

# The Standard Bearer

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*Special Reformation Issue:*

### *The Belgic Confession of Faith*

The great sixteenth-century Reformation and Confessions—inseparable! Christ reformed His church by sending His Spirit of truth to convict men of the truth. As the Spirit led men to see the errors of the Romish church, He also gave new insights into the Scriptures. As a result, in this period scores of solid, Reformed creeds were written.

One of those creeds is the beloved Confession of Faith written by Guido de Brès in 1561. Drawing its name from its place of origin, it is commonly called the Belgic Confession, though the Dutch rightly claimed it as their own (the Netherlands Confession). This well-known confession was the first to be adopted by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Early on in the Reformation, many classes and synods required subscription to it.

We are delighted to present, in this special Reformation issue, a collection of articles that set forth the history and value of the Confession, as well as highlighting specific doctrines that it treats in detail. It is our hope that this issue will not only inform, but also inspire you to renewed interest in and zeal for this significant Reformation creed.

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# The Confession of Faith: Her 450th Year

**H**appy Birthday, Confession of Faith (aka “Netherlands Confession” and “Belgic Confession”) esteemed firstborn of the Reformed family’s confessions. We commemorate the year of your birth—written as you were in 1561 and soon adopted into the Reformed family by our fathers in the *nether* lands. In 2011, you have now lived ten times longer than your author, martyred as he was at the youthful age of 45, in part because of you. What place his martyrdom had in the providence of God to endear you to us, God may show us some day. But we confess (by your lead), that “nothing happens in this world without God’s appointment,” and “with greatest humility and reverence...adore God’s righteous judgments, which are hid from us” (BC Art. 13).

With other Reformed churches we commemorate this 450<sup>th</sup> year

of your birth, with denominations in America and Europe and all the other continents in God’s “elegant” (BC Art. 2) creation. Our reformation cousins in Presbyterianism—part of the “one catholic or universal Church” (Art. 27)—rejoice with us, as they recognize both your beauty and the influence you had on their great standards of Westminster, almost 100 years younger than you. But you are *our* confession, along with the preach-able Heidelberg Catechism and the pastoral Canons of Dordt.

We publicly celebrate your birthday, not because we are proud owners of some antique—to call you that would be to insult you—but because we have in you a God-given treasure. We thank God for your help in confessing our faith according to “His holy and divine Word” (Art. 2).



In commemoration of this celebration and special issue, I read through the Confession in one sitting, twice—in two different translations. Like other Reformed preachers, I am as familiar with this creed as I am with the Heidelberg (for preaching) and the Canons (for its pastoral approach to the “doctrines of grace”). And I love it as much. But as I read the Belgic Confession again and contemplated its place in the churches, I was renewed in esteem for our creeds generally. Creeds define us. They give substance to our identity as “Reformed.” We are not interested so much in what identifies a *Calvinist* (a common, but unprofitable debate) as in what makes one Reformed. And whatever others may say, we say that central to being Reformed is being *confessional*—adopting and using the Reformation creeds.

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The confessions are the *official* testimony of what we “believe with the heart and confess with the mouth” (Art. 1). What we believe is not to be found in Bavinck or Hoeksema, but in the confessions, and in very few places more succinctly and clearly than in the Belgic Confession. What binds us officebearers is not some unspoken promise to uphold the notions of this or that great theologian, but the *written* pledge to uphold the creeds. If someone asks me what I believe, I may give my personal testimony and refer to favorite Bible passages; but my answer ought never omit reference to our confessions. True, we do not “consider any writing of men of equal value with the divine Scriptures” (BC Art. 7). Yet the confessions are our public and official testimony of what we believe Scripture teaches.

### The Value of the Confession

The unique value of the Belgic Confession for us begins there: it is a simple and clear *testimony* of our faith. Guido de Brès wrote the confession because he wanted the people of God to testify the gospel to their neighbors. In the original introduction to the creed, de Brès quoted three Bible passages that speak of witnessing, and then added, “according to which all believers are exhorted to make confession of their faith before men.” Then, as the creed was adopted officially by the *churches* in the Netherlands, it became the *Church’s* Witness to the World, as Rev. P.Y. DeJong entitled his worthwhile commentary

on the creed. The creed is our answer to the question, “What do you believe?” which is why almost every article begins with some variation of, “We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that...” (BC Art. 1).

The unique value of the Belgic Confession includes its *systematic* treatment of a *full* range of doctrines, following the traditional division of “God, Man, Christ, Salvation, Church, Last Things.” Although we might wish the creed were more complete in its treatment of some doctrines (eschatology, predestination, and the covenant, for example), it is surprisingly complete in so many other areas: Scripture (Arts. 1-7); the Trinity (Arts. 8-11); Creation, Providence, the Fall, and Sin (Arts. 12-15); Faith, Justification, Sanctification (Arts. 22-25); even the Church and Church Government (Arts. 27-35).

The Belgic Confession’s value includes its *exemplary polemics*. I say *exemplary* because not all polemics are to be emulated. The Confession’s approach is instructive.

First, the creed *boldly* opposes errors, mostly of Roman Catholicism. Reformed believers are unafraid to say what may later be used against them, even to ‘prove’ their worthiness of death. de Brès’ explicit confession of the truth and condemnation of error—of the necessity of joining the true church, “even though the magistrates and edicts of princes [are] against it” (Art. 28)—brought the Roman Catholic hang-man’s noose around his neck. With thousands of his friends and colleagues, he was bold to speak for truth and against

error even if they “should suffer death or any other corporal punishment” (Art. 28).

What also makes the polemics exemplary is the willingness to expose errors on more than one front. Some enthusiastic ecclesiastical warriors content themselves to rage against one enemy while ignoring another, either afraid of consequences or (as likely) unwilling to own up to the fault toward which they may lean. But this creed turns from left to right, and does battle against the Anabaptists too—their revolutionary spirit, their inclinations to communism, their unwillingness to baptize infants of believers, etc.

The exemplary nature of the polemics is, third, its willingness to be positive as much as possible, indirect in criticism at other times, and vehement (even violent) when necessary. We are all aware of the explicit and offensive references to “the Jews, Mohammedans, and some false Christians and heretics” (regarding denial of the Trinity), the rejection and abhorrence of the error “of the Manichees” (regarding the origin of evil), the “damnable error of the Epicureans,” the “error of the Pelagians,” and others like this. But a thoughtful reading of the creed will reveal how many times restraint was used when one might have expected a blast. I think of the delightful Article 26 describing Christ as our intercessor: “...this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between Him and us, ought in no wise to affright us by His majesty, or cause us to seek another according to our fancy. For there is no creature either in heaven or on

earth who loveth us more than Jesus Christ....” And the article ends with the penetrating question, *obvious but not explicit* in its antithetical nature: “To what purpose should we then seek another advocate, since it has pleased God to give us His own Son as an advocate?” At places where one would expect an all-out assault, there is restraint. “We are satisfied,” the Confession says with some softness, “with the number of sacraments...which are two only” (Art. 33). Without mentioning purgatory, that damnable doctrine, does not the Confession nevertheless allude to it when it confesses that “Christ poured out His precious blood to *purge* away our sins” (Art. 21)?

The final value of the creed I mention here is its *breadth of expression*. I sometimes sense that this breadth is not always known or appreciated among us, but it is the proper expression of the Reformed faith. The language of the creeds ought to be our language, fully. Avoiding error, we avoid also the error of *incompleteness*, an inability or unwillingness to confess what our fathers confessed and use the language they used—all of it—lest we be less than Reformed. Let me give some examples, in no particular order. (The examples themselves indicate the narrowness that pastors sometimes find among members trying to be “righteous over much.”) 1. God’s will *and permission* regarding evil (Art. 13). 2. Angels are God’s messengers who serve His elect (they *still* do); and the devils expect their horrible torments *daily* (Art. 12). 3. We have

permission to read and take profit from the apocryphal books, with limits (Art. 6). 4. Christians know the truth of the Trinity in part from what they *feel* within themselves (Art. 9). 5. God promised Adam that He “would make him happy.” Happy! (Art. 12). 6. Regarding salvation in Jesus Christ, we “embrace” Jesus, we “possess Jesus Christ,” we “receive” Jesus Christ, we “apply and receive Christ” to ourselves (Arts. 23, 29, 35). 7. We “do good works,” and our works are “good and acceptable in the sight of God.” A working faith “*excites* us to *practice* good works.” I am no longer a slave to sin, but “freed from the bondage of sin” (Art. 24). With due care and the necessary cautions, our young people ought to be taught to use, and not be afraid of such language. Our Confession teaches us to use it.

### Maintaining the Belgic Confession

Ah, the use of it! We must use the Confession! One church historian worth reading compared the churches creeds to CDs. Stored, CDs do nothing. They can be handed down from parents to children without ever being used or heard. What worth are they? But put them in a player and immediately they become powerful—the beautiful sounds come forth. Confessions are like that. They have value only as they are “played,” that is, as we use them. Pass them on to the coming generations, so that the church’s children may hear the beautiful confession the church proclaims.

First, consistory members who promise to teach, defend, and reject errors that militate against

the confessions, ought to be fully conversant in the creeds. Each elder, deacon, and minister may ask himself when he last read through the creeds. How familiar is he with these documents he has so solemnly sworn to uphold? How important are they to him?

Second, the creeds should be taught. I have suggested on other occasions that the Belgic Confession ought to have a larger place in the instruction we give to our youth. How many of the young people know Hoeksema’s *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* better than the church’s Belgic Confession? They should learn Reformed doctrine *from* our creeds. Not, of course, *instead of* “Essentials,” but “Essentials” *through* the creed(s). If that catechism book is ever revised, more attention can be given to the language and approach of this official statement of our faith.

Third, preachers do well to make reference to the other creeds in their Heidelberg Catechism preaching and in other sermons. The more the people of God become familiar with the comforting doctrine of all the confessions, the more they will be determined not to lose the creeds in their generations. Also, in the privacy of the study, many preachers have led the people of God to gospel assurance via the confessions. And how many pastors have not led newcomers to the faith through patient explanation of the gospel as it is outlined in the Belgic’s 37 articles?

Fourth, let us manifest unity with other Christians by means of the creeds: formal unity with churches of like faith, and infor-



mal unity as believers with other Christians. The Belgic Confession, remember, is the first-born of the Three Forms of *Unity*, by which the Reformation churches not only expressed their unity, but sought out other Christians in the world. Can two walk together except they be agreed? What better way to show that unity than by agreeing on this venerable document?

Finally, let the creed more and more lead us to the Scriptures themselves, and to our great God and Savior revealed in the Scriptures. Let us never esteem the *creeds* more than we esteem their *source*, any more than we would esteem *faith* more than the Christ embraced by faith. Let the creed

lead us to Christ, “true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship, and serve” (Art. 10). More and more, Christ’s Spirit will “kindle in our hearts an upright faith” (Art. 22), so that we are “new men” who live a “new life” (Art. 24), and reveal ourselves to the world by the “marks of Christians...we avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and our neighbor...and crucify the flesh with the works thereof” (Art. 29). When we find in ourselves “great infirmities,” we will “fight against them through the Spirit all the days of our lives, continually taking refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Art. 29).

And “when the time appointed by

the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven... with great glory and majesty to declare Himself judge of the quick and the dead...” And after we have given “an account of every idle word [we] have spoken” and we find refuge in the blood of Christ, we will be “crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess our names before God His Father and the elect angels” (Art. 37).

If the Lord carries, may our churches confess their faith in Him by this creed for another 450 years.



REV. JOHN MARCUS

## The Life of Guido de Brès

For someone in the Reformed tradition, the influence of Guido de Brès upon Reformed churches goes without saying. Most of that influence stems from his writing of the Belgic Confession, which has served Reformed churches since the sixteenth century. de Brès’ influence, of course, is not due so much to his genius and zeal for the Reformed faith, although he certainly had his share of both. Rather, his influence is due to God’s providential guidance of history, bringing de Brès into the picture and using him to leave a lasting

signpost of Reformed doctrine. The life of Guido de Brès is a story of God’s providential preservation of a man and of the church.

The providential hand of God was working even before de Brès was born. We pick up the story in the year 1522, with de Brès’ mother transfixed by the preaching of an Italian monk. As she listened, Guido’s mother, a devout Roman Catholic, prayed for a son who would be a powerful preacher like this monk. Little did she know that her baby boy, Guido, born that year, would be used mightily by God to battle the errors that enslaved her and so many others.

Exactly how God used Guido’s father and mother to influence their son throughout the years, we cannot tell.

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When he was yet a teenager, Guido received his first Bible, a rare and dangerous privilege in that day. Sometime before the age of twenty-five, through the reading of Scripture and the testimony of the Reformers, Guido came to see that his salvation was in Jesus Christ alone, by faith alone, apart from any merit of his own.

By 1548, the now “heretical” Guido made the decision to travel to England, where he was able to imbibe Reformed theology and practice from the likes of Martin Bucer, Calvin’s friend from Strasburg, and John á Lasco, the Polish Reformer.

In 1552, de Brès returned home to preach God’s Word amidst persecution. Basing himself in the city of Lille, he became an itinerant preacher, ministering to the saints secretly in their homes, in the Church of the Rose.

In 1555, de Brès wrote his first book, *The Staff of the Christian Faith*, which defended the Reformed faith and exposed the errors of Rome. Coincidentally, 1555 was the same year in which Philip II succeeded his father, Charles V, as king. Almost immediately Philip would begin his all-out attack on Protestant Christians in his realm. In March of 1556, a father, mother, and two sons from de Brès’ church were captured and burned at the stake for their faith.

As a result of the persecution, many of the congregants decided to flee with de Brès to Frankfurt, Germany, where refugee churches had been established. It was not long, however, before de Brès moved on to Switzerland, where he studied Greek and Hebrew for three years under Theodore Beza as well as benefiting from John Calvin’s preaching.

But de Brès could not keep himself from serving the persecuted church in his homeland. In 1559, he returned to Doornik (Tournai, France), not far from the city of Lille, where he had labored some three years earlier. The Church of the Palm, located in Doornik, benefited from de Brès’ ministry. de Brès, in turn, found a help meet for him in Catherine Ramon, whom he married the same year.

### Writing the Belgic Confession

During his time at Doornik, de Brès busied himself with the pastoral work of preaching as well as working on a confession of faith, which would later become

known as the Belgic Confession or the Netherlands Confession. He understood that a confession was an important tool for unifying believers in the truth. Because almost every article of the Confession touched on the errors of Rome, it was also important to prove that the Confession was biblical. Consequently, de Brès not only set down what the churches believed, he also added Scripture references to prove each article.

de Brès was not so foolish, however, as to write a confession totally on his own. Much of the confession he wrote was based upon the Gallican (or French) Confession adopted by the Synod at Paris in 1559. The Gallican Confession itself was a product of Calvin’s labors and the churches in France. Theodore Beza’s Lausanne Confession was also an important source for several of the articles of de Brès’ Confession (especially Articles 19, 20, and 37, although other articles also show Beza’s influence).

Furthermore, understanding the value of consulting others in such a work, de Brès communicated with many other ministers, asking them to correct whatever they thought was amiss. Therefore, when the Confession was first published in the Fall of 1561, it did not represent merely one man’s convictions. Indeed, the first publication was properly entitled “A Confession of the Faith generally and unanimously maintained by the Believers dispersed throughout the Low Countries, who desire to live according to the purity of the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Far from being divisive, a charge that many make against confessions in today’s church world, de Brès’ Confession served to unify the churches in the faith.

The Confession was not a document born out of a national synod or other church assembly; when the Confession was written, the churches of the Low Countries had not yet become an organized body. Instead, the Confession arose out of the need for the churches to have a solid foundation upon which they might build their own understanding of Scripture. Inasmuch as the Confession set down scriptural proofs, it also helped to teach others concerning the truth and to show the world (including their persecutors) what they believed was in fact the truth of Scripture. Thus, the Confession was meant for the persecuted as well as the persecutors.

## Persecution for the faith

Before de Brès' arrival in Doornik in 1559, the saints were no strangers to persecution. However, fifteen years having passed since the martyrdom of Pierre Bully, de Brès thought he could work behind the scenes without raising the ire of King Philip's forces. Through secret, after-dark house meetings, many poor as well as influential citizens came over to the Reformed faith. Pastor Jerome (de Brès' alias) was being used mightily in Doornik.

As the church expanded, some of the less educated became impatient and decided to agitate for greater freedom to worship. On September 29, 1561, against de Brès' advice, they organized Psalm-singing demonstrations in the streets. As a result, King Philip's regent, Margaret of Parma, quickly dispatched royal commissioners, who arrested and interrogated hundreds of people to find out who was responsible for the disturbance. It was not long before the commissioners discovered the existence of the secret church and Pastor Jerome.

In hiding and unable to flee the city, de Brès and others decided that now was the time to present his Confession to prove that they were not rebels as the king's commissioners made them out to be. Article 36 of the Confession testified for them: "[I]t is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God." The letter also showed the injustice of their persecution: "...[O]ur enemies have filled your ears with so many false complaints and reports that we were not only prevented to appear before your face personally, but also chased out of your lands, murdered, and burned in whatever place we were found." At the same time, the letter attached to the Confession expressed their willingness to "offer our backs to the whip's lash, our tongues to the knives, the mouth to the muzzle, and the whole body to the flames" rather than deny Jesus Christ. It being impossible to present the Confession and letter in person, they threw it over the wall of the castle.

Although the city remained under lockdown, de Brès was able to escape in December of 1561. How-

ever, in God's providence the commissioners found his lodging and books, etc., thus making him a known "heretic." For five years de Brès lived in exile in French towns near the border, ministering to the Huguenot saints. During that time, the cause of the Reformation continued to prosper. In May of 1566, de Brès attended the first synodical meeting of the Lowland churches in Antwerp, where his Confession was officially adopted. Subsequently, he was invited to return to Antwerp to preach in July. In August, he was asked to help the Church of the Eagle in Valenciennes, about 25 miles from Doornik.

Throughout the month, de Brès and another minister by the name of De la Grange preached in the fields surrounding Valenciennes. As the Reformation surged ahead, many people began to take matters into their own hands. They ransacked Roman Catholic cathedrals, including two in Valenciennes. Under pressure, the regent Margaret of Parma signed a treaty to allow free preaching and dissolve the Inquisition. Nevertheless, Philip II responded by sending troops to subdue Protestant cities. In response, Valenciennes closed its gates to the king's forces, expecting that Prince William of Orange would come to help the Protestant cause or that the Huguonots would take up arms against the king's forces. In December of 1566, Valenciennes was officially declared a rebel city. In February of the next year, to the dismay of the people, Prince William of Orange informed them that he had abandoned his plan to help them. Finally, in March, Philip's men attacked and entered the city.

de Brès and his fellow preacher were able to escape over the wall during the night and meet up with several others. However, the next day they were discovered and arrested. Eventually they were transferred to Valenciennes, where de Brès and his fellow prisoners were cruelly tortured.


Not surprisingly de Brès was depressed over his capture. In a touching letter to his wife from prison, de Brès comments on the doctrine of Providence: "It is very true that human reason rebels against this doctrine and resists it as much as possible and I have very strongly experienced this myself. When I was arrested, I would say to myself, 'So many of us should not have traveled together.... We ought not to have been arrest-

ed.' With such thoughts I became overwhelmed, until my spirits were raised by meditation on the providence of God." By God's grace, de Brès clung to the truth of God's providence: "Now remember that I did not fall into the hands of my enemies by mere chance, but through the providence of my God who controls and governs all things, the least as well as the greatest." de Brès' attitude exemplified the very truth contained in Article 13 of his confession: "This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father...."

On May 31, 1567 as he was led to be hanged, de Brès expressed his joy over the privilege of dying for the sake

of the gospel: "I never dared to think that God would do me such an honor." With a noose around his neck, de Brès admonished the people to be faithful to the Word of God and to submit to the magistrates. Before he finished speaking, de Brès was thrown from the ladder to his death.

His persecutors were able to silence de Brès' speech. But they were not able to suppress the truth of his Confession. "The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still."

Wonderfully, the Confession penned by God's servant Guido de Brès continues with us today some 450 years after it was first published, still serving faithful churches of the Reformation. 

REV. AUDRED SPRIENSMa

## Guido deBrès, the Belgic Confession, and the Sacraments

### Historical Context

We have in the Belgic Confession a rather lengthy section on the sacraments. This is due to the controversy that raged at the time of the Reformation. So, in order for us to appreciate fully what the Belgic Confession sets forth as to the sacraments, we need to look at the historical context of this writing and the then-current thought regarding the sacraments.

The gospel, with the sacraments that picture and seal the promise of the gospel, ought to unite believers! But when heresy creeps in, it is faithfulness to the gospel that differentiates and divides.

The Roman Catholic Church taught that the sacraments were in themselves able to impart grace. The sacraments therefore took the forefront of worship in the Roman Catholic Church. Much fear and superstition

had entered into the receiving of the sacraments, and the sacraments became greatly individualized. Over against such evils, there were those who downplayed the importance of the sacraments, seeing them as vain or insignificant, or external and empty ceremonies. Menno Simons, who might be considered the most dominant spokesman for the Anabaptists, argued that preachers deceive people when they teach that God works powerfully but invisibly in our hearts by the sacraments. Others rejected sacraments, insisting that the Holy Spirit works grace apart from any and all means. Caspar von Schwenkfeld went so far as to condemn Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers as false prophets who failed to esteem Christ as the only Savior, since they placed next to Him the preaching of the Word and sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

Out of misuse, superstition, and depreciation of these holy symbols, the Reformed faith came forth on

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<sup>1</sup> P.Y. De Jong: *The Church's Witness to the World*, vol. 2, p. 335.



the basis of God's Word with a beautiful and balanced treatment of the nature, purpose, efficacy, and therefore the importance and need for the sacraments. Their position was not a compromise between the various other views. Rather, it brought the church back to the Bible, insisting that, in connection with the sacraments, God does bestow saving grace. But, carefully, our Confession distinguishes between the externals (water, bread, and wine) and the internal mystery (God's grace in Christ applied by the Spirit). Or, to put it another way, our Confession carefully differentiates between the sign and the thing signified.

There were five different approaches to the sacraments, approaches that continue today.

The first position is that taken by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe and Asia. "Sacraments came to be regarded as means which actually conferred grace upon all who partook, so long as they did not consciously impede their efficacy by willful unbelief or sin."<sup>2</sup> These sacraments therefore became powerful and important, coming to the forefront of worship. The preaching was necessary only to teach men how to use the sacraments. By its seven sacraments the Church through, its clergy, dispensed God's grace. The sacraments became a goldmine for the Roman Church.

Luther, too, taught that God bestows grace through the sacraments, but he stressed that the sacraments were intended only for believers, God confirming to them the promises of His Word. Rome accused Luther of making the grace of God subjective, entirely dependent upon the personal faith-response of the individual.<sup>3</sup> Luther refined his ideas, making the grace of God more directly connected with the elements. This led to the Lutheran conceptions of baptismal regeneration and the physical presence of Christ in the Supper.

Zwingli rejected the Roman view of the sacraments as an objective means of grace. The sacraments, he said, are merely signs of God's work of salvation. The partakers receive no grace through them.

The Anabaptists viewed the sacraments not as signs and seals of God's grace to us, but rather pledges that we give to God of our faith and obedience. This view is much

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 333, 334.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 334.

like that of Zwingli, though Zwingli stressed the social and corporate character of the sacraments, whereas the Anabaptist's approach was very individualistic.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to these four approaches, the Reformed viewed the sacraments as means of grace to the believer through the inner working of the Spirit, a view worked out and developed in the Belgic Confession, Articles 33-35. In this article we intend to focus only on the truth taught clearly in the first of those three articles.

We do need to pause for a moment to look at how Guido de Brès dealt with the errors of the Roman Catholic Church and the teachings of the Anabaptists. Surprisingly, the Belgic Confession contains no denunciations of the Roman Catholic Church, while the Anabaptists are severely denounced. John Calvin, in his *Gallican Confession*, on which Guido de Brès relied, and in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, did not hesitate to repudiate those churches as well as their doctrine. The Heidelberg Catechism goes further, calling the mass "nothing but an accursed idolatry." de Brès was not hesitant to call out by name the *Anabaptists*, writing, "Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists" (Art. 34), and again, "Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people..." (Art. 36). But no such denunciations of *Rome* by name. Why?

The answer lies in the purpose of this Confession and the recipients of this Confession. de Brès sought to separate the Protestant Reformation from the rebellious and seditious Anabaptists. In contrast to the Anabaptists, the Reformed were good and loyal citizens of the earthly kingdom, posing no threat to the King of Spain. The purpose of the Confession was to bring the King and his court and those in the Roman Catholic faith to an understanding of the Reformed faith, and to win them to that faith through a positive development of the truth of God's Word. We can learn from this. We must ask: To whom are we writing? What is the purpose? Are we writing to warn our people and our children of heresies? Are we writing in a desire to win others to our faith? If desiring to bring them to our faith, we need to come with positive teaching. If we first bash our opponents, can we really expect them to listen eagerly to our instruction afterwards? As the saying goes, "Sugar draws more flies than vinegar." Yes,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 335.

our Formula of Subscription calls us to combat and refute and contradict errors, but we must always do so by speaking the truth in love, mindful of who it is to whom we write, and therefore careful how we write.

### The Purpose of the Sacraments

“We believe...” Our confessions express what we as a church believe in the heart and confess with the mouth. This is not a mere, cold, intellectual statement, but a living, vibrant confession of faith beating in believing hearts.

“Our gracious God...has ordained the sacraments for us...” What is the origin and institution of the sacraments? Are they of *God*, or of the *church*? Who gives them, who defines them, who decides the number of them? The answer to those questions determines the nature, number, and efficacy of these means of grace. Rome taught that it was the church, holding that there were seven sacraments. In answer, we confess, “our gracious God...has ordained.” He has ordained and has given the church her sacraments. He gives two sacraments, “which Christ our Lord has instituted, ... two only, namely, the sacrament of baptism and the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God is gracious. He gives the sacraments to us, not because He needs them, but, rather, on “account of our weakness and infirmities.” It is because of our inability to comprehend spiritual things. God through the sacraments does three things.

First, he “seals unto us His promises.” A seal in itself is nothing. But when the seal is attached to a document, it authenticates what is written. Second, in this way God gives us “pledges of His good will and grace toward us.” We have a visible word. The promises of God are portrayed to us in a picture.<sup>5</sup> Third, God in this way “nourishes and strengthens our faith.” Our weak faith continues to need to be strengthened as we battle against sin and doubt and fear. The sacraments are not vain or insignificant, as Zwingli implied. They are God’s gracious tools to bring us to the object of our faith, Christ Jesus! Sacraments are “visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing”: our salvation! By these means God works in us to strengthen our faith by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, xiv, 6.

### The Sacraments and Their Relationship to the Word Preached

The sacraments are “joined to the word of the gospel.” For Rome, the sacraments were the primary means of grace, the preaching being necessary only to bring the hearers to the sacraments. Our Confession points out that the sacraments have no legitimate place, purpose, or efficacy apart from the Word. God has joined. The Word and the sacraments are ordained by our gracious God. Both have as their central content Jesus Christ, revealed in His person and work. Both are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit for their efficacy.

But there are differences. *Necessity*: The hearing of the word preached is indispensable to salvation (Rom. 10:13-15). Nowhere is this affirmed of the sacraments. The sacraments are necessary because God commands us to use these means. *Extent*: The gospel must be preached to all men everywhere. The sacraments are restricted to believers whom God gathers into His church. *Aim*: The preaching of the gospel is intended by God to work and to strengthen faith. The sacraments aim only at the strengthening of that faith. While there can be preaching without the sacraments, there can be no sacraments without the preaching. The preaching in Reformed churches was thus restored to its primary position. Everything else in the service revolves around the Word and the preaching.

### The Efficacy of the Sacraments

How do the sacraments work in our lives? This is the heart of the sacramental conflicts that disturbed the churches in the days of the Reformation and that continue today. Do the elements in the sacraments mysteriously change, and of themselves impart grace? Is that grace given to all who partake, regardless of whether or not there is faith? Is the reality of the sacrament dependent upon man’s response?

Notice that our Confession declares that “God has joined [the sacraments] to the word of the gospel, the better to present to our senses both that which He declares to us by His word...” What God has joined, let not man put asunder. The words “the better” do not mean that the sacraments are better than the Word, but rather it means that now we not only hear the word with our ears, but our other senses are also employed


to see, smell, and taste those gracious promises made to us by our God. God by these means “works inwardly in our hearts.” The sacraments are not mere pictures of our glorious salvation. They are seals, a guarantee of a faithful covenant God who never breaks His word that He will be gracious towards us. God works in us! It is an inward and invisible thing. Christ Jesus is presented to us! God’s covenant with us is revealed to us.

Two things are repudiated. First, rejected are the Zwinglian and Anabaptist views that reduce the sacraments to empty and meaningless signs, or to man’s pledge to God. Rejected, also, is, Rome’s view that the elements themselves have inherent power to work or impart saving grace to the heart. The water of baptism does not cleanse. The bread and wine do not become Christ’s body and blood. Therefore we do not cling to them but lift up our hearts to heaven where Christ is seated. He is our spiritual food.

It is God who works this inward and invisible thing. He uses earthly elements: the word spoken, water, and bread and wine. But God works grace “in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit who produces and sustains our life in Christ Jesus! God binds

this blessed work to the preaching and the sacraments. Christ comes to us. This is how the Spirit works! The Spirit works faith through the preaching. The Spirit strengthens our faith through the preaching and the sacraments. Unbelievers therefore, in the taking of these elements, receive only condemnation and wrath. Far better it were for them never to have received these ordinances. But the child of God, through faith, receives Christ. He experiences covenant fellowship with his God. He is nourished like a tree planted by springs of water. He is fed unto life eternal.

### **In the Assembly of the Saints**

One more thing should be pointed out in regard to the sacraments: The sacraments are given to the church to be administered “in the assembly of the people of God with humility and reverence...” In far too many groups, the sacraments become a private affair, conducted even in homes and among friends. In Reformed churches sacraments are administered in the assembly of God’s people, supervised by the elders, enjoyed by the communion of saints. By faith, we hear and see Christ, who is our life and our salvation. 

**PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA**

## Clearly Distinguishing the True Church from the False

**[The reader is asked to read first the Belgic Confession Article 29: The Marks of the True Church, and Wherein She Differs from the False Church.]**

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**M**any of the great debates of the Reformation concerned the church itself—what the church is, and what she should be like. That fact led Guido de Brès to devote the largest section of the Belgic Confession to ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. The Confession gives solid, biblical instruction on the offices and government of the church (30, 31), the order and discipline that must be found in the church (32), the sacraments (33-35), and the relationship between the church and the state (36).

Article 27 describes the church catholic, and the following article insists that it is the duty of everyone to join a manifestation of the catholic church, i.e., to join a local congregation that is part of the one, holy, catholic church. The importance, yea, the necessity, of this membership, is obvious, for outside of it there is no salvation. But if one is required to join a congregation that is a manifestation of this true church, one must know how to distinguish the true church from the false. That is the significance of Article 29—it gives the marks by which one can clearly recognize the true church and the false.

The Confession gives three marks of the true church, namely:

- the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein;
- she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; and
- church discipline is exercised in the punishing of sin.

Then it adds a summary: “In short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church.”

Readily apparent is the influence that John Calvin had on Reformed theology and on de Brès himself. When Calvin came to Geneva in 1536, he drew up a *Confession of Faith which all the citizens and inhabitants of Geneva and the subjects of the country must promise to keep and hold*. Article 18 of this confession was on “the church.” The article reads (and we emphasize the marks of the church):

While there is one only Church of Jesus Christ, we always acknowledge that necessity requires companies of the faithful to be distributed in different places. Of these assemblies each one is called Church. But in as much as all companies do not assemble in the name of our Lord, but rather to blaspheme and pollute him by their sacrilegious deeds, we believe that *the proper mark by which rightly to discern the Church of Jesus Christ is that his holy gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard, and kept, that his sacraments be properly administered*, even if there be some imperfections and faults, as there always will be among men. On the other hand, where the Gospel is not declared, heard, and received, there we do not ac-

knowledge the form of the Church. Hence the churches governed by the ordinances of the pope are rather synagogues of the devil than Christian churches.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-three years later, Calvin’s views had not changed, as his last edition of the *Institutes* shows: “Hence the form of the Church appears and stands forth conspicuous to our view. Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence...” (4.1.9).

In his famous reply to Cardinal Sadolet, Calvin wrote, “There are three things on which the safety of the Church is founded and supported: doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments; and to these a fourth is added: ceremonies, by which to exercise the people in offices of piety.”

Notice that there Calvin places Christian discipline along side of doctrine and the sacraments. Indeed, Calvin made it plain that he considered proper Christian discipline to be a mark of the church. In practice and in writing, he maintained that proper administration of the sacraments included barring those who lived in open, unrepentant sin. Calvin was willing to put his life on the line to uphold the principle that the impenitent had no right to the sacraments.

The question arises, why these three marks? The answer to that is first of all this: By means of these three, Christ saves His church. Recall that the Confession taught that outside of the church of Christ, there is no salvation. These are the means Christ uses in the church—preaching, sacraments, and discipline.

Accordingly, these are the three official activities that Christ specifically enjoined upon His disciples, who represented the church. 1) Preach (Matt. 28:19-20); 2) Administer the sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20); 3) Exercise Christian discipline (Matt. 16; 18; I Cor. 5).

In addition, Christ is the Anointed One, *the* office-bearer of God, set by God to be head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ preaches in His church, through the minister whom He calls to preach. Christ administers the sacraments and exercises Chris-

<sup>1</sup> Reid, J. K. S. (1954). *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (31). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.



tian discipline through the ministers and elders. Christ does that because He is present in His church by His grace and Spirit. He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Rev. 2:1). Where Christ is present, there these marks are visible.

But where Christ is not present, where He has removed His Spirit, the assembly is the false church. The marks of the false church are the exact opposite of the marks of the true church. The false church rejects the truth and preaches the lie. "She ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ."

In the false church, the sacraments are profaned: "Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper."

And in the false church, Christian discipline is misused. Rather than punish the impenitent evil doer, the false church "persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry."

The Confession rightly concludes: "These two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other."

### One True Church?

The Confession's clear and absolute distinction between the true and the false church creates a problem for some. They conclude that there must be one true church (that is, denomination), and all the rest are false. Or, that there can be but one true church in a given area, and all the rest are false. That is emphatically not what the article is teaching. Proof of this is found first in history. Reformers such as Calvin and de Brès did not hold that there was but one true church. Calvin not only revered Luther and fellowshipped with Melancthon, he also instructed Reformed people in foreign lands (where no Reformed church existed) to worship with the Lutherans, even when they used candles in the worship service. On the other hand, Calvin called all believers to come out of Rome! Rome was the false church; the Lutherans were not.

Second, that the article is not suggesting that there is one denomination that is true, while all others are false, is clear from this, that the article is discussing the local congregation, not the denomination. For only the local

congregation preaches, administers the sacraments, and exercises Christian discipline.

Third, the article is explaining how to *distinguish* the true from the false. It is not teaching how to *identify* the only true one.

Let me illustrate the difference. A man who mines for gold knows that there is in the ground gold, and fool's gold. The fool's gold has some resemblance to true gold. An inexperienced observer might ask him: How can you distinguish between true gold and fake gold? The miner could then give certain characteristics of true gold, and certain characteristics of fake gold. He is not answering the question: How can you tell the one pure gold nugget that is the only true, pure gold nugget? Certainly some gold nuggets are purer than other gold nuggets. But that is not the point. He will set forth how to recognize the difference between true gold and fool's gold.

Likewise the Confession is not telling us how to identify the one true church in distinction from all false. It is rather setting forth how we can know that a church is a true church of Christ, and how we can know that another is a false church. Some of the churches are true, having the preaching of the truth, proper administration of the two sacraments, and some Christian discipline exercised. Such a church may also have some wrong teaching, some improper elements in the administration of the sacraments, and some inconsistencies in Christian discipline. That church is not as pure as it should be. But it is not yet a false church. If it does not repent and return to the preaching of the pure doctrine, proper administration of the sacraments, and right application of Christian discipline, such a church will become the false church. She will lose all the marks of the true, and exhibit all the marks of the false church.

For this reason, a helpful figure for understanding "the true church" is a wedge.<sup>2</sup> The figure of the wedge is excellent because a wedge has a sharp point and a dull edge. The sharp point of the wedge represents the church where the three marks are clearly and sharply manifest. The dull edge represents the church where

<sup>2</sup> I heartily recommend a *Standard Bearer* article printed in July of 1983 entitled, "At the Point of the Wedge" (Vol. 59, p. 415). It is the commencement address of the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema to the graduates of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary that spring.


the three marks are largely obscured—barely visible and mixed with all sorts of errors.

This understanding of Article 29 has significant practical application.

First, the calling of each and every believer is to be at the point of the wedge. He must therefore not only *distinguish* between the true and the false, he must also discern the church that is at the point. And he must not rest until he is convinced that the church where he is member is at the point of the wedge. He must be convinced that no other church has the truth more purely preached; that no other church is more faithful in administering the sacraments or exercising Christian discipline. If he faithfully applies the standard, namely the Bible and the Reformed confessions, then he arrives at the point of the wedge.

Second, the Confession, after setting forth the marks of the true church, rightly warns: “from which no man has a right to separate himself.” No one may leave the church that has these marks because he was offended by a fellow member, or a decision of a consistory did not go his way, or he does not like the minister. At the same time, the fact that a church has the marks to some extent does not require a man to remain

there until that church has lost all evidence of the marks of the true church. When a church adopts false doctrine and refuses to repent, it has taken a step away from the truth. It has set itself on the path of apostasy. After protesting, warning, and urging his church to turn, to no avail, a faithful member must leave that church for one that maintains the truth of God more purely. God will bless that move towards the point of the wedge. On the other hand, God’s judgment comes on one who moves from the point of the wedge to a church that less clearly manifests the three marks. God’s judgment is that the man, in his generations, moves out of the true church altogether! A dreadful judgment indeed!

The Reformed believer rejoices that the Confession gives this good guidance to distinguish the true from the false church. May God grant to His people the wisdom to discern, and the courage to seek membership where the true church clearly manifests these marks. Insofar as a man is at the point, he contributes to the sharpness of the church’s witness. Insofar as anyone is content to be in a church that is not at the point, he contributes to the dullness of the wedge. Therefore, for the good of the church, for your own spiritual profit, and for the glory of God’s name, rightly apply this article. Seek the true church that is at the point of the wedge. 

REV. CORY GRIESS

## The Belgic Confession on Scripture

**T**he foundational issue in the Reformation of the church in the sixteenth century was the question of authority. Where was authoritative special revelation from God to be found upon earth?<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church taught that there were two sources of special revelation: Scripture, and the tradition of the church. This church tradition had

<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed agreed that there were two sources of revelation: general and special. But they did not agree on how many sources of special revelation there were.

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begun as oral traditions supposedly passed down to the church from the apostles. Eventually it came to mean anything that the church had declared, whether in its councils, its magisterium, or its pope (speaking *ex cathedra*). The Roman Catholic Church taught, then, a dual source for authority regarding matters of faith and life.<sup>2</sup>

Luther, and the rest of the Reformers following him, proclaimed instead that God’s special revelation was

<sup>2</sup> Later, at the Council of Trent, which was the Roman Catholic Church’s official response to the Reformation, Rome officially anathematized anyone who did not bind himself to this dual source of special revelation. See the “Decrees of the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent.”

found in the Scriptures alone. Luther sparked the Reformation based on this conviction when he expressed it to the peril of his own life at the Diet of Worms. There Luther declared with famous words, “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything.” Scripture is the authority for faith and life, Luther said, and if the church and her tradition contradict Scripture, then Scripture’s authority must rule the day.

This principle of *sola scriptura* became what is called the “formal” principle of the Reformation—Scripture alone would rule the faith and life of the Reformation church. This principle is encapsulated in the Reformation creeds, including the Belgic Confession of Faith written by Guido de Brès and officially adopted by the Dutch Reformed at the Synod of Dordt 1618-’19. In Article 7 the Confession begins, “We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God...” And then in the second paragraph of the same article: “Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all.”

The Scriptures alone are the ultimate authority for doctrine and life for the church and for the individual church member. They alone can ultimately bind the conscience. And if the teaching of an individual or the church is proven to contradict the teaching of the Word of God, the teaching of men must fail. In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the authority of Scripture depended upon the authority of the church. In the teaching of the Reformation, the authority of the church depended upon the authority of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Church also teaches that the hierarchy of the church can provide infallible divine guidance. Therefore the members are to have implicit faith in the church’s interpretation of Scripture. The Scriptures themselves, then, are not ultimately free to interpret themselves. For, if the Scriptures are shown to interpret themselves in a way contrary to the interpretation of the Roman Catholic magisterium, the church’s interpretation must simply be trusted.

The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). The responsibility of the church is to hold up that Word in all its power and clarity before the church and the world (I Tim 3:15).<sup>4</sup>

Because Scripture alone is the source of special revelation and is the ultimate rule for faith and life, the Belgic Confession teaches the *sufficiency* of Scripture. That teaching is found especially in the first paragraph of Article 7, where it declares that Scripture is sufficient because it contains three things: “the will of God, whatsoever a man ought to believe unto salvation, and the whole manner of worship.” God’s will, His commands for His creatures’ lives, is contained in this Word. The fact of the will of His decree is revealed in these Scriptures. The plan of salvation, even as that plan was unfolded in the history of Scripture itself, is contained therein. The way we are to worship God corporately, and in our whole life, is clearly revealed in the Word of God. There is no other authority necessary for faith and life.

However, the Scriptures do not exhaust the knowledge of God. God is beyond our comprehension. Yet, they contain the sufficient revelation we need at this point in the history of redemption, to live before the face of God and, by grace, to advance the kingdom.

That does not mean that the Scriptures are sufficient for everything we need to know about everything. They are not. The Scriptures are not sufficient to teach you how to paint your house. They will not tell you, in the end, which college to go to. They will, however, tell you that you ought not paint your house on Sunday. They will tell you that you need the means of grace while you are in college, and that you need to study in a place where you can live a Christian life.

<sup>4</sup> The Confession does not teach, however, that the church has no authority. Article 7 says that we do not consider the writings of men or the decisions of the church to be of *equal value* with Scripture. The church and its teaching have authority in accordance with the Word of God. Also, a man may (and if he wants to stay in a particular communion, must) willingly submit himself even to rules and regulations in the church for the sake of unified practice, even if they are not explicitly taught in the Word of God. But in the end, the church’s authority is always subject to the authority of God’s Word. And a man’s conscience may not be ultimately bound, but by the Word of God alone.

Their sufficiency is not in being a “magic eight ball” for every life decision. Their sufficiency is in leading God’s people in all of life regarding salvation and spiritual understanding.

When the Confession says the Scriptures are sufficient, it also does not mean that we must never go hear sermons, or read books about the Bible, or have creeds. The Confession is not promoting a Biblicist mentality, where it is just me and my Bible. It means that books, and writings, and even church services, are necessary and valuable, but only insofar as they are founded upon the Word of God. The Word is the ultimate authority regarding everything to which it speaks.<sup>5</sup>

The question now is *why* are the Scriptures *alone* authoritative and sufficient for doctrine and life? The answer the Confession gives is that these Scriptures are alone the inspired Word of God, whereas the councils of the church and the statements of popes are not.

In Article 3 the Belgic Confession states that not only the oral Word of God given to the prophets and apostles, but also the writing of that Word on the original pages of the books of the Bible, was a process inspired by God. The *source* of the words of Scripture is God’s own breath. As the Scriptures themselves testify concerning themselves, “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21); and “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16).<sup>6</sup>

While God used men to write the words He wanted to be written down to reveal Himself, there is not one word in all of Scripture that ultimately traces itself back to man. God took up, and sovereignly ordained, the personalities, experiences, and even sins, of the human writers so that exactly what He wanted to reveal would be written down in the exact form He desired. There is no mechanical inspiration advocated by the Confession, but the emphasis in Article 3 is certainly on the fact that even though the Scriptures are organically

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<sup>5</sup> This includes geology, history, biology, psychology, etc. insofar as the Bible speaks to those matters. The Bible, for example, is not a biology textbook, but it does speak to biology and it does have authority that guides us as we study biology.

<sup>6</sup> For what to me is a convincing argument that the phrase “All scripture” here refers explicitly (not just by implication) not only to the OT books, but to NT books as well, see the NIGTC on the Pastoral Epistles written by George W. Knight III, pp. 447, 448.

inspired, their source in every jot and tittle is the mind of God Himself. As surely as the source of the Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God is God alone, so the source of all Scripture as breathed by God onto the page through the minds of men is God alone. Therefore, the Scriptures alone are ultimately authoritative. And, therefore, the Scriptures alone are sufficient.

But there is one more question that must be answered. How do we know that *these sixty-six books*, the books contained in the Protestant Bible, are *alone* those God-breathed words? What about other books that claim to be authoritative? What about the apocryphal books of the Roman Catholic Church? What about the Book of Mormon, or the Koran? What about recently discovered documents such as the so-called gospels of Thomas and Judas? How do we know those are not inspired?

In Article 5 the Confession gives three ways by which we know and trust that the Protestant Bible is alone the inspired Word of God. The first way is by the objective witness contained in the Scriptures themselves. The Confession says that the books of the Bible carry *the evidence in themselves* that they alone are God-breathed. The Scriptures are self-authenticating. That means, first, that they explicitly testify concerning themselves that they are inspired, as we have already seen. But it means more than that. It means that just as the cell of a human body contains within it the evidence of a divine creator in its complexity and unity and purpose, so too the Word of God contains within it an imprint of divine origin.

One such internal evidence would be the diversity and yet unity found in the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible. Consider the great diversity among the books of the Bible. There are sixty-six books written from three separate continents, in cities, countryside, prison, palaces; written in three different languages: Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek; written in multiple genres of literature: history,<sup>7</sup> law, poetry, proverb, prophecy, letter, vision; written by forty different authors, many from very different walks of life: fishermen, kings, peasants, poets, statesmen, herdsman, a military

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<sup>7</sup> Containing references to thousands of places, events, times, people, never once contradicted by archeological discovery.



general, a cupbearer, a doctor, a tax collector—and all written over a period of 1,500 years.


And consider, then, the unity in the Scriptures amidst that diversity. There is one story covering the origin of the world to the end of the world, about one God, with one way of salvation centered in one man, who was God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, with everything before Him and after Him pointing to Him in the forms of types, symbols, prophecies; and with one clear purpose in all of that history: that God might bring one people together to Himself that He might have a bride for His Son, all to the praise of the glory of His grace. Such a unity amidst such great diversity is an imprint of the hand of God upon these sixty-six books.

Another evidence the Scriptures carry in themselves is mentioned explicitly by the Confession: *the things foretold in them are fulfilling*. Indeed, the Confession states that the very blind (the unregenerate) can see (they will not believe apart from grace, but they do see it if they study the Bible) that hundreds of prophecies in this book have been fulfilled—over 300 regarding Jesus Christ alone.

Other so-called holy books do not have this internal evidence. They do not have a unity around a divine and glorious message, beyond human invention. They do not have this record of specific prophecy and fulfillment. These sixty-six books are alone the Word of God.

Nonetheless, this objective witness of the Word of God is not enough to convince us of the authority of Scripture without the subjective internal witness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit “witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God.” The Holy Spirit must work in a person’s heart and produce faith in the Holy Scriptures. But the Holy Spirit does not do this by zapping someone mysteriously, or by a person simply picking up the Bible and feeling something extraordinary as he holds it in his hands. But rather, as the Word is read and as one hears it proclaimed, the Holy Spirit testifies, in the hearts of the elect, that the Word is true. Therefore, as when Nathaniel was doubting Philip’s witness that Jesus was the Messiah, and Philip said to him, “Come and see,” we too, God’s people, will be convinced by the Spirit as we “come and see” the Word of God read and proclaimed.

Finally, there is some place given to the testimony of the church in the authority of the Word of God. Here, the Confession is careful. Article 5 says the authority of these books is established, “not so much because the church receives them and approves them.” Rome taught, and still does teach, that the books of Scripture have authority only because she says so. Scripture derives its authority from her. The Belgic Confession declares the opposite. The Word stands alone, and the church derives its authority from the Word.<sup>8</sup> But the fact that so many in the church of all ages have agreed concerning the objective and subjective witness of these books, and the fact that the Protestant church unanimously holds out these books alone, ought also to bring some substance to the claim that these sixty-six books are alone the Word of God.

This doctrine of Scripture was not abstract and theoretical for the Reformed churches, nor was it for Guido de Brès himself. Article 3 of the Confession contains a powerful pastoral statement regarding the inspired, infallible, authoritative, sufficient Word of God, namely, that the purpose for which God gave us this sure Word is for “a special care which He had for us and our salvation.” If we cannot trust this Word, there is no hope. If this Word depends upon the authority of a church made up of sinners for its authority, there is no comfort. Guido de Brès was hanged for his testimony concerning the authority of Scripture and the other doctrines of the Reformed faith. All the while he maintained a great faith in the promises of the Word he defended. How could he do so, except the Word that says, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” traces itself back, not to the authority of men, but to the authority of the God to whom he entrusted his soul. 

<sup>8</sup> The entire Belgic Confession reflects the faith set forth by John Calvin (indeed, the Belgic Confession is based on Calvin’s French Confession of 1559). Article 5 is a good example of this reflection of Calvin. *Institutes* 1.7.2: “It is utterly vain, then, to pretend that the power of judging Scripture so lies with the church that its certainty depends upon churchly assent. Thus, while the church receives and gives its seal of approval to the Scriptures, it does not thereby render authentic what is otherwise doubtful or controversial. But because the church recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture.”

## The Confession on Church/State Relationship

Anyone reading through the confessional standards of the Protestant Reformed Churches will quickly discover that Article 36 of the Belgic Confession is controversial. In fact, one does not even have to *read* the standards, but only *look* at them to see that Article 36 stands out. It is the only article in the Three Forms of Unity that has a footnote appended to correct a supposed error. About the hundreds of other doctrinal statements in the Three Forms of Unity, the Protestant Reformed Churches say, “These accurately reflect the truth of Scripture.” But about a certain statement in Article 36, the PRC say, “We believe this to be in error.”

The controversy that surrounds this article is not unique to the Belgic Confession. Article 36 addresses the relationship between the church and state, and this relationship had been debated for centuries before the Confession was ever written. However, Article 36 brings that controversy home to Reformed churches. Countless hours at Reformed synods have been devoted to the debate over whether Article 36 properly describes the relationship between church and state. Article 36 has been amended, footnoted, revised, and parts have even been dropped by various Reformed denominations. And still the controversy lives on.

In spite of the controversy, Article 36 remains something of a masterpiece. The considerably broad current of Reformed thought on the whole matter of the magistrates is captured in one clear and succinct article. The article shows a conscious reliance on Scripture for its teachings, bringing together in one summary the entire body of biblical instruction regarding civil authority. Article 36 is not an article to be ashamed of, as if it were the dirty laundry of the Reformed church. Rather, it is one of the jewels in the Confession that, despite all of the controversy surrounding it, still shines with a beautiful luster.

What does this gem have to say about the relation-

*Rev. Lanning is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.*

ship between church and state? The relationship goes two ways, and the Confession addresses both of them. First, the state has a certain responsibility toward the church; second, the church has a certain responsibility toward the state.

About the state’s responsibility toward the church, the Confession says that God has given the magistrates a very specific work:

Their office is not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshiped by every one, as He commands in His Word.

Herein lies the controversy. The question is whether this article allows the intrusion of the state into the affairs of the church. The question arises especially from the statement that the magistrates’ duty is to “protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship....” Some Reformed churches became convinced that the Confession was advocating some form of the established church. An established church is a church that the state officially recognizes as the church of the realm. The state uses its wealth, political means, and even military power to maintain and extend the church. The result is a State Church, such as the Anglican Church in England or the former *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands.

In 1910, the Christian Reformed Church added a lengthy footnote to Article 36 opposing the idea of the established church. When the Protestant Reformed Churches were organized in 1925, they adopted the version of the Confession that includes this 1910 footnote. Although the CRC would later rescind the footnote and revise the entire paragraph of the Confession,

the PRC retain the original wording of the Confession, along with the explanatory footnote.

Although the footnote is too long to quote in its entirety here, a few excerpts will serve to illustrate the point. The footnote follows the Confession's statement that the magistrates must "protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship."

This phrase, touching the office of the magistracy in its relation to the church, proceeds on the principle of the established church.... History, however, does not support the principle of state domination over the church, but rather the separation of church and state.... The Christian Reformed Church in America, being in full accord with this view, feels constrained to declare that it does not conceive of the office of the magistracy in this sense, that it be in duty bound to also exercise political authority in the sphere of religion, by establishing and maintaining a State Church....

The footnote's opposition to an established church and to the idea of a State Church is good. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any indication that the state has the authority, or even the ability, to establish and maintain the church by political means. Rather, God establishes His church by His Word. Therefore, with the main content of the footnote, the PRC agree.

It is questionable, however, whether Article 36 of the Belgic Confession actually teaches the principle of the established church. The article identifies one main responsibility of the state toward the church: "protect the sacred ministry." It reiterates that responsibility later: "[Magistrates] must therefore countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere." Protecting the ministry and countenancing the preaching of the Word are not the same as officially recognizing one church as the church of the state.

What about the other, more controversial responsibilities: "and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship"? Even here, the Confession is not necessarily promoting an established church. These responsibilities are not given as responsibilities over and above that of protecting and countenancing the preaching of the Word. Rather, the connecting word "thus" indicates that they stand in the service of protecting the sacred ministry. If the ministry of the Word is physically

threatened by idolatry and false worship, that idolatry and false worship must be removed by the state. This aspect of the state's responsibility is crucial in our own day with the rapid spread of Islam. The religion of Islam declares physical warfare on its enemies, whether those enemies are political or spiritual. If there were a mosque in town where Muslim men were urged to fight a jihad against the church, and those men burned down a Christian church, the state would have a calling not only to arrest those Muslim men, but to shut down the idolatrous, false worship of the mosque that indoctrinated them. Not because that particular Christian church happened to be the official church of the state, but because the protection of the sacred ministry demands it.

So, while the footnote to Article 36 provides a biblical defense against the principle of the established church, it does not need to make this defense against Article 36. The article could stand on its own without the footnote, and not be in error.

The second part of the relationship between church and state has to do with the church's responsibilities toward the state. Article 36 deals with this relationship by looking at the duties the individual members of the church owe the state.

Moreover, it is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God; to supplicate for them in their prayers, that God may rule and guide them in all their ways, and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce a community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God hath established among men.

This part of the Confession is remarkable. Guido de Brès wrote this during one of the most vicious persecutions the church has ever known. Philip II of Spain, following the lead of Rome, brought cruelty and death to the Reformed believers in the Lowlands. It would have been understandable if Guido de Brès had lashed out


against the unjust tyranny of civil rulers and exhorted the people to rebellion and insurrection. Instead, he insisted in the Confession that “it is the bounden duty of every one...to subject himself to the magistrates.”

There were those in the days of de Brès who rejected the authority of the civil government: the Anabaptists. Most of the Anabaptists believed that the magistrates had authority only over the unbelievers, but that believers were exempt from their rule. Some of the Anabaptists went so far as to establish separate communities that ended up being rivals to the authority of the magistrates. These Anabaptists were a significant problem for the Reformed church, because they gave the Reformed church a bad reputation with the king. The crown did not distinguish between Anabaptists and Reformed. As far as Philip and others were concerned, all who were not Romish were merely Protestant. If one Protestant group rebelled, then the whole lot were considered rebels. Although the Reformed people were generally law-abiding, they were often arrested and persecuted on charges of rebellion because of the Anabaptists.

It is no wonder, then, that the Confession so vigorously distanced itself from the Anabaptists. “We detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates....” A copy of this Confession was sent to the king,

along with a letter reminding him that the Reformed people were law-abiding citizens, and asking for relief from their persecution. But the king paid no heed.

It is especially here that Article 36 has still a noble role to play in the life of Reformed believers. Not only are we required by God to live a law-abiding life, but that kind of life is a powerful witness to the civil magistrates when they abandon their duty. There is a persecution coming for the church greater even than that of the Lowlands in the time of Guido de Brès. The Bible calls it “the great tribulation” during the days of Antichrist. In those days, the Reformed church will be able to stand up and show the godless rulers that we continue to be subject to the magistrates. We pray for them; we pay our taxes; we detest all of those who rebel. It will not change the minds of the rulers, but it will be to them a witness of the power of God’s grace to preserve in His people proper honor for authority even in the darkest of days.

And perhaps, just as the Reformed church long ago sent the Spanish king a copy of the Confession, so the Reformed church will someday again send an anti-Christian king the Confession. And if it does, just as the Confession’s author was called to seal his confession with his blood, so God will again call His faithful saints to give all for Him. 

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

## Annotated Bibliography on the Belgic Confession (1651) and Guido deBrès (1522-1567)

### General Works

■ *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005, hardcover (hc), 431 pp. \$9.00. This is the study edition of our Reformed creeds, church order, and liturgical forms, including historical introductions, full proof texts, and indexes to the creeds. Available from the Protestant

Reformed Seminary (catechism@prca.org).

■ *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources (Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought)*, by Nicolaas H. Gootjes; Richard A. Muller, Gen. editor; Baker Academic, 2007; paperback (pb.), 229 pp. \$21.00. ISBN: 9780801032356. Available from Reformation Heritage Books (www.heritagebooks.org). This is a fine, fresh study on the Confession, including chapters on its early history, Calvin and Beza’s relation to it, and its role at the Synod of Dordt.

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■ On-line Resources: the website of the Protestant Reformed Churches ([www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)) and the *Standard Bearer* website ([www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)—also linked through our denominational website) both have numerous articles on Guido de Brès and the Belgic Confession, including full expositions of the articles of the creed. Use the search engines at the sites to find these excellent materials.

### Special Subjects

■ *The Belgic Confession and Its Biblical Basis*, by Lepusculus Vallensis; translated by Rene Vermeulen; Inheritance Publications, 1993; pb., 262 pp. \$15.90. ISBN: 0921100418. Available from Inheritance Publications ([www.telusplanet.net](http://www.telusplanet.net)). This unique book “provides and explains the Scriptural proof texts for the Belgic Confession by using the marginal notes of the Dutch Staten Bijbel,” the translation ordered by the Synod of Dordt (from the back cover).

■ *For the Cause of the Son of God: The Missionary Significance of the Belgic Confession*, by Wes Bredenhof; Reformation Media and Press, 2011 ([www.reformation.edu](http://www.reformation.edu)); pb, 325 pp. \$29.00. ISBN: 9780977344253. This brand-new book by a Canadian Reformed missionary-pastor defends the Confession as a powerful mission statement and tool used by the Reformation churches, and argues that it continues to be so for faithful Reformed churches in the twenty-first century. You will also find interesting and helpful information at Bredenhof’s blog: [yinkahdinay.wordpress.com](http://yinkahdinay.wordpress.com).

### Commentaries on the Confession

■ *The Church’s Witness to the World*, by Peter Y. DeJong; Paideia/Premier, 1980; hc., 446 pp. ISBN: 0888150202 (out of print but still available at Amazon.com). This is the classic English commentary on the Confession, written by a Christian Reformed pastor/theologian.

■ *Everything in Christ: The Christian Faith Outlined According to the Belgic Confession*, by Clarence Stam, Premier, 1988; pb., 152 pp. \$10.00. ISBN: 0887560164. Available from Inheritance Publications. This is a brief study of the Confession in outline form from a Canadian Reformed perspective.

■ *The Church Says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession*, by Jan Van Bruggen; translated by Johanna VanderPlas; Inheritance Publications, 2003; pb., 230 pp. \$13.90. ISBN: 921100175. This is one of the newer commentaries in English on the Confession and comes highly recommended.

■ *The Overflowing Riches of My God: Revisiting the Belgic Confession*, by Clarence Bouwman; Premier Publishing, 2008; pb, 424 pp. \$18.00. ISBN: 9780887560941. Available from Inheritance Publications. This is one of the newest commentaries available, again written by a Canadian Reformed pastor. Includes study questions for discussion.

■ *With Heart and Mouth: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession*, by Daniel R. Hyde; Reformed Fellowship, 2008; hc, 546 pp. \$30.00. ISBN: 9780979367755. Available from Reformation Heritage Books. Written by a United Reformed pastor, this is the newest commentary on the Confession, treating it in its historical, theological, and ecclesiastical contexts with fresh insights for our modern age.

### Biographies on Guido de Brès

■ *Three Men Came to Heidelberg and Glorious Heretic: The Story of Guido de Brès*, by Thea Van Halsema; Inheritance Publications; pb, 126 pp., \$10.00. ISBN: 9781894666893. Available from Reformation Heritage Books. A classic work for young and old, telling the simple but remarkable story of de Brès and his martyrdom for the Reformed faith.

■ *Trust God, Keep the Faith: The Story of Guido de Brès*, by Bartha Hill-de Brès; Inheritance Publications; pb., 89 pp., \$9.95. ISBN: 9780984432011. Available from Reformation Heritage Books. This is a new title, written for older children and adults.

■ *Faithfulness Under Fire: The Story of Guido de Brès*, by William Boekestein; Reformation Heritage Books, 2011; hc, 30 pp. \$10.00. ISBN: 9781601781024. This also is a new book, written for younger children, complete with illustrations and a simple narrative. ☺

**\* Special Note: Except for the last two biographies, all of the above books are available in the library of the Protestant Reformed Theological School.**

### School Activities

Did you know that this school year the list of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools grew by one? The Loveland, CO PRC is in the process of expanding their church building. This expansion has enabled the families in Loveland to start their own high school this year. School opened this fall with seven students in the ninth and tenth grade, with five teachers teaching them! The Lord willing, Loveland will continue to grow their student body, adding the eleventh grade next year and the twelfth grade the year after. This addition to their school was made possible through the generous donations of the families in Loveland, as well as from many others throughout our entire denomination, for which they are very thankful. Presently Loveland is in the process of putting together different pictures, attached to their website, [www.lovelandprc.org](http://www.lovelandprc.org), so that interested people can view some of the exciting changes being done to their church. When we wrote this, toward the end of September, Loveland was having some trouble with that link to their website, so if you are not able to access those pictures that way, you can try <http://s1011.photobucket.com/home/mkgriess>.

We also note here that the stu-

dents in Loveland organized a car-wash for Saturday, September 17. They were trying to raise money for a class trip to Washington D.C.

### Denomination Activities

We haven't said much recently about the Hope Heralds, thinking that we would do that when the men came near to the end of their season of singing. Well, that time has come. As you may know, the Hope Heralds are a men's chorus made up of men from our west Michigan churches. This year they have 68 members and sing most weeks during the summer months in retirement homes, manors, and churches in the area. What you may not know is that this year the Hope Heralds celebrated their 50th year of ministry in song. This celebration has included some extra concerts. In addition to singing at First Jenison CRC on September 11, they also gave their usual society kickoff concert for the Kalamazoo, MI PRC on September 13. This was followed by concerts at the Crete, IL PRC Sunday, September 18; the Randolph, WI PRC on September 22; and in First CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa on September 23. We should also add that they provided special music at the PRC Seminary Conference on September 16. It would be interesting to find out just how many concerts these men gave this year, and how many miles they traveled to get to those concerts. We are sure that each member of the group thanks God for the opportunity to worship Him in song.

The PR Seminary has begun another school year. There are four students this year: Erik Guichelaar (third year), Joshua Engelsma (second year), Ryan Barnhill (first year), and Vernon Ibe, a special student from the Philippines. In addition, there are seven pre-seminary students studying New Testament Greek.

We are also happy to include here that the faculty of our seminary has informed our churches that they have licensed Mr. Vernon Ibe to speak a word of edification in our churches. Mr. Ibe is a member of the Berean PR Church in the Philippines and is presently completing an internship at Grace PRC in Standale, MI, under the mentorship of Rev. R. Van Overloop.

No doubt many of our readers were able to come and celebrate the 400th anniversary of the publication of the KJV of the Bible on September 16 and 17 at First CRC of Byron Center. This conference was presented by our PR Seminary and featured our three professors. Friday evening Prof. R. Dykstra opened the conference, speaking on "Restoring the Bible to the Believer: The Reformation's Concern Over Bible Translation." This was followed Saturday morning by Prof. R. Cammenga speaking on "Ere Many Years, the Boy that Driveth the Plow...: The History of the King James Version." Professor B. Gritters brought the conference to a close speaking on "Should the KJV be replaced?: A Critical Assessment of the KJV and of Some More Re-

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*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

cent Bible Translations.” Following the conference, there was an open house at the Seminary to view the recently completed renovations. Also on display was a portion of the library of the late Dr. Theodore Letis, a prominent New Testament scholar and proponent of the KJV. Of special interest was the display of a very rare copy of the Greek New Testament produced by Theodore Beza, a student and successor of John Calvin.

### Mission Activities

The Consistory of the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, and the calling church for our

denomination’s mission work there, the Doon, IA PRC, have approved the missionaries visiting the All of Grace PR Fellowship in Gabaldon twice each month. Rev. D. Kleyn will continue visiting on the second Sunday of each month, and Rev. R. Smit will visit on the fourth Sunday of each month. In addition, Pastor J. Flores, pastor of the First Reformed Church in Bulacan, and Rev. Kleyn have plans to investigate some mission work of the FRC on the island of Leyte. They plan to leave Friday, September 23, and return again on the following Monday, September 26, D.V.

### Congregation Activities

In order to help the students from other PR churches that are attending the Hull, IA PRC while at Dordt College feel welcome, Hull set up a schedule for them to have Sunday dinners with families from their church. Those who signed up could expect anywhere from three to six students to join them for Sunday dinner.

### Minister Activities

Rev. A. Lanning declined the call he was considering to serve as the next pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. ☺

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Notice

■ With joy and thanksgiving to God, the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Seminary inform the churches that they have licensed Mr. Vernon Ibe to speak a word of edification in our churches. Brother Ibe is a member of the Berean PRC in the Philippines and is presently completing an internship in Grace PRC, Walker, MI under the mentorship of Rev. R. Van Overloop. It is our prayer that God will use this aspect of Mr. Ibe’s training to prepare him to minister the Word among the saints in the Philippines after his graduation from our seminary, the Lord willing, next year. “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). All scheduling of Mr. Ibe will be done through the seminary.

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Elroy Altena in the death of Elroy’s brother,

#### SENTNER ALTENA.

Revelation 21:4: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Rev. James Lanning, President  
Brian Gritters, Clerk of Records

### Lecture

■ Please reserve Friday, October 28 for a Reformation Day lecture by Prof. Dykstra entitled “False Prophets and the Certain End of the World: What the Reformation Can Teach Us.”

The lecture will be held at the Protestant Reformed Church of Crete at 7 P.M.

### Wedding Anniversary

■ We rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

#### MICHAEL and BRENDA ENGELSMA,

as they celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on October 7, 2011. We sincerely appreciate the Christ-centered home and instruction they provided for us as well as the godly example they have shown. We are thankful for the years that God has given them together and pray that He will continue to bless and keep them in His care.

- ❖ Mark and Liz Langerak  
Meghann, Kayley, Trevor
- ❖ Sam and Heather Copple  
Braden, Mitchell, Tyler, Drew, Katie,  
Ethan
- ❖ David and Jaime Ritsema  
Clayton, Devon, Elyse, Tristan
- ❖ Jason and Lois Engelsma  
Evan, Anniva, Ellery, Benjamin
- ❖ Luke and Crystal Engelsma  
Kennery, Dexter
- ❖ Seth Engelsma

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Margaret Hoekstra, Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hoekstra, Mrs. Lois VanMaanen, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Maasen, and Mr. and Mrs. Jason VanMaanen and their families in the death of their brother, brother-in-law, uncle, grandfather, and great grandfather,

#### MR. ED VAN MAANEN.

II Corinthians 5:8: “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

Rev. James Lanning, President  
Brian Gritters, Clerk of Records

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Consistory and congregation of Grandville PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Mr. Jack Brands in the loss of his wife,

#### BRENDA BRANDS,

and to Kirsten, Larissa, and Caitlin Brands in the loss of their mother, who was taken to glory August 15, 2011.

May they find comfort and encouragement in the promises of Scripture: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
Tom Bodbyl, Assistant Clerk

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Brian Gritters in the death of Denise’s sister,

**MRS. BRENDA BRANDS.**

John 11:25, 26, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

Rev. James Laning, President  
Don VerMeer, Clerk

**Wedding Anniversary**

■ With joy in our hearts we congratulate our parents,

**TERRY and LAVONNE  
KOOIENGA,**

as they celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary on October 1, 2011. “For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death” (Psalm 48:14).

- ❖ Jared and Janice Kooienga  
Trevor, Laci, Tanner
- ❖ Brian and Tara Koole  
Mitchel, Evan, Kelly, Samantha,  
Jordan
- ❖ Ryan and Katie Kooienga  
Emma, Tyler, Meghan, Kayla
- ❖ Todd and Nicole Kooienga  
Madison
- ❖ Brett and Denise Zandstra  
Austin
- ❖ Vonda Kooienga
- ❖ Bryce Kooienga
- ❖ Seth Kooienga

Jenison, Michigan

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Consistory and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Jim Reitsma and family in the death of Donna’s father,

**HAROLD LUCAS.**

May they find comfort in these words from Psalm 33:20: “Our soul waiteth for the LORD; he is our hope and our shield.”

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President  
Tom Bodbyl, Assistant Clerk

**Wedding Anniversary**

■ On September 18, 2011 our parents, **DUANE and KATHY MINGERINK**, celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for the many years of faithful and blessed marriage He has given to them. We are thankful for the godly example they have been to us, as well as for their continual love and guidance in our lives. It is our prayer that God continue to bless them in their lives together. Psalm 127:1: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

- ❖ Jason & Tammi Scholten  
Whitney, Haley, Ethan, Carter,  
Jacob, Emery
- ❖ Chad & Katie Mingerink  
Colten, Chloe
- ❖ Kurt & Ciri Mingerink  
Kaden, Sadie
- ❖ Jared & Stacy Hekstra  
Joshua
- ❖ Karli Mingerink

Byron Center, Michigan

**Wedding Anniversary**

■ With humble thanks to God, we celebrated with our parents, **MARVIN and NANCY KAMPS**, their 50th wedding anniversary on October 6, 2011. They have been faithful in their covenant marriage in setting forth a godly example for us all. We thank them for all their selfless acts of love and kindness shown to us and their grandchildren. Our prayer is that God may continue to bless and keep them in their marriage. Our God is a covenant God and faithful to keep all His promises!

Psalm 125:1, 2: “They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.” Psalm 136:1: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.”

With much love from all your children  
and grandchildren.

**Reformation Lecture**

Friday, October 28, 2011  
7:30 P.M.

**Prof. Ronald L. Cammenga**

will speak on:

“The Heart of the Reformation:  
Justification by Faith Alone”

to be held at:

Community Orthodox  
Presbyterian Church  
2131 Alamo Ave.  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
sponsored by the  
Evangelism Committee  
of Kalamazoo PRC

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Wilmyna Jansma, and to Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Bleyenbergh and family in the death of their husband, brother-in-law, and uncle,

**TONY JANSMA.**

II Corinthians 1:3, 4: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

Rev. James Laning, President  
Brian Gritters, Clerk of Records

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