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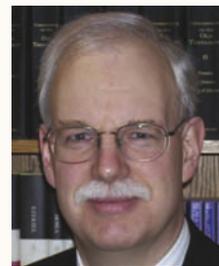
In spiritual matters, things don't change like they do in technology



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Confessions: Spiritual Security Software

The church has some very good spiritual security software

In our computer age, many have become familiar with names like Norton, McAfee, and Kaspersky. These are names of programs that offer various combinations of software to protect your computer from electronic viruses, worms, trojans, or malicious programs designed to steal private information or wreak havoc with your computer system. In order to benefit from such programs, it is necessary that you not only install it on your computer but also that you activate it and keep it current through regular updates. If you do not have at least some basic computer security software in place, then usually it is sooner rather than later that you get troubles with your computer.

In this we can see an analogy with our life as Christians. Our three sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, constantly attack our spiritual *heartware*, trying to pull us away from the Lord and his Word. For this reason we stand in need of some good spiritual software to protect us from spiritual viruses, worms, trojans, or malicious teachings designed to destroy us.

Highly recommended version: TFU

Thankfully the church has some very good spiritual security software. The generic term for this is "the confessions." When you check around, you will see that there are different versions, originating in different parts of the world. The one I am most familiar with, and would heartily recommend, has a track record of stellar service for nearly 400 years and is a product of French, German, and Dutch spiritual faithfulness. The name of this spiritual security software is the Three Forms of Unity, namely, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg

Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. For convenience, it sometimes is referred to as the TFU. As a bonus, with the TFU software you also get the "Ecumenical Creeds" package, that is, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

In the world of computers, technology changes so fast that the product you buy today will be outdated by tomorrow. Therefore, in today's terms, it would seem that when speaking of something with a four hundred year track record, we are dealing with something rather outdated. In spiritual matters, however, things don't change like they do in technology. Sin is not so imaginative. The best it comes up with is new names for the same old errors, counting on the forgetfulness and lack of historical awareness of people.

When properly installed, our spiritual security software will be busy constantly scanning all the information that comes to us, sending warning messages

The confessions were written at times when there were controversies and attacks on the gospel and they staked out their ground against various heresies. Heresies often come like a trojan virus. They come under the guise of being beneficial while the danger is hidden inside. For this reason, heresies are not always



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noticed immediately, often because they are advocated by nice people. When believers in the past saw through these heresies, often after they began to do damage, they then set out the scriptural teaching that serves to this day as a defense against new versions of the same heresy.

For example, the Ecumenical Creeds defended the doctrine of the Trinity over against Arius and his followers. In the sixteenth century, the same heresy was repackaged by Socinius. In our age, that same old heresy has been repackaged by a whole variety of cults, ranging from the Unitarians to the Mormons to the Jehovah's Witnesses. They have the same old lies, just with different names.

As for the Three Forms of Unity, at a time when the doctrine of grace had been obscured by emphasis on works and an attitude towards the sacraments that gave them almost magical power, they defended issues like the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, the total depravity of fallen mankind, the doctrine of justification by faith, apart from works, out of grace. They put the focus back on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when it comes to our salvation. They spoke of the spiritual character of the church, the government by local elders, and the sacraments as means of grace for the strengthening of faith.

Installation, activation, heeding warnings

Now just as with computer security software, this spiritual security software is of no use if it is left sitting on the shelf. It needs to be installed. This is done through faithfully catechizing the youth. A church that fails to catechize its youth makes them vulnerable to every wind of doctrine. Unlike installing a computer program, catechizing takes considerable time. The beauty of catechizing, which is a personal activity in the sense that a minister interacts with the youth, is that it is able to address problems in installation, that is, if questions arise. By having a number of years of catechizing, it is also possible to ensure errors are corrected.

At the same time, an installed program is of no use if it is not turned on. This means that there must

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be an appropriation of what has been taught and a conscious use of what has been taught. It will require some time, but when we conscientiously use what has been taught, after a while it should become second nature. Like computer software, it should run quietly in the background, immediately sending a warning signal when a spiritual virus is detected. This means, for example, that the moment someone speaks about Scripture in a way that undermines its authority or denies its sufficiency in matters of faith and life, a warning message should pop up in our mind. The same should happen when we hear someone speaking eloquently and at great length to redefine the meaning of the six days of creation in order to accommodate evolutionary thinking. In like manner, warning messages should pop up when we hear people undermine the doctrine of justification by faith, infant baptism, or Christian ethics pertaining to the unborn or human sexuality. The alarm bells will ring, even though the people promoting such views may come across as nice people and use Christian terminology. Indeed, when properly installed, our spiritual security software will be busy constantly scanning all the information that comes to us, sending warning messages.

There is one more aspect to consider in light of our analogy, namely, the matter of updates. This is a key feature of computer security software. Daily there may be several updates. When the confessions are used properly, however, any user realizes there is no need for daily updated virus definitions because they root us in the teachings of Scripture and enable us to pick out new versions of the old heresies and errors. What is necessary is regular refreshing of the spiritual security software. This is done by faithfully attending church as well as through reading of good literature. An important aspect of preaching, as well as good literature, is that it helps in learning about current versions of old heresies.

We have been richly blessed by our spiritual security software, the TFU. Like any software, however, for it to do its work, you have to turn it on and listen to its warnings. It has a track record that, when used properly, it is a tool that protects the believer individually and the church collectively. By heeding the warnings signals, it will keep its users close to our Lord and his Word.





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MATTHEW 13:52

A Reason to Rejoice

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Philippians 4:4

Are we known as a joyful people? At first glance, our worship services are pretty sombre. In speaking about our faith, we tend to be fairly reserved. Even when we have "the celebration" of Lord's Supper, we don't look too celebratory at all. But is joy really missing from us? Do the glad tidings of salvation actually bring us gladness of heart? They can and they should!

Some will say that our services must be conducted in good order: we don't want to go the way of the "happy-clappy" churches. Others might insist that our personal experience as believers isn't so important: it's all about God's glory, not our changing feelings. Still others could point out that many of us are of Dutch descent, a people famous for their reserved character. Yet none of this can excuse the sin of a joyless life. For God *commands* us to rejoice.

Today there are countless, but ill-founded, reasons for joy. One person's joy comes from those temporal things he has in his possession. Another's is based on the pleasures she's experiencing. It's nice while it lasts but when the moment passes, so does the joy.

So we need a better reason for our joy, a more durable cause. But – and here's the unexpected twist – God says that true joy needs to begin with sadness. We grieve on account of our many transgressions. We know it from the Catechism, which describes repentance like this: "It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have

offended God by our sin" (Q&A 89). The Bible shows us what our sins have done: separated us from God. It tells us what our sins deserve: everlasting condemnation.

Begin with weeping! But then let that sorrow lead you to repentance (2 Cor 7:10). See the ugliness of what you've done and then run to the Lord for mercy. For He will dry your tears and pardon your sins. And He will give you joy.

Here then, is the source of true rejoicing: it's found only through a right relationship with the living God. What joy there is in knowing the Lord and the greatness of his perfections! We rest ourselves in his constant faithfulness. We expect blessings from his everlasting goodness. We are lifted up by his almighty power and instructed by his flawless wisdom.

Those who begin with grief can go on to this new joy, because they've tasted from the cup of salvation in Christ. This is why it says, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4). Who is "the Lord" in that text? It is Jesus, our Lord and Saviour! "Rejoice in the cross," Paul is saying. "Rejoice in the empty tomb! Rejoice that Jesus sits enthroned in heaven above!"

This is a central theme of Philippians, sometimes called Paul's "Letter of Joy" because the "joy" keeps bubbling to the surface. And Paul's saying much more than, "Be joyful in what you have or feel." For was Paul sailing the blue waters of the Mediterranean as he writes? Was he so happy because he got a pay raise from his sending

church? On the contrary, Paul is stuck in a prison in Rome. Chains hang on his wrists as he scratches out these words. He's nearing the day of his execution, it seems. His earthly situation could not be worse. And yet the joy overflows. For he knows that the most important thing in this life is our right standing with the Almighty God. In Christ, Paul and every believer can rejoice always.

So, to ask it again, are we known as a joyful people? Joy in the Lord might not put a permanent smile on your face. And there will surely come sufferings and persecutions and tears. But we remember our new status: we have a faithful Saviour and we belong to Him for now and for always.

This makes every average, ordinary day, into a day of new mercies! Getting out of bed each morning, beginning our tasks once more, we can say it with the Psalmist, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad" (118:24). Let's rejoice, because it's another day of grace in Jesus Christ.

And then take the joy you have today as a down payment. The best is yet to come! Imagine a place where there are no more tears. Imagine a place without brokenness and pain. Imagine a place where we'll have full and unending joy because finally we'll see our God, even face-to-face. How long will we rejoice? We will rejoice in the Lord always and we will rejoice in the Lord forever.





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Inerrancy – Lessons from History

(Part 1 of 6)

The reports for Synod 2010 are now circulating among the churches. Among these reports, one can find a Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) – this is intended to function as the church order for a merged federation of Canadian Reformed and United Reformed churches. The PJCO contains an Introduction which provides the biblical and confessional basis, the historical background and foundational statements for the document. In the section regarding biblical and confessional basis, we find the following statement: “We Reformed believers maintain that the standard for personal, public and ecclesiastical life is God’s Word, the inspired, infallible and inerrant book of Scripture.” Some concerns have been expressed not only about the status of this Introduction in general, but also about the language used in this statement, particularly the word “inerrant.”



Some have claimed that the Canadian Reformed Churches, while holding to infallibility, do not officially hold to a doctrine of inerrancy. They say that biblical inerrancy is not found in our confessions. Consequently, the Introduction to the PJCO seems to be introducing extra-confessional binding. Through the PJCO, the Canadian Reformed Churches will be committed to inerrancy, whereas we never have been before. What motivates this uneasiness about inerrancy seems to be a latitudinarian impulse that wants to make or maintain room for certain controversial views.

In this series of articles, I propose to discuss the topic of inerrancy. I want to define it, explore what our confessions actually say on this topic, and most importantly look at the history of what the Christian Reformed Church has done with inerrancy in the last half century. I intend to argue that giving up the doctrine of inerrancy will inevitably result in a wrong direction. Whatever else we think about it and the merger/unity process in general, the PJCO is right to include a commitment to inerrancy.

Definition

As we begin exploring this topic, it’s important that we be clear about our definitions. Since he has been so highly influential in Reformed circles, it’s appropriate that we refer to Edward J. Young. Young was one of the founders of Westminster Theological Seminary and was a professor of Old Testament there. In his excellent book, *Thy Word is Truth*, Young set out to define and defend a biblical doctrine of inerrancy.

He defined it thus: “By this word [inerrant] we mean that the Scriptures possess the quality of freedom from error. They are exempt from the liability to mistake, incapable of error. In all their teachings they are in perfect accord with the truth” (113). Young went on to write a fuller explanation of what this entails:

The Bible is inerrant. That Word which the Holy God gave to man is a Word that in all its

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New Worship Times:

Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church will now be held at 9:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., effective January 24, 2010.

statements is to be trusted. Upon its utterances we may fashion our lives and actions. He who dogmatically proclaims the presence of error in the Bible has, as a matter of fact, arrogated to himself an amount of knowledge which he does not actually possess. We today are living almost two thousand years after the latest books of Scripture were written. Can we transport ourselves back to the days of Scripture and speak with such positiveness upon those days that we can infallibly point out what is error and what is not? Those who think that they can do this, often give little evidence of understanding the nature of what they are doing. As a result of further study and also as a result of archaeology much of what formerly was regarded as error has been demonstrated to be no error at all. Adverse judgments against the Bible have had to be modified, not once or twice, but over and over again. There is no other document from antiquity which for accuracy can even begin to compare with the Bible. When therefore we meet with difficulties in the Bible let us reserve judgment. If any explanation is not at hand, let us freely acknowledge that we do not know all things, that we do not know the solution. Rather than hastily to proclaim the presence of error is it not part of wisdom to acknowledge our ignorance? (185)

Young's book is a must-read for anyone attempting to understand a traditional Reformed approach to the nature and authority of Scripture. It's a classic on the subject that begins where we ought to begin: with what God's Word says about itself. Referring to a variety of Scripture passages, Young makes the case for inerrancy from the Bible itself. Readers who might want to see one of the best biblical cases for inerrancy should read *Thy Word is Truth*.

Committed to inerrancy

Given the definition provided by Young, where do the Canadian Reformed Churches stand with regards to this doctrine? Historically speaking, in 1979, J. Visscher stated what he believed to be "the Reformed position" on this matter. He wrote, "What exactly is our position in the midst of this swirling controversy? It should be one of whole-hearted support for the doctrine of inerrancy and those who promote it. The scriptural passages that have been mentioned, especially 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20, 21; John 10:35; are quite clearly asserting that the Bible is inspired, infallible and inerrant." Visscher went on to argue that the Canadian Reformed are also committed to inerrancy because we hold to Articles 5 and 7 of the Belgic Confession. We will just note here what Visscher wrote – I hope to come back to the Belgic Confession in the next instalment in this series.

Visscher's position might be dismissed as the unofficial, informal statements of one minister. However, at the present day, the Canadian Reformed Churches are officially and publicly committed to the doctrine of inerrancy regardless of what one might think about what Visscher wrote or even the Belgic Confession's statements on Scripture. Indeed, the Canadian Reformed Churches have already committed themselves to inerrancy by applying for and being received into membership in the North American and Presbyterian Reformed Council (NAPARC). NAPARC's constitution includes a commitment on the part of all its members to Scripture being "without error in all its parts," which is simply another way of saying "inerrant." Those who would balk at the inclusion of inerrancy in the PJCO's Introduction should also balk at Canadian Reformed membership in NAPARC.

Is our NAPARC commitment to inerrancy a form of extra-confessional binding? It might be, depending on your view of what the Belgic Confession says. Even if it is, as I've pointed out before, we already have extra-confessional binding in the Canadian Reformed Churches on a number of issues (e.g. homosexual marriage) – and there's nothing wrong with that. We're not only bound to the confessions but also, and more importantly, to Scripture.

Next time, we will briefly look at the Belgic Confession and whether it contains a doctrine of inerrancy.

Note: J. Visscher's two articles on inerrancy appeared in the October 20, 1979 and November 3, 1979 issues of *Clarion*. 



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A Bit of Church History

Doleantie and Union

In a previous article (January 15, 2010) we traced the developments that led to the Secession of 1834 in The Netherlands. Since the truth of God's Word was no longer embraced, many faithful believers under the leadership of men as Rev. deCock departed from the established State Church and formed a new federation of churches. In this new federation of churches, the authority of the Word of God was specifically acknowledged, and the intent categorically expressed to embrace the truths of Scripture as confessed in the three Forms of Unity and worked out in the Church Order of Dort.

Invariably, sin and weakness plagued the "new" church. There were but six ministers, all of them young, and none of them had been trained to think as Reformed confessors; they had to study Calvin's *Institutes* themselves and learn to think according to the patterns of the confessions. The young leaders had different emphases, which in turn led to clashes and friction. Add on top of that the scorn that was publicly heaped on the Seceded people and it becomes obvious that things were not easy for those of our fathers who belonged to these churches. And as if all of that was not enough, problems magnified when many in the Seceded churches, under the influence of the spirit of the times, gave themselves to subjectivism.

Subjectivism

What, you ask, is that?! In time past it had been assumed that churchgoers simply belonged to the Lord and so had forgiveness of their sins and were heirs to life eternal. But with the return to the Word of God in the Secession, this was seen as too simplistic; going to church in itself obviously could not mean that you were automatically right with God. So the leaders of the Seceded churches sought the Bible's answer to how one can be sure of salvation and taught the people of the pew that God was faithful to his promises in the covenant.

But a pendulum on a clock swings from far side to far side. Similarly, a corrective from one extreme leads so often to embracing an opposite extreme. Instead of accepting God's promises in Jesus Christ and insisting that one's confidence about redemption depend on his redeeming work, the leaders in the Secession churches instructed their membership to concentrate on what they experienced within themselves. They took to navel-gazing: was there sufficient sorrow for sin within oneself? Did they receive a "Damascus Experience" (as Saul did in Acts 9) so that they could be really sure that Christ's sacrifice was actually for them (and not just for the neighbour)? Did they receive some vision or voice or dream that gave them proof that God's gospel was really true for them? This is subjectivism, seeking reassurance of God's promises in the feelings and experiences detected in one's own heart.

In varying degree this emphasis found its way through the churches and in varying degree this emphasis was also resisted by faithful covenant preaching. In part because they wanted to stress this emphasis on the soul still more, a group left the Seceded churches in 1841 under the leadership of Rev. L.G.C. Ledeboer. This group became the Reformed Congregations in The Netherlands. Members of this body of churches migrated to North America after World War II and formed The Netherlands Reformed Congregations. Today still the members of these churches search within their own experiences for reassurance that Christ's work on the cross is actually for them. I'll come back to this point momentarily.

Abraham Kuyper

In 1837 Abraham Kuyper was born within the established Reformed Church of The Netherlands – the government recognized State Church, those who did not go along with the Secession of 1834. He was raised to have little respect for the authority of God's Word and much respect for the ability of the human mind to

reason its way to solutions to life's questions. Kuyper, like so many in his church, gave little credence to human depravity and to God's judgment on sin and considered Jesus Christ a good moral teacher. Even so, Kuyper trained for the ministry and was ordained in 1863 in the village of Beesd.

I need to mention here that things were not all peaceful in the church to which Kuyper belonged. Because the ministers largely denied human depravity, there was little emphasis on the need for Christ's atoning work. So church attendance was poor, with the pious meeting instead in little groups to comfort and encourage each other in God's service. As Kuyper settled into his ministry in Beesd he visited those in his congregation who were less than faithful in their church attendance. One senior sister by the name of Pietje Baltus showed Kuyper the truth of the gospel – including the good news of Christ's self-emptying on the cross for sinners' salvation. Under God's blessing the young minister grappled with church fathers as John Calvin and came to faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour for sinners. This change in the preacher invariably changed his preaching also.

After serving his congregation in Beesd for four years, Kuyper moved to Utrecht. Here he developed an interest for politics and began to follow closely what was happening in government circles. In 1870 he moved to Amsterdam to minister to the large congregation of that city. It was while he was in Amsterdam that he began to write a daily paper called *The Standard* and a weekly paper known as *The Herald*. In 1874 he resigned his pastorate in this city to take up a seat in the Dutch parliament. In 1880 he began the Free University in Amsterdam and in 1900 he even became Prime Minister of The Netherlands.

Abraham Kuyper was obviously an enormously gifted man. In his two papers he wrote not only scriptural meditations, but also interacted with theological trends of his day, and gave leadership too in matters of politics, education, science, and so much more. At this point in our story, it's his reaction to the subjectivism mentioned earlier that needs our attention.

Presumptive regeneration

Kuyper learned from Scripture that all mankind had fallen into sin and so joined Satan's side. God, though, in mercy had chosen some people to salvation (election) while He in justice passed other people by (reprobation). So the human race was divided into two groups on the basis of election. On the one side were the believers and on the one side the unbelievers. The believers, said Kuyper, were regenerated, while the unbelievers were not regenerated; the believers had faith, while the unbelievers did not.

Kuyper misrepresented what baptism signified

The question now arises: where do children fit into this? To which camp does your newborn belong? Kuyper answered that believers' children belonged with the believers and then added that the newborn already had faith and was regenerated. No, the faith in the infant's heart was not alive yet and the regeneration was not evident yet, but that will come when the child grows. Kuyper pointed to seeds of grain that archaeologists of his day had found in Egyptian tombs; this grain had lain dormant for years and now when water was added they sprouted and grew. So too with faith, he said; God plants the seed of faith in the heart of the infant and after many years waters it with the preaching of the Word, and behold, the seed of faith sprouts and grows into a living faith. Then the regeneration that God worked in infancy manifests itself in a godly lifestyle. Since the child already has the seed of faith in his heart and so is regenerated, the infant ought also to be baptized – as a sign that God has in fact regenerated the child. Notice: baptism is here not a sign and seal of God's covenant, but is instead a sign and seal of God's accomplished work of regeneration in the child's heart.

But consider now a practical problem. For the sake of the argument, suppose a godly couple is blessed with twins. Both receive the sacrament of baptism to signify that God has already worked faith in their hearts and regenerated them. Some weeks after birth,

one of the twins dies. In your grief you find comfort in the good news of baptism-as-sign-of-regeneration and are assured that this child has gone to be with the Lord in heaven because her heart was regenerated. The other child continues to grow to manhood and – horror of horrors – wants nothing to do with God and his service; the second twin is a drunk and a thief – obviously not regenerated. But what, then, are you to think concerning what you were told when your babies were baptized? Was baptism not a sign that God had regenerated the twins, and wasn't that the ground of your comfort when the first twin died? But if it's evident now that the surviving twin was not regenerated, on what grounds can you maintain that the deceased twin was regenerated – despite the baptism of both? Is the first one then not in heaven after all?

Kuyper answered the question by insisting on a link between baptism and regeneration and then adding that parents when they present their infant for baptism are to *presume* their child is regenerated and so *presume* that the Lord has placed the seed of faith in their infant's heart. That becomes, then, the ground for baptism; parents have their children baptized on the grounds of *presumed regeneration*. They may train up their child on the assumption of his regeneration (and therefore of his election), and may maintain that assumption until it proves to be wrong in adulthood.

This, then, was Kuyper's answer to the subjectivism mentioned earlier. You don't, he said, look inside your soul for signs that Christ's work is for you; you look instead at your baptism – and that's indeed an improvement. But Kuyper misrepresented what baptism signified. He didn't see it as a sign of God's covenant promises (to which you have the obligation to respond through faith), but as sign of a godly work already accomplished in you (which may turn out in later life to be absent after all).

Doleantie 1886

We need to drop this thread on regeneration and assurance for a minute to pick up another subject. The state church (to which Kuyper belonged) didn't insist on the doctrines of Scripture anymore; man was not depraved and so did not have to repent of sin and seek forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Well now, after Kuyper resigned as Minister of the Word in Amsterdam in order to take up a calling as Member of Parliament, he was chosen to the office of elder in his old church. So he got caught up in new developments in church life. It used to be the rule in the State church that anyone wishing to make profession of faith had to confess the doctrine of the

Trinity and agree to maintain this doctrine. As some consistories thought that such a thumbnail doctrine was too sketchy (and so insisted on young people knowing and confessing much more before they would allow profession of faith), church authorities regulated that a member could appear before a more liberal neighbouring consistory and make profession of faith in that church – provided, notice, that his own congregation would provide an attestation testifying to good moral conduct. Then, after professing faith in the liberal congregation next door, the young man could come back and participate in Lord's Supper in his own congregation.

The two churches recognized in each other a kindred love for God and appreciation for his Word

The church in Amsterdam in which Kuyper was an elder refused to permit members to profess the faith if the faith they wanted to profess was nothing more than acknowledging the reality of the Trinity. When such members requested an attestation to the more liberal church next door to make profession of faith in that church, Amsterdam's consistory declined to grant one. The matter of course was appealed to Classis, and there the church authorities (in October 1885) ruled against Amsterdam and demanded that attestations be issued – which Amsterdam again refused to do. One understands that tensions escalated and frustration did too.

In January 1886, the church authorities appointed by Classis suspended eighty of the one hundred office bearers of the church of Amsterdam (including Kuyper) and wrote out the requested attestations for those who wanted to receive admission to the Lord's Table simply on the basis of acknowledging the Trinity. To make sure that the eighty office bearers could not get at the church archives, the Classis authorities took it upon themselves to change the lock of the storeroom, which was promptly removed and a guard posted until a civil judge could rule in the matter. Because the eighty disturbed the peace (it was said), the authorities appointed by Classis now deposed them from their office. Efforts by the eighty to appeal the wrong of it all to synodical assemblies proved futile and so, in December 1886, the deposed office bearers decided to go into "doleantie," a term meaning "complaining, grieving." They complained of wrongs in the church and recognized that they could no longer be one with

the state church. This new church, of course, did not appear only in Amsterdam; through his writing in his papers Kuyper had given ample leadership to many other congregations throughout The Netherlands.

Union 1892

The people of the Doleantie of 1886 quickly established contact with the people of the Secession of 1834. The two churches recognized in each other a kindred love for God and appreciation for his Word. They recognized in each other too a mutual respect for the three Forms of Unity and a desire to live according to the Church Order of Dort. Back in 1834 at the time of their Secession from the State church, the Seceders had stated publicly that they desired to join together with all who would serve God obediently with them on the basis of the Forms of Unity. Here was now a group who desired to serve God faithfully and so the Seceded churches pursued unity with the new Doleantie group. The union became a reality six years later, in 1892.

That's not to say, though, that the Seceded churches were all enthused about Abraham Kuyper. Yes, they had much respect for him as an exceptionally gifted leader, who sincerely sought to give biblical leadership in the questions of the day. But many had great difficulty embracing Kuyper's teachings on presumptive regeneration. Looking inside oneself for evidence that one was actually redeemed by Jesus' blood did not give the comfort and assurance one needed, but looking instead at a baptism administered on the basis of presumed regeneration did not give comfort and assurance either. Here was an item of unfinished disagreement that needed to be discussed further after the Union. Meanwhile, it was felt that the Union could proceed on the grounds that all parties concerned stood side by side on the same basis of Scripture as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.

It should be noted that the Union turned out to be a blessing for both sides. Though Kuyper's doctrine of presumptive regeneration was distinctly wrong, it nevertheless provided a catalyst for those tending to subjectivism to reconsider their thinking. How, actually, does one receive reassurance that one is in fact a child of God and an heir to life eternal?! The Union compelled further investigation on this question, an investigation that led to greater clarity on God's revelation about the covenant. But that's a story for another time, a story that will end up at the Liberation of 1944.

Back to subjectivism

As it turns out, a number of the Seceded churches declined to join in the Union of 1892 because of their objections against Kuyper. This smallish group maintained their own churches in The Netherlands (today known as the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* – which translates as Christian Reformed Churches, though not to be confused with the Christian Reformed Churches of North America). In the course of time some of their descendents migrated to the New World and established churches in our land. These are the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Something of the subjectivism that characterized much of the thinking of the Secession Churches before the Union of 1892 is still found in these churches.

The Netherlands Reformed Congregations (mentioned earlier) experienced a fracture in the 1970s to form the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of North America and a second fracture in the 1990s to form the Heritage Reformed Congregations. On the subject of the assurance of salvation these three churches as well as the Free Reformed Churches are essentially agreed: you need some sense within you that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for you, and not just for your neighbour. The strength and nature of the sense varies between these churches, but for many of the members your assurance of being saved is to be sought within yourself. None of these four churches have received the benefit that flowed from confronting Kuyper's error on presumptive regeneration and that's to say that none of the four have come to embrace and appreciate what the covenant is really all about. And the covenant is the story for next time. . . .

Gratitude

In the gracious providence of God, our ecclesiastical ancestry runs back through the Union of 1892 and so builds on the cross-fertilization that resulted from the Secession churches merging with the Doleantie. Some of our parents are of Secession origin, while others are of Doleantie origin. Both had to give and take as a result of the Union. That Union in turn most certainly brought its tensions and struggles – the Liberation of 1944! – but by God's grace we have received much through the Union of 1892. **C**

Celebrating 25 years in the Ministry for Rev. W. den Hollander

On October 8, 2009 the congregation of Toronto came together in our church building to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Rev. W. den Hollander being in the ministry. As Master of Ceremonies, Br. Hank Kampen opened the evening by reading Romans 10:1-15 and we sang Psalm 27: 2, 3, and 6. One of Rev. den Hollander's sons, Arie, accompanied us very enthusiastically on the organ. This was followed by prayer, thanking our Heavenly Father for all his blessings in bringing us to this celebration of one of his servants.

A special welcome was extended to Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander and their children, some of whom had come from a distance. Also welcomed was Rev. MacLeod, pastor of the Free Church of Scotland, a nearby colleague of Rev. den Hollander. Br. Kampen gave an overview of the work Rev. den Hollander had done in our federation of churches. He had been pastor of two congregations previous to coming to Toronto in July, 1996 – those being the congregations at Winnipeg (1984-1989) and Orangeville (1989-1996).

Opportunity was given to those present to speak congratulatory words to Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander. Rev. Rolf den Hollander from the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg spoke on behalf of his congregation. He noted that this was his father's first congregation and now he has the privilege of being the pastor in Winnipeg as well. From comments made by the members at Winnipeg he noted that his father had left a lasting impression among the congregation. He extended their heart-felt congratulations and thankfulness for Rev. den Hollander's fruitful service in their midst. Br. Mark den Hollander, another son of Rev. den Hollander, spoke words of appreciation and congratulations on behalf of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg of whom most of the members had been blessed with Rev. W. den Hollander's ministry as well. Following this,



William den Hollander II read a letter that he had received on behalf of the congregation at Smithers. Rev. Slaa, son-in-law of Rev. den Hollander, is pastor of this congregation. Due to happy circumstances, the birth of another child, he was prevented from being present for this joyous occasion and so passed on his congratulations and words of encouragement.

Once again we joined our voices in singing Psalm 84:1, 5 and 6 acknowledging God's goodness and blessings.

Several letters of congratulations had been received; from the churches at Orangeville, Burlington-Waterdown, Ottawa, Burlington South, and Burlington East read by Br. Kampen. The program continued with

a beautiful piano and violin duet presented by Sr. Cynthia Bultje and her daughter Dana with the title, "Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing."

Br. Arie den Hollander, on behalf of the family was given the opportunity to address everyone present. He gave us some of the highlights and the goings on in the minister's family. He noted the many hours of work his father spent serving his congregation to the praise and glory of God. He thanked his father for being the God-fearing person that he is and for raising his family to know their Heavenly Father.

The choir sang 2 pieces namely, "I Will Serve the Lord All my Days" and a revised version of "I am Your Servant, Oh Lord" by Don Besig and Nancy Price.

Br. John Van Dyk, vice chairman of council, was given the opportunity to present Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander with a gift on behalf of the congregation. They were presented with a framed gift certificate of a return flight to Israel, which was received with much gratitude and amazement by Rev. den Hollander. . . he was left nearly speechless. Rev. den Hollander expressed his thanksgiving first of all to our Heavenly Father, for it is by the grace of God that one becomes a minister of the Word. He then expressed his appreciation for the beautiful evening and the gift that they had received. We closed the evening by praising God with the words of Psalm 150:1, 3 and a prayer of thanksgiving. Every one was invited for refreshments and the guests could congratulate Rev. and Mrs. den Hollander personally. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!!



He is Your Servant, O Lord

He starts every day with a prayer, O Lord
Drawing Him closer to you
Help him to know he's never alone
Guide him in all he's to do.

He grows every day in Your grace,
O Lord, knowing he's safe in Your sight.
Show him the way to follow his faith
Help him to walk in Your light.

Our hearts ever grateful,
Our voices we raise
Our spirit rejoices in glory and praise
We pray he'll be faithful all of his days
He is Your servant, O Lord.

He looks all around him, what does he see,
The bountiful gifts You have given for free,
The kindness and friendship of people who care
And the blessing of God's Word to share.

He sings every day of Your love, O Lord,
Sharing the joy in his song;
Teach him to live, to trust and forgive
Help him be steadfast and strong.

C



reviewed by Richard Aasman

**Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture*
Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2009**

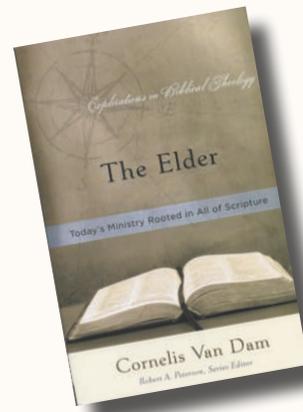
Additional Information: 283 pp., CDN \$18.96 (Part of the *Explorations in Biblical Theology* series)

Our egalitarian culture tends not to have a high regard for authority. TV sitcoms disparage father figures and the media lodges a constant barrage of sarcastic criticism against prime ministers and presidents, or anyone else in political office. Respect and veneration for authority and office is passé. Sadly that spirit can invade the church with the result that there is no longer a high respect for the office of elder. The consequences are devastating for the well-being of the church.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's book, *The Elder*, is not just another book that outlines certain significant aspects of the office of elder. It is in a class of its own. Dr. Van Dam demonstrates the relevance of the office of elder today by going back to its historic roots – to the beginning of this office in ancient Israel. In a scholarly and yet very pastoral way, he shows the grandeur of the office of elder and the great blessing and relevance of this office today. This book acts as a resource and encouragement for elders, but it is also designed to benefit theological students, church leaders, and church members in general. It is being well received in the Reformed and Presbyterian world. I think this book should be in every home and read by all. It is a wonderful journey through the Old and New Testaments with amazing insights into many Bible texts. It stimulates appreciation and love for the office of elder. It will also encourage men to aspire to the office and to prepare themselves accordingly.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 is the introduction. Here Dr. Van Dam gives an overview of the office going back to the Old Testament. God is the Good Shepherd and elders are to emulate the Good Shepherd by disciplining, protecting, comforting, and loving those in their care. Elders must meet certain criteria such as being of good moral character and maintaining a good family. Not just here, but throughout the book, elders are reminded they are to love the sheep who ultimately belong to the Good Shepherd. This challenges every elder to look deeply in his own heart and answer the question: do I love the sheep and will I do whatever I can to lead them in the pathways of God?

Part 2 deals with the Old Testament origins of the office. As Israel started to grow as a nation, the office of elder naturally developed to teach the people of



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God, to give leadership and to act as judges. When elders played a major role in the life of the church, then the church flourished. In Numbers 11 we learn that the seventy elders received the Spirit. Using Numbers 15, Dr. Van Dam explains how elders must carefully discern between sin done in "weakness" or "defiantly." It is of critical importance that elders understand this.

Part 3 deals with the continuity of the office of elder from the Old Testament to the New Testament and some transformation that takes place. The author makes clear that the office of elder in the Old Testament becomes two distinct offices in the New: ruling elder and teaching elder. The latter is often called a minister. Although different, they remain unified in that they are both shepherds of the flock. In this section there is a thorough discussion about elders using the keys of the kingdom. This use of the keys is a blessing that leads believers to where they are safe from Satan and the forces of hell. The author also discusses the laying on of hands. He shows that it is inconsistent to do this only with ministers and not elders. The laying on of hands does not impart gifts but acknowledges that such gifts are already present.

Part 4 is entitled, "Elders as Preservers and Nurturers of Life in the Covenant Community." As the title indicates, this deals with the crux of the matter as far as the execution of office is concerned. Dr. Van Dam shows how elders need to have their personal lives in good order; they need to know Scripture and see it as the wealth of their Master; they must supervise the preaching of the gospel; they are to build up the body of Christ to spiritual maturity. In this section the author makes a thorough investigation of the need to make home visits and the application of Matthew 18. Again we see not only a very scholarly and biblically based approach by the author, but also very pastoral. When elders deal with sin by a member of the congregation, they need to discern wisely the context of that sin. Identical sins in different contexts warrant a different approach. An elder is basically like a father who deals with his children. He knows their strengths and weaknesses. He knows how to deal with each one with firmness, love, and understanding. If elders read this

section of Dr. Van Dam's book and take it to heart, it will be a huge blessing for their shepherding within the congregation. It will stimulate every elder to see the value of his office and to take it seriously.

Part 5 deals with two current issues: female elders and elders for life. Dr. Van Dam takes us through Scripture to show that females may not be elders but their gifts can be used in other ways in the congregation. The difference between lifetime and term eldership often comes down to practical considerations and in practice is not much different. On the last pages of the book we are reminded of the privilege of eldership. In Exodus 24 the seventy elders went on Sinai to see something of the glory of God and to have fellowship with Him. The elders represent the people and they are a continual reminder to us that one day we too shall see God. Knowing who and what the elders are should lead the church to esteem the elders highly and allow them to do their work joyfully. It is also important that in our families our children hear parents speak respectfully about the elders and pray for the elders.

On the last pages of the book there is a section that has questions for further study. This would make the book excellent material for a Bible study group. There is also a section with select resources for elders and another of additional specialized resources. This goes chapter by chapter and guides the reader to other writings that go deeper into specific subjects. This is very helpful, for instance, for theological students. Finally there is an index of Scripture passages and of subjects and names. The entire book is well laid out and is very handy for reference.

Dr. Van Dam's book, *The Elder*, is a pleasure to read and it is easy to read. One comes away with such deep appreciation for the Good Shepherd who placed elders as shepherds for his flock. When the church has faithful elders and those elders are respected by the church, then believes will indeed be lead to where they are safe from the devil and the forces of hell. They will be lead to spiritual maturity that gives glory to God. We thank Dr. Van Dam for his contribution to the well-being of Christ's church.



Readers' Forum

With Synod Burlington 2010 fast approaching many of us are also looking forward to the new *Book of Praise* with the revised Psalms and additional fifteen or so hymns. Rumor has it that we could have it in our hands before Christmas of this year. The Committee for the *Book of Praise* has done a tremendous job. With the Thees and Thous removed it will be a good improvement, also for us, since we have not memorized too many and still know more Dutch psalms by heart.

However, the main purpose of our letter has to do with the size of the new *Book of Praise*. We also heard rumors for plans to print in a 5 ½ by 8 ½ size format, which is the size in use in many churches, to replace our present much smaller and handier 4 ½ by 6 ½ format. We hope that this is not true, since that would be quite a step backward. The reason is, as we understand it, mainly because of additional hymns.

We believe that the physical size of the new *Book of Praise* is very important and may have far reaching future implications. We think especially of singing and memorization of the psalms in our homes. Churches will be forced to spend quite a bit of money for pew copies, since the book will be too heavy and clumsy to carry back and forth to church. It certainly will not fit in a lady's purse! Presently most families have a number of copies of the handy format *Book of Praise*. Often every family member has a personal copy, and carries it anywhere, to catechism, Bible Study, other meetings and of course for family devotions. A much

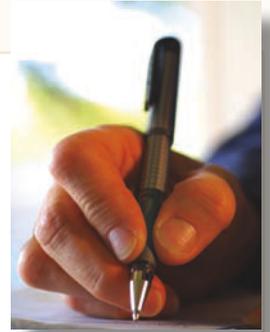
larger heavier format will change all this, *and not for the better*.

We hope that Synod will appoint a special committee to study and consider whether the physical size of the new *Book of Praise* may impact the spiritual life of individuals, families, and churches. To stay with the handy size we have used until now, there are several options. Some of the older Dutch psalm books, for instance, have music first stanza only, partly on the bottom of one page is continued on the next page. From our childhood, we remember (and still have) psalm books that were made small and *with a minimum of blank space*. Our present *Book of Praise* has forty half pages of blank space, which could be better used. Another option is a "words only" edition, which can be the same handy size we have now, but with much larger print, something perhaps worth considering, especially with seniors in mind.

In short, the size of the new *Book of Praise* should not be left just to the printer. Also not just to the *Book of Praise* Committee, since they are primarily concerned with the *contents* of the new book. The decision of fonts, paper quality, and size should, as we see it, not be a hasty decision, but should also be made with the wellbeing of Christ's church in mind. The physical size of the new *Book of Praise* should have the same careful consideration as the contents, since it is equally, or maybe even more important in the long run.

Gerry and Paulina Denbok

Burlington



Dear Editor,

I was delighted to read in the January 1, 2010 issue Rev. Stam's article "Looking for our Common Ancestor" and the article by five of our Canadian Reformed Ministers "Ten Reasons Why Evolution is Dangerous and Evil."

I have tried to understand and dialogue with some of the contributors to the Reformed Academic website. I can understand somewhat the challenges they are facing in their profession, however I am convinced they are wandering away from the truth of Scripture.

In the letter to the editor from Dave Schriemer, Jan. 15, 2010 issue, he ends, "We have a new generation of budding Christian scientists being held back from a meaningful use of their talents." Let us not forget a new generation of budding Reformed ministers who go through secular or Christian universities and are exposed to all different opinions on creation and evolution. It is my understanding that even in Christian universities the students are taught to discern for themselves without given a clear direction. Should we not be safeguarding the truth of all of Scripture including Genesis in our places of training where our future ministers are studying at, including our own schools?

It was like a breath of fresh air to be instructed and encouraged by our ministers. I sincerely hope that they continue to do so, for if we tweak with Scripture ever so slightly it will eventually derail us completely.

I encourage our ministers not to take the back seat, but to continue to give sound scriptural guidance.

*With Christian greetings,
Bill Bartels*

Dear Editor,

I am responding to the article "Ten Reasons Why Evolution is Dangerous and Evil" in the issue of January 1, 2010.

I understand the authors' concern about the rise and influence of Darwinism, but I am afraid that their approach may well be counter-productive. Firstly, they do not distinguish clearly between the theory of biological evolution and evolutionism. Evolution is a scientific theory which has indeed not been "proven" (no scientific theory is beyond questioning), but which is based on a good deal of evidence and has much explanatory and predictive power. This does not mean, incidentally, that I subscribe to it. I don't. But I do want to point out that it is so well established that increasing numbers of orthodox Christians accept it, while rejecting the materialism that is often connected with it.

Evolutionism, on the other hand, is a worldview, which is widely influential today and has given rise to the indeed horrible theories and practices that the article mentions. I don't hesitate to join the five authors in qualifying evolutionism as evil. But the fact that evolution is a "foundational component" of this evolutionistic worldview does not, by itself, disqualify the theory. Ideologues have abused scientific theories before and thoughtful Christians (and others) have rejected such abuse without rejecting the theories.

I will not attempt, in this brief letter, to deal with scientific and historical arguments. I have done that before in this periodical and, more recently, elsewhere (see <http://reformedacademic.blogspot.com>). Nor is it my intention to defend evolution. It is a theory that I myself continue to question and I fully realize the dangers it poses. But I am convinced that it is not only unwise but also impossible to dismiss it, without further ado, as evil. We should ask ourselves what is more helpful for students who are taught the very strong arguments in favour of evolution: to say that it is the devil's own work, or to tell them that many Christians are able to reconcile it with their faith? Our students should hear from us that neither playing the ostrich nor turning to atheism is the only option for a Christian. For the rest, let us admit the limits of our understanding, here as elsewhere, and pray for light.

*Frederika Oosterhoff
Hamilton, ON*

Dear Editor,

I was dismayed to read the lead editorial in the first issue of 2010 ("Looking for our Common Ancestor," 59:1). I had participated with others in attempting to draft a biblical, rational, theological, exegetical, confessional, socially sound response to the acceptance of theories of theistic evolution and that seem to be gaining acceptance within our circles. That submission you published in the same issue. The level of discussion promoted in the new electronic press – the blogosphere – is one of disrespect, sarcasm, and "gotcha" politics. I find that deplorable, disappointing, and discouraging. More and more, I participate less and less in Internet discussion groups. I had thought that by engaging in this discussion in the Canadian Reformed oracle *Clarion*, we could once again raise the standard of discourse among Christians. I had assumed that in the church press we would not stoop to the kind of disrespect of those with whom we disagree that we find on the Internet. It's distressing,

but I was wrong. Your editorial dripped with sarcasm and ridicule. I'm embarrassed to have my name juxtaposed to this editorial. I can imagine that by the time the reader got to our contribution their eyes were rolling in disgust, or they were laughing their heads off in mockery. Not really the lead in I was expecting.

John van Popta
Pastor, Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church
Burlington, ON

Editorial Comment

The Editor apologizes to the readers for placing the editorial "Looking for our Common Ancestor" without requesting revision. From the feedback received, it is apparent that some of you considered it to be offensive.

Dear Editor,

Permit me to react to Rev. Holtvlüwer's defence of the use of non-synodically approved psalm rhymings in the worship services. I am aware that it was only upon the urging of the consistory of the church he serves that he submitted it for publication.

That I respond to his submission is not because he called my objecting to this practice wrong. If I was wrong, this has to be admitted, but it has to be proved first. I hope not that I resemble the man who, in answer to the question "Are you always right?" said "No, for yesterday I thought that I was wrong, but I was wrong."

My concern is this: that justification of an obvious breaking of a promise laid down in the Church Order is being defended. If this is permitted, then, as they say in Dutch, "the gate is wide open." When the basic thesis is wrong, the rest, built on it, cannot be right. A house that has its foundation removed collapses. It is gone. Poof! Such is the case with the house Rev. Holtvlüwer tried to build.

If I understand him well, the foundation for his whole argumentation is the text of the former Article 69 C.O., and then specifically the words "maintained and adopted for ecclesiastical use by the Synod of Middelburg in 1933." He lets this refer to the rhyming of the psalms as well, even though the literal text of that article does not permit this. This is what the Germans would call *hineininterpretieren*, which means that first you read something *into* the text and then you triumphantly declare that the text says what you want it to say.

Besides, a Synod does not adopt the psalms. The article simply says that the psalms shall be sung (no mention of any rhyming), as well as the hymns which Synod Middelburg 1933 adopted.

However, there is more. Synod Middelburg 1933 was not faced at all with the question of adopting

or rejecting an old or new rhyming of the psalms. What Synod Middelburg 1933 was faced with was the expansion of the hymn section of the Dutch Psalter. It would lead us too far if we should want to elaborate on this point of the hymns. In fact, no Dutch Synod ever adopted the rhyming of the psalms which was in use in 1933. This rhyming had been "imposed" upon the churches almost 160 years before by the civil authorities. No general synod *could* ever have adopted them either, for no general synod was held from 1619 on till the one convened by King William I in 1816. This being the situation, why should the Synod of Middelburg 1933 all of a sudden see itself compelled to take a decision regarding the *rhyming* of the psalms? That point was not on the agenda at all.

This renders it highly unlikely, to put it mildly, that the rhyming of the psalms was included in the redaction of the Church Order article. This apart from what I mentioned, namely that the very text of the article does not permit it.

Our conclusion: the foundation under Rev. Holtvlüwer's argumentation has been removed. The house of cards collapses.

Second conclusion: there was no provision such as the churches made in the present Article 55 C.O. that the psalms shall be sung in the rhyming adopted by general synod.

Third conclusion: no violation of the promises laid down in the Church Order was present when rhymings were tested in the services prior to 1983.

Fourth conclusion: after the adoption of the present article it does constitute a violation of solemnly made promises when non-synodically adopted rhymings are used during the worship services.

Fifth conclusion: it is impermissible with an appeal to an old law to defend transgression of a new one that replaced the old one.

In Abbotsford, too, we test the new rhymings, but before the services start. Personally I have sung my way through the whole collection of new rhymings and am thankful for the gifts the Lord has given to our brother Helder to serve the churches so well. The few technical remarks I had I have forwarded to the proper committee.

One more thing. Rev. Holtvlüwer is of the opinion that Synod Smithers obviously agreed with the wrong suggestions of the committee that reported to it. Synod Smithers obviously did *not* agree, as it did not speak of testing "during the services."

And I have never heard of a practice that appeals are launched against a committee report or suggestions contained in it. But then, I still have a lot to learn.

W.W.J. VanOene

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*