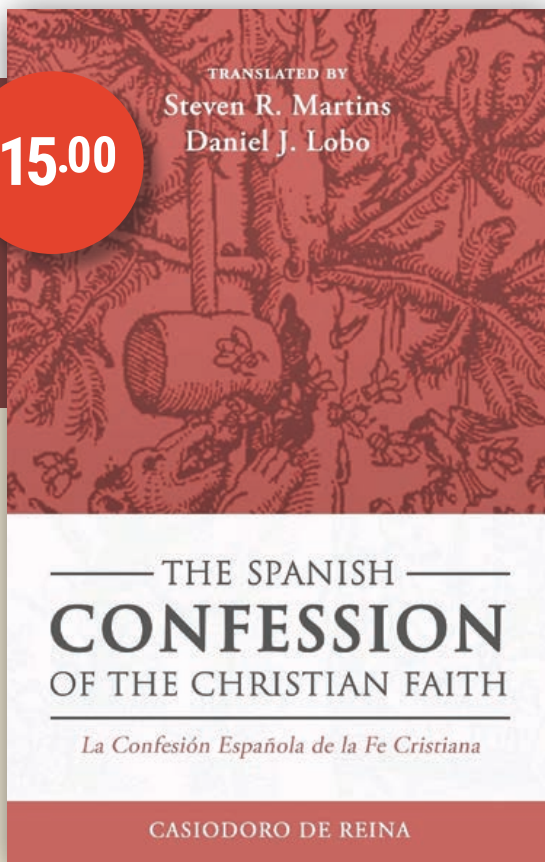
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