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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

—Exodus 19:5–6

### Keep My Covenant

**G**od's covenant must be kept. At Sinai God told his church, "Keep my covenant" (Ex. 19:5).

To keep God's covenant means to obey God's law. God himself said so: "obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant" (Ex. 19:5). To keep God's covenant means to obey God's law diligently. God himself said so when he called us to *keep* his covenant. The word *keep* refers to a soldier's duty to watch the city, guarding it against the enemy. The soldier attends to his duty with zeal, lest he and the city be lost. So also the Israelite in the wilderness must keep God's law conscientiously, zealously, attentively, eagerly, willingly, ardently, fervently, avidly, passionately, earnestly. God's law must not be his afterthought but his first thought. God's law must not be tedious or unsavory to him but his chief delight. He must attend to God's law, meditate upon God's law, measure his thoughts by God's law, and conform his deeds to God's law.

The child of God must obey God's law because of God's covenant. What is God's covenant? This: "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19:4). This: "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (v. 5). This: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (v. 6). What is the theme of each of these? This: "unto me." Unto me! The almighty and infinite Jehovah says to the insignificant dust of the earth, "You are unto me!" This expresses the essence and heart of God's covenant, which is his gracious fellowship with his people through

Jesus Christ. In gratitude for being brought "unto me" in the covenant, the child of God keeps God's covenant by obeying God's law.

But what of the way God told the children of Israel to keep his covenant? "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Ex. 19:5). If ye will keep my covenant...then ye shall be unto me. The grammar of God's covenant promise is conditional: if...then. The theology of God's covenant promise, however, is pure, unconditional grace.

What is the theology of God's covenant promise? First, God establishes his covenant with his people according to his eternal decree of election and not at all according to the worth or the deeds of his people. "The LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). No condition; only the pure grace of election!

Second, God establishes his covenant with his elect people in Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sins of his people and obeyed God's law on behalf of his people. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). No condition; only the pure grace of Jesus Christ!

Third, proceeding from God's decree and on the basis of Christ's atonement, God calls his people out of darkness into his marvelous light as a holy nation and a peculiar people (I Pet. 2:9).

The result is that God's people are zealous of good works of obedience (Titus 2:14). Their obedience is their gratitude and the mark of their election and redemption. No condition; only the pure grace of God's calling!

God's covenant must be kept. Not unto God's fellowship but because of it!

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

September is the handiwork of God.  
Summer's verdure settles into autumn's gold.  
Sunset's radiant hues become trees' garments.  
South-flying flocks chase welkin's glow.  
September is the handiwork of God.

In this issue of *Reformed Pavilion*, Dewey concludes his edifying series on trying the spirits. Sadly, the series now comes to an end. Happily, the reader now has the entire series of articles in hand and can begin again. The series is worth multiple read-throughs.

The undersigned contributes a few observations on a note from the editor in the *Banner* in 1920. What glimpse into the state of the Christian Reformed Church can an article from a century ago afford? Let the reader judge whether he agrees with the conclusion drawn.

"Dewey concludes."

"The undersigned contributes."

How foolishly we must speak. Our labor is not ours but God's, to whom be glory forever.

—AL

## FROM THE RAMPARTS

### Spirit-Led: Church Membership

#### Introduction

If you were to alert a man that his home was on fire or that his vessel was foundering and that all efforts to save them have failed, he would leave his home or his boat as quickly as possible.

Not so with members of a false church. When you point out to them the fact that the identity of their church is false according to her marks and that to remain means death, the response is indifference. Why is that? Why the stark difference in responses between the two situations? The answer to the question lies in the nature of the church. The church is entirely spiritual, yet she exists on this earth with an earthly form. When a church becomes false, she does not lose her earthly characteristics. She keeps her form.

She still has a building. The members of the congregation file in and take their seats, greeting one another as they always have. The church still has a minister who walks in, followed by a line of officebearers. All of them wear nice clothes and suitably grave expressions as they take their places in the sanctuary, the minister behind a wooden podium and the other men in the elders' row or with their families. The service follows the same form as it has for decades. The minister says words from behind the pulpit, there is some singing, collections are taken, a sermon is delivered, more songs are sung, and then everyone files back out, and the service is completed. The people drink their coffee and eat their cookies and then go home. All things

continue as they have since the beginning. Nothing has changed regarding her earthly characteristics. But spiritually? Everything is different. She is no longer a church at all but a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).

A few come out of such a church, but the majority do not. Why is that? In this article we will consider the reasons that men stay in a church that clearly manifests the marks of the false church or why men join themselves to a church irrespective of what is taught there. We will consider what life in a true church looks like. We will conclude by considering the Spirit's work whereby he lives in one church and leaves another. Let us begin by looking (again) at the evidence.<sup>1</sup>

### A Tale of Two Churches

Consider for a moment two churches, Hope Protestant Reformed Church and Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, and what took place at each church.

About ten years ago a controversy arose at Hope PRC. This controversy arose because of concerns about the preaching. An elder objected when the minister compromised justification by faith alone and taught that the covenant was conditional. That elder was then branded an antinomian; suspended; and, shortly thereafter, deposed. He then spent the next three years under discipline and suspended from the Lord's supper. After many meetings, and many more protests and appeals, Synod 2018 spoke to the matter and said this about the preaching of the minister of Hope PRC:

The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional

covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error.<sup>2</sup>

By corrupting the pure gospel and by persecuting those who had rebuked her for her errors, Hope PRC was unmistakably false. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession says that the true and false churches are easily known and distinguishable from each other, and that was certainly the case at Hope PRC. Not giving evidence of having turned from such a state by repenting of her errors, Hope PRC continues as a false church. Spiritually, she is no church at all but is a synagogue of Satan.

Why then haven't the elders filed articles of dissolution with the state? The reason is simple: from an earthly perspective all things continue as they always have. The form remains. If enough people participate in this charade of playing church, no one need leave. Why would they? Where is the danger? Nothing has changed from the weeks or months before. The members are indifferent about the spiritual condition; but they see the physical condition of the church, which has not changed a whit, and they are comfortable with that.

Now consider Byron Center PRC and what took place there. Byron Center called Rev. Andrew Lanning to come over from Singapore and help them. He accepted the call in late 2017. This was at the height of the controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Reverend Lanning had not been an idle spectator in this controversy, removed as he may have been geographically from the controversy's epicenter. He had protested the decision of Synod 2016 to not sustain Elder Neil Meyer's protest. In the protest he stated that Synod 2016 had not adequately dealt with the errors of the sermon that had been protested by Elder Meyer. Reverend Lanning contended that the sermon taught a conditional covenant and that this represented a new threat to the PRC,

<sup>1</sup> I am going to consider the Protestant Reformed Churches. I am not going to spend more time on the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) in this series. God gave them his Spirit; and their response was, to use the words of Martin Luther, to swallow him, "feathers and all." What a glorious beginning had the RPC! And what a shocking fall. They were planted "a noble vine, wholly a right seed" and within only a few years turned into "the degenerate plant of a strange vine" (Jer. 2:21).

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 70.

namely conditional experience of the covenant. He asked synod to condemn the sermons as teaching false doctrine. Reverend Lanning identified the error and condemned it. I relay this to make it clear that when Byron Center PRC called Reverend Lanning, his views on the controversy were not in question. Byron Center PRC knew where he stood.

Reverend Lanning came over and helped Byron Center PRC. He helped them the only way a minister can truly help a congregation, and that was by preaching the pure gospel to them. With no admixture of man, Reverend Lanning preached Christ alone and him crucified. It was justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant. He did it faithfully Sunday after Sunday, and it was glorious. The congregation grew under the preaching, both numerically and spiritually. Most professed a love for the preaching. The church began to discuss an expansion project and purchased land for this purpose. This continued until Reverend Lanning preached a word of rebuke to the congregation and to the denomination, which were showing themselves obstinate. This obstinacy showed up in sermons preached in the denomination, in decisions of the assemblies, and in the church paper. Rather than receiving these rebukes and being broken by them, the members of the congregation hardened themselves against the preaching.<sup>3</sup> Many left to form a new church. Pressure mounted until, finally, the congregation had enough of the rebukes and, together with the church visitors, cast Reverend Lanning out of her midst. Byron Center PRC had the pure preaching, rejected it, and then persecuted the man who had rebuked her for her errors. But Byron Center PRC wasn't finished exposing its heart and soul.

Consider who Byron Center PRC called to be her minister after having treacherously discarded the man whom, only a few years earlier, they had asked to come over and help them. They called Professor Dykstra. Professor Dykstra was very active in the controversy. At one point he banded together with two of his colleagues, and together they traversed over hill and dale, charging sin against Reverend Lanning and others who had, in Professor Dykstra's mind, sullied his name and reputation, about which he was very jealous. Doctrinally, he never could quite find himself on the side of the truth, which would have allowed him to condemn the lie. In the lead-up to Synod 2018, Professor Dykstra identified the problem plaguing the denomination not as a compromise of the gospel of grace but as the length of protests. "It is positively detrimental to overload the ecclesiastical assemblies with a mountain of documents."<sup>4</sup> The solution was not to preach the gospel purely. The solution was that "Synod may be forced to appoint a study committee to address the problem of ballooning protests and appeals."<sup>5</sup> Then, a few weeks after the decision of Synod 2018 that said the issue was justification by faith alone, the article of a standing or falling church, Professor Dykstra got on the pulpit of Hope PRC, the church from which this false doctrine had proceeded, and he said this:

The truth is preached here. I know it is. The truth of sovereign, particular grace that God saves his people through Jesus Christ. The truth is preached here. Even if there have to be some corrections made, the truth is preached here. That's why our covenant youth must stay here and embrace that truth.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Rebukes are quite something. People love to talk about them, but no one receives them. "When one adduces Solomon's proverbs to the effect that open correction is better than hidden love, and that a friend's reproof is good and faithful, no one will disagree [Proverbs 27:5–6]. Yet when it comes to practicing them, there is no one who shows himself to have understood" (John Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them: Anti-Nicodemite Writings of John Calvin* [Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001], 99).

<sup>4</sup> Russell Dykstra, "PRC Synod 2018, Agenda," *Standard Bearer* 94, no. 16 (May 15, 2018): 367.

<sup>5</sup> Dykstra, "PRC Synod 2018, Agenda," 367.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Dykstra, "Made Free by the Truth," sermon preached on July 1, 2018, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=715182145556>. See Dewey Engelsma, "Restored," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), December 31, 2022, <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com/2022/12/31/restored/>.

Professor Dykstra was not finished minimizing the error. Using his position as editor of the *Standard Bearer*, he spoke peace to the denomination regarding their sin (“these are some deep theological waters”), and then he warned the people sharply. He did not warn them about what they had done in compromising justification by faith alone and slandering and murdering the faithful few who had opposed it, but he warned against anyone who might allege that those responsible for compromising the gospel were guilty of heresy.<sup>7</sup>

What was said about Hope PRC can rightly be said about Byron Center PRC. The twentieth article of the Belgic Confession says that the true and false churches are easily known and distinguishable from each other, and that was certainly the case at Byron Center PRC. She had one minister who preached the truth and condemned the lie and rebuked the people for their errors. She had another minister who had no clue what was going on, minimized the error, and then spoke peace to the denomination when there was no peace. Not liking the taste of the gospel or its rebukes, the members of Byron Center PRC found a Balaam who would bless what God had cursed.<sup>8</sup> Not giving evidence of having turned from such a state by repenting of her errors, Byron Center PRC continues as a false church to this day. In fact, spiritually, she is no church but is a synagogue of Satan. But enough people continue to participate in the charade of playing church, so no one need leave. This will continue until the day of our Lord’s return. That’s when the charade will end.

These facts are out there for anyone to read and understand. It has been explained over and over and over. Yet so few leave. Why?

### Life Savers

John Calvin identified the reason why men do not leave the false church. Men love their lives. “All long to live, and that at their ease, and each

one according to the lust which leads him” (206). Who likes to suffer loss? “Everyone would like to be carried on a litter to worship God... and would like for lands and possessions, goods and business connections and all other assets to follow right along” (215–16).

Jesus warned against this attitude and practice of life-saving.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. (Mark 8:34–35)

In John 12 we read of some Greeks coming to Philip and telling him, “Sir, we would see Jesus” (v. 21). Philip goes to Andrew, and together they tell Jesus. Jesus’ response is to teach them about his work—that he must die so that salvation may come to many—and what this would mean for those who would follow him. “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (v. 25). The church world today would say that Jesus needed some work on his presentation when winning souls. Evangelism committees today like to spend more time grilling hot dogs for the neighbors than they do warning men who would join them that they will lose their lives.

### Most Stay

Men today give all kinds of reasons that they cannot leave the PRC. There is work yet to be done! More protests and appeals are coming! That sounds good, but those are just excuses. The reason not to leave the PRC is because if you do so, you will lose your life. If you had a name before, you won’t anymore. Your business will suffer. Former friends and family will disassociate from you and shun you. The sense of security that you have being in a large denomination

<sup>7</sup> Russell Dykstra, “Synod 2018: Obedience and Covenant Fellowship,” *Standard Bearer* 94, no. 18 (July 2018): 415.

<sup>8</sup> See John Calvin, *Come Out from Among Them: Anti-Nicodemite Writings of John Calvin* (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001), 221. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this book are given in text.

with plenty of clergy and money and people and buildings will evaporate overnight. The reason men don't leave the PRC today is because they love the lives they have built, and they don't want to put them at risk.

Some men acknowledge there to be a problem in their denomination, but they have just a few more questions they need answered. And a few more. And a few more after that. They do an awful lot of learning but are never quite able to come to the knowledge of the truth (II Tim. 3:7). The reality? Their questions are just a pretense to allow them to continue saving their lives. They are asking "not to know the truth, but to get an answer to their liking." So they stay, and God sees to it that they get what they want. "And our Lord, in order to punish them for their hypocrisy, lets them find what they were seeking. Yet this is only unto their more grievous confusion" (66).

For others the excuse they give to save their lives is that the way that the reformation took place was all wrong. They will tell you that the words that were used were too harsh, or the proper order was not followed. Like one man said, "If I have to leave, I will do it the right way!" There is nothing new under the sun. Men like that have plagued the church since time immemorial. Just as in the days of Calvin, so too today, there are those who "wait without doing much of anything, to see if there will be some sort of nice reformation. They have no stomach to busy themselves in it, as long as they see that it is dangerous" (107).

Some men waver, making this confession one day and that confession the next day. They are forever being tossed about and end up paralyzed, so that they do nothing at all. They can expect more wavering. "However, one must not wonder too much at such inconsistency. It is the true reward of all who are not grounded in God's truth: God avenges himself on them by causing them to be always wavering and contradicting themselves in their conduct" (46).

For those who once knew the truth and turned their backs on it for the sake of ease for

them and their children, God gives them over to something as well. "God has let them stumble into an abyss of darkness, depriving them of the knowledge which he had formerly given them. At last the devil possessed them, to incite them against the gospel and make them persecute with rage and furious cruelty the doctrine they had known to be of God" (49). What an irony: those to whom the members of the true church once looked for help will be the same ones who will be their cruelest adversaries.

The false church also has a security about it that is rather comforting. There is nothing tenuous about membership or life in a false church. Ministers may come and go; members may come and go; but the institution is secure. You will never have to hear these words in the PRC: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. 4:3). Or the New Testament equivalent: "It will never last." But you will hear that in a true church. Who wants to join himself to something that seems so weak and frail and that has no strength? This explains too why men go back to the PRC, having once left it. It is the same as Rome. There is an appearance of strength that is comforting to the flesh. The PRC and other denominations like it will never be reduced to nothing in the eyes of the world, as Belgic Confession 27 says will be the case of the true church.

The false church may not have Christ or godliness, but they sure have a form of it (II Tim. 3:5). Consider these stirring words at the beginning of two of their synodical gatherings:

As office bearers in our churches we are grateful to our God that He will use us for the weighty task of promoting those matters which affect the well-being of our churches.

We come together as churches, and this fact delineates our position and also designates our calling. We are gathered here and united by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We profess only One as our Master, there is only One who is our

Heavenly Father. Therefore there are no fathers or masters among us. Christ is King and His Word our law.

The task that awaits us is a weighty task. In this, the broadest assembly of our churches, we are not to ask what I want or desire, but rather what is the will of my King?

In all of our discussions and decisions Synod must be guided by the principles of the Word of God, His revealed will. I speak of principles. We do not find a literal rule for everything in His Word. In no instance may we give priority to human wisdom, so that we make ourselves guilty and give cause for the Lord to cast greater clouds of darkness upon us. For this reason we have all the greater need for the rich grace of the Holy Spirit. So often we expose ourselves to the danger of placing our own opinion in conflict with the will of God and give priority to our own point of view...

Having come together for the task, we are called to apply the gifts that our God has given us. However, the pressing need of our hearts calls us first of all to turn to the Lord in humble prayer so that the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so sorely needed, may be granted to us. May that Spirit be in our midst from beginning to end so that all we do may contribute to the prosperity of our churches and the praise of His Name, who purchased us with His precious blood and has paid the price for our sins.

Come, let us unite ourselves in prayer to the God of all grace. It is His eternal pleasure to hear us, who are unworthy in ourselves, and to use us within His Kingdom. For this reason He will grant us our petition. Let us then lay our petitions before Him, even though we can do this only in an imperfect manner.

Or this:

There is work, much work. For the most part it is difficult work. You are in need of much grace and wisdom. However it is also glorious work, because it is the work of the Lord. You are coworkers with God. It is a great honor to be engaged in that work. More excellent work does not exist. Your work is of greater significance than that of the captains of industry in this large world city. Therefore work with all your might. And direct your gaze toward the great Shepherd of the sheep, who also in the midst of most difficult labor assures you: I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

What grand words! What stirring words! Surely no one could take these words on their lips and do anything else than please the Lord God in heaven with their decisions! These were the remarks at the beginning of the Christian Reformed synods of 1924 and 1926, where they adopted the false doctrine of common grace and threw out the prophets God had given them to lead them into the truth.<sup>9</sup> A form of godliness—but only a form.

### Some Go

Some do leave, of course. But their leaving too is an exercise in life-saving. The controversy in the PRC has been like a get-out-of-jail-free card. This is their opportunity to leave. Now they have an excuse. Looking around at the ecclesiastical landscape like a man would look at a cruise ship buffet table, they pick a church to attend. The truth may be above all, according to the Belgic Confession, but it's not a factor when it comes to determining one's church membership. If the last letter is "C," you can fill in the first two letters with whatever suits you best, whether U R or C R or O P—any of them will do. There are a lot of good churches out there, after all. Conservative churches! That is how, overnight, a Reformed man can become a Presbyterian man. Or a man can join a church that teaches exactly

<sup>9</sup> *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1924*, 4–5; *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1926*, 6.

that which the man condemned only a few months ago. It explains how a man can sit at the Lord's supper with adulterers who are not in the least bit sorry for their adultery and who would tell you if you asked them that they plan on continuing in their adultery for the rest of their lives and that God approves and is happy about their adultery. I refer, of course, to the sin of divorce and remarriage.<sup>10</sup> These men, who only a few months before considered divorce and remarriage to be sin, now start to equivocate. Excuses follow. "I can't be responsible for what those members do!" But what puts the lie to their excuses is that they would never tolerate a homosexual sitting down with them at the table of the Lord. Oh no, then they would rise up in holy horror! But all that means is that one sin offends their sensibilities, and the other one does not. They will be the judge of which sins are acceptable. Men who once confessed that God loves only the elect now are comfortable in a church that teaches that God loves all men. Men who once thought it a tenet of orthodoxy that God desires the salvation of only the elect now are okay with their children being taught that God desires the salvation of all men but is thwarted in that desire because some stubborn men just will not give their hearts to God. But enough of that. Arguing theology with those men is a fool's errand. They did not join that church because it taught this, that, or the other thing. They joined that church to save their lives. Man had a life to save for himself and his family, and everything else had to give way in the pursuit of that life-saving.

How refreshing it would be for those who stay in a false church or who join a church to save their lives to just come out and say, "I am in this church because my life is easier here."

Life-saving lives within us all. We want Christ, and we want all of our things. We soon tire of controversy and hard looks. We love our relationships, and the thought of being estranged from those we love is abhorrent to us. Surely God would not

require that of us? But this is not a new thing. Calvin wrote of this when he said,

God would not have his children seek him through lovely meadows or pretty, pleasant woods, but by way of harsh and rough regions...and all this to exercise their faith, to prove the zeal and desire they have to reach him...let us recognize that God did not just start today to deal with his believers like this, and let us take heart and follow after those who have gone before us so long ago. (211)

Calvin was writing to people in France who did not have a true church that they could attend. He told them to move to a place where they could worship God in spirit and in truth. And then the excuses proliferated like weeds in a garden, as they do today. Calvin exposed the excuses as just that by pointing to three hypothetical situations involving food and drink, possessions, and health. There were those who said they could not leave because of a duty they had to their earthly prince. Today that would find expression in those who say they have family to think about, or their business is there, and therefore they can't leave. To this Calvin said, "I only ask them if they would be stopped by such a scruple if they had nothing to eat or drink at home. There are none who would not boldly permit themselves to leave their country in order not to die of hunger" (202). Calvin exposed the desire and love of men's hearts when he said that "if they were offered six times as many goods in a foreign country, they would have no great problem leaving promptly to take possession" (202). And to those who say, "Well, you won't find a perfect church anywhere, and every church has its problems," Calvin responded that if "it were a matter of their bodies, and someone told them where they might find good doctors, suitable medicines and other helps, would they say that did not interest them, because one can fall ill anywhere?" (207).

<sup>10</sup> "And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11-12).

Many will protest that their decisions regarding church membership have nothing to do with saving their lives. It is their love for God and his truth that compels them! It is just a coincidence that their decision about church membership means that they will never again have to face controversy in the church, they will have everything they could desire for themselves and their families, and never again will anyone look at them side-eyed on account of the church they attend. Relationships will be restored, and life will be much, much easier than they had it before. It just so happens, happily for them, that they can have God's worship and God's truth while also conveniently keeping their lives. These men lie when they say that love for God and his truth compels them. But what else can they do but lie, now that they have chosen their lives over God? And so these men do what man has always done when he must defend the indefensible: he dissimulates. "Were there no fear of loss of life, or goods, or esteem or connections, or the favour of friends, to hinder our freedom to obey God, would one find one in a hundred (yea, in a thousand) who would dissimulate as all presently do?" (76). In other words, if all of these earthly considerations were no longer present, I wonder if men would have to disguise their true motives. These men would do better being silent altogether, for it is not man against whom they lie but the Holy Ghost.

### **Thy Altars, Lord!**

What spirit is it that works in such a man? They would tell you it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. But is it? Would the Holy Spirit, who is "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13), take a man to a church where he knows he will hear error? Would Christ offer his blessing on those who sit at his table as hardened adulterers? Is Christ present in a church that slew his prophets and corrupted his truth? What spirit is it that leads a man to take his children to a church and enroll them in a school where he knows they will hear lies about God—that God loves all men, offers salvation to all men, and sincerely desires the salvation of all men? To ask these questions is to answer them.

In all these decisions there are a lot of things that motivate men, but the one needful thing is noticeably absent. "All languish in their cupidity. Yet none cry out, 'Thy altars, Lord, where are thine altars, my God, my king?' The fact is that they are too much governed by the vanities of the world to obey God" (188). Would to God that the zeal of God's house would consume these men as it did the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they profess to serve.

I hope you find it as refreshing as I do to clear the air on these things. Men maintain membership in a false church, or leave the false church only to join another church where errors are taught and maintained, not because they were led there by the Spirit but because they wanted to save their lives.

### **Truth's Rent**

Those in a true church might ask, "Does it always have to be our lot to be small and despised? Will we ever be able to breathe a sigh of relief and have things easy again? Do things always have to feel so precarious? Can't we have both Christ and our old lives? I'm so weary of the hard looks from former friends and acquaintances; isn't there any way to restore our good name among men and restore the relationships we once had?"

The answer is yes. You can have all of that back. You can go from a small, despised place in the world to a very broad place, and you can have that in a matter of weeks. Just find a church where you know you will never again have to experience controversy, about which no man speaks evil, and that has an air of respectability. It would be best if it had "Reformed" or "Presbyterian" in the name. That way you know it is conservative. Also, make sure it is a church that has some connection to a large, well-established school that has the name "Christian" in it, so that your children can be sure not to experience the least hardship. You will find yourself surrounded by masses of genuinely nice people, and it will not take long for new friendships to blossom. You will never again suffer lack, and nothing you desire will be kept from you.

You will never again have to endure reproach. Your new minister will never confront you with your sin by way of sharp rebuke. His voice will ooze with sentimentality, which will leave you comfortably at ease.<sup>11</sup> He will even sprinkle in a few jokes so you don't take the whole church thing too seriously. Church does not have to be this serious, stuffy place where all you hear about is sin, sin, sin. It can be a fun place to be! You do not need to be united with the church of all ages and sing only psalms; in fact, it will be only on the rarest of occasions that you will sing a psalm at all. This unites you with the church of at least the last few hundred years. You can follow the lead of Isaac Watts (who wrote hymns so he could make David speak the language of a Christian) and sing modern hymns instead of the 150 psalms of David. Instead of the sweet psalmist of Israel, you can fill your soul and the souls of your children with the songs of Keith and Kristyn Getty, Dawn Rodgers, Eric Wyse, Bethel Music, and Chris Tomlin. Some of these songs will cause a tear to roll down your cheek, and you will feel very warm inside. You will never again be an offense to anyone. No one will cast you out of their fellowship or spit out your name as an evil thing. All men will speak well of you. No one will hate you. Some things that are done or said in that church will cause you discomfort, but that will go away with time. You will grow to love what you are hearing, and you will rejoice that your children get to hear it. Oh yes, you can have all that in no time at all. Dietrich Bonhoeffer may have said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come, and die,"<sup>12</sup> but who cares what Derek Bonweffer said. You can have Christ *and* keep your life.

And all it will cost you is Christ.

It is not the reproach of man that the faithful child of God endures. When the child of God goes outside the camp and suffers, it is not because he himself is there; it is because Christ is there.

It is the reproach of Christ. The child of God is made partaker of Christ's sufferings. It is not your name that men cast out as evil. It is Christ's name. It is not your back on which the stripes were first laid, however those stripes might manifest themselves; it was the back of Jesus Christ on which those stripes fell. It is not your cross to bear, but it is Christ's cross that he bore. The afflictions are not yours but Christ's.<sup>13</sup> A life of ease can be yours, and all it will cost you is Christ.

John Calvin called the opposition, suffering, and hardship "truth's rent" (109). When the truth is proclaimed and confessed, this comes with a cost, or "rent." Jesus himself promised this. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24–25). There is a cost to membership in a true church. You will find no such cost, or "rent," to saving your life.

### Reason?

To this point I thought that men would be swayed by reason. You know, facts. Take, for example, a recent sermon by Reverend Bruinsma, preached at Randolph PRC.<sup>14</sup> It taught the same error as that condemned by Synod 2018. It taught the same doctrine as that taught by Reverend Overway, that God rewards our imperfect obedience, for which doctrine Reverend Overway got his walking papers. It was as man-centered a sermon as could be. And it was painfully shallow. Mud-puddle shallow. With no objection it could have been preached from any pulpit in any church in the United States today. This is what the people were taught: "God blesses his people, beloved saints, he blesses them when they are faithful to him. And God blesses us too when we walk in faithfulness before him." And this:

<sup>11</sup> Is there a class at seminary that trains men to make their voices that drippy?

<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

<sup>13</sup> See Isaiah 53:5, Isaiah 63:9, Luke 6:22, Hebrews 13:13, and I Peter 4:13.

<sup>14</sup> Wilbur Bruinsma, "Daniel's Firm Conviction," sermon preached August 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMiXI8ecKN4&t=5259s>.

But God does reward us for our faithfulness to him. He doesn't always reward us in this life, but he does reward us. He rewards us in the life to come. We realize that it's a reward of grace. It's only because God works that faithfulness in us so we give him all the credit. But God does reward faithfulness. In his grace God will say to you and to me in that day of days, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your rest."

And to close the sermon, Reverend Bruinsma didn't point the people to Christ and his active obedience, which is imputed to the child of God so that it is only by the righteousness of Christ that the child of God will stand before God. No, he left them with the empty children's ditty "Dare to Be a Daniel," which he learned as child (and which he should have left there).

So, according to my thinking, if I could lay out in an article that the same error condemned by the PRC in 2018 is still being taught today, then people will rise up and protest and appeal; and after being strung out and abused by the assemblies, they will finally leave. But that wasn't the case then, and it isn't the case today. Men and women are not members of the PRC because of the preaching. So as far as Randolph PRC goes, every Sunday, morning and evening, enough people participate in the charade so all seems well. They will keep doing that until the Lord returns. Then, and only then, the charade will end, and the spiritual condition of Randolph PRC will be revealed.

Examples like this could be multiplied. And they have been. Over and over again it has been shown by example, and with chapter and verse, that the PRC has not rent its garments, much less its heart (Joel 2:13), over the error in which it has walked and in which it continues to walk.

Maybe someone would be moved if I provided a more recent example. Well, how about the September 1, 2024, issue of the *Standard Bearer*? You cannot get more recent than that. In this issue Joel Minderhoud has an article titled, fittingly enough, "Venom, Vitriol, and Victory." Joel writes,

As slanderous accusations were used against Jesus Christ Himself by twisting His words (Ps. 56:5) and by falsely accusing Him (Matt. 26:61), so the church will endure similar slander. In theological disputes, for example, one can misrepresent another's position by twisting his words, or even by quoting them directly but out of context, all in order to make the other appear to be teaching something that was never his intention.<sup>15</sup>

Doesn't that sound nice and pious? What a good warning. Joel is even able to work into the article an insinuation that the PRC has been the victim of such slander and misrepresentation. Facts are annoying things, but let's examine them. In the controversy in the PRC, there were those who were misrepresented and slandered, and it was the same people Joel and the rest of the elders at Hope PRC murdered. Multiple times Classis East misrepresented Connie Meyer as she and her husband Neil stood for justification by faith alone. And when it was pointed out by synod that classis had done this, was the response of the delegates of Classis East sorrow and brokenness for their sin? No, they declined to apologize. Although it has been said before, it bears repeating: for a denomination that pins so much of a man's salvation on his act of repenting, the PRC do precious little of it.<sup>16</sup> By definition Joel's words are gross hypocrisy. What the denomination does with such a man is promote him.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Joel Minderhoud, "Venom, Vitriol, and Victory," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 20 (September 1, 2024): 499.

<sup>16</sup> See Dewey Engelsma, "Repentance," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), May 4, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com/2021/05/04/repentance/>.

<sup>17</sup> See Dewey Engelsma, "Trusting in the Shadow of Egypt," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 32 (November 18, 2023): 5–9.

This article prompted a letter, which received a response. See Andrew Lanning, "Letter to the Editor," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 34 (December 2, 2023): 4–9.

Are you getting tired of hearing this? I sure tire of writing about it. It has become clear that any appeal to reason will not accomplish much. Anything, really. The reason is that the true church of Jesus Christ does not have much to offer men and women from an earthly point of view.

### **Not Much for the Flesh**

This is what the true church has to offer. You will experience tribulation (Acts 14:22). You will suffer (Phil. 1:29). Persecution will be your lot (II Tim. 3:12). You will know affliction (I Thess. 1:6). You will lose earthly relationships (Luke 14:26–27). Men will hate you (John 15:19). Your name will be spit out as an evil thing, and men will no longer associate with you. They will remove you from their fellowship (Luke 6:22). Every day your life will be that of a cross (9:23). It will be one of fiery trials (I Pet. 4:12). You will always be small—like two or three olives at the top of the highest bough small (Isa. 17:6). The devil will work without ceasing to destroy and murder you and will use wicked stratagems to do so (Belgic Confession 12). The whole world will rage against you, and at times you will be reduced to nothing (Belgic Confession 27). You will be cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented in this world; and your cheeks will often be tear-stained, which tears will only be finally wiped away in the day of our Lord (Belgic Confession 37). Your ministers will be a spectacle to the world. They will be mocked and viewed as scum (I Cor. 4:9–13). No one will respect or honor you, for you and your fellow members are the empty, foolish things of the world. You will be nothing in the eyes of the world (I Cor. 1:28). You will have triumphs, but it will not be in gold or silver; it will be “in the blood of martyrs” (Calvin, 226). All of this is to say that as a member of a true church, you will live and experience the life of a Christian.

Now compare that with the promise of the false church. None of the things listed above will ever befall you. Isn't that grand? You can have Christ but without all the discomfort. You just have to tolerate lies taught about your Lord. (But don't worry; it won't be long, and you will love

those lies.) If someone brings up suffering or gives an example of someone who has suffered, you can blithely dismiss it and say it was their foolishness that was the cause, or they made a big deal out of nothing, and they got what was coming to them. That was the approach in Calvin's day when he was accused of sending “poor folk to the slaughter for the sake of piddling and childish trifles” (24). It is the approach today of those who rather like their easy existence and would prefer not to see it disturbed.

The true church of Christ cannot compete with that. Not from an earthly perspective. “Hey, come over here! You will be tormented and lose everything!” Nobody is answering that call, even if you try to show them that spiritually it is heaven on earth, “for who, I ask you, are we that should be witnesses of the truth of God, and stewards charged to uphold his cause? Here are some miserable earthworms, creatures full of vanity, utter liars; and God would have us defend his truth, which is an honour which even the angels of heaven do not enjoy. Should not this sole consideration set us on fire to offer ourselves to God for him to use us as he pleases in such an honourable cause?” (162). That is indeed stirring, but feelings only last a few minutes and certainly not long enough for a man to tell his spouse, “I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_ Church on Sunday because it manifests the marks of the true church, and that is where Christ is, and that is where I must be.” Eloquence or reason will not convince anyone. If a man's coming back from the dead cannot do it (Luke 16:19–31), then words on a paper certainly aren't going to either.

### **The Work of the Spirit**

There are things difficult to understand (II Pet. 3:16). Discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in a man or a church is not. It is as plain as seeing whether a bush produces grapes or thorns, figs or brambles. Take the work of a church and hold it up against the mirror of the word of God, and what you see is a true church or a false church, according to her marks. A man said to me recently that the marks of the true church are really just the marks of Christ. I found that to be

ever so lovely. Why join yourself to a true church that manifests the marks? Because Christ is there, and where would you rather be than where Christ is? Loss? Sure, there may be some loss, but don't you see that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18)?

For those who leave the PRC for another denomination that corrupts the gospel, you would now join yourself to a church where you know (you know!) you will hear error? And such error that, if you had heard it in your previous church, you would have been on the elder's doorstep on Monday, protest in hand. But now you just ignore it? Don't you know the joy of hearing Christ's voice, of hearing the truth of God's word set forth without error, truth that sets before you Christ and him crucified and him alone? You would leave that for some piddling shiny things that your flesh and the world tell you are important? You would save your life, which is only a vapor and like the grass, so that today it is here and tomorrow it is gone? Ignore for a moment what spirit is in your church; my question is, "What spirit is in you?"

My desire is that men would hear what we hear every Sunday at Remnant Reformed Church. We hear the voice of Christ in the preaching. It is a feast. I want that for you. In the spirit of II Corinthians 5:20, I plead for you to be motivated not by a consideration of your life and your things but by a love for Jesus Christ and him alone. What do you have to lose? Your life? What is that compared to the immeasurable riches of Christ? To those who have been scattered by the false church, it is grievous what you have had to endure. But brothers and sisters, don't exchange one false church for another! By joining yourself to a church irrespective of what is taught there and in spite of the error that you know is taught there, don't you see that you do despite to the Holy Ghost, who is the Spirit of truth? Christ has done you no injustice, neither has anything befallen you that was not foretold, "for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to

believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29).

I said earlier that no man would answer the call to come to a true church of Jesus Christ. If it is only a man calling, then it is true: no man will heed that call. But when that call is carried by the breath of God, who moves and acts as he wills and carries that call effectually into the hearts of his people, which call no man can resist, then that man will suffer the loss of all things for the sake of hearing the gospel purely preached and will do so with the joy of the Lord in his heart. This is a blessed comfort, for as the members of a true church would tell you, they love their lives as much as, if not more than, the next man. But praise be to God that the way of a man is not in himself, and neither is it in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23).

The work of the Holy Spirit is mysterious, but the fruit that such work bears in the life of a man or a church is not. It is work that leads the church not into error but into truth (John 16:13–15). It is the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isa. 11:2). Although God's people are given the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, the Spirit gives to them teachers—who may for a time through persecution be "removed into a corner" but who are soon restored to again teach the church, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (30:20–21).

I read what is going on in the PRC as they flounder about trying to find someone to fix them. My heart breaks to read of those who have suffered abuse trying themselves to do the work that the shepherds of the church ought to have done. But there is no help to be found in the PRC, where the Spirit of Christ does not dwell. For it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ in the heart of the faithful pastor who preaches "the gospel to the poor" and who is sent to "heal the brokenhearted." Only the gospel can knit the brokenhearted, bring "deliverance to the captives," and give sight to those who are blind. Only the pure gospel can "set at liberty them that are bruised" and proclaim "the acceptable year of the Lord"

to the children of God (Luke 4:18–19). Can you imagine anything more beautiful? Sure, you will lose a few things, but what is that in comparison to the freedom promised by the gospel? Are you grieving? Jesus has sent his Spirit, the Comforter, not to make your earthly life easier but to “teach you all things”; and what does the Spirit teach but those things taught us of Christ? (John 14:26). There is no strength in man; why then do you continually look to man for your help? Your faith “should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). Where else will your faith be strengthened than in a place where the gospel is purely preached, which preaching is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16)? You who have been anointed

by the Holy Spirit, don’t you know that “the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie” (1 John 2:27)? Why do you tolerate lies being taught to you and your children and “spend money for that which is not bread” and expend yourself “for that which satisfieth not?” (Isa. 55:2).

It is the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ who works in a true church to bring the members Christ and him crucified, to the care of their souls in this life and the next.

Beloved brothers and sisters, “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

—DE

## THE ALCOVE

Last week as our industrious copyeditor was reviewing the latest *Banner* article by Herman Hoeksema, her eye lit upon the below note from the editor in that issue of the *Banner*, and she pointed it out to the undersigned. The article caught our attention because it mentioned Hope church. At the time of the article’s publication—April 22, 1920—Hope was still a relatively new congregation. She had been established four years earlier, in 1916, as Hope Christian Reformed Church at River Bend and by 1920 was still waiting for the Lord to provide her with her first pastor. After waiting two more years yet, God provided Hope with recent seminary graduate George M. Ophoff, who was ordained as Hope’s first minister early in 1922. A short two years later, in 1924, Reverend Ophoff and Hope’s consistory were cast out of the Christian Reformed denomination due to their opposition to the Christian Reformed dogma of common grace. Hope would join with other like-minded churches to form the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1925.

The below article from 1920 might prove interesting to readers of *Reformed Pavilion* because

several of our readers were members of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in their lifetimes. And whereas Hope church had been persecuted by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924, Hope church became the persecutor one hundred years later. Harrying and ecclesiastically murdering the faithful members among her for their opposition to Hope’s preaching of conditional covenant fellowship, Hope PRC participated in casting out those who are now members of Remnant Reformed Church. Just as surely as the CRC discarded Hope in 1924, so Hope discarded her members in 2021. But the Lord is always merciful to his remnant, gathering Hope’s outcasts in 2021 as the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and then gathering them again in 2023 as Remnant Reformed Church when the RPC had cast them out.

The below article from 1920 also might prove interesting to readers of *Reformed Pavilion* because it mentions the current building where Remnant Reformed Church meets. In the article “the public school” is a reference to what was then called Blair School. Blair School later became Riverbend School. The Riverbend building today houses Pavilion Christian School and is the

meeting place for Remnant Reformed Church on Sundays. In the inscrutable operations of the Lord's providence, the congregation of Remnant meets today in the very same building where her spiritual forebears met over a century ago.<sup>1</sup>

But mostly the below article from 1920 might prove interesting to readers of *Reformed Pavilion* because it illustrates the spiritual emptiness and vapidness of the Christian Reformed Church already in 1920. The editor who penned the article, Dr. Henry Beets, was one of the most prominent men in the Christian Reformed Church. Editor of the *Banner* for twenty-five years, stated clerk of the CRC for forty years, and even knighted by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands for his support of Dutch culture in the United States, Henry Beets' name was synonymous with the Christian Reformed Church. But when this paragon of the denomination turned his attention to the "progress" of the churches, all he could see were dollars and buildings and Reed organs and windows and furnaces. Apart from a notice about good attendance and fine attention at the worship services, there is not a mention of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ that saves sinners.

One might argue that Beets' article was meant as more of a status report than a spiritual report and that one should not read too much into a mere status report. Well, perhaps. After all, it is good to thank God when he provides a building. But consider that the CRC in 1920 had just been convulsed by a controversy over premillennialism and had deposed a minister over it. And consider that in 1920 a professor in the seminary was busy teaching the ministers-to-be that the miracles in scripture could be explained naturally rather than supernaturally. And consider that by 1920 young Herman Hoeksema had already noted several times in his *Banner* articles that Christian Reformed people were not very Calvinistic (Reformed) in their thinking. And consider that by 1920 Abraham Kuyper's common grace vision for the church was widely accepted

by the majority of Christian Reformed theologians, which vision committed them to a constant preoccupation over fitting in with the world. What filled the CRC in 1920 was not sound doctrine and zeal for God's truth and love of the gospel more than one's life. What filled the CRC in 1920 was the balance sheet and the bricks and building a bridge to the surrounding world.

In such a climate the burning question in a status report on the churches should have been "But do they have the gospel?!" That is, do the churches repudiate the premillennialism that Harry Bultema tried to introduce? Do the churches repudiate the notion of Prof. Ralph Janssen that the miracles in the Bible have a scientific explanation? Do the churches repudiate Abraham Kuyper's invention that God has a common favor for all men, which common favor is the basis for the church's cooperating with all men in building an earthly kingdom? Do the churches have the gospel, or don't they?

But in the spiritual climate of the CRC in 1920, reporting on the gospel that the churches believed was best avoided. Much better it would be to traipse through the many thousands of dollars that lined the collection plates and the fine earthly property that they owned. In Editor Beets' report of the churches, the spiritual leadership in the CRC showed itself to be as spiritually bankrupt as the denomination that it represented. Looking back from our vantage point a century later, by 1920 the CRC was already shockingly carnal in how she counted progress in the churches. How gracious was God in giving the reformation of 1924, in which the CRC unmasked herself as false by casting out Herman Hoeksema, George M. Ophoff, Hope church, and others but in which God preserved his true church by causing the Protestant Reformed Churches to be born.

Let the children of the reformation of 1924 take note. Church institutions that were once true die and become false, even though they exist in their institutional forms until the Lord returns.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is at least one family at Remnant that traces not only its *spiritual* lineage to the Hope PRC of yesteryear but traces also its *family* lineage there. Jantje (Jennie) Engelsma was a charter member of Hope PRC. Her great-great-grandson Dewey Engelsma and his family now worship in the same building at Riverbend where she once worshiped.

<sup>2</sup> See *From the Ramparts* elsewhere in this issue.

Let not the church ever find her safety in her form, whether it be her money or her men. Let her not glory in her coffers but in the cross. And let the true church find her safety in this alone, that she is built upon the cornerstone, who is the

Lord Jesus Christ, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her.

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

—AL

## Jenison and Its Daughters

by Henry Beets

Note from the editor in *The Banner*, April 22, 1920

When the Hope church, in Tallmage township, across the Grand River from Jenison, Mich., was to be organized, it was feared by some that the loss of a few families in “River Bend” would seriously hurt the Jenison congregation. Again when Wyoming Park was to form a separate church, some were afraid it might break down the Jenison congregation. Well, happily, it did not. Some time ago we learned from an annual report that its congregational offerings leaped from less than \$2,000, five years ago, to considerably over \$4,000, in fact nearly \$4,500, and its offerings for outside purposes nearly trebled.

That certainly shows that the church instead of going backward is forging ahead right along. No wonder. The good Book says: “There is one that scattereth and yet increaseth.”

There is something else we rejoice in, knowing something of Jenison’s condition. It is that all services, on Sundays and weekdays, except the Sunday morning worship, and the Ladies’ Aid, are now conducted in the language of our land, and that to the general satisfaction. Who says we are “slow” in Michigan? We congratulate Rev. Westenberg and his people. Through the kindness of Rev. Noordewier, one of its former pastors, we gladly give a picture on our front page, of the Jenison church building—also considerably improved in recent years, especially as to basement facilities.

And what about Jenison’s eldest daughter, “Hope,” in Tallmage township? We officiated there in the gospel last Sabbath, and were pleased to see surprising progress. The meeting

places are no longer the public school and bro. R. Nieuwenhouse’s front room, but a neat church building, of cement blocks. It contains a neat auditorium, and high, lighted by fine windows.

Recently the commodious basement was finished and a furnace installed. And Sunday morning a fine Reed organ was used for the first time.

Better than everything else, the attendance was encouraging and the attention fine. Last summer there was quite an ingathering of souls in “Hope,” through the instrumentality of Student Medendorp. The folk in “River Bend” are glad he comes there again this summer.

And what about Wyoming Park?

Strictly speaking it is not Jenison’s daughter as much as Grandville Ave’s, and that congregation too, by the way, has not suffered because of its willingness to help the Wyoming people get a new church.

Well, Wyoming Park is very busy nowadays in erecting a 40x46 ft. frame church edifice. The windows are being put in and practically all the material is on the ground. The Holland services in the morning, in the neighboring Schoolhouse, are somewhat better attended than the afternoon services in English. But the prospects are good, and the people have in mind to work and push ahead.

Both in Wyoming Park and in River Bend the people are very happy because the Rev. J. R. Brink continues his work in the home mission field of the Grand Rapids Classes.

We share heartily in their joy.

EDITOR

**Article LXXIII. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)**

**T**he unity of the counsel of God was such, so we found, that the glory of God dominates the entire counsel as its purpose. All other component parts of the counsel of God must be and are subservient to that highest purpose of all. There is, in the light of Scripture, no room for doubt in this respect.

That unity of the counsel of God may further be pointed out by saying that, according to the counsel of God, the highest glory of God is to be manifested in Christ Jesus. The Son is to assume human flesh, is to unite in Himself the divine and the human in unity of Person. In that Immanuel all things are to be gathered together again in one, both that are in heaven and that are on earth, Eph. 1:10. He is to be the Head of the covenant of grace and the King of the Kingdom. For that purpose He is given a people, for that purpose He is given the kingdom by the determinate counsel of God. Unto that purpose this people and this kingdom are created. To that purpose even the work of the devil and the power of sin are made subservient.

All things are ours, but we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Such is the rule according to the determinate counsel of God.

Now, in close connection with the confession of the unity of God's decree stands the other truth of the all-comprehensiveness of that counsel. By it we mean that nothing whatsoever is excluded from the control of the decree of God, that all things in heaven and on earth exist and move according to God's irresistible will.

This truth always was the deepest source of joy and comfort for the people of God. For it tells them that also the enemy is not allowed to move

beyond the limits of that counsel. It assures them that they and all things are for time and eternity in good hands. In times of adversity it makes them patient, for they know that back of the darkest gloom, severest pain, keenest grief stands the counsel of the All-wise and Most Gracious, guiding them aright, and causing all things to work together for their good. In times of hatred and persecution on the part of the world it makes them bold and strong, for they know that the devil and his host and all the anti-Christian power of earth and hell cannot move the smallest fraction of an inch beyond the determinate counsel of God. In times of prosperity it makes them thankful, for they know that all they receive comes to them according to the determinate counsel of God. And with regard to their salvation they give glory to God alone, for they are assured that only that determinate, all-comprehensive counsel of God saved them and led them on to glory.

No, truly, the child of God does not wish to wrest anything whatever from the power of that determinate counsel. He is satisfied, he finds rest, only in the confession that this counsel is all-comprehensive, indeed!

It was this faith that caused Job, the day that he is deprived of all his possessions, that he bemoans the loss of ten children, to bow down in worship and say: "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." That the Lord had given was perhaps easy to acknowledge. But how about the fact that the Lord had taken away? Was it also as plain? Had not the Chaldeans come to steal the camels and kill the servants watching by them? Had not the Sabeans taken away the oxen and the asses?

Had not fire from heaven burnt the sheep and the destructive desert wind killed his children? And after all, if any agent must receive the blame of having deprived Job of all his possessions, is it not the devil that is jealous of Job's righteousness? Yet, Job comprises all these agencies under the power and control of One when he says: "the Lord hath taken away." He was aware that nothing could go beyond the control of God's all-comprehensive counsel!

And, surely, a miserably dualistic world it would be if the Lord gave and the devil could take away! A world without comfort, without stability, without rest for the children of God it would be, if the power and will of God and the efforts of the devil had to be placed dualistically side by side. If the Almighty would build and the devil could destroy; if the Almighty would save and the devil would ruin; if the Almighty would make His counsel and the devil could frustrate it, there would be no rest for the present, no hope for the future, no certainty with regard to the coming of the kingdom of God. And, therefore, the child of God, not only because he is compelled by Scripture, but also because the confession is the deepest joy of his heart, maintains gladly: the counsel of God is all-comprehensive.

It embraces, it determines absolutely all that exists and all that ever will be, nothing excluded. The counsel includes the whole of creation and all of providence. All things are created according to that counsel. The form in which they were created, the purpose for the which they were made, their several relation to one another and to the whole of creation, their history, development and final destiny, — all these things are according to the determinate counsel of God.

It includes all the history of every individual man, of all nations, of the whole of mankind, nothing excluded. The time of our birth and of our death; the circumstances under which we enter into the world; the power of body and mind with which we are endowed; our entire individual history and our eternal destiny, — all these are according to the determinate counsel of God.

War and peace, the course and outcome of battles, the rise and fall of nations, leagues and alliances, all these develop and take place according to the determinate counsel of God.

The entire history of the whole of mankind from its inception to its culmination, with its development along the lines of election and reprobation; yea, of the devil and his host as well as of the myriads of holy angels, it all follows the direction of the all-comprehensive counsel of the Almighty!

I imagine, I hear some say: that is boldly presented. Others will go the length of saying: that is a dangerous doctrine. Still others will call this doctrine rank determinism!

I maintain: it is purely Reformed truth. It is the unadulterated truth of the Word of God. It is the soundest and most effectual antidote against the shallow humanism of our age. It is the strength of our life, the joy of our heart, the very substance of our hope.

I know it, the sound, full and consistent maintenance and preaching of the counsel of God is liable to meet with opposition. Personally we have met with this opposition more than once. I do not refer now to opposition from the outside world, of which we cannot expect much Calvinism, but from among our own people, who call themselves Reformed. I have often wondered why this should be the case. Many there are who traditionally call themselves Reformed, but who have never had a grasp of Reformed truth or have gradually weaned away from it. What they like is a mixture of Reformed truth and Arminianism. A good Reformed sermon with an Arminian application. They care not how you emphasize the counsel of God in your sermon, if only you leave it all in the hands of man in your application. They care not how you emphasize the total depravity of man by nature in your discourse, if in your application you only turn Arminian and leave the impression that the sinner in his own strength can turn to Christ. But if you come with the full and pure truth of the counsel of God, that "cor ecclesiae," and actually give it the place it must have as the heart of the church, they say: that is too bold, you leave no chance for the sinner!

Of course, apart from the historical reason that many of our people settled in these parts of the world at a period when the beauty of our Reformed truth had not yet been recovered from under the dust of the eighteenth century, there is also the reason of our strong Arminian surroundings to account for this spirit. We live in the midst of an Arminian world in as far as it is still more or less orthodox. Especially in our age this Arminian spirit is strong. With every breath the Arminian gas is being inhaled, gradually, unnoticeably, but surely poisoning the people of Reformed persuasion. And the result is that many of our people have inhaled more than they are aware of. They still are officially Reformed. They call themselves Reformed, though they do not particularly emphasize it. But in very deed they manifest a strong tendency toward Arminianism and have partly, some even largely, weaned away from the sound doctrine of our Reformed faith.

It is these people that will oppose especially the full and sound presentation of the counsel of God. Some more, others less. And they will think it bold to maintain without wavering: the counsel of God is absolutely all-comprehensive.

Yet we would answer: this is the simple, unadulterated Reformed view of the matter. Nothing is excluded from the control of God's decree.

Of course, all shades and varieties of Pelagians and Arminians and Socinians, when they come into contact with a clear and true presentation of the Calvinistic view, cry out with one accord: Determinism! We could expect nothing else from them. They are only anxious about man, his freedom and his glory. And in their anxiety to maintain the freedom of man they bind the Sovereign God with a thousand fetters! Naturally, they can see nothing but determinism in this consistent conception of God's counsel. Hence, their charge.

Two things, therefore, we will attempt to do, in connection with our treatment of the all-comprehensiveness of the counsel of God. In the first place we will show from Scripture that also this is more than human philosophy. That, in fact, it is divinely revealed truth. In the second place we will attempt to show that the doctrine of the counsel of God, even in its most consistent form, has nothing in common with the philosophy of determinism in any of its forms.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

