

# The Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith*

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# The Fruit of Our Lips

*The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.* Proverbs 18:21

Even the ungodly realize there are limitations to the freedom of speech we enjoy in America. Although we may espouse any view we wish, we may not slander or defame others. As Christians we know that God desires pure hearts and pure speech. God made the tongue to glorify Him and bring blessing to others.

All too often we use the tongue in ways that bring reproach upon God and hurt others. Thus James calls the tongue a fire, *a world of evil among the parts of the body ... a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* How we use our tongues has

a tremendous effect on others.

Our words can kill. We can literally bring death to others through false charges or testimony, but more often we bring inner death by words which hurt and wound people. We can tell someone we wish them dead, or make derogatory comments about their physical or mental abilities. Many have the audacity to speak like this, while priding themselves on their honesty.

Sometimes we think that if what we say is true then we may say it, but truth that only brings harm to another person should not be spoken.

Love covers a multitude of sins, but derogatory comments come out of a heart of pride. A pride filled heart thinks it is much better than anyone else. A pride filled person thinks he would not be as ridiculous as the person being talked to or about.

We can also cause death by speaking evil of someone to a third person. Proverbs 25:18 says, *“Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor”* (See also Prov. 26:22,28). Scripture warns against this use of our tongue, especially as it pertains to those who are in authority over us.

We are warned about making accusations against officebearers without good evidence. Even when we



Volume 53, No. 2 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) *“And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’ (Judges 7:20).*

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Send all copy to:  
Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord  
7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.  
Portage, MI 49024  
Phone: (616) 324-5132 Fax: (616) 324-9606  
Email: wyb.kath@juno.com

#### Board of Trustees

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**Editor:** Wybren Oord

**Contributing Editor:** Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

**Production Manager:** Peter Wobbema

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#### Editorial Office

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.  
Portage, MI 49024  
(616) 324-5132 Phone  
(616) 324-9606 Fax  
wyb.kath@juno.com Email

#### Circulation Office

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.  
Grandville, MI 49418-1176  
(616) 532-8510 Phone

#### Circulation Office Hours

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#### Business Mailing Address

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.  
Grandville, MI 49418-1176  
Email: reffellowship@juno.com



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have good evidence and legitimate concerns about someone else, by making them public, we can harm the person rather than help him. We ought to wisely confront the individual in love. Only if he refuses to repent should we go to another, and then only for the benefit of the other person and never out of malice (See Matthew 18).

Words also have the power of life. Praising God or talking about the truth of Scripture promotes life and may bring people into fellowship with God and His people. We bring joy and blessing to others by using our tongue for their salvation. Assuring others of our prayers and love also encourages others. Speech that shows honor to others edifies the fellowship and communion of the saints. Respectful words about those in authority, such as office bearers, builds up the church and brings unity within the church. How crucial it is to use our tongues wisely!

What we say expresses what is in our hearts. If our hearts are pure and filled with love for God's people, our speech will reflect this. Bitterness or anger in our hearts will also be reflected in how we speak (See Matthew 12:33ff). When our hearts are filled with good things our speech promotes joy and happiness. We, in turn, are then filled with joy, happiness, and love.

Our speech also impacts ourselves. *"From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things, but the unfaithful have a craving for violence. He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin"* (Proverbs 13:2-3). Proverbs 18:20 says, *"From the fruit of his mouth*

*a man's stomach is filled; with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied."* Verse 21 adds, *"the tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."* Usually we think what feeds and satisfies us is that which we take into our mouths. Yet this is not true with regard to our speech.

Those who love to use the tongue for death or life will eat the fruit. If we enjoy using the tongue for good, life, and happiness, we will reap the

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fruit of this in good, life, and happiness. If we enjoy using the tongue for evil, death and misery we will reap those things.

The words *"those who love it"* in Proverbs 18:20 does not refer to those who love talking. It refers to those who, when they talk, love using it for either good or evil. This includes all of us. The use we make of our tongue will effect us – *"from the harvest of our lips [we] shall be satisfied."* Consider this carefully. What we say indicates what is in our heart. When the content of our hearts is spoken, revealing the evil that lies within, we will feel miserable and impure, with greater hatred and heartache than before. In this way we are fed by the words we speak.

Proverbs 18:7 says, *"A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul."* When we speak out of anger, bitterness or envy, deriding others, do we really feel better? Do crude and immoral jokes or deriding comments make us happier or more joyful? Are we then *filled* with the knowledge that the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts are pleasing in God's sight? No, it only reaps more grief. If we speak hastily, we reap for ourselves destruction, both in this life and the life to come.

The words we speak have an eternal effect! Jesus says that when we speak of our brothers contemptuously we are liable to judgment in this life, and when we call him a fool we are in danger of the fires of hell. Of course, we are saved only on the merits of Jesus Christ. Those saved in Christ Jesus, however, are filled with His love and joy. They seek righteousness, speaking only that which is constructive.

In Matthew 12 Jesus says, *"that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless words they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."* We are judged on this basis because our words reflect the heart. Our words have an eternal effect! Thus our words have power for life and death.

Where we have fallen short of God's glory we must humbly confess with Isaiah, *"I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips."* We must see our sinful talk as evidence of a sinful heart, and flee to Jesus for

mercy. He delights to show mercy. Pray that He would create in us a pure heart, a heart of wisdom, enlightened by the word. The only way to learn to control our tongues is to ask God for wisdom and then live daily out of that wisdom. If you want to know how to gain a heart of wisdom see Proverbs 2:1-6 and Psalm 34:12-13.

As we struggle for hearts of wisdom and tongues that promote life, let us pray David's prayer: "*Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds, that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart may be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*"

**Rev. Calvin Tuininga** is the Pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Pantego, North Carolina.

# TEEN SCENE

## Feet of the Gospel

ARE YOU READY?

*Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the LORD. Proverbs 22:17-19a*

It seems like we always have to get ready for something. Just last month we had to get ready for exams in high school. We have to get ready for family pictures. Each week we get ready for school or for work. We get ready to go out with friends or go to a basketball game. Each Sunday morning we get ready to go to church.



also have to prepare mentally for the church service so that you're ready to meet with the people of God to worship Him. If you do not get ready for this mentally you won't give God the proper praise due Him and you won't receive the full blessing that you would otherwise receive.

Getting ready is not always just about getting ready physically. There is more to it than getting cleaned up and getting dressed or putting on make-up. There is a mental and emotional side to getting ready as well. For school we have to get mentally ready for a test by studying. Sometimes you have to mentally/emotionally prepare for the razing Uncle Bob is going to give you at your family gathering. You get mentally prepared when your team is going to play the big rivals in basketball. You try to get mentally/emotionally prepared for that first date but often are too nervous and can't think straight. You

There still is another side to being ready or prepared. It is your spiritual side. While you are getting ready for anything whether physically, mentally, or emotionally, your spirituality is right there with you. It is not something you can put in a box and then take out for church services, catechism, youth group, weddings and funerals. The spiritual part of your being is with you right now, even as you read this article, and when you eat dinner with your family, and when you are out with your friends.

When God breathed into Adam at creation, God placed a soul in Adam. God did not do this act with



any other part of creation. Only man has a soul and his soul works in tandem with his mind, conscience, and emotions. Only man is created in the image of God and God is all spirit. We are like God because we have been given a spirit/soul (with mind, conscience and emotions) unlike other creatures. Our soul was given to us in our mother's womb and we can't get rid of it or toss it aside. It is always a part of us.

If we think of the piece of armor that God gives us in preparation of our spiritual battle, it should help us understand the readiness that we need to have. Ephesians 6:15 says, "and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

In life you want to stand on something solid that will not slip away. I remember in Costa Rica a couple of years ago walking in a jungle-like area with my youth group. We went to see some property where a new Christian high school was going to be built.

While we were walking down a particularly steep hill, many of us were slipping and falling into the mud. Everyone was trying not to fall. We all tried to grab some weeds or small trees for support and find a place to firmly set our feet. If one of our feet slipped, it didn't matter what we were holding in our hands - we would still fall. We found out that a person needs a firm foundation to stand, otherwise he will fall.

In the past, soldiers in the Roman army used to wear some kind of spike on their footwear. Those spikes served several purposes.

The soldiers were able to move faster than any other army. Imagine thousands of men walking on a muddy road or up a wet field. Their spikes would keep them from slipping. They could move faster and they would have better traction to keep moving.

In addition, the spikes could be used as a offensive weapon to kick at the adversary. Finally, in the heat of battle while the enemy is pushing against them, the spikes would help



them stand their ground. Today, we see spikes on football and baseball players shoes. Spikes help the athlete do the things that he needs to.

So what do we have as our spiritual spikes? What grounds us so that when the enemy attacks and ham-

mers into us we can stand our ground? It is the Gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ. That is to be our foundation. We cannot slip when we are on the solid ground of the Gospel. We will be ready for battle when we are dug into the Gospel. So, you must keep on digging into God's Word and getting a good foothold on your spiritual life.

You must understand that you are at war spiritually. The church and her people have always been at war with the devil. One of his attacks is to say that you only need your spiritual life when you are at church. But the war is going on around us constantly and is directed at us constantly. The armor of the shoe calls for continual preparation in the Gospel.

Defensively you need to be able to withstand the blows of life, when a loved one dies, or your father loses his job, or the break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or a friend that wants you to go drinking on Friday night. The devil is not going to stop the assault on you.

When you are grounded in the gospel and have taken the words of God into your heart (mind, conscience, soul, desires/emotions) you

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read Psalm 119:1-11. Are we left to ourselves, or does God provide direction? Where must we place the Word of God? If something is inside of you and precious to you, what would you do with it?

Read II Corinthians 10:3-6. What do we do with ideas that go against the Word of God? What are we called to do with our own ideas? How do we then act and live?

will be prepared to strike out offensively with your lips. You can kick up your spikes!

You can help convince another person of his sin with words from the Word of God. You may also turn another from sinning and turn them to God, for God's glory, honor, and praise.

But you have to be in the Word. You have to know the Gospel. It has to be a part of your heart so that it naturally comes out of your mouth. Then you can be both on the defense and offense at the same time. Then you will you find peace. In God's Word, in the good news of Jesus Christ and in His faithful promises. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:34-36 that He did not come to earth to bring peace. He came here to wage war! Trust His Holy Word so you can stand firm and repel the attack. Are you ready?

**Mr. Dave Vander Meer** is the Youth Director of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

# We Said it Would Never Happen

*When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)*

We said it would never happen. We said there was no such thing as a "new hermeneutic" making its way through the corridors of the Christian Reformed Church. We said that the "slippery slope" argument was all wet. We said that the argument for the ordination of women would not lead to it. We said we could be a positive influence upon those denominations which allowed for it, while never being influenced to allow for it ourselves. We said it would never happen. Many feared that it would. And on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002 it became the official policy of the First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto.

In an October letter to the congregations of Classis Toronto, the council of First CRC communicated its decision to consider the "nominations of gay and lesbian members, including those living in committed relationships, for all elected offices." The letter expresses the question with which the

council of First CRC, Toronto believed it was faced: "were we willing to identify ourselves as an inclusive congregation or not?"

Recognizing that their decision is in direct opposition to the stated position of the denomination which was put forward at Synod 1973 and reaffirmed at Synod 2002, the council acknowledged in the letter that their decision "involved the risk of potentially straining in a serious way our relationship with the denomination we all know and love." At the time of this writing, Classis Toronto is scheduled to meet in January to discuss the decision of First CRC. In the meantime, several area churches have expressed their concern about the position that First CRC has taken.

## A Salvation Issue

In their open pastoral letter to Classis Toronto, the council of First CRC indicated that they felt compelled to make this decision "for the sake of our own local congrega-

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*To Paul, there was no such creature as a  
Christian drunkard, a Christian swindler, a  
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tion” and that they had been led to the point “where everything was, in some ways, at stake. Words were not enough anymore, and a decision was essential.”

In an article in *Christianity Today* (Dec.9, 2002), it was reported that “church leaders say that confession of Christ, not sexual orientation, is the key factor in whether a person can hold a church office.” Rev. Henry Bruinsma, pastor of Maranatha CRC, in Woodbridge, Ontario, whose council sent a letter to First CRC expressing their concern with the decision, said “our deepest concern is that the very salvation of people is at stake, because people will be misled about the basics of a new life in Christ and the nature of sin, repentance, and salvation.” It is clear that, to some, the decision of First CRC is very much, to use a common but misused phrase, a “salvation issue.”

### **A Biblical Issue**

In Leviticus 18:22, we read that the Lord gave this Word to Moses to deliver to the people: “do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.” In Romans 1:26,27, we are told that when men exchange the truth of God for a lie, God will give them over “to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.”

What we today call “living in committed relationships,” is called “detestable” by God. What we today call a lifestyle that should be “included” in the church, God calls “unnatural” and something to which

people are “given over to” in judgment.

### **An Identity Issue**

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, after warning the church in Corinth not to be deceived into thinking that the wicked will inherit the kingdom of God, proceeds to list idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, and homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy persons, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers, as among “the wicked.” His grand conclusion is verse 11, “*and that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*” The issue in 1 Corinthians 6 was an issue of identity. To Paul, it was unthinkable that someone who had been justified and sanctified in Jesus Christ could continue to identify themselves with their former lifestyle. To Paul, there was no such creature as a Christian drunkard, a Christian swindler, a Christian thief, nor a Christian homosexual. It was unthinkable! That was what some of you were! But no longer. Now, you have been washed. You have been sanctified! You have a new identity. Your identity is in Christ and in Christ alone.

Wouldn’t it have been odd if the apostle Paul would have introduced himself to the churches in Galatia or Ephesus as Paul, the Christian per-

secutor of the church, called by the will of God...? Of course it would! Paul was no longer a persecutor of the church. That is what he was. But no longer. Now, he had a new identity. He was a Christian. His identity did not lie in a former lifestyle, but in a present reality. He was in Christ.

### **A Faith Issue**

The question of whether or not practicing homosexuals may serve as office-bearers in the church of Christ, like all issues relating to the “regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith,” must always return to the simple, and yet tremendously difficult question in our times, what does the Scripture say? With regard to the Holy Scriptures, we confess, that we believe “without any doubt all things contained in them”(Belgic Confession, Art.V).

As B.B. Warfield pointed out many years ago, what Scripture says, God says. If God has spoken, as the passages alluded to above clearly demonstrate, then who are we to question? Is it not the height of arrogance and much worse, spiritual error, to suggest that we are somehow more “inclusive” than the Word of God?

We must never forget that our Lord Jesus Christ excluded as well as included. All those who repent and believe the Gospel, all those who

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bear fruit in keeping with repentance, all those who have submitted their own loves, desires, and lifestyles to the loves, desires, and lifestyle of Christ Himself are included in the church of Christ and are called to service within the Christian church.

The same Christ, however, whose love and grace is greater than all our sins, is the Christ who excludes as well. He excludes unworthy men from the office of elder and deacon (1 Timothy 3). He excludes women from serving in those same offices (1 Cor.11, 1 Cor.14, 1 Timothy 2). As we have seen from 1 Corinthians 6, He excludes the wicked from the Kingdom. As the Head of His church, He has the full power and authority to establish the nature of that church.

More than that, He has revealed to us His will for His people. As the church is pressured to accommodate itself to the prevalent inclusivistic views of the world, we must never forget that we have an exclusive Gospel, an exclusive Christ, and an exclusive Word. And we must never forget that in seeking to be more “inclusive” than the Word of God, we are actually excluding people from the true message of the Gospel. And by hiding from them the call to repentance, faith, and obedience to Christ, we are excluding them from the Kingdom.

### A Church Issue

Only four months after joining the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which includes several denominations who have allowed for the ordination of homosexuals for many years, the Christian Re-

formed Church is faced with the challenge of addressing this issue within its own ranks. How will Classis Toronto respond? Many within the Christian Reformed Church are prayerfully asking that question at this time. It is clearly a critical time. Is there room in the Christian Reformed denomination for congregations that allow for the ordination of practicing homosexuals?

The council of First CRC, Toronto, has indicated that their goal is to be an “inclusive congregation” and that they “are actually not very interested in debating the subject any longer.” Will the Christian Reformed denomination be an “inclusive” denomination, in the sense of including

that which the Word of God excludes as wicked? Will this crack in the foundation of the denomination be repaired, along the lines of a faithful Nehemiah who stood boldly against great forces of opposition? Or will the crack continue to grow and expand? May God help us to rebuild and repair, so that we will not be forced to cry out with the people of Judah, “*the strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.*”

**Rev. Peter Moelker** is the pastor of the Wyoming Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Ontario Canada.

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# Fences for Grazing

What does it mean to be Reformed? Yes, I know. This has been asked and answered a hundred and one times. Books have been written, lectures delivered, and nice audio albums produced all in the hopes of answering this one question – what does it mean to be Reformed? But if that’s the case, then why does this question continue to be asked?

We would go a long way in finding an answer if we recognized that this question doesn’t necessarily surface for reasons of ignorance. In other words, the question isn’t always asked because more Reformed data is needed. Sometimes the person who asks “What does it mean to be Reformed,” is actually asking, “How are we to live as Reformed believers?” Therefore, memorizing the Lord’s Days doesn’t go all the way to answer the question. Knowing the history behind the Belgic Confession is not going to make you Reformed. Nor is identifying the five petals of T.U.L.I.P. Being Reformed is knowing *and* living. It seems to me then, how we answer the “how” question of being Reformed is the real question of our day. We begin to answer that when we look at the function of our confessions.

We must admit that a generation has grown up that is simply ignorant of the knowable and quotable aspects of the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith is objective; it is confessional. It is knowable. We recognize this when, during profession of faith, the individual is asked, “First: Do you heartily believe the

doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church...” Thus, the fight that many of us grew up in involved getting people to see the need to simply *know* the Reformed faith. Thankfully, the battle is shifting from this front. Our children are being catechized. Congregations are hearing the Word faithfully proclaimed. But just because the battle is shifting, we shouldn’t think that it is over.

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Another front is forming. It is a front on which we are going to have to do some real soul searching again. It all develops around this question: “How are we supposed to live with what we know?”

You don’t need to have 20/20 vision to notice the peaks and valleys of our history. It seems as though there is a constant ebb and flow of extremism, i.e. going from liberalism to conservatism back to liberalism and back again to conservatism *ad infinity*. Why is that? The story goes something like this: Liberalism says that conservatism is too cere-

bral and not in touch with the intangibles of the Christian’s experience. The conservative element reacts and steers away from the happy-clappy-cliff of destruction and settles for simply not being liberal. The choices become heart or head.

Precisely because neither of these satisfy as entities unto themselves, we might begin referring to the said groups as “ping” and “pong.” The Church gets drunk on the elixir of *reaction* and then tries to do its work. We need a better approach to how we view being Reformed. That means, we need to rediscover how our confessions operate among us.

In my neighborhood we have a community playground where the children go to play. Around this playground is a nice white fence. Among other things, this fence protects the children so that they are free to play. I doubt that many of the children give the fence a second thought. And yet, they show their appreciation for the fence every time they play in the freedom provided by the fence. Now, lest you think I’m watching *This Old House* when I should be working, let me try to bring this full circle.

If I can over simplify for a moment, the party line of liberalism has been, “We don’t need the fence of the confessions.” In reaction, the conservatives have been saying, “We need the fence of the confessions.” In either case, the fence has become the exclusive focus. And that’s the danger! Thankfully, we have come a long way in recovering and repairing our love for the confessions.

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But for what? So that we can stare at the fence? Imagine the absurdity of my neighborhood children coming to the playground only to stare at the fence. Wouldn't you say, "Children, look at the playground that you are free to play in. What's wrong with you? Why all the fence staring?"

If we truly love the confessions we will show this by living in the freedom of the confessions. Being Reformed begins when we recognize the fence. But growth in being Reformed is only stimulated when we see what is protected by the confessions. It takes place when we discover our freedom in the confessions.

We need to live in the Church just like the little children who don't give the fence a second thought. Now some might say that this is an anti-confessional statement. I beg to differ. In my silly illustration the children at the playground do not give the fence a second thought *precisely because it is in tact, because it is strong and sturdy.* When the leadership does its job and makes sure the fence is well-built, the proper response is to play. And that is where the new front is forming. Will we not only take delight but also promote delight in living with what we know in the life of our congregations? Can we *enjoy* being surrounded by our confessions?

The confessions give us a wonderful playground in which we can think and exchange ideas that are not confessional. Perhaps a better word than playground at this point would be pasture. We have a pastureland that is protected by the confessions. Do we see this

though? Here is where the elder-ship needs to be engaged in pastorally turning the sheep from defining themselves as fence *gazers* to being pasture *grazers*. The burden for this is all due to the fact that it is in this pasture where we as consistories may seek to find a better way. A better way for what?

Let's take the Lord's Day for a non-controversial subject. Is there a better way for observing the Lord's Day that promotes delight in our congregations and homes?

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***If we truly love the confessions we will show this by living in the freedom of the confessions.***

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Now I'm not talking about a better way to define justification. I'm talking about a better way to live within the objective truths of what we confess. I don't have an answer to the question I just raised. My only point is to show that within the fence of our confessions we can legitimately ask this kind of question. We can ask this question and more, not as liberals, and not as conservatives but as Reformed believers who want to live in the freedom of the confessions. We are permitted to look for better, more God glorifying ways of manifesting our Reformed heritage.

For too long people have been laughing and mocking our heritage saying, as it were, that the "R" of

Reformed stands for "Ruts." This isn't too far off when the rules of engagement have been determined by the standards of fifty years ago. "Let's go back to the way things were fifty years ago" was a common theme I heard growing up. But being Reformed means so much more than this because of how we can live within our confessions. We will only see this when we begin to understand how the confessions need to operate as a fence, a fence that protects and promotes our glorious freedom as the sons and daughters of Christ.

Many have settled for not being liberal. That is all the confessions end up meaning. That is their sole function. Determine right from wrong. Life in the Reformed community then becomes a life of the litmus test. To be sure we need this, but as we grow, we need more than this. It is in defining the "more than" where the discussion now needs to turn. And that is what makes being Reformed so exciting. The freedom to talk. The freedom to think. The freedom to graze in the pasturelands that have a glorious fence which protects and promotes this very activity. So mark this up as the 102<sup>nd</sup> article on "Being Reformed" and let the grazing begin.

**Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra** is the Pastor of the Community Reformed Bible Church of Highland, Indiana.



# My Only Comfort

*“You know that you are ransomed from your futile ways ... with the precious blood of Christ” I Peter 1:18, 19*

Last month we looked at the theme of the Heidelberg Catechism. We saw that the theme of the catechism is comfort. But what kind of comfort is it that the catechism is referring to?

## Earthly Comfort

Today we use that word “comfort” in a lot of different ways. We use it to refer to the things that make our lives easier. For example, I am an avid camper. In the middle of a cold February I think about Spring and I start planning where the family will be camping. Over the years I have noticed something about my camping habits and the habits of other campers.

When my wife and I first started camping, we stayed in a tent. That worked fine for the first two years. The third year, for some reason, my eight month pregnant wife was not excited about camping in a tent. I believe our discussion had something to do with “comfort.”

That year we added to our comfort by buying a pop-up trailer. It has served us well for several years but I have to admit it’s a lot of work to crank the roof up, pull those beds out, and get everything situated. Maybe we should look into a trailer. One with air conditioning, because you certainly remember how hot it was last August, don’t you?

I have noticed that this kind of thinking goes on in the minds of

many campers. Eventually, people move up to a fifth-wheel. Once the children move out of the house, they buy a motor home with a slide out. Last summer I saw one motor home with three slide outs! That thing had more comfort in it than my home! In addition to the air conditioning, it had a king-size bed, a satellite for the color television, a generator should the owners ever wind up some place where there is no electricity, built in grill, and a dish washer. You name it - it’s all available. And you know, we gotta have all that comfort, even if we “just park it at a Wal-Mart.”

## Eternal Comfort

That is not exactly what the writers of the Heidelberg Catechism thought about when they used the word “comfort”. They were not looking at any temporal comforts where a person goes out and “roughs it” with all the creature comforts of home and then after the camping season goes back to his normal life with air conditioned

homes, dish-washers, micro-waves, and so on. Not at all.

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism sought a comfort that was eternal. They wrote about a comfort that would endure from everlasting to everlasting. They wanted a comfort not only in this life; but also a comfort that would remain with them even at the time of death.

For them, comfort was not a lazy-boy recliner that would one day wear out and need to be replaced; comfort was not an air conditioned cab on your John Deere; or a camper with all the conveniences of home. No. The comfort that they sought was something far greater than the material things that this world can offer.

Comfort can be defined as a good thing that takes care of a bad situation. It doesn’t necessarily take the bad situation away, but it makes us strong enough to endure it. When your little toddler wakes up from a night-mare and screams about a place of man eating tigers and monsters, it is usually enough for a parent to say, “That’s okay, we are right here with you” or “Don’t worry, we won’t let the monsters

*“I am not my own, but belong  
- body and soul - in life and in  
death - to my faithful Savior,  
Jesus Christ.”*

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get you. Go back to sleep.” When your child hears you talking to him and is aware of your presence, then that child is all right and goes back to a comfortable sleep. He is comforted.

Sometimes comfort can act as a tear drier. Sometimes it is a shot in the arm. It can be positive re-enforcement or affirmation. It can be encouragement in a difficult time. Comfort is strength to keep you going.

### A God of Comfort

Now, let’s look at that in connection to the relationship that we have with God. Every time we hear the Law of God, it is not difficult for us to see that we have violated it. We have been jealous; we have been angry with a brother or sister in Christ; we have been envious of others. Our eyes have wandered away from God’s Word and looked at our neighbor’s possessions with envy and our neighbor’s spouse with desire. We are guilty. We have sinned against God.

The Bible tells us that when we sin against God we deserve to die. In fact, we deserve to go to hell forever! That would be God’s just punishment for us all. In that sense, Pope Paul IV was right when he said, “The fear of God’s judgment at the moment of death is always present.” All the earlier catechisms were right when they wrote about the fear of facing God in the final judgment. We are a people filled with sin and we do indeed deserve the wrath of God. We deserve to go to hell.

And yet, as the Heidelberg Catechism points out, our God is a God of comfort. Not comfort *in* our sin,

but comfort for all who seek to be delivered from it.

To expose evil may be the work of the moralist. To scorn evil may be the work of the self-righteous Pharisee. But to convince us of our sin, even as the Law does, is never enough. God comes to us as more than the Judge. He comes to us as a Savior.

I Peter 1:18, 19 teach us: “You know that you are ransomed from your futile ways...with the precious blood of Christ.” That is comfort.

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*Comfort can be defined as a good thing that takes care of a bad situation.*

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God’s Son, Jesus Christ, tells us that He did not come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17). That is comfort. How important it is for us to know, not only that we are sinful, but that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Jesus is the great Deliverer! He said of His own death: “When I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

Through Christ our iniquity is pardoned. Sin is forgiven. That is the great comfort for all those who believe in Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as their own Savior. Romans 5:8, 9 says: “But God showed His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we are now justi-

fied by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” Saved by Him from the wrath of God. Oh, what a comfort is to be found in Jesus Christ!

What is your only comfort in life and death? May you be able to say: My only comfort is that I am not my own, but I have been redeemed! I have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. I belong to Him completely - body and soul, in life and in death. I belong to Him and He is going to take care of me. No, He has taken care of me on the cross of Calvary.

**Rev. Wybren Oord** is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan and editor of *The Outlook*.



# CanRC and URC Church Order Committees

*This article is a Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order held December 11-12, 2002 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, MI*

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gurp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Jack DeJong, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Luke 1: 39 - 46 and prayer.

Motions to appoint Dr. Kloosterman as chairman and Rev. Sikkema as recorder of the minutes of this meeting were adopted. Mr. Nordeman was appointed to prepare the press release.

An agenda and timetable were adopted. The agenda included a presentation of a summary of the labors of the URC committee, a presentation of a summary of the labors of the CanRC committee, discussion and adoption of a *modus operandi* and its implementation, and the adoption of minutes and press release. It was decided to make the most use of available time by meeting in the evening as well.

## The Mandate

Dr. Kloosterman shared with the meeting the mandate that the committee had received from the Fourth Synod of the URCNA, Escondido 2001:

- a) That the current Church Orders of the two federations be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Dort CO.
- b) That the CO Committee work together with a Canadian Reformed CO Committee to develop suitable and agreeable adaptation[s] of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure and essential provisions.

He then explained how the committee had worked with this mandate and the resulting proposals for a church order, having taken into consideration the Scriptures-based foundational principles for Reformed church government.

Dr. DeJong in a similar fashion gave an overview of the activities of the CanRC Committee and the mandate this committee had received from Synod Neerlandia 2001:

1. To work closely with the committee re church order appointed by the URCNA synod.
2. To evaluate the differences between the current church orders of the federations in the light of the Scriptural and confessional

principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort.

3. To propose a common church order in the line of the Church Order of Dort
4. To keep the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) updated on the progress.
5. To provide the CPEU with a report in sufficient time for them to produce the comprehensive report for Synod in a timely fashion.

It became clear that the respective mandates were very similar. Differences between the current church orders of the federations were to be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and confessional principles. A common church order maintaining the principles, structure, and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort was to be proposed. Both committees had done extensive work in mapping the various church orders, including the Church Order of Dort, to facilitate this evaluation. To clarify terminology used, it is understood that when speaking of the Church Order of Dort we refer to the original Church Order of 1618 and the adopted version by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914 in its English translation (1920).

It was agreed to work as one committee to develop a draft for a common church order with a single set of minutes and press releases. However, the meeting also recognized that in this process the occasional need for one of the sub-committees to confer privately might arise.

While both committees had prepared a draft proposal for a common church order, the meeting adopted a motion to use the Church Order as adopted by the CRC in 1914 as a starting point, and to compare it to the proposals from both sub-committees. The respective mandates used words that this be “a common church order maintaining the principles, structure and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort”. This, however, was not interpreted to mean a slavish following of each article, its wording and sequence in the church order.

### **The Introduction to the Church Order**

The first item in this effort was a discussion on the need and place of an introduction in a church order. The CanRC introduction, as recommended by General Synod Lincoln 1992, provides an overview of the history of this church order. In the URCNA Church Order the introduction focuses more on a declaration of beliefs and the biblical basis for a church order. The URC Church Order also includes a section ‘Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government’. The URC committee considers these foundational principles to be fundamental. While specific wording could be revised or improved on, the principles as based on Holy Scriptures must remain. Although adopted by an earlier Synod, the final status of these Principles among the churches has yet to be established. They currently read as follows:

### **FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED CHURCH GOVERNMENT**

1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27).
2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18).

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### ***The differences between the current church orders of the federations are to be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and confessional principles.***

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3. Because the church is Christ’s possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are not a matter of human preference, but of divine revelation (Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18).
4. The universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9).
5. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The office of elder (presbyter/episkopos) is clearly local in authority and function; thus Reformed church government is

Presbyterian, since the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5).

6. In its subjection to its Heavenly Head, the local church is governed by Christ from heaven, by means of His Word and Spirit, with the keys of the kingdom which He has given it for that purpose; and it is not subject to rule by sister churches who, with it, are subject to the one Christ (Matthew 16:19; Acts 20:28-32; Titus 1:5).
7. Federative relationships do not belong to the essence or being of the church; rather, they serve the wellbeing of the church. However, even though the churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another. Entrance into and departure from a federative relationship is strictly a voluntary matter (Acts 15:1-35; Romans 15: 25-27; Colossians 4-16; Titus 1:5; Revelation 1:11, 20).
8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession (I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17).
9. Member churches meet together in consultation to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors in the broader assemblies. The decision of such assemblies derives their authority from their conformity to the Word of God (Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17).



10. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, local churches should seek the broadest possible contacts with other like-minded churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world (John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6).
11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; II Corinthians 5:18-21).
12. Christ cares for His church through the office-bearers whom He chooses (Acts 6:2-3; I Timothy 3:1,8; 5:17).
13. The Scriptures encourage a thorough theological training for the ministers of the Word (I Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5).
14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the elders, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship (Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; I Peter 2:9).
15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through the teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith (Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17).
16. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, to maintain the unity and

the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby bring honor and glory to God's name (I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11).

17. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every child of God, but when discipline by the church becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the elders of the church, the bearers of the keys

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***The authority of the elders and minister is unquestionably one given to the church by the Lord. But what authority do broader assemblies have in the churches?***

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of the kingdom (Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3).

After an extensive discussion the meeting reached a consensus that the introduction of the proposed common church order should include: 1) a historical background, 2) the Scriptural and confessional basis, 3) foundational principles, and 4) headings of the four sections of the church order. Rev. Scheuers will prepare a draft introduction for discussion at a future meeting.

**The Authority of Assemblies**

Much time was spent discussing the principle of 'jurisdiction'. This is an area where both federations have distinct views colored by tradition as well as recent experiences. The

authority of the elders and minister is unquestionably one given to the church by the Lord. But what authority do broader assemblies have in the churches? Language that is mutually acceptable must be found before articles that involve jurisdiction can be formulated. These articles must avoid language such as 'jurisdiction over', but should convey words and thoughts of 'original authority', 'derived authority', and 'delegated authority'. The respective committees will give more thought to this subject before it is dealt with again at a future meeting.

Agreement was reached on wording of Article 1 'The purpose of the church order', and Article 2 'The three offices'. At this point it was decided to deal with subsequent articles without numbering them. Their proper sequence within the church order will be determined later.

**Ministers of the Word**

Agreement was reached on part of the articles dealing with the duties and the lawful calling of the ministers of the Word. Also provisional agreement was reached on articles dealing with ministers being bound to a particular church, and ministers coming without a congregation from another federation. The need for an article dealing with 'Exceptional Gifts' (Dort Article 8) received much discussion. The individual committees will also consider this article before it is dealt with again at a future meeting. Provisional agreement was reached on articles dealing with provisions for the care of the minister and the retirement of the minister.

The last hour of the second day was used to review the agenda for the

next meeting. In the meantime the respective committees will carefully study the various church orders, and be prepared to discuss the issues of jurisdiction, exceptional gifts, and the need for regional synods. The next meeting will take place D.V. February 13 and 14, 2003 at the URC of Dutton, MI, this being the more central location.

Appreciation was expressed to the Dutton URC for its hospitality and the exceptional help its secretary was able to give to the committee. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its work. He wished that the churches of both federations would have seen and heard the fraternity and camaraderie so present in the discussions and deliberations. To God alone be the praise and glory.

## The New Perspective on Paul

### *The Contribution of N.T. Wright (2)*

In order to understand the full meaning of this summary statement of the doctrine of justification, we need to consider briefly several distinct aspects of Wright's understanding. Chief among these are: 1) his interpretation of the phrase, "the righteousness of God," as the basis for the justification of God's people; 2) the precise meaning of the language, "to justify"; 3) the role of faith as the "badge" of covenant membership or justification; 4) the past, present and future tenses of justification; and 5) the relation between Christ's resurrection and the church's justification.

#### **The 'Righteousness of God'**

Students of the Reformation are well aware that one of the key Pauline phrases for a proper understanding of justification is the phrase, "the righteousness of God" (compare Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 3:21-26). Following Luther's "discovery" that the righteousness of God is not so much the demand of God's law as the gift of his grace in Christ, the Reformers taught that we are justified by the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ, which is granted and imputed to believers. In this understanding, the

righteousness of God is revealed through Christ who, by his obedience to the law and substitutionary endurance of the law's penalty, is the believer's righteousness before God. Justification is a judicial idea, and describes the way all of the requirements of the law have been met for the believer through the work of Christ. Those who receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ by faith stand acquitted and accepted before God.

Following the lead of Sanders, Dunn and others, Wright insists that this Reformation view amounts to a profound misunderstanding of the language of the "righteousness of God." Wright maintains that "[f]or a reader of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Jewish scriptures, 'the righteousness of God' would have one obvious meaning: God's own faithfulness to his promises .... God has made promises; Israel can trust those promises. God's righteousness is thus cognate with his trustworthiness on the one hand, and Israel's salvation on the other" (p. 96). Though the Reformation view rightly emphasized that the "righteousness of God" reflects a "legal metaphor" taken from the law court, it misapplies this language

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by misunderstanding the way the Hebrews understood the functioning of righteousness in the judgment of the court.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew law court, there are three parties: the judge, the plaintiff and the defendant. When the Judge pronounces a verdict in the court in favor of the plaintiff or the defendant, we may say that he has been “vindicated against the accuser; in other words, acquitted” (p. 98). This is the only meaning that the term “righteous” has, when it is applied to the person in whose favor the Judge acts: that person is, so far as the court’s action is concerned, in the *status of being acquitted or righteous*. So far as the court’s judgment is concerned, the person who is righteous has the status of being vindicated or being in favor with the court.

Even though Wright acknowledges, as the Reformation view also insisted, that the language of the “righteousness of God” reflects a legal or forensic setting, he also insists that the vindication of someone in God’s court *does not involve God’s granting or imputing anything whatever to the person whom He vindicates*. “If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom” (p. 98). When the “righteousness of God” is revealed, this means that God reveals his covenant faithfulness by keeping his promise to his people, vindicating them as “righteous.” Because this righteousness is God’s own faithfulness to his cov-

enant promise, it is not something that he could bestow upon or impart to his people.

#### **What it is “to be justified”**

Just as the Reformation misunderstood the language of the “righteousness of God,” so it also misunderstood, Wright maintains, the language of justification. In the popular mind, justification is taken to be the answer to the problem of sinners who try to find favor with God by doing good works. There is a sinful tendency in all of us to try to pull

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***Wright insists that the vindication of someone in God’s court does not involve God’s granting or imputing anything whatever to the person whom He vindicates.***

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ourselves up by our own moral bootstraps, to seek to find favor with God on the basis of our achievements or efforts. Whether in the dress of Pelagianism, which teaches that sinners are saved on the basis of the performance of good works in obedience to the law, or semi-Pelagianism, which teaches that sinners are saved on the basis of God’s grace plus our good works—there is an inescapable tendency to base human salvation upon self-effort. The doctrine of justification is the only antidote to all such Pelagian or semi-Pelagian views of salvation, because it teaches that salvation is an unmerited gift of God’s grace in Christ to sinners who receive the gospel

promise by faith alone. In Wright’s estimation, this popular opinion regarding justification, whatever its merits (and he acknowledges that it has some), “does not do justice to the richness and precision of Paul’s doctrine, and indeed distorts it at various points” (p. 113).<sup>2</sup>

According to Wright, Paul’s doctrine of justification did not serve to answer the “timeless” problem of how sinners can find acceptance with God, but to explain how you can tell who belongs to “the community of the true people of God.” When the language of justification is interpreted in terms of its Old Testament and Jewish background, we will recognize that it is covenantal language. Justification does not describe how someone gains entrance into the community of God’s people but *who is a member of the community* now and in the future. In Paul’s Jewish context, Wright maintains,

“justification by works” has nothing to do with individual Jews attempting a kind of proto-Pelagian pulling themselves up by their moral bootstraps, and everything to do with definition of the true Israel in advance of the final eschatological showdown. Justification in this setting, then, is not a matter of *how someone enters the community of the true people of God*, but of *how you tell who belongs to that community*, not least in the period of time before the eschatological event itself, when the matter will become public knowledge. (P. 119, emphasis Wright’s).

Because justification has to do with God's recognition of who belongs to the covenant community, it is not so much a matter of "soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church" (p. 119).

### **Faith, the badge of covenant membership**

Because justification focuses upon God's declaration regarding *membership* in the covenant community, Wright interprets Paul's insistence that justification is by faith and not by works, in a manner that is quite similar to Dunn's approach. The "boasting" of the Judaizers was not a boasting born of self-righteousness, but a kind of misplaced nationalistic pride and exclusivism. The "works of the law" were those requirements of the law that served to distinguish Jews from Gentiles, and to exclude Gentiles thereby from membership in the covenant community.

However, now that Christ has come to realize the covenant promise of God to Abraham, faith in Christ is the *only badge* of membership in God's world-wide family, which is composed of Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul's insistence that justification is by faith expresses his conviction that with the coming of Christ God is "now extending his salvation to all, irrespective of race" (p. 122). "Justification ... is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final creation" (p. 122).

One of the surprising and provocative implications of this understanding of justification, according to

Wright, is that it radically undermines the usual polemics between Protestants and Catholics. Whereas many Protestants have historically argued that justification is a church-dividing doctrine, precisely the opposite is the case: Paul's doctrine of justification demands an inclusive view of membership in the one family of God. "Many Christians, both in the Reformation and in the counter-Reformation traditions, have themselves and the church a great disservice by treating the doctrine of 'justifica-

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tion' as central to their debates, and by supposing that it describes that system by which people attain salvation. They have turned the doctrine into its opposite. Justification declares that all who believe in Jesus Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their cultural or racial differences" (pp. 158-9). Protestants who insist upon a certain formulation of the doctrine of justification as a precondition to church fellowship, accordingly, are guilty of turning the doctrine on its head. Rather than serving its proper purpose to join together as members of one family all who believe in Christ (faith being the only badge of covenant membership), the doctrine of justification is turned into the teaching of justification "by believ-

ing in justification by faith."<sup>3</sup>

### **Justification: past, present and future**

One feature of the doctrine of justification that receives special emphasis in Wright's understanding is its nature as an eschatological vindication of God's people. When God justifies or acknowledges those who are members of His covenant community, He does so in anticipation of their "final justification" or vindication at the last judgment. Justification occurs in three tenses or stages—past, present and future. The justification of God's covenant community in the present is founded upon "God's past accomplishment in Christ, and anticipates the future verdict."<sup>4</sup>

In the *past* event of Christ's cross and resurrection, God has already accomplished in history what He will do at the end of history. Jesus, who died as the "representative Messiah of Israel," was vindicated or justified by God in His resurrection from the dead. This event, Christ's resurrection, represents God's justification of Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, through whom the covenant promise to Abraham ("in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed") is to be fulfilled. Because that promise comes through the crucified and risen Christ, it cannot come through the law (compare Rom. 8:3).

This past event of Christ's justification becomes a *present* reality through faith. All those who believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord are justified, that is, acknowledged by God to be members of the one great family of faith composed of Jew and Gentile alike. Because the



present reality of justification focuses upon membership in the covenant community—justification being, as we noted earlier, a matter of ecclesiology and not of soteriology—baptism into Christ is the event that effects this justification. “The event in the present which corresponds to Jesus’ death and resurrection in the past, and the resurrection of all believers in the future, is baptism into Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

Though justification has a past and present dimension, its principal focus lies in the future. At the final judgment or “justification,” God will declare in favor of His people, the covenant community promised to Abraham. In this final justification, God’s vindication of His people will even include a “justification by works.” Commenting on Romans 2:13 (“It is not the hearers of the law who will be righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified”), Wright insists that “those who will be vindicated on the last day are those in whose hearts and lives God will have written his law, his Torah” (p. 126-7). The “works of the law” that justification excludes are those badges of Jewish identity that served to exclude Gentiles. Justification does not exclude, however, those works of the law that are equivalent to the obedience of faith by the working of the Spirit.

### **Justification and the work of Christ**

One final feature of Wright’s new view of justification that remains rather undeveloped and unclear is its basis in the work of Christ. As we noted above, Wright does speak of Christ’s cross as a representative death and of His resurrection

as His vindication by God. But it remains rather unclear what Wright understands by Christ’s work of atonement, and how he relates the believer’s justification to Christ’s work.

One thing that clearly emerges in Wright’s limited treatment of this subject is that he has little sympathy for the historic view that Christ’s cross involved His suffering the penalty and curse of the law on behalf of His people. In an extended

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***Wright’s has little sympathy for the historic view that Christ’s cross involved His suffering the penalty and curse of the law on behalf of His people.***

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treatment of Galatians 3:10-14, for example, Wright insists that its language “is designed for a particular task within a particular argument, not for an abstract systematised statement.”<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3 is not about Christ suffering the curse of the law in the place of His people, all of whom have violated the law and are therefore liable to its curse. Paul is not talking about a general work of Christ that benefits sinful Jews and Gentiles alike. The traditional reading of this passage, which takes it to refer to Christ’s substitutionary atonement, is, in Wright’s view, “nonsense.”<sup>7</sup> If this passage is read in its first century Jewish context and within the setting of God’s covenant promise to

Israel, it will become evident that Paul is talking about the curse of the exile that Israel is experiencing as a people. Wright maintains that “in the cross of Jesus, the Messiah, the curse of exile itself reached its height and was dealt with once and for all, so that the blessing of covenant renewal might flow out the side, as God always intended.”<sup>8</sup>

Wright’s reading of Galatians 3 is rather characteristic of his treatment of the subject of Christ’s atoning work generally. Though it is clear that he has little sympathy for the older, Reformation understanding of Christ’s saving work, what he is prepared to offer as an alternative remains rather obscure. Christ’s death and resurrection are representative of Israel’s exile and restoration. They are the means whereby the promise of the covenant is now extended to the whole world-wide family of God. However, because Wright’s understanding of Paul’s gospel and the doctrine of justification has little, if anything, to do with the problem of human sinfulness and guilt, his understanding of the work of Christ likewise puts little emphasis upon the kinds of emphases that historically formed an essential part of the doctrine of Christ’s atoning work.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Wright does not believe, however, that the idea of righteousness and the “legal metaphor” it reflects is the most important theme of the book of Romans or Paul’s other epistles. In a very telling observation at the close of his discussion of justification in *What Saint Paul Really Said*, he remarks that “Romans is often regarded as an exposition of judicial, or law-court, theology. But that is a mistake. The law court forms a vital metaphor at a

key stage of the argument. But at the heart of Romans we find a theology of love. . . . If we leave the notion of 'righteousness' as a law-court metaphor only, as so many have done in the past, this gives the impression of a legal transaction, a cold piece of business, almost a trick of thought performed by a God who is logical and correct but hardly one we would want to worship" (p. 110) This language seems to be little more than a thinly-guised piece of innuendo against the Reformation's understanding of justification on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 115: "The discussions of justification in much of the history of the church, certainly since Augustine, got off on the wrong foot—at least in terms of understanding Paul—and they have stayed there ever since."

<sup>3</sup> "The Shape of Justification," <http://www.angelfire.com/mi2/paulpage/Shape.html>, p. 3. This article is Wright's response to Paul Barnett's critical evaluation of his understanding of justification. Barnett is an Anglican bishop from the diocese of Sydney in Australia. Cf. "Tom Wright and The New Perspective," [http://www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/pwb/ntwright\\_perspective.htm](http://www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/pwb/ntwright_perspective.htm).

<sup>4</sup> "The Shape of Justification," p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> "The Shape of Justification," p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> *The Climax of the Covenant*, p. 141.

**Dr. Cornel Venema** is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary where he also teaches Doctrinal Studies. Dr. Venema is a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

# Sound Bites

## *Torch and Trumpet 1970*

### January 1970

"The grave leads to judgment . . . . Each man will receive exactly what he deserves: no more - but also no less. And the standard will be what man has done with the Word of God. None can escape. Does his life give evidence that he believes God's wisdom rather than his own? Does his life give evidence that he trusts in the goodness of God rather than his own? Does his life give evidence that he bows before the sovereign authority of God rather than his own?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"...when your pastor must be called to bring a word of comfort because YOU are at the grave; because God's appointment with YOU has been kept, what will your pastor say about you?"

*Some Things Only Happen  
Once*

Elton J. Piersma

### March 1970

"The same inspired apostle who was ready to go to such lengths to meet the people to whom he was commissioned was every bit as much concerned that the Word of God he taught must not be in any way altered to appeal to the unregenerate tastes of his listeners."

*Misguided Evangelism*

Peter De Jong

### April 1970

"The crying need of the day is not a new direction, a new road or a relaid highway. The need is to enter

upon, walk and work in the entire, well marked way of life that Christ has placed before us."

*What Should Come First?*

Gerard Van Groningen

"It is a fact that the fundamental, and, we believe, biblical assumption upon which our whole system of church government is based, that God's Word has entrusted authority in the church to the elders and that all such authority is consistorial, is rapidly being lost from sight."

*Board Members Represent the*

*Churches*

Peter De Jong

### May 1970

"The Christian Reformed Church has fallen upon difficult days. Its very existence as a denomination is being threatened in a very real way. Let no one think that it cannot fall. It is falling. Some may doubt this, but if they do, it is perhaps because they lack an intimate knowledge of what is going on and/or they are insufficiently grounded in Scripture and therefore are unable to discern truth from error."

*Is This the "Bride" Christ*

*Bought?*

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

"It is not enough to be Reformed for merely traditional reasons. If we want to be Reformed, we must be Reformed in our own day."

*Is It Still Worthwhile to be*

*Reformed Today?*

Klaas Runia



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“The church will not long attract people when it tries to compete with the far superior entertainment on TV. The strength of the church is not in the latest fads, but in ‘doing its thing.’ And ‘its thing’ is the preaching of the Word.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The strength of the church is not in fewer sermons but in better ones.”

*Phooey on the Sermon  
and the Church Order*  
Edwin H. Palmer

### June 1970

“...freedom of interpretation may not mean that every interpretation is acceptable.”

*Is It Still Worthwhile to be  
Reformed Today?*  
Klaas Runia

### July 1970

“The Hebrew word for ‘day’ is ‘yom’ and this word can occasionally be used to mean an indefinite period of time, if the context warrants. In the overwhelming preponderance of its occurrences in the Old Testament, however, it means a literal day - that is, either an entire solar day or the daylight portion of a solar day. It was, in fact, defined by God Himself the very first time it was used, in Genesis 1:5, where we are told that ‘God call the light, Day’”

*Do the Six Days  
of Creation Correspond to the  
Geological Ages?*  
Henry M. Morris

“...in the history of the church it was often the common people of God who remained loyal to God’s Word.”

*We Need Each Other*  
Jelle Tuininga

### October 1970

“...in a world of men never wholly sanctified, the call to righteousness in every nook and cranny of life, in every interest of human existence, is not only relevant but it is also of the utmost necessity and importance.”

*The Foolishness of Preaching*  
Edward Heerema

“They are on call, so to speak, twenty-four hours every day. When a pastor is called somewhere, he must go. When the telephone rings, he has to answer. When someone knocks at his door, he must invite the visitor. Whether it suits him or does not suit him, he must be ready. It is expected of him. He must always have a suitable word for the occasion.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“The minister...does not serve as a mouthpiece for the Church. Rather, he is the mouthpiece of Christ who through him speaks to the members of the Church.”

*The Servant of the Word*  
Simon Kistemaker

### November 1970

“To be a leader or a participant in a church secession and to justify such drastic action, one must first discern, spell out, and clearly set forth the basic issue or issues at stake.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Malcontents, disgruntled persons, and those who have an axe to grind are usually not given to examining the real reason for joining a secession movement. Notwithstanding their eagerness to gain momentum and to grow in numbers, the leaders of a secession movement owe it to themselves, to their would-be adherents, and above all to

the Lord to exercise careful screening in order to sift out the true motives of those who apply for membership with them.”

*Secession is Serious Business*  
John Vander Ploeg

### December 1970

“In most church-related colleges today, as a result of the spirit that prevails, orthodoxy is a bad word, representing a stumbling block to a bona fide academic activity.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“There seems to be a sinister delight in shaking and shocking God’s people by shooting holes into the foundations of their faith.”

*The Crisis in Education*  
Bernard J. Haan

“...the seriousness of secession should be considered not only by those who secede but also by the church from which the seceders have seen fit to disaffiliate themselves.”

*The CRC in 1970 - Quo Vadis?*  
John Vander Ploeg

# This Is My Outlook

Earlier in this issue Rev. Peter Moelker wrote a compassionate article about events occurring within the Christian Reformed Church. One can sense the frustration he is experiencing as he sees things happening within the denomination that he loves and has faithfully served for many years. My heart goes out to him and to others who try to maintain the truth and the integrity of the Word of God within a denomination that is not-so-slowly sliding down the slippery slope.

At the time this issue went to print, Classis Toronto was expected to meet in January to deal with First CRC's permitting of the nomination of gays and lesbians to the office of elder and deacon. My prayer is that the delegates to that Classis meeting will be granted wisdom and that the Christian Reformed Church will stand fast upon God's Word as they explain to First Toronto CRC the error of their thinking.

There are two things that stood out in my mind as I read about First Toronto's decision in *Christianity Today*, *The Banner*, *Christian Renewal*, and now in this issue of *The Outlook*.

My first thought was "How does a church rooted in God's Word come to a point where they believe the sovereign God calls 'homosexuals living in committed relationships' to serve in the capacity of Elder or Deacon?" The answer is rather obvious. It is because the church has long accepted the same people as members in good standing. At some point in the church's history they had

to overlook God's Word in order to show what they thought was compassion to those living in sin. Instead of calling them to repent, they openly accepted homosexuals as members and it was only a matter of time before these members were permitted to serve as song leaders, teachers, and in other areas within the church. From there, it only became a small step to place them up for nomination as Elders and Deacons.

What is more disturbing is the attitude First Toronto CRC has toward this unbiblical practice. They state very simply that they "are actually not very interested in debating the subject any longer." I Peter 3:15 says: "always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give account for the hope that is in you." Based on God's Word, the church has through the centuries believed that a homosexual lifestyle is aberrant behavior; behavior that we believe will exclude one from the eternal kingdom of God. If a church should adopt a hope that there is salvation for those who live this kind of lifestyle, they should ALWAYS be prepared to defend that hope.

The only reason that I can see for a church not to want to defend its practices is because it has no defense. First Toronto, no doubt, knows the passages of Scripture that speak straightforwardly against homosexual practices. They, no doubt, know the stand that the Christian Reformed Church has taken in this matter. And they have no defense. They, no doubt, have studied this issue thoroughly themselves. In their

studies they have not been able to justify the position of accepting homosexuals in the Church of Jesus Christ, and so they choose to no longer discuss it.

I am reminded of the old joke in which a man says to his wife: "I've already made my mind up, so don't confuse me with the facts." As a joke it is funny. But when a church takes on that attitude it is not funny. In fact, it is terribly dangerous. As Rev. Moelker pointed out in his article, the fact is that the Bible calls the homosexual lifestyle a wicked sin. It is a lifestyle that excludes one from the Kingdom of Heaven. Those are the facts! A church that adopts a view contrary to the plain authoritative written Word of God is not a church on the "fringe" or a church that is uniquely "inclusive" as First Toronto views themselves. It is apostate. And it is leading her members away from God's truth into Satan's lie.

**Rev. Wybren Oord** is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan and editor of *The Outlook*.





# Book Review

Deborah Alcock, *Done and Dared in Old France* Neerlandia, AB / Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2001. 286 pp. \$14.95 CN, and \$12.90 US, paperback.

Like *The Secret Mission: A Huguenot's Dangerous Adventure in the Land of Persecution* by Anton Van der Jagt reviewed last month, *Done and Dared in Old France* by Deborah Alcock is an historical fiction. It is based on facts using real names and references to them that are actually true. There is no better way to get introduced to historical events than by means of historical fiction. Of course, our interest should go beyond the fiction; but our interest in what is beyond should be piqued by it. It might do us some good to know something of the human fear, the sufferings, and the deep trust these Reformed people experienced.

Atcock's book introduces us to a fictional Gaspard whose life is certainly turned around through the instrumentality of the famous minister, Claude Brousson. Though brought up as a Huguenot, he was separated from his family (who finally fled to safety in England) and fell into a bad crowd.

The Lord delivered him out of many dangers. While his life in France was perilous, he finally was reunited with his family in England.

Alcock's volume concludes with a longer biography of Claude Brousson, a famous Huguenot pastor. The

reading of these short essays is a must for all who claim to be Reformed.

These two volumes, reviewed this month and last month, and all the volumes in the series, should be made available to every family. The churches and our Christian Schools should seek to include them in their


libraries. Even home libraries will be well served to have them on the shelves so they can be read. Having read all that are available in the series, I can highly recommend them.

If you have difficulty finding them in Christian bookstores, contact Inheritance Publications, Box U4, Neerlandia, AB, Canada TOG 1R0. In the USA books can be ordered from Inheritance Publications, Box 366, Pella, IA 50219. Toll free telephone and fax number: 1-800-563-3594.

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