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# Doers of the Word

*“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” James 1:22*

We cannot possibly please Christ unless He dwells within our hearts. We cannot act Christ-like unless we have become children of God through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. James does not advocate only *doing* certain things which will please God. He is saying to those already born again: PROVE YOURSELVES. James teaches us that the most important thing in life is *becoming* a child of God. Only then will you be able to act as a child and obey the Father as a child.

A child who is not your own feels no obligation to obey you as your own children do. A child-father relationship is absolutely essential before we can become doers of the Word. The Law was given to the people of Israel AFTER they were brought out of slavery. Then they were under an obligation to serve the Lord who had given them their freedom. We must first have the incarnate Word in us if He is going to be made manifest through us.

James wants us to become complete in Christ. It is not enough to be

born into the family of God. It is necessary to grow.

## How Not to Grow

Too often when people are blessed with the privilege of faithful preaching and teaching of the Scripture, they become enamored with *their own knowledge* of God's Word. They become self-satisfied with *that knowledge* and forsake the effort to *live out* the profound truths that they have come to understand.

I am sure you have dealt with people who have an incredible knowledge of the Bible and the doctrines of the Reformed faith. They can tell you exactly what you are doing wrong and why they are right in everything they do. They are incredibly headstrong but they are



Volume 53, No. 6 (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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frightfully heart-weak.

James tells us that a true believer will not be satisfied by just knowing the Word of God. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit will keep convicting him of his own failures until he becomes obedient.

Being a DOER involves our whole personality; our whole inner being: the mind, the soul, the spirit, and the emotions. James speaks of doers of the Word emphasizing what you *are* rather than what you *do*. The true Christian is a person whose life is dedicated not only to learning God's Word but also striving in all that you do to be faithful and to live in obedience to that Word.

#### **The Auditor**

Today, one might compare the "hearer" with someone who audits a class at college. When you audit a class, you are not required to write any of the papers or take any of the tests. In fact, you really don't even have to show up for the class. In other words, you are not held accountable for anything that you have heard in classroom or any of the reading assignments.

There is just one drawback. You do not get any credit and you will not receive a diploma. As an auditor you may have listened very carefully and greatly benefited from what you heard the professor say. However, on the day of graduation you will be sitting in the audience and not among the graduates.

The tragic thing is that there are many people in the church who are "auditors". They are members who willingly expose themselves to the teaching and the preaching of the Word but they have absolutely no

desire to apply anything they hear to their lives. They receive and take advantage of the privilege of hearing God's Word, but they have no desire to obey it. When that attitude is followed consistently, it proves that they are not Christians at all. They are pretenders.

The sad thing is that people who are merely hearers and not doers somehow get it into their heads that they belong to God when in reality they do not. Hearing God's Word and applying it to *others* is not going to save you. No, God's Word must

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lead to a genuine repentance; a turning to Christ for forgiveness; rejoicing in that forgiveness and then the faithful application of God's Word to our day-to-day lives.

Those who fail to become *doers* will not receive the diploma at the end of their course. They will not hear the Master say: "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Certainly, salvation is the free gift of God given to us by the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, but once you become a Christian, your Christianity is not worth very much if it does not cost you very much.

The Biblical line between a saint and a sinner is very clear. I John

3:10 says: "*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*"

#### **The Doer**

Being a "doer of the Word" is not a question of what you experience or what you know. It is a question of *how you live* in the light of the Word of God.

The character of a person is evidenced by the conduct of that person. The way you behave and the way you treat others is the test of what you are on the inside. That's because your true nature will express itself outwardly. James certainly is not alone in this way of thinking. Jesus spoke of knowing people by their fruit and said in Matthew 12:34b, 35: "For the mouth speaks out of that which is in the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil."

#### **Self-Deception**

Finally, James says that if you are just a hearer of the Word and not a doer of it, there must be something wrong with your thinking. "*You are deluding yourself,*" James writes.

You are not thinking right and you are missing the whole purpose of your life. Maybe you do not want to be a doer of the Word. You think you have more to lose than you have to gain by becoming an obedient child of God and willingly doing that which He commands in His Word. If that is the case, James is right, you are deluding yourself.

Look around. Who are the happiest

people in the world? I would contend that it is the person who follows Christ. It is the person who has the Savior lead him through life and the dangers of this life.

I have been with enough people diagnosed with cancer who have an incredible comfort because they knew the Lord was with them and that He would lead them through. And in the end, they knew the Lord will lead them through death.

I have done enough funerals to know the comfort that comes to a Christian family when a loved one dies in the Lord, and also enough to know the lack of that comfort when a non-Christian dies without the Lord.

Where do you want to be? If you are just a hearer of the Gospel, you are truly deluding yourself and you had better do something about it. You are practicing self-deception.

Listen to the Word! Read the Word! Apply it to your life!

It is senseless for you to place more importance on the temporal, material things of this world that will rot and fade away than on that which is eternal. And you know that to be true. Therefore, prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers of it.

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

# Patriotic Music in Worship

The Reformed tradition has exhibited a range of thinking and practice regarding the use of patriotic music in corporate worship. Does the practice of free speech warrant the State's advocacy of civil religion? Conversely, does this social freedom justify the Church's promotion of the state as a quasi-confessional institution.

The state, as a minister of divine justice and rule in the world, does not have the duty and responsibility to endorse the Christian religion (or any religion). Its God-ordained task is to protect and provide for its peoples (ensuring their general health and welfare), including the free expression of religious belief and practice by all living within its borders. Christian magistrates, in particular, and members of the body of Christ in general, have not been given the mandate to establish true religion (i.e., biblical Christianity) as the confession of the state.

At the same time it is inappropriate for the church to confess the name of God (as an act of worship) while extolling the virtues of the nation (as in the lyrics, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing"). The confessional church's allegiance is to God and to Him alone. Of course, the community of faith in worship prays for governmental leaders and for the general well-being of the nation and nations

of the world.

Civil religion, now as in the past, can only foster a distorted and erroneous conception of God, the sovereign Lord of the church, the Creator and Redeemer of humanity.

## The Patriotic Song

The patriotic song is a lyrical composition written to extol the virtues of the country to which one belongs. Its purpose is the expression of one's allegiance to the nation. It is peculiarly focused upon one people and one nation. The text of the song describes the land and the people which inhabit it. It addresses the national consciousness.

In contrast, the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of the church are directed exclusively to God. They are means of instilling faith, hope, love, confidence in Christ, praise, and adoration among the saints of God. Hymns in worship belong exclusively to the people of God wherever they meet. They are not, first and foremost, meant to be evangelistic tools aimed at reaching the unconverted.

## The Patriotic Song in Worship

Several reasons have been furnished by interpreters of the Bible to exclude patriotic songs from congregational worship.

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The first reason follows from the definition of the patriotic song. The purpose of singing patriotic music is at variance with—but not in opposition to—the testimony of the gospel and worship that is exclusively God-centered. This exclusivity is what distinguishes a worshipping congregation from all other gathered peoples. Certainly the Bible calls us to honor those in civil authority and to pray for them, but that is altogether different from using patriotic music in worship.

The second reason may be more difficult to discern and comprehend as members of the body of Christ. We cannot look to Old Testament practice and make a direct transfer from old to new covenant worship. The very question of the relationship between the two Testaments is itself a difficult and complex subject.

In the wilderness of Sinai ancient Israel was constituted by God a special, holy nation. It was properly described as a theocracy. No other nation in the world at that time down to the present was singled out as was Israel of old. This nation was closely identified with the kingdom of God. Since the coming of Christ, no nation, including Israel, now occupies a special place among the nations. In the body of Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. We are all one in Christ. No longer is there a comparable holy, geo-political entity on the face of the earth.

As a theocracy, ancient Israel was in a unique position — divinely constituted and divinely ordered. So long as Israel was faithful and obedient, that is, so long as Israel

kept the law of Moses, she was promised blessing and prosperity in the land of Canaan. God was painting a portrait, in time, in history, in anticipation of the new and better covenant in Christ's blood.

The nation-states of this world have been instituted by God; nothing occurs in human government that is not under the sovereign rule and control of God. However, the state — with the exception of ancient Israel — has not been granted authority to maintain or

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enforce religion. The state is not a confessing body; its role is purely civil, not religious.

Of course, it is appropriate and dutiful for Christian politicians to testify to their faith and to deliberate all political and social matters in the light of the teachings of the Bible. The same is true for Christians working in every arena and vocation in life. The legitimate separation of church and state as distinct institutions ordained by God does not preclude Christian testimony and witness-bearing in the market-place, in the classroom, or elsewhere.

**Concluding Remarks**

Are Christians free to sing and per-

form patriotic music? Of course they are. All in its proper place and time. Christians have a duty to honor and respect civil leaders and to pray for the nation's welfare.

Are there times when patriotic songs should not be sung? Are there occasions when Christians must voice dissent? Such a time arises when there are blatant offenses committed by a nation against God or humanity. Recall the atrocities committed against the Jews. Should a German Christian extol the virtues of his country in such times? I think not.

Can Christians gather together to sing patriotic songs? Yes, but not as the community of faith in worship. In general, singing and playing patriotic music in concert halls, in sports arenas, in shopping malls, in outdoor parks is certainly appropriate and healthy for any nation. They are to do this, however, without identifying themselves as a religious, confessional body. To do so is to confuse the two distinct realms of church and state.

We honor Christ by singing his praises, and in so doing reserve the singing of patriotic hymns to their own rightful place. "Render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and to God the things that belong to God" (Luke 20:25).

**Dr. Mark W. Karlberg** has three earned degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, including a doctorate in Reformation/Post-Reformation studies.

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# Mid-America Graduates

The eighteenth commencement service of Mid-America Reformed Seminary was held on May 16, with graduates Christian McShaffrey and Lawrens Slagter receiving Masters of Divinity degrees. The service was held in the new facility of Community URC in Schererville, Indiana, the church Mr. Slagter attended during his years at Mid-America. Mr. McShaffrey's pastor, Rev. Bruce Hollister, of New Covenant Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church in New Lenox, Illinois, was the commencement speaker.

Rev. Hollister spoke on "Christ's Strength Made Perfect in Weakness" from II Corinthians 11:30-12:10. He challenged the audience to remember: "None is too weak to be of service to Christ, but many are too strong to be of any significant use to Him." He spoke about the "divine gem" of the power of Christ that is manifest in its "proper setting" of our weakness and frailty. He reminded the graduates that ministry begins in "weakness and humiliation."

"There is a great and natural temptation—an inevitable propensity—to become proud, to exalt oneself, to think oneself 'sufficient' unless one is preserved by Christ, graced with a perpetual and acute sense of one's own weakness and frailty," said Rev. Hollister. He emphasized the severity of Paul's thorn in the flesh by calling it a "stake in the flesh" and noted its nature is intentionally undefined so that it serves as a "type" for every Christian's trial. He concluded: "How blessed

is the strong man that has become a weak man, that he might be strong in Christ!"

Rev. Alan Strange, Associate Professor of Church History and Theological Librarian Registrar, presented the charge to the graduating seniors. He spoke of a "spiritual call to arms" as the men enter the great spiritual fray, won by our Lord Jesus Christ, of which we are all engaged in "divine mop-up operations."

From the final verses of Isaiah 40, Rev. Strange demonstrated how "waiting on the Lord is the way that we wage kingdom warfare." This requires "patience with the slowness of sanctification" in our lives as well as the lives of others. It means "openness to God, His Word,

His world" as we refrain from rushed judgments and rest in Him. We need to wait on the Lord because we are weak and only He "gives power to the weak" (v. 29). We wait by "meditating on the Word, spending much time in secret prayer, and delighting in Him in spiritual communion."

Board member Doug Allen presented diplomas to the graduates.

"Graduations are wonderful times to look back and see the way God's grace has worked in the lives of our students," says Seminary President Dr. Cornel Venema, "and to look forward eagerly to the way in which He will be pleased to use our students in His service and for the benefit of His people."



*Pictured from left to right are: Mr. Blane Conklin, Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Graduate Lawrens Slagter, Dr. Cornel Venema, Graduate Christian McShaffrey, Prof. Mark Vander Hart, and Dr. Alan Strange.*



# The Justice and Mercy of God

*“For we know Him that hath said, ‘Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense,’ said the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord shall judge His people.’” Hebrews 10:30*

Lord’s Day 4 addresses a number of questions about God. The first question concerns whether or not God is fair. It is a question that is still asked today. Is God fair in the way in which He deals with the human race? Is it fair for God to require us to keep His law now that we have become sinful through the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve?

The second question of Lord’s Day 4 asks if God will actually punish sin. Does our sin truly offend God or is He content to just let it go?

In its third question, Lord’s Day 4 asks about the mercy of God. “But isn’t God also merciful?” Lord’s Day 4 therefore, addresses both the justice and the mercy of God. It promotes the proper understanding of the balance and relationship between those two things.

The justice of God is not a very popular notion these days. In fact, there are many people who identify themselves as “Christians”, but when you talk to them about their beliefs, you find that much of what they believe is the opposite of what is taught in the Bible. It is as though there is this new “flavor” of Christianity which greatly downplays the justice and holiness of God. These people like the idea of the love of God and that God is forgiving and kind and willing to be gracious. But the idea of God’s justice, that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead and the fact that God punishes

sin, such Biblical truths are not very popular among them.

With this new flavor of Christianity, God’s forgiveness is looked upon very much like a charge card, as though you can proceed to sin and then just “charge it” to God’s forgiveness account.

Recently, in the news, I heard a young lady confess: “I know what I did was wrong, but I really don’t have a problem with it because I knew that God would forgive me.” In other words, one of the reasons she was willing to knowingly sin was because she believed that God would forgive her anyway. She was willing to sin intentionally because she believed she could just go ahead and “charge it” to God’s forgiveness account.

This is the strange and unbiblical (but popular) belief that sin really has no consequences. It attempts to nullify God’s holiness and considers His justice to be something insignificant. This strange and

unbiblical view of God and Christianity also disregards the Bible’s teaching about hell. Many people today do not believe this loving God would ever condemn people to an eternity in hell.

But God’s children ought to know the true ways of their heavenly Father. In His justice, God has promised that sin must be punished. Yet, in His mercy, He has provided His own Son to pay the penalty of sin in our place.

Lord’s Day 4, as it comes under the heading of “Man’s Misery”, is paying special attention to the justice of God. God does not do man an injustice by requiring in His law what man is unable to do. In His justice, God will not permit man’s disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished.

Lord’s Day 4, therefore, already points us to the absolute necessity of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in our place. Because we know the demands of God’s justice are sure and certain, we can also be

**Q** *But doesn’t God do man an injustice by requiring in His law what man is unable to do?*

**A** *No. God created man with the ability to keep the law.*

# Classis Michigan

## URCNA

comforted to know that His provision for our salvation and all the promises of the gospel are equally sure and certain.

Human laws are often subject to change. But God's law does not change. He will not reverse His holy, righteous and just judgments. Our God is not swayed by popular opinion. Rather, His Word is truth.

Today, in His mercy, the Lord yet calls all people to come to Him and receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior in order that they might be saved from the wrath which is to come. In His great love and mercy, He communicates to us in advance of eternal punishment that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. He tells us plainly that the wicked and unbelieving will certainly perish in the flames of hell forever.

Lord's Day 4 communicates to us what the Bible teaches concerning the balance between God's justice and mercy. By this precious doctrine, we are pointed to Christ. We are comforted by God's faithfulness and His unchanging Word and promises. And above all, because of these abiding truths, we are all the more enabled by the Spirit of God to embrace our precious Savior both now and throughout eternity.

**Rev. Steve De Boer** is the pastor of the Eastmanville United Reformed Church in Coopersville, Michigan.

The twelfth meeting of Classis Michigan of the United Reformed Churches in North America took place on June 3, 2003 at the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. Cornerstone had called this special meeting for the purpose of examining Mr. Gene Crow who had accepted a call to the church plant in Muskegon.

Rev. Besteman, appointed by Cornerstone to be the chairman, welcomed the delegates and several visitors including: Rev. F. Gunnink, Rev. E. Knott, Rev. R. Lankheet, and Rev. J. Wesseling.

The examination of Mr. Crow went smoothly. Delegates were impressed with the way Mr. Crow articulated himself in the areas of Practica, Church Polity, Confessional Knowledge, Reformed Doctrine, and Ethics. After the exam, the delegates voted unanimously that Mr. Crow had sustained the examination and instructed the Cornerstone Consistory to proceed with the ordination. Rev. Lankheet, former pastor to Mr. Crow when he lived in California, offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

After the examination, Classis continued with the business of the day which included a report from the Ad Hoc Missions Committee. The committee proposed that a Classis Mission Committee be established "to promote Biblical and Reformed missionary activity by encouraging

the churches to send ordained personnel and then support staff for those ordained personnel." The committee would assist the churches of Classis by gathering, coordinating, and publicizing information of mission activity. The Classis adopted the proposal.

Classis also discussed the possibility of establishing a classis wide Health Insurance Policy for pastors and other kingdom workers. After some discussion, the delegates voted in favor of the concept. Delegates were encouraged to discuss particular programs with their Councils.

While most of the meeting went well, delegates felt the gravity of their responsibility when Classis went into Executive Session to offer advice to five churches seeking their counsel in matters of discipline.

In addition, Classis concurred with the actions of Cornerstone URC in releasing Rev. T. Perkins from service at Cornerstone URC by means of Church Order Article 11.

May the Lord bless the work of His servants.

Faithfully submitted,  
Rev. W. H. Oord, Clerk





# Synod 2003

## Reformed Church US

The 257th annual Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) met at Eureka, South Dakota, from May 19 through May 22, 2003. The first Synod of what later was named the RCUS met at Philadelphia on September 29, 1747. The RCUS has had a continuous existence ever since, and in the good providence of God today holds just as strictly to the "Three Forms of Unity," as did our fathers when they founded the first German-Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania in 1725.

A number of important issues and changes came before this 257th Synod, ranging from choosing a foreign missionary to handling appeals and complaints against one of the Classes by one of its congregations. Important matters of Sunday School material and seminary education also came before this Synod for consideration and resolution, as did continued work in publishing no-longer-available historical and theological source materials of the RCUS on CD ROM.

### Foreign Missionaries

In recent years the RCUS has not supported foreign missionaries on the fields, but has supported and helped indigenous pastors and elders of the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo (ERCC) and the Free Reformed Church of Kenya (FRCK). The RCUS operated as the mother Church in the founding of both of these African denominations, the ERCC in 1984,

and the FRCK in 1998.

While this support of indigenous workers will continue, the RCUS Synod of 2003 adopted a proposal from its Permanent Foreign Ministries Committee (which oversees the work between Synods) to send Mr. Kurt Schimke as a teaching missionary to East Africa under a plan that will have him working with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) missionaries at Westminster Bible College in Mbale, Uganda, for part of the year and spending another part of the year among the FRCK churches in Kenya.

Mr. Schimke is a candidate for ordination in the RCUS and will have to be approved by the OPC Foreign Missions Committee before leaving for Africa as a missionary, but the plan for doing this was approved by Synod with the main purpose of training men for the ministry of the FRCK.

Should the Lord finish opening the door to Africa for Mr. Schimke, the plan adopted by Synod would renew a cooperative relationship in Foreign Missions that the OPC and RCUS operated from 1960 to 1986 when the RCUS served as the supporting church for OPC missionaries Rev. Harvie Conn in Korea, and later for Rev. Lendall Smith in Taiwan. The RCUS also has a cooperative work in the Congo with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated), which operate a theological college in Lubumbashi, RDC.

### Appeals and Complaints

The appeals and complaints brought from Covenant Reformed Church of Carbondale, PA, centered on a requirement for further information from the officials of the Covenant East Classis of the RCUS before Classis would consider dissolving the pastoral relationship between the congregation and a pastor whom they had asked to resign (the RCUS Constitution requires that such cases be laid before Classis for resolution, since the pastoral relationship is established by Classis and can only be dissolved by it, even though the pastor in this case had agreed to resign).

A special judicial committee of Synod heard all of the arguments in the case and brought its recommendations that the complaints be denied by Synod on the basis that a Classis has the responsibility to examine such a case fully as required by the Constitution of the RCUS, and as is indicated by the Constitutional provision that all records of the congregations and consistories must be made available to Classis in carrying out its functions. Synod approved these recommendations.

### Christian Education

A number of other issues came before Synod this year that concern the future of the Denomination. The Permanent Christian Education Committee has been monitoring the challenging project of the production of graded Sunday School materials based on the four volume redemptive history, *Promise and Deliverance*, by S.G. de Graaf.

Over the past five years the Com-

mittee writing the materials has produced at least draft lessons for the over 1000 weekly classes (254 at each of four grade levels), and is presently writing more finished materials.

With over \$60,000 invested in past years, this year's Synod was reluctant to budget the additional approximately \$40,000 needed for full production of the materials, especially since the vast majority of them have not yet been seen outside of the writing Committee.

Synod approved making CD ROM copies of the finished materials available to our congregations for \$50 per CD, thus allowing the congregations to print the materials for their own use and trials.

### **Training of Ministers**

Another issue that concerns the future of the Church is the training of candidates for the ministry. Since its emergence as a small remnant denomination in 1934, the RCUS has depended upon independent seminaries to train its candidates, beginning with Westminster in Philadelphia in 1955. While several seminaries have served the RCUS and other conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations well in some respects, the number of seminary graduates who are not fit for the ministry is too large. The results in broken churches and frustrated would-be ministers, also in the RCUS, have not been pretty.

This problem stems most of all from the mistaken idea that a doctor's degree rather than competence in the ministry is the main qualification for seminary professors. The result has often been an intellectualized

Christian faith with little competent training in preaching and pastoring.

It is interesting that professional training in other fields such as medicine and law is done by competent practicing doctors and lawyers, and not by an elite group of Ph.D.s who have little experience in what they are supposedly teaching.

In recent years several groups within the RCUS have been working at providing training for minis-

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- New Geneva Seminary in Colorado Springs, CO, has been approved by the Synod of the RCUS for a number of years. An independent seminary, it operates as a night and Saturday school with one RCUS minister and a number of Presbyterian Church in America men as professors.
- City Seminary of Sacramento, CA, began classes in 2000, and obtained approval by the Synod of the RCUS for the first time this year. It also holds its classes evenings and on Saturdays, and has as its primary aim the training of men

for bible-based ministry in the Sacramento metropolitan area.

- The newest of these RCUS-involved seminaries is Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Vermillion, SD, which began classes in 2002, and was also approved by this year's Synod as an institution worthy of support and training for RCUS ministers. Its aim is specifically to involve ministers of the RCUS in training future ministers for the denomination, and it seeks to operate under direct synodical oversight. It operates a traditional daytime class schedule and seeks to provide careful training in preaching and pastoring skills. To give time for both academic work and practical experience, Heidelberg Seminary uses a four-year curriculum to attain a Master of Divinity degree. Synod this year also continued a Special Committee that is studying the feasibility and desirability of making Heidelberg Theological Seminary a "denominational" seminary which would work under the direct oversight of Synod in accordance with the Constitution of the RCUS.

Synod also continued the approval of several other independent seminaries as "worthy of support," including Westminster in Philadelphia, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and Greenville Seminary. It also instructed its Permanent Christian Education Committee to reexamine Westminster Seminary in California with a view to perhaps re-including it on the list of approved seminaries; it had been removed several years ago.

RCUS students at "approved" seminaries have the advantage of being eligible for denominational aid



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which usually pays their tuition, or a major portion of it.

### **Pensions**

Over the years the RCUS Synods have resisted the idea of a “pension plan” for retired ministers. This resistance stems from the fact that many older Reformed ministers were coerced into joining the liberal Evangelical and Reformed merger of 1934 by the fact that they would have lost their pensions by failing to join the merger.

This left the RCUS with a meager two or three ministers to serve a Classis of almost thirty congregations during the late 1930s and World War 2 years. To help retired pastors and their widows, the RCUS has provided a special diaconal fund of “Ministerial Relief” which provides payments to such individuals according to their needs as assessed by their church elders and deacons.

In order to alleviate the need for all of these funds to come from our annual direct giving, Synod this year approved a Committee to bring forth a pension plan for RCUS ministers that will be considered at next year’s Synod. Since this plan is promised to include complete portability, it might find more favorable response than past attempts have.

### **Home Missions**

The RCUS continues a vigorous Home Mission program of founding new congregations across the United States. New mission congregations in Bentonville, Arkansas (home of Walmart), and in Southeast Colorado received Synod funding, along with already established mission works in California, South

Dakota, Minnesota, and Colorado.

The Vermillion, SD, home mission work, Providence Reformed Church, was added to the roll of organized congregations of the RCUS.

New ministers added to the roll of Synod during 2002 include the Rev. Mike McGee of Minot, ND, and the Rev. Kyle Sorensen of Manitowoc, WI.

Several home mission churches have been able to obtain church

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## ***The 257th Synod of the RCUS was an enjoyable time of fellowship and hard work.***

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facilities, though not without incurring major debts. This year’s special home mission capital fund debt reduction offering on the RCUS day of prayer for missions will go to Grace RCUS at Greely, CO. The Synod also maintains a loan fund to help congregations build facilities.

The Synod continued its funding of work among Deaf Christians through Deaf Reformed Ministries, and is looking to fund at least one more deaf congregation to add to the two deaf congregations already enrolled. Our purpose is to found a separate classis of deaf Reformed congregations when three such congregations are in operation. Messrs. Mike Brabo and Chuck Snyder interpreted for

the deaf elders and pastors who were in attendance at the Synod.

Fraternal delegates from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) also graced our sessions, as did an observer from the United Reformed Churches in North America.

The 257th Synod of the RCUS was an enjoyable time of fellowship and hard work for the delegates and the host congregation, Eureka Reformed Church.

God has truly been gracious to our remnant of the German Reformed heritage in North America by keeping the RCUS true to His word and the Reformed creeds, as well as giving us close fellowship with other Reformed and Presbyterian folks of like precious faith all over the world. Nevertheless the battle is far from over. History and our own experience over many years of ministry in the RCUS have proven again and again that vigilance is the order of the day for all who would maintain the marks of the True Church.

Dr. Robert Grossmann  
Vermillion, SD

# Christian Education: Is It a Mess?

## (Part 2)

Increasingly, Reformed education resembles an affinity to evangelical Christianity, and in some ways, to the secular world. *The spirit of independence, autonomy, power, and pragmatic ethical integrity are ripping into the soul of the Reformed educational community.*

I believe that Reformed educators need to address whether they really wish to be different and distinct anymore. Perhaps, this question revolves around our own identity crisis! Do we really want to embrace the Reformed tradition in our Christian education? During my years in Christian education, I have served on Education Committees of two different school boards which held to the Reformed Confessions as their doctrinal standards. On both boards, I participated in tense discussions with administrators and fellow board members who wished that the school would be more evangelical than Reformed. The reasons for such a sentiment ranged from the perception that the Reformed Confessions are too narrow to include the broader Christian community, and that the school can be better served financially if she opens her doors to a larger constituency.

In my experience, it is not unusual for Reformed Confessional schools which have had a long history in a given community to begin taking on the appearance of being embarrassed for their Reformed convictions.

Increasingly, many wish to distance themselves from what they have perceived to be a ridged and narrow perspective concerning the Christian faith. A modern view of “tolerance” becomes their principle of religious authority to guide their new educational philosophy.

In contrast to the evangelical spirit gripping Reformed education, there has also emerged a progressive, as well as an aggressive, agenda which interacts, in most cases without much discretion, with modern and post-modern life. In this context we are witnessing an increasing number of Reformed educational institutions which seem to resemble the left wing of the political, economic, social, and pluralistic conceptions of American cultural life (e.g. the enlightenment law of tolerance, modern egalitarianism and its comrades of feminism and homosexual rights, a “Christian socialism,” and a strong environmentalism).

This educational model is shaped by a transformational or what is sometimes referred to a reformational view of the kingdom of God which will restore the literal creation to the original intent of the Creator.

Two different schools of neo-Calvinism dominate this particular model of creational and cultural restoration: the shalom school and the creation-order school. Although the method to achieve their goal is different, both schools understand the goal to be political, economic,

and social justice for all God’s oppressed people in the world. One can achieve this goal by educating the students for shalom (peace), or one can achieve this goal by educating the students to reclaim all creational norms for Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Upon a close examination of these two schools of thought, one will find certain alarming resemblances to the continental and English-American social gospel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The present Reformed identity crisis in Christian education does not end with Reformed educators embarking the evangelical spirit, or on the other side of the spectrum, Reformed educators accommodating themselves to cultural modernity. There is one other group yet to be mentioned.

In reaction to the bureaucratic power of the NEA and the government, the evangelical models of Christian education, and the left wing of culturally progressive Reformed education, there is a growing movement to address this educational mess by returning to a classical model of education (Greek and Roman models) draped in the historic Reformed tradition.

The classical model contends that the answer to the difficulties in American as well as Christian education lies in reviving the Gospel in the context of Greek and Roman antiquity. In a unique blend of studying the works of Greek and Roman antiquity as well as the Gospel, the student is brought into contact with



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the circumstances in which the Gospel *transformed* the political and cultural landscape of the western world. After all, the advocates of classical Christian education seem to maintain that the early church provides us with an example of *transforming* our world. If they could do it, then we can do it today. More specifically, if the Christian church could transform Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, then it can transform the thought of Darwin, Freud, and Marx.

However, as their ideal is placed before their students, there seems to be much to be learned and endorsed within classicism as opposed to modern thought. In other words, there is a reason that the movement understands itself as classical Christian education. It is definitely befriendng the world of antiquity more than the modern world. In my mind, this creates a serious problem! I thought that Cornelius Van Til taught us that classical thought is the root of all pagan western thought, and therefore, classical thought is no friend of Reformed Christianity. In fact, it is our serious intellectual enemy! By reminding us of Van Til's position with regard to Greek and Roman thought, I am not endorsing that Christians should not read the classics; rather, we need to be reminded that classical thought is as pagan and mythological as anything that has emerged in our own day. In light of Van Til's directive to critique all systems of thought by the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, it seems to me that little discernment has been exercised in the Reformed classical educational movement to conform all knowledge to the Christ of the Bible. Rather, one foot is in the clas-

sical world, and one foot is in the Bible.

### **Political Posturing in Education**

These various Reformed models on Christian education are not the sole problem confronting the present landscape. As these various Reformed perspectives attempt to resolve the educational chaos in this country and present their own model of educational identity, one should not overlook that political

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***We are witnessing an increasing number of Reformed educational institutions which seem to resemble the left wing of the political, economic, social, and pluralistic conceptions of American cultural life.***

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posturing raises its ugly head. What do I mean by political posturing? I am speaking about a pragmatic ethic in which Boards, administrators, and faculty will operate by an ethic driven by success, visibility, and honor for the sake of the institution itself. Perception, perspective and vision become the law within the institution, even to the degree of deception and manipulation for the sake of the institution or for the sake of power by certain individuals in the institution.

In light of sin, one of the serious areas of fragmenting Reformed education is men and women who

control the life of the institution for the sake of their own personal agenda, prestige, and ego! It is exactly within this context that deception and manipulation are employed; those who press themselves to the position of control demand that everybody and everything be viewed through their lenses. Such individuals are so manipulative that Biblical revelation itself can only be understood through the lenses of their agenda as the Bible is employed to defend and justify any request they make or action that they take.

But there is a serious problem here; in many cases, they employ the Bible to defend their world of power. Those who are perceptive in such a situation come to realize that the real issue is not the Bible, but the real issue is the person(s) who exercise power! Let us not be deceived, there is no respecter of persons in this pragmatic model; Christian educational institutions which are liberal, moderate, and conservative all show evidence of this.

For example, it is not uncommon for those who push themselves to the forefront to control the agenda, vision, teaching, discipline, and life of their constituents. They will request your mind, your social habits, your behavioral attitudes, and your entertainment. In this context, their dictatorial tendencies show their colors and they couch their actions of control in deception and secrecy for the "name" of the institution. Beware of those who tell you that all their actions must be kept secret for the sake of the institution; it is wise to ask yourself, "What are they trying to hide?" Usually, they are attempting to hide something that may be devious.

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Simply put, watch out for self-appointed popes—even within the Reformed community! We have too many of them! For example, here is a helpful prescription for analyzing leadership; *it is the movement in the man, not the man moving the movement*. Think about Abraham, Moses, and Paul in this regard; God’s grace and sovereign hand shaped these Biblical saints into leaders. None of them sought to be a leader or pronounced themselves as a leader. Rather, in correspondence to the humility of God’s character, God moved their humble and unassuming character in spite of their resistance against Him to lead.

#### Notes

1 For a more detailed analysis of these two schools of thought, one should consult William D. Dennison, “Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots of Transformation: An Introductory Essay,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* (June, 1999) 271-291.

**Dr. William Dennison** is the Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

## Looking Out and About

- Mr. Gene Crow who recently sustained his ordination examination in Classis Michigan was ordained on the morning of June 29 at the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan to serve as the first pastor of the Lakeshore United Reformed Church in Muskegon, Michigan. The service was led by the Reverend Andrew Cammenga, Pastor Emeritus of the United Reformed Church of Escondido, California.
- Rev. Patrick Edouard who is presently serving as the pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto, Ontario has accepted the call extended to him by the Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa. The Edouard family will be moving to the Pella area sometime in August.
- On June 22 the Reverend Eric Fennema who until recently was serving the First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa was installed as the pastor of the Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, Alberta. The Reverend Jay Wesseling, Associate Pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church of Sanborn, Iowa preached at the installation service.
- The Reverend Steve McGee who for the past six years has served the Covenant United Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michi-

gan was installed on June 29 as Associate Pastor of the Bethel United Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan to serve as a Missionary Teacher at the Grace Bible College in D’Abadie, Trinidad. The McGees hope to leave for Trinidad around the first of August.

- The Bethany Covenant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois has faithfully borne witness to the Reformed Faith in its community for seventy-eight years. Now due to changing demographics in its neighborhood and a declining membership it has decided to disband. The last services will be held on August 17. May the seed of the Gospel which has been sown over the many years continue to bear fruit unto eternal life.

*Clerks and Churches are encouraged to send news of events taking place in their churches to [wyb.kath@juno.com](mailto:wyb.kath@juno.com)*



# We Confess

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

### *Article 2 (Part 1)*

#### *Of the Knowledge of God*

Article 2 of the Belgic Confession is divided into two short and simple parts: the knowledge of God in the “book” of creation, and the knowledge of God in the “book” of Scripture. The Confession uses the literary feature of a simile here to compare creation to a book when it says it “is before our eyes *as* a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are *as* so many characters.” The parts of creation are similar to letters in that they communicate a story to us. Calvin speaks of the creation by saying, “the glory of God is written and imprinted in the heavens, as in an open volume which all men may read...the glory of God is not written in small obscure letters, but richly engraven in large and bright characters, which all men may read, and read with the greatest ease.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **General Revelation**

“We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe.”

We speak of the knowledge of God in the first “book” as “general revelation.” This means first, that it is revealed generally to all men, and second, it reveals a general knowledge of God as Creator, but not as Redeemer.

#### **Creation**

The Psalmist in Psalm 19 declares the wonderful knowledge of God made known by the heavens and the earth in verses 1-4. He personifies the heavens as an eloquent preacher, whose voice is so loud and clear that all men, everywhere and at all times, can hear and understand him. The clarity of this knowledge to all men, everywhere and at all times, is so overwhelming that Calvin says God “...daily place[s] Himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold Him.”<sup>2</sup>

In verse 1 the Psalmist says to us that the heavens declare God’s glorious power while the firmament above exhibits the craftsmanship and wisdom of God, the master architect-builder. Verse 2 says “day unto day...night unto night” which means that every moment of every day from the beginning of creation until its end, the knowledge of God’s power and wisdom are made known. Verse 3 says to us that there is one universal language which all mankind knows: the language of creation. And verse 4 says that the book of the knowledge of God in creation is from one end of the world to the next.

As we meditate upon Psalm 19 and the knowledge of God revealed in the “book” of creation, we are reminded that this world “is my

Father’s world.” And one day all men will know that this cosmos, all that there is, is the world of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. As one man has said, scientists are climbing the mountain of knowledge little by little seeking to find out the meaning of life and the world we live in, and when they finally reach the top they will find the great theologians of old awaiting them!

#### **Preservation**

The Confession then goes on to say that God did not just create the universe, but that He through His Son, at this very moment, and since the beginning of the world and unto its end, has been “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3); for “in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). The providence of God, as we know from our experience of His care for us, is “the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds as with His hand, heaven and earth and all creatures...that without His will they can neither move nor be moved” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27-28).

#### **Government**

The “government” of the Lord is His “almighty and ever present power” in relation to history. This means that even the course of history, the rise and fall of nations, the succession of times, and the outcome of world events are “completely in His hand” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 28). This is what Paul was saying to the pagan philosophers on Mars Hill when he said, “He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has deter-

mined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26).

### The Content of General Revelation

The glory of God, then, is revealed in the creation, providence, and government of the universe as in a mirror.<sup>3</sup> And this mirror is large enough and clear enough for all to look in to. In these three areas we see the very fingerprint of God’s “handiwork” and are led heavenward to our Creator.

Paul says to us that God’s invisible attributes, especially His eternal power and the fact that He is divine, and we are not, is clear for us to see. But the Confession follows the Apostle in saying that this knowledge of God in creation, providence, and governance is of God as Creator. The content, then, of general revelation is not of God as Redeemer, but simply as the wise, eternal, powerful, and creative God that He is.

### The Limit of General Revelation

This understanding of the content of general revelation is important for understanding the limits of this knowledge. By “limit” we mean to say that there is only so much we can learn about God from general revelation.

This knowledge gloriously reveals God as eternal and mighty, but it goes no further. It’s purpose is to reveal that there is a Creator, that He is eternal, that He is wise and almighty so that men will be inexcusable on the last Day. As Calvin says, “this knowledge of God, which avails only to take away ex-

cuse, differs greatly from that which brings salvation...the manifestation of God, by which He makes His glory known in His creation, is, with regard to the light itself, sufficiently clear; but that on account of our blindness, it is not found to be sufficient.”<sup>4</sup> This knowledge, Calvin is saying, is of Law, not Gospel. It leaves without excuse; but it does not save.

This is utterly practical for us because we live in a day when people are asking, “What about those who have never heard of Jesus but are ‘sincere?’ Many evangelical Christians are unknowingly following the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, which says in its *Catechism*

*Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.*<sup>5</sup>

While we confess with Paul that unregenerate man suppresses the knowledge of God (1:18), Roman Catholicism and others say they

are neutral. While Paul says “there is none who seeks after God” (Rom 3:11), Roman Catholicism says men “seek God with a sincere heart.” So we believe that man is spiritually blind. And if there is someone in some far off part of the world whom the Father has elected, we believe that Christ died for that person, and that the Holy Spirit will irresistibly call that person by sending a preacher.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Calvin’s very elegant comments on Psalm 19 in his *Commentaries on the Book of Psalms: Volume I*, trans. James Anderson (Calvin’s Commentaries: Volume IV; Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 1996), 307-333.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1997) I.v.1.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 307, 314.

<sup>4</sup> *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Calvin’s Commentaries: Volume XIX; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1996) 71.

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 847.

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

### Questions for Further Study/Discussion

1. What does general revelation reveal about God? (Ps 19; Rom 1:18ff)
2. Why did God give this knowledge to the unregenerate?
3. Can general revelation give enough knowledge of God to save?





# Evaluating the New Perspective on Paul (4)

## What Does Paul Mean by ‘Works of the Law’?

### *Part 1*

So far our evaluation of the new perspective on Paul has addressed several general matters of method and the understanding of Second Temple Judaism associated with the work of E. P. Sanders. The most important test, however, of the new perspective is whether it adequately treats the writings of the apostle Paul. Does the new perspective offer a more compelling interpretation of the epistles of Paul, especially in terms of their teaching on the doctrine of justification, than that historically associated with the Protestant Reformation? Since the new perspective advertises itself as a more faithful reading of the apostle Paul than that stemming from the Reformation, the critical issue still confronting us is whether it provides a more satisfying account of Paul’s writings.

One of the key features of the new perspective is the way it treats Paul’s understanding of the “law” and the “works of the law.” In the older Reformation view, Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone was presented in stark contrast to any doctrine of justification by works performed in obedience to the law. An important aspect of the Reformation’s interpretation was the claim that justification is by faith alone apart from works of the law.

Since no sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, is able to keep the law of God perfectly, there is no possibility of finding acceptance or favor with God by works. Furthermore, in

the Reformational view of Paul’s writings, the doctrine of justification was treated as, among other things, the apostle Paul’s answer to a kind of Jewish-Christian “legalism” that taught that we are justified by works performed in obedience to the law. In this older Reformational reading of the apostle Paul, the doctrine of justification was interpreted as Paul’s answer to the dilemma of the sinner who cannot find favor with God on the basis of works done in obedience to the law. Thus, justification by faith answered the question how an unrighteous sinner can find favor with God.

As we have seen in our survey of the new perspective, this older Reformation view, especially in its handling of Paul’s understanding of the law, is roundly rejected. According to Sanders, the apostle Paul developed his doctrine of justification from the prior vantage point of his conviction that salvation comes by faith in Christ. The problem with Judaism was not its legalism—after all, no such legalism was present in Second Temple Judaism. Rather, the problem with Judaism was that it was not Christianity.

Paul’s analysis of the human “plight” (no justification by works of the law) was the fruit of his prior conviction that the “solution” (justification by faith) to the human predicament can only be found in Christ. In Sanders’ reading of Paul’s writings, therefore, the doctrine of justification does not address the predicament of human

sinfulness and inability to keep the law. Paul’s diagnosis that no one is justified by works of the law is a by-product of his basic conviction that faith in Christ is the way of incorporation into the new covenant community of Christ.

Moreover, according to two of the principal authors of the new perspective, James Dunn and N. T. Wright, Paul’s teaching about the “works of the law” is addressed primarily to a *social* problem, namely, the inclusion of Gentile believers together with Jews as members of the covenant people of God.

When Paul speaks of the “works of the law,” he is not referring to any general obligations of obedience that are required by the law. Rather, Paul is speaking particularly about those “boundary markers” that separated Jews from Gentiles (for example, circumcision, dietary requirements, and Sabbath or feast day provisions). The real problem that occasioned Paul’s development of his doctrine of justification was the failure of some Jewish-Christian opponents to embrace Gentiles as well as Jews among the covenant people of God.

The promise of inclusion within the covenant family of God, according to those who insisted upon adherence to the “boundary marker” requirements of the law, was restricted to the Jews or those who became identified as Jews by their adherence to these requirements.

According to Paul, however, justification by faith means that Gentiles are also included in the covenant community, though they are not under any obligation to identify with the Jewish covenant community by undergoing circumcision or fulfilling these requirements of the law. The “works of the law,” in this understanding of Paul’s writings, do not refer to general obligations of obedience to law as a basis for justification or acceptance with God. They refer to requirements in the Mosaic law that distinguished Jews from Gentiles.

In order to evaluate these claims of the new perspective, we need to answer three distinct, though related, questions:

1. *What does the apostle Paul mean by the language of “works of the law” or “works”, when he insists that no one is justified by them? Do the “works of the law” refer exclusively to what Dunn and Wright call the “boundary markers” of the law?*
2. *Does the apostle Paul oppose the teaching of justification by works on the basis of his conviction that no one is able to do what the law requires? Or, is the real and primary occasion for Paul’s argument against justification by works of the law, his conviction that, now that Christ has come, the only way of inclusion among the people of God is through faith in Christ (arguing, as Sanders puts it, from “solution” to “plight”)?*
3. *Is it correct to claim, as the Reformation did, that Paul opposed the “Judaizers” for*

*teaching that justification rests upon human obedience to the requirements of the law? Does the apostle Paul oppose a “legalistic” distortion of the doctrine of justification, which taught that acceptance with God depends in some measure upon works of obedience to the law?*

### **VARIOUS USES OF THE TERM ‘LAW’:**

#### **APRELIMINARY OBSERVATION**

Before directly taking up these questions in turn, we need to begin with a preliminary observation regarding the apostle Paul’s usage of the language of “the law” or “law”

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*One of the great difficulties in sorting out Paul’s understanding of the law is the diversity of ways in which he speaks of it.*

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in his writings. One of the great difficulties in sorting out Paul’s understanding of the law is the diversity of ways in which he speaks of it. Sometimes he speaks in a highly favorable way about the law, whereas on other occasions he speaks rather negatively about it.

Any failure to pay close attention to the way the term “law” is used in a particular passage can lead to serious misunderstanding. Or, to put the matter differently, if it is assumed that Paul is using the language of “law” in a uniform way throughout his writings, the likelihood of misunderstanding is very

great. The context in each instance must always be taken into consideration before determining what Paul means by his various references to the law.

For our purpose here, it is enough to note the following distinct ways in which Paul speaks of the “law” in his epistles.<sup>1</sup>

1. The most important use of the language of “law” or “the law” in Paul’s writings refers to the administration of the *law of Moses* (Romans 2:17-27; 5:13-14; 7; 10:4-5; Galatians 3:10-12,17-24; 5:3-4). In Romans 5:13, for example, speaking of the disobedience of Adam and its consequence, the apostle notes that “until the law sin was in the world.” The “law” in this passage refers to the law as it was given through Moses.
2. Even though the most important use of the language of “the law” refers broadly to the law of Moses, it is significant to note that the apostle Paul can also speak of the law of Moses in a *broader* and a *narrower* sense. In the broader sense, “the law” refers to what might be called the Mosaic administration of the covenant, which in its comprehensive teaching is fully compatible with the gospel of “righteousness by faith” (e.g. Rom. 3:21; cf. Rom. 8:4). However, in a narrower sense, the law of Moses often refers specifically to the obligations and demands of the law (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9:8; 15:56; Romans 2:12-13, 23-27; 3:20-21,28; 4:15; 5:20; 7:5,7-9; 8:4; 13:8-10; Galatians 2:16,19; 3:10; 5:3-5:14). When speaking of the law in this narrower sense,



the apostle Paul emphasizes that it belongs to a particular era of the history of redemption, *after* the giving of the promise to Abraham 430 years earlier (Galatians 3:17) and *prior* to the coming of Christ in the fullness of time (Galatians 3:24; 4:1-7; Romans 6:14-15). Moreover, in the more specific sense of the commandments of the law of Moses, Paul emphasizes the contrast or antithesis between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of (obedience to) the law (Romans 4).

3. Sometimes the apostle Paul uses the language of "law" to refer to something like a "principle," "order," or "rule" (Romans 3:27; 7:21,23,25; 8:2). In these passages, the "law" refers to a rule that governs human life and conduct. For example, in Romans 7:21 Paul says that "I find it to be a law that when I want do right, evil lies close at hand." "Law" in this passage simply refers to a principle that governs the lives of those who want to do what pleases God: they find that the temptation to do otherwise lies close at hand.
4. Consistent with the usage of "law" to refer to the law of Moses, Paul often uses the language of "law" to refer to the Old Testament Scripture as a whole or more particularly to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible written by Moses (1 Corinthians 9:8-9; 14:21,34; Romans 3:19, 21; Galatians 4:21-31).
5. In Romans 2:14-15, 26-27, the apostle Paul declares that the Gentiles, to whom "the [Mosaic]

law" was not given, have the "work of the law written on their hearts" (v. 15). Though this passage does not explicitly assert the common theological distinction between the "moral" and the "ceremonial" law, it does suggest that the moral requirements of the Mosaic law are in some sense known by those to whom the law was not given, as it was to Israel. Even the Gentiles, who do not have the written law of Moses, know what the law requires.

6. The apostle Paul also contrasts the "law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2; compare 1 Corinthians 9:21) to the law of Moses, since it does not require circumcision. This "law of Christ" is the distinctive norm of conduct for those who are united to Christ by faith and who walk in step with the Holy Spirit of the new covenant. For those who are united with Christ and indwelt by His Spirit, there is a sense in which there is no longer a need for the written ordinances of the law. The believer's life in the Spirit of

Christ expresses itself in a freedom and maturity of obedience that does not require the specifying of the precepts and prohibitions of the law.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed treatments of Paul's uses of the language of "law," see Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 33-40; Douglas J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 73-100; Stephen Westerholm, "Torah, nomos, and Law: A Question of 'Meaning,'" *Studies in Religion* 15 (1986): 327-36; and Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, The Law, and Justification* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 287-90.

**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*.

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**REFORMED FELLOWSHIP**

# This Is My Outlook

Over the past several months there has been a continual debate over what the Christian Reformed Church should do with the actions of First Toronto CRC. First Toronto, you may recall, has come out of the closet with a statement declaring that they will nominate openly homosexual members for elders and deacons. Many churches and several classes have written letters to First Toronto encouraging them to withdraw their decision. This article was written before Synod met, so I cannot comment on their reaction, but members of the Board of Trustees have also expressed dismay over First Toronto's stand.

While I am truly grateful for the many churches, classes, and Board members who wrote letters to First CRC expressing their dismay and encouraging the church to change the policy it has adopted, I cannot help but wonder where all of these protesters have been over the past few years. I cannot help but wonder why they have limited their efforts to the church in Toronto.

In the May 10, 2003 issue of *World* magazine, there is a review of Calvin College that is not very flattering. The four page critique of the college sets out to explain a sentence that appears very early in the article: "On theology-rooted issues such as origins, feminist theology, and homosexuality, the school's policy and curricula have drifted away from Scripture."

In the area of homosexuality alone, *World* magazine reported the following:

- In 2001, the school invited the openly lesbian singers, Indigo Girls, to perform in concert. Although there were some protests from students, alumni, and donors, the group was invited to return in 2002.

- Calvin College observes "Ribbon Week." During this week, heterosexual students wear ribbons to show their support for those who want to sleep with people of the same sex.

- Calvin President, Gaylen Byker, is quoted as saying: "Homosexuality is qualitatively different from other sexual sin. It is a disorder." He went on to say that having a week to celebrate homosexuality is "like having cerebral palsy week."

- Pro-homosexual material can be found in Calvin's curriculum.

- *Chimes* editor, Christian Bell called the president of the American Family Association a "hate mongering homophobic bigot." When asked by *World* magazine if he believed homosexual thoughts were sin, Bell replied, "No." Mr. Bell is a pre-sem senior at Calvin.

After reading this article about my alma mater, I wondered, "Why the big surprise about Toronto?" If these are the thoughts and activities promoted by the college, how can we be surprised when graduates of

that college bring those thoughts into the church? Why does the Board of Trustees of the CRC talk about possible discipline and even expulsion from the denomination for a church in Toronto when the very same views are being promoted in their own back yard? Why aren't the churches and classes crying out in protest to any of the items mentioned in *World*?

Two mind-sets seem to prevail in our thoughts about Calvin College: 1) It was a good school in my day, therefore, it is a good school today; 2) The school provides a good education for my children so they will be able to get a good job. Both mind-sets ignore the present spiritual condition of the school. For far too long the church has tolerated the views promoted by Calvin College. Overtures and protests are ignored. With that being the case, those who continue support the college have only themselves to blame for the events in first CRC of Toronto.

Sadder than the report from *World* about Calvin College, I fear, is the way that those who support the school will respond to the article. In a "bad message, kill the messenger" mentality, readers of *World* will toss the magazine aside, disgusted by what they have read. Although they have trusted *World* for its reporting on the Iraq War;

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***I cannot help but wonder where all of these protesters have been over the past few years.***



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they have appreciated the candid reports of the political race; and have agreed with many of the editorials; they will not believe what they read concerning *onze* school. Suddenly they will view the magazine as incredibly biased and missing the mark.

Quentin Schultze responded that way in the June issue of *The Banner*, calling the *World* article “yellow journalism”. He called *World’s* description of Ribbon Week as “an unbelievably biased statement with little connection to reality.”

Gaylen Byker, is quoted as saying that he was “disappointed but not surprised by the article.” He did not deny anything that *World* reported. In fact, responding to *World* magazine’s charge concerning origins, Dr. Byker went on to confirm the fact that professors “in

general, believe the earth is very old and that there is a process of natural selection but that God is both the creator and sustainer of the earth, in charge of every process.”

In addition, a graduate of almost twenty years ago (1986) comments: “I think that 95 per cent of the current student body would find this description of Calvin foreign to their experience.” I’m not sure if that is a positive statement about the school or a negative statement about the students.

Others will read the article, sadly shake their heads in agreement and then not do anything about what they have read. After all, they think, it’s such a good school. Even *World* has to admit that Calvin is consistently on national “best college” lists and is the “flagship of Christian liberal arts education.”

I well remember ten years ago being part of a congregation that wanted clarification on the views of a particular professor at Calvin College. A fellow minister from our classis came to my home and said, “How dare you have a professor come and speak about his views at your church. You have no right to do that!” He went on to add how the people in the pews should never question “our professors”.

Which explains why things have become the way they are.

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

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**Brian Vos**

## Looking Above

### *A Series on The Revelation of Jesus Christ* *Revelation 1:1 “Revelation”*

Upon his appointment as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary on May 8, 1894, Geerhardus Vos addressed the President and Board of Directors with these words: “In his sinful condition, while retaining some knowledge of God, man for all pure and adequate information in divine things is absolutely dependent on that new self-disclosure of God which we call supernatural revelation.”<sup>1</sup> If man is to be saved, supernatural revelation is indispensable; it is absolutely necessary; we cannot do without it.

The book of Revelation is supernatural revelation. The opening words of the book underscore its supernatural character: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1). The Greek word that is translated “revelation” - and which serves as the title of the book - is *apokalypsis*, from which derives the English word “apocalypse.” The verb form of the word (*apokalypso*) means to remove a veil or covering in order to reveal that which lies behind it. Thus, the book of Revelation is an “unveiling” - it removes the veil in order to reveal.

But just what does the book of Revelation reveal? Verse 1 answers that question: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The book of Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus Christ. It is important to bear that in mind. Though the book of Revelation is at times rather baffling and strange - containing such enigmatic images as the four living creatures, the twenty four elders, the four horsemen, the 144,000, the number 666, Armagedon, and so on - it is meant to be an unveiling of Jesus Christ, a revealing of Jesus Christ. The book is not intended to seal up,

but to disclose; it is not meant to hide, but to reveal.

This is the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. But how are we to understand that? Some have argued that Jesus Christ is the One who reveals Himself in this book: it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that is, Jesus Christ is the One who reveals Himself. Others have maintained that Jesus Christ is the One who is revealed in this book: it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that is, Jesus Christ is the One who is revealed.

Which is it? Is Jesus Christ the One who reveals Himself in this book or is it Jesus Christ who is revealed in this book? The answer is *both!* Jesus both reveals Himself in this book, and is Himself the One who is revealed in this book! Jesus Christ is both revealer and revealed. That Jesus Christ is revealed in the book of Revelation is evident from such passages as the vision of 1:10-20. That Jesus Christ is the revealer in the book of Revelation is evident from such passages as 5:5 and following. There Jesus is the One who opens the seals. Jesus Christ is both revealer and revealed. In every sense of the word, this is The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus Christ is revealed to us in this book, and as Jesus Christ reveals Himself to us in this book, He unveils and reveals the arena in which He lives. In other words, heaven itself is opened before us in the book of Revelation – heaven itself is unveiled before us in the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is an unveiling of the heavenly world – that world to which Christ has ascended – that world in which Christ lives.

The book of Revelation was given to us to draw us into that world. God has spoken to us on earth from heaven that He might draw us into heaven. The book of Revelation is heaven's account of the history of the Church as she lives in the midst of this world between the first coming of Christ and His return. Revelation was not written, then, to inform us of those events that transpired in and around the year 70 A.D., with the fall of Jerusalem, nor was it written to inform us of the plot-line of events at the end of time.<sup>2</sup>

Revelation was written to set Christ before us, and in setting Christ before us, to set heaven itself before us. Revelation reveals to us that world that lies above. As you make your way through the book, it is as though you were walking about Zion. It is as though you were going all around Zion. It is as though you were counting her towers. It is as though you were marking her bulwarks. It is as though you were considering her palaces.<sup>3</sup> The book of Revelation teaches us that there is another world above this world (a world after which this world is patterned, and to which this world will give way). It unveils the heavenly world to us. It opens heaven for us. It summons us to look above.

Through its imagery and beauty, the book of Revelation grabs hold of us and brings us into the heavenly world. It is a book that sets our minds on things above. It is a book that teaches us to find our life hidden with Christ in God. It is a book that brings us into the world to come. It is a book that opens heaven to us and feeds us with the Christ of

heaven. It is truly supernatural revelation!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Vos, Geerhardus.

The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos: Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation. Edited by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980. p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> That plot-line has already been given to us by Christ Himself in the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24, as well as by the Apostle in his letters to the Thessalonians. That plot line very simply stated is this: Christ at His first coming has inaugurated the kingdom, and with it the beginning of sorrows; those sorrows will intensify as the increase of wickedness continues on the earth; throughout this time the spirit of antichrist will grow, reaching its culmination in a great antichrist figure; the antichrist-crisis will be immediately followed by the second coming of Christ, and the final establishment of His kingdom. Revelation does not deviate from this order, nor does it add to this order.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Psalm 48.

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



# Sound Bites

## *The Outlook - 1975*

### **January 1975**

“To remain reformed is important. But it is not easy. It is far easier to drift away from the full-orbed view of God and the world.”

*To Remain Reformed*  
Peter De Boer

“I’m afraid that, by and large, modern preaching has not just done away with the old fashioned language, but also with the old fashioned message.”

*Religionless Christianity*  
Cornelis Pronk

### **March 1975**

“If we spend more time in trying to decide how to do something than we spend in the doing of it, then we may be guilty of majoring in minors, or to put it differently, of ‘sitting on the premises’ rather than ‘standing on the promises’”.

\* \* \* \* \*

“There is much of Christianity today which consists of hollowness rather than holiness.”

*Majoring in Minors*  
Harlan G. Vanden Einde

### **April 1975**

“Sometimes we commiserate with those who suffer in like fashion as we do, but we never get beyond the point of talking about the suffering itself. Paul did not stop at the point of the ‘thorn,’ but went on to speak of its purpose in his life, and the benefit he derived from it.”

*Power in Weakness*  
Harlan G. Vanden Einde

“The key of warding off depres-

sion is this: Do not follow your feelings when you know that you have a responsibility to fulfill. Instead, you must act against your feelings to do what you know God wants you to do, whether you feel like it or not.”

*How to Overcome Depression*  
Jay E. Adams

### **May 1975**

“Letting the practice of our churches and the changing customs of the times decide what the Bible is to teach us on this point seems to set aside the authority of the Bible in much the same way Roman Catholics and Modernists do.”

*Women’s Lib in the CRC*  
Peter De Jong

“It is not sin to contend for the faith (Jude 3); it is a sin to be contentious. It is not a sin to ask that God’s Word be preached in truth and purity; it is a sin to be proud, arrogant, or to think that we are saved by pure doctrine.”

*Keynote Address at Theological Convention*  
J. A. O. Preus

### **August 1975**

“The Bible is God’s saving revelation - intended to save man. In itself, it remains that, even if man rejects it.”

*On the Love of God*  
Jelle Tuininga

(continued page 24)

## The Annual Meeting of The Reformed Fellowship

**When: September 25**

**Where: Trinity URC in Caledonia, Michigan**

**The Speaker will be Professor Robert Swierenga**

**The topic will be *The History of Orthodoxy in West Michigan***

**Punch is at 6:00 PM, Dinner is served at 6:30 PM.**

**Prof. Swierenga will speak at 8:00 PM**



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(I Peter)

#### John Piersma

Daniel

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Ephesians  
I & II Thessalonians  
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(continued from page 23)

### September 1975

"Today we have an excessive pre-occupation with church methods, programs, and machinery to the neglect of the basic message of Christianity and the systematic and consistent proclamation of that message."

*Our Question Box*  
Leonard Greenway

### November 1975

"We do not want controversy just for controversy's sake. However, we know full well that controversy for the faith is a sign of life. There is no controversy at the cemetery, the city of the dead."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Of an apostate denomination averse to controversy and sorely in need of a showdown, someone once made the discerning observation: You can't split rotten wood!"

*For All This We Thank Him*  
John Vander Ploeg

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