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Special Reformation Issue:

The Reformation in the Netherlands

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On this Issue

The work of reforming the church is always a work of God by His sovereign grace. The church is God's, and He has determined the marks of the true church. These marks are the preaching of the pure gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the right exercise of Christian discipline.

However, due to the sinful natures of believers as well as the presence of carnal seed within the church, there is a constant tendency for the church to depart from these biblical standards. For this reason, God must reform His church from time to time.

No greater reformation of God's church ever occurred than the great sixteenth century reformation of Luther and Calvin. After a thousand years of apostasy and corruption, reform was crucial in all aspects of the church's life – doctrine, worship, church polity, and walk of life.

This one glorious reformation, God worked differently in the various regions of Europe. This issue of the *Standard Bearer* is devoted to the reformation of God's church in the Netherlands, or the Lowlands. One of the notable features of this reformation in the Netherlands is that there was no dominant church-

man to lead the way. Yet the reformation there was a thoroughgoing reform of God's church. It was also unashamedly Calvinistic.

This issue will examine the reform of doctrine, church polity, and worship in the Netherlands; the problem of the church and state relationship in this period; and the contributions of this reformation to missions. And, finally, this issue will demonstrate that the convictions of these Reformed Dutch were deep-seated, as untold thousands gave their lives for the sake of the truth.

RJD 

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace or The Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Nowhere has the doctrine of the covenant figured as prominently, or been so

thoroughly developed, from the sixteenth century Reformation of the church to the present, as in the Dutch Reformed tradition.

For this the Christian church owes the Dutch Reformed tradition a huge debt of gratitude, inasmuch

as the truth of the covenant is central to the Christian faith and life.

Covenant and Election

A fundamental truth of the covenant of grace was determined early in the history of the Reformed

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faith in the Netherlands. That God establishes the covenant with the elect only, particularly, with the elect children of godly parents only; that God directs the promise of the covenant to the elect only; that God is gracious in the covenant to the elect only; and that God gives all the covenant blessings and the covenant salvation to the elect only, on the basis of the covenant death of Christ for the elect only, was authoritatively decided in the time of the spread of the Reformation into the Netherlands in its distinctively Reformed form. This was roughly the period from about the middle of the sixteenth century to the meeting of the synod of Dordt in 1618/1619.

At this time, the very beginning of the Dutch Reformed tradition, the Spirit of truth led the Reformed church in the Netherlands to decide that election governs the covenant.

What this means is that God's covenant grace is not wider than the eternal decree in Christ ordaining certain humans unto salvation, in distinction from others appointed to damnation. In arriving at this official decision, the Reformed church in the Netherlands simply applied the fundamental truth of the Reformation, namely, that salvation is by sovereign grace alone, to the reality of the covenant.

Two considerations seem to belie the assertion that the Reformed church in the Netherlands decided the doctrine of the covenant early and that it confessed the covenant to be governed by election. The first consideration is that the earliest Dutch Reformed theologians, for example Gomarus, and the "Three Forms of Unity" lacked a developed doctrine of the covenant. In fact, the covenant did not have a prominent place in the theology of the earliest Dutch Reformed theologians or in the "Three Forms of Unity."

The second consideration is that the development of the doctrine of the covenant in the Dutch

Reformed tradition after Dordt has taken place by a vigorous, even fierce, controversy. As C. Graafland has shown in his magisterial three-volume study of the "origin and development of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed Protestantism," *Van Calvijn tot Comrie* [Eng. tr.: *From Calvin to Comrie*] (Boekencentrum, 1992-1996), the issue in the controversy over the covenant in the Dutch Reformed tradition, as in Reformed Protestantism generally, has always been the relation of the covenant and election. More particularly, the issue has always been the question whether election governs the covenant. Summing up his study, Graafland identifies the "main line" as "the relation which the doctrine of the covenant has (had) to the doctrine of election" (*Van Calvijn tot Comrie*, vol. 3, p. 394; this and all subsequent quotations from Graafland's three volumes are my translation of the Dutch).

E. Smilde, in his *Een Eeuw van Strijd om Verbond en Doop* [Eng. tr.: *A Century of Struggle over Covenant and Baptism*] (Kok, 1946), and C. Veenhof, in *Prediking en Uitverkiezing* [Eng. tr.: *Preaching and Election*] (Kok, 1959), have demonstrated that this controversy over the relation of the covenant and election continued in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. This was the very same controversy that split the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) in the 1940s and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America in the early 1950s.

This fundamental issue of the relation of election and the covenant confronts the entire Reformed community in North America at the present hour in the spreading heresy of the "federal vision." The "federal vision" is a covenant doctrine, which for all its new developments, especially its bold advocacy of justification by faith as a human work and by other works of the sinner, is as old as the covenant theology of Coornhert (d. 1590), Snecanus (d. about 1600),

Wiggertsz (d. 1624), Arminius (d. 1609), and Amyraut (d. 1664). The "federal vision" is a doctrine of the covenant that cuts the covenant loose from God's eternal election in order to make election dependent on the sinner's free and sovereign choice for or against God in the covenant. It is a covenant doctrine that denies sovereign grace in the covenant.

Controversy over the Covenant

If there was little development of, and indeed little emphasis on, the covenant in the early Dutch theologians and in the creeds, and if the subsequent history of the dogma in the Netherlands has been a fierce controversy between those who affirmed and those who denied that election governs the covenant, how can it be said that the doctrine of the covenant was established early in the history of the Reformed church in the Netherlands as a bond of salvation governed by election?

It is true that there has been a long, often bitter, struggle in the churches of the Dutch Reformed tradition over the covenant, particularly over the relation of the covenant and election. It is also true that there have been notable defenders of the truth that election governs the covenant. Graafland recognizes that Gomarus, like Zanchius and Beza, thought it of central importance "that participation in the new covenant of grace has been ordained only for the elect." The reprobate are merely in "the external covenant," or in the covenant "externally." For Gomarus, the covenant was so dominated by election that it was "a part of election" (*Van Calvijn tot Comrie*, vol. 3, pp. 77, 78).

Similarly, the Dutch theologian Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) "in the most radical manner shifted the main truth of the covenant of grace from time to eternity." Comrie "most radically limited the covenant of grace to the elect" (*Van Calvijn tot Comrie*, vol. 3, p. 376).

Smilde and Veenhof demonstrated that VanVelzen, the best of the theologians of the *Afscheiding* [Secession] in the nineteenth century, taught the same doctrine of the covenant. VanVelzen maintained that the phrase “sanctified in Christ” in the Reformed baptism form refers only to the elect children of believing parents.

In light of the history of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed Protestantism, particularly Dutch Reformed Protestantism, it is a mystery why contemporary Reformed theologians so violently react against a doctrine of the covenant that closely relates the covenant and election, and relates them in such a way that election governs the covenant. These theologians assail such a doctrine of the covenant as illegitimate. Their dismissal of the “identification” of the covenant and election (which is their pejorative way of describing a doctrine of the covenant in which election governs the covenant) leaves the impression that this doctrine of the covenant has had no place in the Reformed tradition. But at the very least it must be acknowledged by every knowledgeable, honest scholar that the teach-

ing that the covenant is governed by election has had a prominent, powerful, honorable place in the Reformed tradition.

On the other hand, as Graafland makes plain, the line of those in the Netherlands who defended a doctrine of the covenant “liberated” from the “oppressive weight” of the eternal decree runs through the humanists Coornhert, Veluanus, Snecanus, and Wiggertsz, and the heretics Arminius, vanLimborch, and Amyraut (*Van Calvijn tot Comrie*, vol. 3, pp. 88-278). The foes of predestination have always advanced a doctrine of the covenant that extends the grace of God in Christ more widely than does the “Calvinistic” decree of election. Thus, these foes, whether subtly or overtly, use the covenant to destroy, and bury, election, and with election the gospel of sovereign grace.

A Settled Issue

Although there has been controversy over the relation of the covenant and election in the Dutch Reformed churches from Dordt to the present, the issue was settled already in the early period of the Reformation in the Netherlands. It was settled officially. It was settled

in such a way that Reformed Christianity, particularly Reformed Christianity in the Dutch Reformed tradition, is bound to a doctrine of the covenant that confesses that predestination governs the covenant.

The fundamental issue concerning the covenant, namely, that the covenant is governed by election, was established especially by two official, binding documents, the “Form for the Administration of Baptism” and the Canons of Dordt.

(to be continued) 

Recommended works on the subject of this article:

- C. Graafland, *Van Calvijn tot Comrie*, 3 vols. (Boekencentrum, 1992-1996)
- E. Smilde, *Een Eeuw van Strijd om Verbond en Doop* (Kok, 1946)
- C. Veenhof, *Prediking en Uitverkiezing* (Kok, 1959)
- C. McCoy and J. Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism* (Westminster/John Knox, 1991)
- D. Engelsma, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (RFPA, 2005)

Rev. Ronald Hanko

Creeds and Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Netherlands

Introduction

The beginning of the Reformation in the Netherlands does not have a single person or single event in the life of a person as its focus as does the be-

ginning of the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland, or Scotland. In Germany the publication of Luther’s 95 theses is inseparably connected with the beginning of the Reformation in that country, and Luther is the central figure. In Switzerland Zwingli and Calvin are the main figures, and the public disputations between Zwingli and Faber in 1523, along with the

publication of the first edition of Calvin’s *Institutes* in 1536, are the significant events.

This has been recognized by others. DeJong says:

The rise of Protestantism in the Netherlands distinguishes itself in several respects from that in neighboring lands. Here was no outstanding leader to rally the people around his standard.

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Much less do we find the Reformation inaugurated or encouraged by political authorities. Instead it developed gradually among the masses who listened to the teaching and preaching of individuals dissatisfied with conditions in the church.¹

Because there was no central figure in the early years of the Dutch Reformation, it is difficult to pick out any one date that is of the same significance as the 1517 publication of Luther's 95 Theses in Germany or the 1536 publication of Calvin's *Institutes* in Switzerland. If there is any date that is important in the early history of the Reformation in the Netherlands, it is the year 1566. In that year the Confession of Faith of Guido deBrès, also known as the Belgic or Netherlands Confession of Faith, was adopted by the Synod of Antwerp. In that same year Peter Datheen translated the Heidelberg Catechism into the Dutch language. In that year we first hear of sermons preached from the Heidelberg Catechism. These are things that shaped the character of the reformation in the Netherlands and made the Dutch Reformed churches what they are today.

If 1566 is indeed the most important date in the Dutch Reformation, then it is striking that the focus is not on a man or on the deeds of any person, but on two creeds that remain even today the creeds of those churches that trace their spiritual origins to the Reformation in the Netherlands. The events of that year remind us that the Dutch Reformation was and is eminently creedal.

Few other churches have three main creeds of the kind and variety of those used in the Dutch Reformed churches. Few put such emphasis on creeds as do these churches. Still fewer use their creeds as extensively in the catechizing and instruction of converts. None but the Dutch Reformed have the practice of regularly preaching from their creeds.

In examining the relation between creeds and reformation in sixteenth-century Netherlands, there are, then, three things that shaped the Reformation there; first, the early popularity of the Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands; second, the use of those creeds in the Dutch Reformed churches, especially in preaching; and third, the introduction of the practice of subscription to these creeds and later to the Canons of Dordt in the Dutch churches. These things determined the course of the Reformation in the Netherlands and gave to the Reformed churches their unique character.

The Creeds of the Dutch Reformation

The Confession of Faith is the first Dutch creed and remained the only official creed of the Dutch churches for over fifty years. Written in 1559 by Guido deBrès, a pastor in the French-speaking churches of the Lowlands, as a personal statement of faith, it was quickly recognized for its doctrinal completeness, its clarity, and its warmth. That it would therefore serve the needs of the churches was also immediately recognized. And so in 1566, seven years after being written, the Confession of Faith was adopted at Antwerp "that the good Christians of the Reformed Church should not be driven about by every wind of doctrine, as had hitherto been too much the case."²

At the time of its adoption it was thoroughly revised and some important changes were made, including the shortening of the sixteenth article on election. It was signed by many of those present, including many nobles, though it is not clear that the ministers present were required to sign it. It was sent to Geneva for printing and became the principal creed of the Dutch churches until the Synod of Dordt, when the Heidelberg Catechism was officially adopted and

the Canons of Dordt written.

The Heidelberg Catechism, first published in Germany in 1563, was also quickly recognized as a clear, useful, and deeply devotional statement of the Reformed faith, and though it was not officially adopted by the Dutch churches until the great Synod of Dordt in 1618-19, it came into wide use in those churches in 1566 when it was translated from German to Dutch. The author of this translation of the Catechism, Peter Datheen, is better known for compiling the original Dutch Psalter, but he ought to be remembered for this noble deed as well.

Thus it was that in the Netherlands these creeds took the place of a Luther in Germany, of a Zwingli in Zurich, and of a Calvin in Geneva, and this shaped the formation of the Dutch Reformed churches as churches whose outstanding characteristic is a close attachment to their creeds. These creeds provided a basis for unity that was especially important in the absence of any one notable leader. They insured competent instruction in the Reformed faith where there was at first no Protestant magistracy to insist on such instruction. It is difficult to see how the Reformation in the Netherlands could have prospered without them.

The Preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism

Without a doubt the practice of preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism has shaped and molded those churches from their beginnings. Interestingly, the first

1. Peter Y. DeJong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), p. 5.

2. Quoted from Maurice G. Hansen, *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Traced from A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840, in Short Historical Sketches* (New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America: 1884), pp. 57, 58.

record of this practice was also in the year 1566. Jansen says: "Already in 1566 the well-known preacher Peter Gabriel preached each Sunday from the Heidelberg Catechism."³ The matter came up in different ways at subsequent synods, but did not become official practice until 1586, when the Synod of s'Gravenhage adopted the following article, now encapsulated in the present Article 68 of the Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Churches:

The ministers everywhere shall on Sundays, ordinarily in the afternoon sermon, preach the sum of the Christian religion, in the Catechism, which is at present accepted in the Dutch Churches, so that the same may be finished annually, according to the divisions of the Catechism itself, made for this purpose.⁴

This practice seems very strange and even unbiblical to those who are not accustomed to it, but it is supposed to have been introduced from other countries and is not unknown elsewhere. Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *The Lord's Prayer* (reprinted by the Banner of Truth in 1958-1960) are sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Nevertheless, it was only in the Netherlands that preaching from a catechism became first the practice and then the rule of the churches.

Whether one likes the practice or not, it must be evident that regular preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism insured that the members of the Dutch Reformed churches were well taught and grounded in all the principal doctrines of the Reformed faith. This, along with regular catechizing both of children and of new converts, insured the stability and strength of those churches for many years to come and continues to do so in those churches that have not abandoned the practice.

Subscription to the Creeds

Another important practice, introduced very early in the Dutch Reformed churches, was that of subscription to the creeds, that is, the formal signing of agreement with the creeds by those who are officebearers, professors, ministers, elders, and deacons in the churches. In that way, doctrinal purity was and is maintained, and in the way of doctrinal purity, also unity among the churches.

While there was in the beginning no Formula of Subscription such as was adopted by the National Synod of Dordt in 1618-19 and is still in use in the Reformed churches, the practice is nevertheless very old. As early as 1568, at the Convent of Wezel, candidates for the ministry were required to declare their agreement with the Confession of Faith and the Catechism:

Furthermore, he shall be asked whether he is in complete agreement with the doctrine which is publicly maintained in the church and in accord with the confession of faith first presented to the King of France by the ministers of the churches in that kingdom, and after being translated into our language, was dedicated and presented to the king of Spain and the rest of the government officials of Nether-Germany, and finally also contained in the Catechism.⁵

And in 1571, at the Synod of Emden, written subscription to the Confession of Faith and, interestingly, to the French Confessions was made obligatory on all the ministers of the gospel and elders of the churches:

In order to demonstrate the unity in doctrine among the Netherlands churches, the brethren thought it well to subscribe to the confession of faith of the Netherlands churches, likewise to subscribe to the confessions of the churches in France, in order

thereby to attest their agreement and unity with these French churches, surely trusting that the ministers of these French churches also on their part will subscribe to the confession of faith of the Netherlands churches, giving testimony of their mutual unity.⁶

Conclusion

In all these ways, the writing, adoption, and use of creeds had a profound influence on the development of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, an influence that was both good and lasting. It is sad that so few seem to see this today and have so little use for the creeds of the Dutch Reformation or for any creeds. Because the Dutch churches were from the beginning creedal churches, what was true of the early church in Acts 9:31 was also true of these churches for many years: "Then had the churches rest ... and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." For those churches the options were indeed "creed or chaos,"⁷ as they are also today. In recognition of that reality, the creeds were adopted, put to good use, and given an important place in the churches. 

3. Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1923), p. 294 (author's translation from the Dutch).

4. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring*, p. 295 (author's translation from the Dutch).

5. P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual* (trans. Richard deRidder), (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 24.

6. Biesterveld and Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual*, p. 43.

7. The title of a book of essays by Dorothy L. Sayers (New York: Harcourt, 1949).

Enduring Fiery Persecution in Reformation Netherlands

It is not well known, but it is well documented, that the first martyrs of the Protestant Reformation came from the Lowlands.

We normally associate the great persecution that took place in the Netherlands during the Reformation years with that dread name the Duke of Alva, as well we should. But the brutal slaughter of those in the Lowlands who dared adopt and confess the teachings of the Reformers did not begin with the Duke of Alva. It was under the Duke of Alva that such came to its cruelest, most intense expression, during what is known as the years of the Spanish Inquisition, but it began almost as soon as the teachings of Luther entered the Netherlands and various monks began promoting them as biblical truth. It was the same Emperor Charles V of Spain who had once sat across from the young Luther at the Diet of Worms who now...

...thought to stop the agitation [of the Reformation] by publishing (1521), at the Pope's request, a "placard" (a royal edict printed and distributed - kk) forbidding the printing or reading of Luther's works. In the same year he ordered the secular courts to enforce throughout the Netherlands the Edict of Worms against all proponents of Lutheran ideas. On July 1, 1523, Henry Voes and Johann Eck, two Augustinian friars (Luther's religious order when a monk - kk), were sent to the stake at Brussels as the first Protestant

martyrs in the Lowlands (and really all of Europe - kk) (Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 633).

Their crime? Acquainting others with Luther's teachings and voicing criticism of Rome. A year later, the prior of the Augustinian monastery at Dordrecht, Henry of Zutphen, a friend and pupil of Luther, also was burned at the stake for spreading Luther's heresies. The Dutch historian Petrus J. Blok writes:

The impression made by the death of these early martyrs was deep, both abroad and in the Netherlands. Luther dedicated a hymn to them, in which he declared that their ashes were not lost but would bear testimony to their faith, and his letter of condolence to "all the dear brothers in Christ, especially those in Holland and Brabant and Flanders," in which he urges the persecuted to follow the example of the martyrs, was long one of the precious jewels of the Netherland reformers (Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, vol. 2, pp. 310-11).

These martyrs were the first of many in the Netherlands, their numbers swelling tremendously during the following decades. Over the next 50 years (a half century!) countless others would be imprisoned, mutilated by torture, heavily fined, or driven into exile for espousing the same belief, namely, the supremacy of God's word over Rome's.

It is important to note this, because Satan himself soon got involved in the religious controversy, as is always his practice and cle-

erness, by promoting a radical movement in the Reformation. The Anabaptist movement arose with its fiery mystics and its revolutionary doctrines - the despising and overthrow of civil government itself - giving rise to magistrates justifying severe penalties and execution of all those associated with the Reformation movement. Early on (1525-1535), not only were thousands slain in battle as the result of this widespread Anabaptist insurrection, but the execution of other thousands was justified in the name of stemming this wildfire of revolution and civil chaos.

We mention this because any number of recent historians, claiming an interest in being even-handed, seek to justify the brutal treatment to which Dutch Protestants were subjected by the Spanish monarchy, claiming that it was an understandable reaction to and fear of the Anabaptist movement with its lawless "communist" abuses (as they are called by these same historians). No doubt the Spanish princes and the Duke of Alva used this very argument to justify their brutal repression of the Reformed religion. But such is bogus, and an attempt to defend the indefensible. By the time the Spanish Inquisition was put into place in the Netherlands (the early 1550s), the Anabaptist movement had been thoroughly crushed (the mid-1530s), and the Reformers and their followers had made very plain they had no interest in such revolutionary practices. Had the Anabaptist excesses never occurred, the Romish magisterium and magistrates would still have

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found religious reason to institute the brutal regime of the Inquisition.

Behind the mask of the dreaded Inquisition and the iron fist it imposed upon the Lowlands from the 1550s into the early 1570s was a simple intolerance by Romish authorities of church and state of religious freedom in any shape (something contemporary re-writers of history would just as soon ignore), together with a deep-seated hatred for Reformed truth in all its forms, and of *Calvinism in particular*.

This is not so difficult to demonstrate. In 1542 Cardinal Caraffa, together with Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuit order) and Charles V persuaded Pope Paul III to reorganize and activate the institution of the Inquisition. Cardinal Caraffa, who would become the infamous Pope Paul IV, was appointed head of the institution. He laid down four rules for his subordinates. We quote two of them. Rule #1 reads: "When the faith is in question, there must be no delay, but on the slightest suspicion rigorous measure must be taken with all speed." Rule #4 reads: "No man must debase himself by showing toleration toward heretics of any kind, *above all toward Calvinists*" (emphasis mine - kk) (Durant, *op. cit.*, p. 925). That last phrase is telling. That Calvinism should be singled out above all the rest by the Curatorium of Inquisition is worth a study in itself. But there it is, naked as an egg.

When this same Cardinal Caraffa became Pope Paul IV in 1555, the institution was set in full motion, first in Italy itself, where a number of bishops had expressed sympathy to Reformation doctrines; and, as we are informed by a certain Cardinal Seripando, under Paul IV's "superhuman rigor

the Inquisition acquired such a reputation that from no other judgment seat on earth were more horrible and fearful sentences to be expected" (*ibid.*).

Some 17 years prior to the arrival of the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands, Charles V imposed the Inquisition upon the Lowlands. The Emperor issued law upon law against social and religious dissent. What was published in September 1550 gives an excellent summary of both the severity of the restrictions applied and of the penalties to be imposed. What follows gives its highlights:

No one shall print, write, copy, keep, conceal, sell, buy, or give, in churches, streets, or other places, any book or writing made by Martin Luther, John Oecolampadius, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, or other heretics reprobated by the Holy Church...nor break or otherwise injure the images of the Holy Virgin or canonized saints ... nor hold conventicles, or illegal gatherings, or be present at any such in which the adherents of the above-mentioned heretics teach, baptize, and form conspiracies against the Holy Church and the general welfare.... We forbid all lay persons to converse or dispute concerning the Holy Scriptures, openly or secretly ... or to read, teach, or expound the Holy Scriptures, unless they have duly studied theology, or have been approved by some renowned university ... or to entertain any of the opinions of the above-mentioned heretics ... on pain of being ... punished as follows...the men [to be beheaded] with the sword, and the women to be buried alive, if they do not persist in their errors; if they persist in them they are to be executed with fire; all their property in both cases to be confiscated to the Crown....

We forbid all persons to lodge, entertain, furnish with

food, fire, or clothing, or otherwise to favor, anyone holden or notoriously suspected of being a heretic; and anyone failing to denounce any such we ordain shall be liable to the above-mentioned punishments.... All who know of any such person tainted with heresy are required to denounce and give them up.... The informer, in case of conviction, shall be entitled to one half the property of the accused.... To the end that the judges and officers may have no reason - under pretext that the penalties are too great and heavy and only devised to terrify delinquents - to punish them less severely than they deserve, [we ordain] that the culprits really be punished by the penalties above declared; we forbid all judges to alter or moderate the penalties in any manner; we forbid anyone, of whatever condition, to ask of us, or of anyone having authority, to grant pardon to, or to present any petition in favor of, such heretics, exiles, or fugitives, on penalty of being declared forever incapable of civil or military office and of being arbitrarily punished (Durant, *op. cit.*, 634).

Note that the law of the Inquisition forbade so much as talking about the Holy Scriptures without a papally-approved authority present, much less made an allowance for possessing a Bible. Such a 'crime' was punishable by death. And betrayal of a man by his 'friends' was rewarded by receiving half the accused's property. Under such repression the Reformed of the Lowlands lived and sought to worship and survive.

When the Duke of Alva with his army behind him arrived in the Netherlands August, 1567 it was not that this edict had not already claimed its thousands. It had. For instance, Guido deBrès, the author of the Belgic Confession, had already been numbered among the martyrs, hanged in Brussels in May of 1567 when he was discovered in the Lowlands preaching to the

That Calvinism should be singled out above all the rest by the Curatorium of Inquisition is worth a study in itself. But there it is, naked as an egg.

French Huguenot refugees fleeing the merciless cruelties in France. But Charles V's successor, Philip II, judged the application of the Inquisition by his father's appointees too lenient. Alva came to eradicate Calvinism from the Netherlands once and for all. It was, after all, those damnable Calvinists who advocated the right to voice religious dissent and to worship according to one's conscience and God's Word.

As the noted historian Geoffrey Parker writes, commenting on what governed Spain's Lowland policy, "It was taken for granted by all [of the King's advisers] that there could be no question of permitting open Calvinist worship to continue in the Netherlands: Philip II had declared too many times his firm intention never to become the ruler of heretics" (*The Dutch Revolt*, p. 88, 1977). The Duke of Alva came to apply Charles V's published policy of Inquisition with a vengeance. If Charles V had slain his thousands, Philip II through his Duke would slay his ten thousands, and claim to do God a favor.

Durant gives a flavor of what the "Church Under the Cross" was subjected to under this agent of Satan himself. Alva, as Governor General,

...prepared to cleanse the Netherlands of heresy.... He appointed a "Council of Troubles," which the terrified Protestants rechristened the "Council of Blood"; seven of its nine members were Netherlanders, two were Spaniards; but only these two had a vote, and Alva reserved to himself the final decision in any case that specially interested him. He ordered the council to ferret out and arrest all persons suspected of opposition to the Catholic Church or the Spanish government, to try them privately, and to punish the convicted without tenderness or delay. Agents were sent out to spy: informers were encouraged to betray their relatives, their enemies,

their friends. Emigration was forbidden, shipmasters aiding emigration were to be hanged. Every town that had failed to stop or punish rebellion was held guilty, and its officials were imprisoned or fined. Thousands of arrests were made, in one morning some 1,500 persons were seized in their beds and carried off to jail. Trials were summary. Condemnations to death were sometimes voted upon groups of thirty, forty, or fifty at a time. In one month (January 1568) eighty-four residents of Valenciennes were executed. Soon there was hardly a family in Flanders that did not mourn a member arrested or killed by the Council of Troubles. Scarcely anyone in the Netherlands dared protest; the slightest criticism would have meant arrest (Durant, *The Age of Reason Begins*, p. 445).

There came a point when even the Catholic citizenry raised its voice against the brutal excesses they observed. The outrages and suffering were especially felt in the southern section of the Lowlands, what in time became known as Belgium. Here Catholicism was most deeply entrenched. Those of Reformed and Calvinist persuasion began fleeing to the northern provinces. It was either join forces with and find some protection under the Protestant House of Orange, which armed itself to defend its existence and its ancient 'Chartered Rights' against Alva's merciless tyranny, or be hunted to extinction. Alva marched north with his forces to impose the iron fist of the Inquisition on the cities and provinces there too, in time igniting fierce resistance. Soon war ravaged the land.

But before united military opposition broke out, the Inquisition had its way. The tales of the ensuing slaughter, suffering, and heroism could fill a book. They have. Any number of them. How does the apostle put it? "What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell...[of those who] were tor-

tured, not accepting deliverance: that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword:...being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world is not worthy) (Heb. 11:32, 35-38).

In such a hostile environment the Reformed and Calvinistic faith survived and grew.

When Alva, in 1573, finally asked to be relieved of his post, the Inquisition ran itself out. It had become painfully evident to Alva, as well as to Philip II, that his brutal regime and methods had not succeeded in stamping out Calvinism at all but simply served to unite the once loosely knit federation of provinces, instilling in them a greater resolution to resist to the bitter end. Faith proved to have more strength than the malice that sought to root it out.

This is not to say that the sufferings of the Dutch nation ended with Alva's departure. Bitter war continued for three more decades before a truce was called. But Alva's departure did bring to an end the Inquisition's reign of terror, with its endless torture aimed at persuading one to deny one's faith, one's Lord, and perhaps betray members of one's family in hiding as well.

In the end, by God's sustaining grace, the blood of the martyrs and the patience of the Dutch and displaced French saints was not in vain. The biblical faith expressed in Calvinism took deep root in the Lowlands. The doctrinal fruit of Christ's church established there would benefit the church universal richly in the long centuries following those dreadful days.

As we wait for our Lord's return, may we be found as faithful as these hardy, spiritual forbears.



Original Source Documents

The next two selections transport us back in time to the events of the reformation in the Netherlands. The first is a song composed by Martin Luther, honoring the first two martyrs of the Reformation as a whole – two Augustinian monks from the Lowlands. On July 1,

1523, Henry Vos and John van den Essohen were burned at the stake in Brussels. Shortly thereafter, Luther composed this, the first hymn of the Reformation.

The second is an eyewitness account of the hedge-preaching that occurred in the Netherlands. This

was a worship service in an open field, made necessary because the Romish authorities forbade Calvinistic preaching in the churches. The eyewitness account is obviously not that of a supporter of the Reformation.

A New Song Here Shall Be Begun

1 A new song here shall be begun –
The Lord God help our singing!
Of what our God himself hath done,
Praise, honor to him bringing.
At Brussels in the Netherlands
By two boys, martyrs youthful
He showed the wonders of his hands,
Whom he with favor truthful
So richly hath adorned.

2 The first right fitly John was named,
So rich he in God's favor;
His brother, Henry – one unblamed,
Whose salt lost not its savor.
From this world they are gone away,
The diadem they've gained;
Honest, like God's good children, they
For his word life disdained,
And have become his martyrs.

3 The old arch-fiend did them immure
With terrors did enwrap them.
He bade them God's dear Word abjure,
With cunning he would trap them:
From Louvain many sophists came,
In their curst nets to take them,
By him are gathered to the game:
The Spirit fools doth make them –
They could get nothing by it.

4 Oh! they sang sweet, and they sang sour;
Oh! they tried every double;
The boys they stood firm as a tower,
And mocked the sophists' trouble.
The ancient foe it filled with hate
That he was thus defeated
By two such youngsters – he, so great!
His wrath grew sevenfold heated,
He laid his plans to burn them.

5 Their cloister-garments off they tore,
Took off their consecrations;
All this the boys were ready for,
They said Amen with patience.
To God their Father they gave thanks
That they would soon be rescued
From Satan's scoffs and mumming pranks,
With which, in falsehood masked,
The world he so befooled.

6 Then gracious God did grant to them
To pass true priesthood's border,
And offer up themselves to him,
And enter Christ's own order,
Unto the world to die outright,
With falsehood made a schism,
And come to heaven all pure and white,
To monkery be the besom,
And leave men's toys behind them.

7 They wrote for them a paper small,
And made them read it over;
The parts they showed them therein all
Which their belief did cover.
Their greatest fault was saying this:
"In God we should trust solely;
For man is always full of lies,
We should distrust him wholly":
So they must burn to ashes.

8 Two huge great fires they kindled then,
The boys they carried to them;
Great wonder seized on every man,
For with contempt they view them.
To all with joy they yielded quite,
With singing and God-praising;
The sophs had little appetite
For these new things so dazing.
Which God was thus revealing.

9 They now repent the deed of blame,
Would gladly gloze it over;
They dare not glory in their shame,
The facts almost they cover.
In their hearts gnaweth infamy –
They to their friends deplore it;
The Spirit cannot silent be:
Good Abel's blood out-poured
Must still besmear Cain's forehead.

10 Leave off their ashes never will;
Into all lands they scatter;
Stream, hole, ditch, grave – nought keeps them still
With shame the foe they spatter.
Those whom in life with bloody hand
He drove to silence triple,
When dead, he them in every land,
In tongues of every people,
Must hear go gladly singing.

11 But yet their lies they will not leave,
To trim and dress the murther;
The fable false which out they gave,
Shows conscience grinds them further.
God's holy ones, e'en after death,
They still go on belying;
They say that with their latest breath,
The boys, in act of dying,
Repented and recanted.

12 Let them lie on for evermore –
No refuge so is reared;
For us, we thank our God therefore,
His word has reappeared.
Even at the door is summer nigh,
The winter now is ended,
The tender flowers come out and spy;
His hand when once extended
Withdraws not till he's finished.

Hedge services at Ghent, June and July 1566

Sunday 30 June 1566] ... then some-one preached, dressed like the other [preacher] in lay attire, with an ermine-trimmed gown and a fine felt hat. [He was] short of stature and aged about thirty, and seemed, to judge from his speech, to hail from Kortrijk. Close to the chapel outside St Lievenspoort [he preached], bare-headed and with great modesty, on a small hill surrounded by copses and plantations. He sat on some hoods and cloaks, lent him by those who had come to listen, and he had in front of him a book, from which he read from time to time, before closing it again and continuing with his sermon. Before he preached, he knelt folding his hands together very devoutly. To avoid being arrested or surprised, he was led into the enclosure in a group of six people in such a way that no one knew who out of the six was the preacher until he made ready to speak. He expounded the Gospel of the day, reproved sins and prayed for the magistrates, the King and the Pope, that God might enlighten their minds so that the Word of God (as they called their doctrine) might go forward peacefully. He had promised to preach at three o'clock in

the afternoon, but he began at two o'clock.

Those present sat in three separate, closely-packed small companies made up of men, women, and young girls; each of these had about as many members as the preacher had years. Each company had its teacher and the members had small books in their hands and from time to time sang the psalms; you could buy books there in which the psalms were printed in metrical form for a stiver. Many onlookers stood around; they had come to see what was going on there because it was for everyone a strange, unheard-of event, especially for those who lived in Flanders. I was told this by my washerwoman with whom I strongly remonstrated. I said to her that we were threatened by a great evil and danger, if it were not quickly stopped, but, like many simple folk, she thought it was quite innocent and even edifying....

On Sunday 7 July [1566] they preached again, in defiance of the authorities, at Stallendriesche at high noon. Thousands of people attended from the town and from the surrounding countryside, including many of the common

people, who were not very well-versed in the Holy Scriptures and the Church Fathers. They [the Calvinists] gave these the impression that now for the first time the truth had been revealed and the Gospel preached aright because the preachers especially cited the Scriptures most valiantly and stoutly. They let the people check each passage in their testaments to see whether or not they preached faithfully, [when they said that] the New Testament contained the Word which the Lord had commanded all men to proclaim; not the human inventions and institutions, with which the papists (as they call them) had busied themselves; having raised these above God's Word or allowed these to obscure God's Word, it could not advance as it should and must [instead] be bent and give ground in order to accommodate human invention and contrivance; that it was much more proper that human laws should yield and make way for the sacred and blessed Word of God, for this, not rosaries, pilgrimages, voyages, and many suchlike superstitions, will prevail at the Last Judgement; that we are also under a far greater obligation (as

the Apostles tell us) to obey the Word of God than men or magistrates, even though we are forbidden to hear this on pain of death, for the Lord says that we should not be afraid of those who would take the body captive, but only those who would cast the body and the soul into the everlasting fires of Hell; and that He shall be ashamed to confess before His heavenly Father and the angels of God those who are ashamed to confess Him in this world; that also

Christ (who cannot lie) has prophesied that those who preach and hear His Word in its naked purity shall be oppressed and persecuted for as long as the world exists.

With these and other similar arguments they struck such a marvelous chord in the hearts of good and uneducated people that many of them declared that they were ready to forfeit both their property and their lives for the Word of God and Christ's name. This sprang, alas, more from a naïve fervour than

from any judicious circumspection, for if they had heeded and properly understood the counter-arguments, they would have come to the opposite conclusion. Not everything that claims to be the Word of God is in fact the Word of God. You must search out what has been the judgement of the Holy Spirit of God, which lies hidden under the letter of God's Word. It was not without good cause that St Paul said that the letter kills but the Spirit brings life. 

Rev. Steven Key

The Development of Church Order in the Netherlands

The development of church polity in the Netherlands arose out of the crucible of persecution.

From 1515 to 1555, Charles V of Spain ruled the Netherlands, which at that time included Holland, Belgium, and a portion of Northern France. When it came to maintaining the strength of the Roman Catholic Church, this Roman Catholic king ruled with an iron fist. Those who had been brought under the influence of the Reformation, and particularly those who would promote the teachings of the Reformation, faced torture and death.

When Charles V died, the churches of the Reformation soon discovered that his son, the new king, Philip II, only increased the persecution in the Netherlands. Philip did all within his power to destroy the Reformed faith in the Lowlands. When he sent the Duke of Alva to the Netherlands, terror reigned among the children of the Reformation. His ravages among

the people of the provinces and their property is described as being "like those of a tiger among a flock of sheep."¹ Consequently, many thousands of God's people fled, especially to Germany and England, where Reformed congregations were established by Dutch refugees in Wezel and Emden (Germany) and in London.

On November 3, 1568, a meeting was held in Wezel with some 40 ministers and elders present. Because there is no indication that these men were delegated by their churches, the meeting seems to have been an unofficial gathering. But it is evident from the written conclusions of the meeting that these church leaders came together with a particular purpose in mind. This informal assembly, under the leadership of Petrus Dathenus,² gathered to establish a unified church body, a Reformed federation of churches, and to draw up a tentative church order that would serve to unite these churches in a biblical form of church government.

The fruit of the meeting in Wezel was recorded in writing under the heading "The Articles of

Wezel 1568." The introduction to these articles reads as follows³:

Certain specific items or articles which the ministers of the church in the Netherlands have judged to be partly necessary, partly useful for the church's service.

The apostle Paul prescribes that in the church of God all things must be done decently and in order so that unanimous agreement may be established and maintained not only in doctrine but also in the polity (of the church) itself and in the ecclesiastical regulation of office. In order that completely equal regulation of these matters may now be observed in all churches of the Netherlands, it seemed good to us to propose the following matters in an orderly fashion, concerning which we have consulted with the best reformed churches, so that these regulations may be unanimously adopted and maintained by the ministers of the Netherlands for the benefit of the church.

The Articles of Wezel provided regulations for the churches in eight main areas: Concerning the Assemblies and the Classes of the Prov-

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inces, Concerning Ministers and Teachers, Concerning the Catechism, Concerning the Elders, Concerning the Deacons, Concerning the Sacraments, Concerning Marriage, and Concerning Discipline.

As mentioned in their introduction, the church leaders who gathered at Wezel did not formulate these regulations on their own, but “consulted with the best reformed churches.” Notably, they consulted the church order that John Calvin had written for Geneva, entitled *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. It is also very likely that they consulted with John á Lasco, the well-traveled Polish Reformer, who had labored in Ostfriesland before settling in London to serve as minister of the growing number of refugees from the Continent.⁴ In London, á Lasco also wrote his ecclesiastical ordinances for the church there. His work was then translated into Dutch by Maarten Micron in his *Christelijke Ordinancien*. While á Lasco had returned to Poland some two years prior to the gathering at Wezel, it is likely that if he was not consulted personally, his ecclesiastical ordinances for the church in London were carefully studied. The influence of both Calvin and á Lasco is found in the subsequent Church Order of Dordrecht, but there can be found other influences as well, even reaching back into the ancient church.

It is striking that even while persecuted and scattered, the churches still looked forward in the hope of being able to return to their homeland with the free exercise of religion. It was in anticipation of that return, therefore, that they saw the necessity of the churches standing together in denominational unity.

While the gathering at Wezel laid the footings for a church order uniting the Reformed churches, it was three years later, at the first official synod of the Dutch churches, that the foundation was laid for what would later be more perfectly realized at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19. In 1571, a synod was

convened in Emden, on the border between Germany and the Netherlands. While Emden did not adopt a church order in the form that we know it today, it adopted a series of regulations and foundational principles for the unity and government of the churches.

Chief of the regulations adopted by the Synod of Emden was the principle set forth in the first article adopted by the Synod:

No church shall lord it over another church, no minister of the Word, no elder or deacon shall lord it over another, but each one shall guard himself against all suspicion and enticement to lord it over [others].⁵

Even though this article would later be given a place near the end of the Church Order of Dordt simply because of the organizational structure of the Church Order, nonetheless, it is recognized as a fundamental principle of Reformed church government. In the church of Jesus Christ there is one who rules, and that is Christ. Among His servants there is no room for one to lord it over another. A minister is not to lord it over another minister, nor over a consistory; an elder is not to lord it over another elder, nor a consistory over another consistory. All officebearers have their place directly under Christ and are His servants.

The importance of this first article was that it set the Reformed churches apart, in their biblical form of church government, from the church of Rome. The Council of Trent, in the definitive setting forth of Roman Catholic doctrine as a response to the Reformation, had clearly stated that there is only one church to which all believers must belong, and that within the church there is a divinely-ordained hierarchy of office holders. So we see in the Roman Catholic Church today the papal head, beneath whom are the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, etc. But the Reformed churches, setting forth the truth on

the basis of biblical teaching, recognize Christ as “the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church.”⁶ So we confess with the Belgic Confession in Article 31, “As for the ministers of God’s Word, they have equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the church.”

This truth of Christ as the only Lord of the church also guards the unity of the church from domineer-

1. Maurice G. Hansen, *The Reformed Church of the Netherlands Traced from A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840, in Short Historical Sketches*, New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America. 1884. p. 64. (Hansen also gives a graphic and terrible description of the persecution that ensued.)

2. <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc09/htm/iv.vii.c.htm> (Article from the Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia* on the Reformed [Dutch] Church: I. In the Netherlands).

Dathenus became a noteworthy figure in the formation of the liturgy of the Dutch Reformed churches. He authored the first Dutch versification of the Psalms, translated the Heidelberg Catechism from the German language into the Dutch, and authored several liturgical forms that were incorporated into the liturgy of the Reformed churches.

3. *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual, Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Church*, P. Biesterveld and Dr. H. H. Kuyper, authors, professors at the Free University of Amsterdam, translated by Richard R. DeRidder, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI 49506, 1982. p. 20.

4. *A Survey of the Sources of Reformed Church Polity and The Form of Government of The Christian Reformed Church*, Richard R. DeRidder, syllabus published by Calvin Theological Seminary in 1983. pp. 25-26.

5. Translation of P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual*, p. 35.

6. Belgic Confession, Article 31, “The Ministers, Elders, and Deacons.”

ing individuals, and it provides a biblical foundation for church reformation.

Church unity was clearly the focus in the decisions taken at Emden, which decisions would later be incorporated in the church order finally adopted by the churches.

As at Wezel, so also the Synod of Emden recognized that church unity is doctrinal unity, unity in the truth of God's Holy Word. The Synod required all ministers to express agreement with the Belgic Confession of Faith, as well as the French Confession in the French-speaking churches. In addition, they expressed that the Genevan Catechism be used in the French-speaking churches, and that the Heidelberg Catechism be used in the churches of the Netherlands. Thus the confessions were recognized as forms of unity.

After establishing doctrinal unity as the essential element for the organization of Reformed churches into a denomination, the Synod gave its attention to developing a model for church life. Much attention was given to the offices of the church, and particularly the ministry of the Word. In addition, regulations were adopted concerning the administration of the sacraments, as well as the orderly and godly conduct required of the members of the church, and the biblical exercise of Christian discipline against those who walk ungodly, including officebearers.

Some regulations of church gov-

ernment are firmly established upon biblical principles. Others, while not mandated by Scripture, serve the good order of the church's life. But the Synod of Emden closed with the following article:

These articles concerning the lawful and proper order of the churches have been adopted by common consent, so that if the welfare of the churches requires, they may and should be altered, augmented and diminished. However no individual church shall be free to do this, but all churches shall diligently observe them until it has been otherwise decided by a synod.

That concluding article demonstrates that the Reformed fathers cherished the unity of the church. While recognizing the autonomy of each congregation — notice the reference, not to church, singular, but to *churches* — they would also maintain denominational unity. Churches promise to receive and abide by decisions of synods, not because some higher body made them, but because the churches themselves made the decisions “by common consent.” This idea would later be embodied in the Church Order of Dordrecht in Article 31, with its statement that, subject to a decision being overturned by appeal and thus proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or the articles of the Church Order, “whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be

considered settled and binding.”

Soon after the Synod of Emden, the Lord gave relief from persecution in the Netherlands. Consequently the Reformed churches were allowed to develop on Dutch soil. Several subsequent synods met and contributed to further development of the church order. It was finally at the renowned Synod of Dordrecht meeting in 1618-19 that a number of sessions were given to finalizing and adopting the Church Order that we, in the main, continue to follow today in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

While the Church Order of Dordt was cast aside for many years in the Netherlands as the civil authorities became more and more involved in church government, through continued church reformation the Church Order of Dordt stood and found a measure of restoration. With relatively minor revisions it continues to serve our churches today.

It is our humble prayer that the only King of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, will bless our use of it unto the obedience of love. May this obedience be always to the praise and adoration of His and our Father above, whose injunction resounds in the churches from age to age: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Corinthians 14:40).⁷

7. Concluding paragraph to the Preface of the Church Order Book of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Prof. Herman Hanko

Reformation and the Sword

Introduction

The Reformation of the sixteenth century in general and the Reformation in the Netherlands in particular frequently were made possible by the aid of

the secular magistrate and by the sword that the secular magistrate wielded. Wars were fought against enemies of the Reformation, wars that from our earthly point of view made the Reformation possible.

Especially in the Netherlands

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the success of the Reformation, culminating in the great Synod of Dordt, was dependent upon the might and power of magistrates who were willing to use the sword in the work of reforming the church. The Netherlands was at war with Spain. Spain was Rome's strongest supporter among all the countries of Europe, including Italy. The Reformation in the Lowlands was so closely entwined with the war between the Netherlands and Spain that the two cannot be understood except in relation to each other.

The burning question is this: Is reformation in the church of Christ ever to be supported by the sword power of the magistracy?

A Brief History

For many centuries the Lowlands (combining what is now the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) were ruled by the royal house of Hapsburg. Prior to the Reformation this Hapsburg rule meant that the Lowlands were under the rule of the king of Spain, who at the time of the Reformation in the Lowlands was Charles V. However, chiefly due to the love of the Lowlanders for liberty, the people of the Lowlands had traditionally been granted far more freedom than most other people under Spain's rule. Other than paying their taxes faithfully and obeying the minimal laws imposed on them, these Lowlanders enjoyed great freedoms and even were ruled by their own local rulers.

The Lowlands, because of their strategic location at the mouth of the Rhine River, had become wealthy and prosperous, for through them passed much of Europe's commerce devoted to overseas trade. Their freedom and prosperity were cherished by the people on this western fringe of Europe.

The Reformation came to the Netherlands rather early and was chiefly Lutheran. Yet the unique features of the Lutheran Reformation were never etched on the soul

of the nation, for shortly after Lutheranism had altered the thinking of some, the Calvin Reformation came as Geneva exerted its influence throughout the continent. Calvinism swept through the Netherlands like wildfire. While from an earthly point of view Calvinism seemed to be ideally suited to the sturdy, hard-working, and self-reliant character of the citizens of the Lowlands, from God's point of view the country was being prepared to be the cradle of the Reformed faith.

Spain, loyal to the pope and ruled by the strongly Roman Catholic Charles V, took notice of the intrusion of the truths of the Reformation into the distant part of the realm called the Lowlands. Charles was determined to destroy any Reformation influences in his kingdom and especially in what is now the Netherlands and Belgium. He therefore sent a regent (his sister, Margaret of Parma) and troops into the land to suppress all Calvinism and to make use of torture and murder to accomplish his purpose. At first the measures of his regent were sufficiently mild to be tolerated by the Lowlanders – although already under her regency the nobility and merchant class considered Charles' efforts to be unwarranted limitations on the freedoms that they had come to enjoy.

But Charles, worn with the cares of the empire, retired to a monastery to spend his last days wearing a hair shirt, and Philip II took his place on the Hapsburg throne. Philip was a different sort. Cruel, wholly dedicated to the pope, lacking in judgment and tact, bitterly hateful of the Reformation, he decided to impose his false religion on the Lowlands at any cost. Philip ordered the Duke of Alva with his army into the Lowlands to suppress the Reformation. Alva was given a free hand and the use of the cruel Inquisition to accomplish the goal of wiping out the Reformation and bringing the Lowlanders to submission.

The result was bitter persecution. Thousands were put to death in unbelievably cruel ways, and tens of thousands fled to other countries, including England and Germany. The nobility and merchant classes took up arms in defense of their homeland. William the Silent, later murdered by a papal supporter, became their leader. And what became known as the Eighty Years War followed.

It is clear, however, that from the very outset religious issues were inseparably connected with political issues. The people of the Lowlands, especially the nobility and merchant classes, were Calvinistic and were threatened by Spain's attacks religiously, politically, and economically. There were many ups and downs in the war, and actual fighting was only sporadic. But gradually, partly because of some important victories for the northern provinces at Brielle and Leiden, and partly because of the neglect and demoralization of the Spanish troops, the northern part of the Lowlands (what is now known as Holland) gained its independence as a sovereign state, with Calvinism as its religion. The sword had won the day.¹

The Netherlands had become a Calvinist country. The church organized in that land became a national church, that is, a church supported and promoted by the government. So dependent was the church on government support at the time of the Arminian conflict that the Reformed could do nothing to stop the spread of Arminianism until the existing government of Oldenbarneveldt was overthrown in a *coup d'etat* led by Prince Maurice. Once more the government was instrumental in preserving the Reformed faith.

1. For more information consult any good book that describes the history of the Reformation in the Netherlands, and consult the pertinent chapters in my *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, especially chapters 30-32.

The Historical Context

The idea of a national church was not new to the Netherlands. With some important differences, the Roman Catholic Church had established national churches throughout Europe. In Geneva, Calvin had also worked to establish a close relationship between the church and the state. To the state was assigned the duty and obligation to support and promote the true religion.² The chief idea of a national church was a church within a state ruled by those who were Reformed. Calvin did not think a Reformed church was possible without a Reformed magistracy.³

In France the establishment of a national church was impossible, because the authorities in France were consistently Roman Catholic,⁴ and the Calvinistic church in France was consistently persecuted. Yet, in France, too, the Protestants (known as Huguenots) resorted to the use of arms to protect themselves. Bitter wars were fought in France between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics, which left parts of France in ruins.

Calvin was opposed to using the sword to promote the true religion. W. Fred Graham writes,

It is well known that Calvin would countenance rebellion against even the most repressive government only in extreme circumstances and then only when led by lower magistrates. But in practice Calvin would allow no rebellion at all, not once advising anyone to raise a sword against a monarch.⁵

Although the Huguenots, the persecuted Protestants in France, resorted to the use of arms in defense of their faith, a mitigating factor must be mentioned: The defense of the Reformation by the use of arms was frequently politically motivated and was usually practiced when the Reformation was under the leadership of political figures such as Admiral Coligny and Condé. When these men were

dead and the Huguenots were simply a church fighting for their rights to worship God, they did not resort to arms, but suffered terrible persecution, until they were finally expelled by the ferocity of the enemy after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes under Louis XIV in the seventeenth century.

Such was not the case in the Netherlands. The idea of a national church came from Geneva, but the willingness and even eagerness to resort to arms in defense of the Reformed faith did not. It was an idea borrowed from earlier Huguenot history in France.

Evaluation

The church is forbidden by Scripture to defend itself by resorting to arms or rising up in warfare against the magistracy. Jesus makes it very clear that they who fight with the sword will perish with the sword. Calvin was right (and Luther): The gospel is not promoted nor the church gathered by force; nor is the church of Christ, "gathered, defended, and preserved"⁶ by the Son of God, in need of carnal warfare to attain its goals. Nor may one argue that persecution gives the church freedom to fight back. The Scriptures make it clear that persecution is for Christ's sake; that it is suffering in fellowship with Him; that it is the expected lot of God's people; that it is to be considered a privilege for which the saints must be joyful; and that the cause of the gospel is advanced and not destroyed by the ravages of persecution.

It may be argued that in the Netherlands the war against the Spaniards was a war of self-defense; that religious issues were mixed in by virtue of events that transpired in the Lowlands; and that, therefore, the war was political and could not be extricated from the religious aspects of it. It might be further argued that the war against Spain made the Reformation in the Lowlands possible. But these arguments are specious. It remains a question

whether even from a political point of view the uprising against Spain can be justified. Spain sent its soldiers to the Lowlands because of the rapid spread of the Reformation. The nobles and merchants were concerned primarily about their positions of authority and their material prosperity. If God was pleased to use the sinful actions of the Lowlanders to establish the Netherlands as the cradle of the Reformed faith, it would not be the first time that God used wickedness for the welfare of the cause of His truth. God can and does use a crooked stick to draw a straight line.

The deeper problem is the problem of a national church. Whatever may be one's position on the relation between church and state, a national church is an impossibility. It does not take a Reformed magistracy to perpetuate a Reformed church. Because the magistracy is almost always an enemy of true religion, it does more harm than good for the cause of the gospel. The history prior to Dordt proves this. No wonder that it took a political *coup d'etat* to bring about the Synod of Dordt and the victory of the Reformed faith.

God uses weakest means to fulfill His will. The Reformed faith nourished in the Netherlands is our heritage. Let us be thankful for it. But let us learn that our salvation does not lie in the bloodshed of our enemies; it lies rather in our bloodshed as we are persecuted for Christ's sake. 

2. See Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, with its footnote.

3. See Emile G. Léonard, *A History of Protestantism*, vol. 2, tr. By R. M. Betholl (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967) 84-94.

4. With the exception of Henry IV, who later became Roman Catholic. He justified his betrayal of the Protestant cause with the remark, "Paris is worth a mass."

5. W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (John Knox Press, 1971) 61.

6. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 54.

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Rev. Arie denHartog

The Reformation and Worship in the Netherlands

One of the three areas that were desperately in need of reformation in the church of Rome according to the great reformer John Calvin was her corrupted form of worship (along with the urgent need for correcting her false doctrine and the hierarchal tyranny of her church government). The corruption of the worship of the church of Rome was serious. It was characterized by evils as great as image worship and the inclusion of all sorts of unbiblical ceremonies and superstitious practices. It was particularly one of the confessions of the Netherlands Reformed churches that called the mass of Rome at bottom "accursed idolatry." The preaching of the Word of God was almost nonexistent.

The Reformation, with holy zeal for God and His glory in the midst of His church, sought to deliver the church from all Roman corruptions and superstitions and to institute again in her a form of worship pleasing to God and one that would also comfort and edify the people of God. The cathedrals of the Roman church with all their

grand architecture, famous art work, and images of the saints were awe-inspiring to some, but they were an abomination to God.

Unholy zeal for cleansing the church of Rome of her images and pagan superstitions broke out into iconoclastic riots in the Netherlands that were referred to as "The Troubles in the Netherlands." But these were severely condemned by the leaders of the Reformation in Holland.

The dramatic spread of the Reformation in the Netherlands is an astounding wonderwork of God in church history. Once virtually the whole country was strongly Roman Catholic. So powerful was the influence of the Reformation here that the Reformed Church actually became, for a time, the state church of Holland.

Principles of Calvinism made dramatic changes in the worship of God in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The followers of the Reformation were persecuted by the Spanish inquisition. During those times they had to worship in open fields at great danger to their lives. But in character with their understanding of true worship, they did not need the Roman cathedrals. Hundreds of people

flocked to outdoor meetings to hear preachers of the Reformation. God's spiritual temple was among them.

Later, because the majority of people in communities in Holland became Reformed, church buildings were taken over, cleansed from their idols and all vestiges of the corrupted worship of Rome, and adapted to serve for worship according Calvinistic Reformed tradition. Dramatic visible changes were made to church buildings. The altars of the Roman Catholic mass were replaced with communion tables. Pulpits were placed prominently in the forefront with pews around them.

The chief part of the reformation of the worship of the church in the Netherlands was the restoration of the true preaching of God's Word to its rightful and central place in the worship of God.

The Reformation revived the right understanding of the nature and authority and character of the preaching of the Word in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The preaching of the Word was recognized as the very voice of God Himself in the church. God's people came into the awe-inspiring presence of God when the Word of

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God was preached in the midst of His church. The preaching was considered to be the chief means of grace for the people of God.

Calvinism believes that the purpose of the worship service is centrally the revelation of the glory of God in the midst of His people through the preaching of the Word. True religious experience takes place in the worship of God, in response to the declaration of God's truth and glory in the preaching. The worship service is not the place for the telling of someone's private religious experience, not even that of the preacher. It is not the occasion for ecstatic, supposedly Spirit-filled, utterances by individuals at the worship service. The church worships corporately and reverently together as one, and the central focus is on God. Through the preaching of God's Word, God's holy temple is in the midst of His people. They enjoy true spiritual fellowship and communion with the Holy One.

True preaching is based on the careful and serious exposition of the Word of God. Calvin, more than any man in church history, deserves the title "prince of exegetes." The preaching of Calvin was characterized by simple, yet very profound, careful, penetrating exegesis of the infallible Word of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Calvin did not fill his sermons with a lot of illustrations and human-interest stories. Calvin simply, with great power and authority, declared the Word of God by explaining the meaning and intent of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. Even today, centuries after the Reformation, Calvin's commentaries show the clarity and power of Calvin's preaching.

Preachers of the Reformation in the Netherlands had a very distinct and powerful Calvinistic imprint. Some were trained in Calvin's Geneva and other Reformed schools that had arisen in Europe and England, where the influence of Calvin was very strong.

The Reformation in the Netherlands was in the beginning spread by itinerate preachers. There was a great scarcity of ministers. Much of the Roman Catholic clergy at the time of the Reformation were dreadfully ignorant and had never been trained to preach. Soon Holland also had its own excellent Reformed schools for the training of Reformed preachers. These became the agents of the rapid spread of the Reformation.

The Reformed churches in the Netherlands from the beginning had two worship services every Lord's Day. They were usually well attended. Proper observance of the Lord's Day was defined chiefly in terms of frequenting the house of God and faithfully attending to the preaching of God's Word there. Many of the Reformed churches even had preaching services on weekdays. Sermons were long, lasting sometimes over an hour. Audiences were large. The common people had the spiritual gifts of God for listening to the preaching of the Word of God, even though many of them had only minimal formal education. Reformed preaching had a strong impact on the lives of God's people. We are told by historians of the time of the Reformation that the Dutch were a devout people whose godly living made a noticeable impact on the everyday affairs of their life.

The Reformed churches in the Netherlands believed that one of the purposes of the preaching of the Word of God in the worship services was to build up God's people in the knowledge of the truth of God. This was done through solid biblical preaching. Regular preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism was begun in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands already in the early days of the Reformation. The Heidelberg Catechism, from the Palatinate in Germany, was translated into the Dutch language by Peter Dathenus.

It was divided into 52 Lord's Days. The Church Order mandated that all preachers in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands preach on the Heidelberg Catechism. It was not considered sufficient that all the doctrines of the Word of God were explained in the churches in a systematic way. Heresies were regularly refuted by the preaching. The people of God were equipped to stand strong in the faith and to defend themselves from the many winds of doctrine that always deceive many in churches where there is little knowledge of the truth. Under the blessing of God's covenant of grace, strong generations of Reformed people grew up in the Netherlands.

The history of the use and development of Reformed liturgy in Holland is interesting and significant for understanding the development of the Reformation in the Netherlands. The Roman church had elaborate liturgies that were chanted by Roman Catholic priests, often in a cold and ritualistic manner. Because Latin was considered a kind of sacred language by the church of Rome, liturgies were chanted in Latin during the worship services, even though the worshipers could not understand a word of them and benefited nothing from them. This caused some in Reformed churches in other parts of the world to imagine that having liturgy at all in the worship services was itself a practice of Roman Catholicism to be entirely condemned.

This did not happen in the Reformed churches of Holland. Liturgies were already in use by Calvin in Geneva and by the Reformed churches in Germany. These liturgies were translated into the Dutch language largely by Peter Dathenus. These were officially adopted by the earliest synods of the Dutch Reformed churches for use by all the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The consensus of the Reformed churches was that

using such liturgy in the worship service was proper and, though not specifically mandated in the scriptures, their use in the worship of God was based on sound biblical principles.

The order of worship in the Dutch Reformed churches was amazingly uniform and purposefully structured. It closely resembled the order of worship in Calvin's church in Geneva. This was according to the conviction that in the church of God all things should be done decently and in order. The worship services contained the simple elements of the opening vatum and salutation, singing of the Psalms, the reading of God's law, the recitation of the Apostles' Creed, congregational prayer, the reading of Scripture, followed by the preaching, which was the main part of the service.

The use of Reformed liturgy also served to maintain unity of faith and practice in the Reformed churches of Holland. In the main, those churches were not of the opinion that all use of liturgy and form prayers would lead to cold formalism in the worship services. This was considered to be a position of false piety. Leaders of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands were instrumental in producing and translating masterpieces of Reformed liturgy for worship. The most beautiful and classic examples of this Reformed liturgy are the forms that were used in all the Reformed churches in the Netherlands for Baptism and for the administration of the Lord's Supper. These established forms of worship were of great value at the time of the Reformation, when there was such great controversy surrounding the meaning of the sacraments. They served to maintain the proper administration of the sacraments, one of the marks of the true church.

Perhaps we should say something yet about the singing and music in the Dutch Reformed churches. The Reformed churches, from their beginning, taught that

singing belongs to the congregation as a whole, and it must always focus on the glory of God. The worship service is not a time for listening to glorious choir concerts or for providing an opportunity for a soloist to display his talents, or for a vocal group to perform a program. I can still remember hearing in my youth the stirring sound of large Dutch Reformed immigrant congregations gloriously singing the Psalms together. This was truly Dutch Reformed tradition.

From the beginning, the Dutch Reformed churches insisted on the singing of the Psalms of David in the worship services. A few directly biblical songs were also adopted for use in the worship services, such as the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, Elisabeth, and Simeon, the doxology and musical renditions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed. The introduction of additional hymns was at first opposed by the Netherlands Reformed churches. There was great carefulness about which songs were sung in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Many feared that the free introduction of hymns into the worship services would involve the real danger of allowing heresy to creep into the Reformed churches through her singing. It was only later in the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands that this matter became the source of serious controversy and one of the causes of division in the churches of the Reformation in the Netherlands.

The Reformed churches in the Netherlands from the beginning were strongly committed to the idea that the Psalms are God's own inspired songbook for His church, even in the New Testament age. Hymns composed by men may theoretically be sound in doctrine and even beautiful in expression of the truth, but the Psalms were in a category of their own and were specially adapted for the public

worship of God. The Psalms are all properly God-centered. They are profound in their meaning. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands had a good understanding of the christological character of the Old Testament Psalms and therefore could satisfactorily answer questions regarding the need, in the worship services, for hymns that, it was said, spoke more directly from a New Testament perspective about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Because in many cases Reformed Christians took over Roman Catholic cathedrals, they found themselves in buildings with magnificent organs. Calvin opposed the use of organs in the worship services. At first the singing in the Dutch Reformed churches was a cappella, led by an appointed *voorzinger*. But, over time, pressures from the congregations led to the use of organs in the churches. Most Reformed churches did not consider this to be a violation of the purity of worship. In some cases, however, the use of organs led to the evil of using the worship service as the occasion for organ concerts. The organ in the worship service overpowered the singing of God's people, and was therefore wrongly used. Organs could, however, be properly used to lead and support the singing of the people for the glory of God and not for the glory of the musicians playing the organ.

Let me end with a reference to some interesting things about the practice of Reformed Christians in the Netherlands in their daily lives. Because of the invention of the printing press at the time of the Reformation, songbooks that also included the creeds of the Dutch Reformed churches and their adopted liturgy could be printed in great numbers. These books were greatly prized by the devout members of the Reformed churches. They were carried along to church each Lord's Day, but they were also used often in the homes

of Reformed Christians. Liturgies and catechisms were taught in the home and even memorized by children. The love for the singing of the Psalms was promoted in the homes because children frequently gathered around their parents for the singing of the Psalms. Moth-

ers in the home and fathers at work went about their work singing the Psalms. Having been raised in a Dutch Reformed home myself, I can remember the great blessing of this practice in my own home. There were many martyrs in the

Dutch Reformed churches during the early days of the Reformation. It is recorded that many of these martyrs died with the comforting words of the Psalms in their hearts, and Psalms served as their courageous and God-glorifying confession before their tormentors. 

Prof. Barry Gritters

The Netherlands' Early Contributions to Missions

Reformation and missions? The Netherlands of the sixteenth century and world evangelism? Some might propose these as new examples of oxymoron. In the early decades after the Lord began reforming His church, the Reformed believers in the Netherlands (and elsewhere, for that matter) did relatively little mission work outside their own lands.

But the sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed in the Lowlands did make important contributions to God's cause of missions in the world—enduring contributions worthy of note by Reformed churches today.

Reasons for inactivity in missions

The temptation to criticize the Reformed in the Netherlands for their failure to send out many missionaries early on and to great distances ought to be resisted. For many reasons:

First, the reality of distant lands with many peoples was just beginning to dawn on Europe. World exploration was in its infancy. Reformed believers certainly knew of the Jews and Muslims ("Turks" as they called them).

They knew of Asia and Africa. But of the unevangelized heathen in the more distant lands of Asia, Australia, and the Americas they were largely unaware.

Second, how to travel to what distant lands they did know was challenging. Mission work after the Reformation was hindered by the political realities and the church-state relations of the day. In most countries the church was under the authority of, or at least under the influence of, the state. The political reality of *cuius regio eius religio* (whose is the region, his is the religion) applied. The government of a land determined the religion of the land. This made it difficult, if not impossible, for a missionary to attempt to influence the religion of a people in a neighboring country. Then, Spain and Portugal, both Roman Catholic countries, had dominion over the seas. How could Protestant missionaries go out of the Netherlands?

Third, the Protestants in Europe were literally fighting for their lives, threatened as they were by the Roman Catholic majority. A people under such threats could not have the energy to send out many missionaries. The Peace of Westphalia gave Protestants a glimmer of hope. But that did not come until the middle of the seventeenth century (1648).

Fourth, the controversies among the Protestants themselves sapped strength from the churches. Protestantism battled over doctrines and quickly divided. Calvinism's battle against Lutheranism, and the Reformed against Arminianism in the Netherlands, took time and energy—necessary time and energy. But the Roman Catholic charge stung: "Laboring in unity, we have gained thousands of converts from Jews and Turks. Divided, you have but a handful."

Finally, doctrinal positions put roadblocks in front of an aggressive and healthy labor in missions. Some of the reformers, Beza included, believed that the great commission had been fulfilled by the apostles—at least that the great commission did not apply to the church of the day. Also, Luther contended that the end of the world was imminent. ("In a hundred years this will all be over." "The last day is not far away.") Their view was that the unbelief in the world at large was God's judgment upon the nations for rejecting the gospel many years before. The nations were beyond hope. Christ would return soon.

Reformed Dutchmen going out

Nevertheless, Reformed believers in the Netherlands began to engage in missions. Missionaries

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went out with the merchants of the Dutch commercial ventures: the United East-India Company, founded in 1602, and the West-India Company, founded in 1621. When missionaries were in short supply, a special training school for missionaries was established in Leiden — the “*Seminarium Inductum*.” Dutch missionaries went to Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Australia, Malaysia, and India. In their work, they translated the Bible into many of the languages of the native populations. They wrote gospel literature. By the end of the 1600s, well over 300 missionaries had been sent to the newly discovered East Indies. The Dutch also went *west*. The West Indies, the mainland of North America, and Brazil were destinations. The story of Reformed missions in each of these lands is fascinating all by itself.

What is not so happy is the way in which much of the mission work was performed in the early days after the Reformation.

The work of most missionaries was inseparably related to commercial ventures and colonialism. The leaders of business ventures wanted Reformed ministers to travel with them to be pastors to the colonists. The faithful ministers among them did see the God-given opportunity to bring the gospel to the unbelievers in these dark lands. But the ministers came at the behest of *business*. Even the missionary-school was established by the United East India Company. Also, because of commercial interests and governmental influence, some foolish practices took place on the fields: missionaries received cash bonuses for each new convert; there were requirements of a Christian profession for employment in the colonies; and the United East-India Company in Japan issued warnings against handing out Christian literature, public worship, and observing the Sabbath.

The Substantial Dutch Contribution

The Reformed contribution from the Netherlands after the Reformation was not so much to the *practice* of missions as to the *doctrine* of missions. While missionaries were going out, others were reflecting on their work and on the biblical principles that should govern that work. What Reformed churches today can learn from Dutch history is perhaps more from these early writings as from the initial labors.

The Dutch Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius is considered the father of Reformed mission theology. Born already in 1589, Voetius was an early participant in the Reformation’s progress in the Netherlands. He served two pastorates, from 1610 to 1634, in which he gained good knowledge of the mission labors of the churches. From 1634 until 1676, when he died at age of eighty-seven, he taught at the seminary in Utrecht. A delegate to the great Synod of Dordt, Voetius took part in the battle against Arminianism. He also participated in the synod’s decisions about missions, including the question of baptism on the mission field, which the consistory of Amsterdam raised.

Voetius did not develop the first Protestant theology of missions in an ivory tower. As an experienced pastor and professor, living among the churches and knowledgeable of the church broadly, Voetius wrote in reaction to 1) the explosive growth of Roman Catholic missions, 2) the relation of the government to the church, and 3) the commercial ventures of the Hollanders. (For those interested in a more thorough explanation of Voetius’ missiology, see *Calvin Theological Journal*, April 1991, pp. 47-79.) In his writings, he asked and answered some of the classic questions:

1. What is the purpose and goal of missions? Voetius’ view was broad, but he identified

mission’s purpose and goal as *the conversion of men, the planting of churches, the glory of God*. The “planting of churches” (he spoke often of *plantatio ecclesiae* and wrote a major treatise entitled *De Plantatione Ecclesiarum*) came about by the conversion of God’s elect (he maintained a predestinarian emphasis) and the gathering of them to Christ by the Word preached. Voetius had a broad view of missions. Included in the goal was a) the *re-gathering* of scattered churches; b) the *re-formation* of churches deformed in doctrine, life, or discipline; c) the *re-union* of divided churches; and d) the support of poor churches. Ultimately, the goal of missions for Voetius was the glory of God *through* the salvation of people and *through* the planting and reformation of churches. Notice, Voetius did not speak of world “shalom” or “kingdom-building” as goals. It was not until the twentieth century that other Dutchmen would chastise Voetius for this “failure” and propose new goals, which are adopted broadly by churches today.

2. Who sends the missionaries? Over against the Roman Catholic practices as well as some of the Protestant practices, Voetius maintained that the church alone may send missionaries. Specifically, *God* must send them *through* the church. Although Voetius would have allowed churches (that is, classes or synods) to send missionaries, Voetius vehemently opposed their sending by the government, by commercial interests, or by individual Christians or groups of Christians. Mission work is an *ecclesiastical* effort.

3. Who may be sent to do missions? A most rigorous selection process was required, in which social skills, eloquence, prudence, diligence, piety, and boldness were required. Voetius advised that the missionary be trained not only in the most important discipline of theology (“no theological misfits allowed”), but in science, history,

and philosophy. Then, the man must have thorough knowledge of the people's culture, history, religion, and language. No man may enter a field without language training. Interestingly, Voetius proposed a distinction between those who "plant" and those who "water," and also made a three-fold distinction between those who 1) preach, 2) those who teach catechism and visit the sick (both must be officebearers) and 3) those who, though not officially "sent" (Voetius kept his eye fixed on church order), were present to as-

sist in all the other necessary work on a mission field.

4. Finally, who are the objects of missions? The church must set her sights on all who are estranged from the church. Some are estranged by bare unbelief, others by heresy, and yet others by schism. There are Jews, Gentiles (pagans), and Muslims. Significantly, Voetius believed that the characteristics of the people on any particular field determine what particular man is qualified for the work in that place: are they cultured or uncultured,

educated or unlettered, Jew or Muslim? Send a man fit for that work.



The length of this special issue does not permit a lengthier description of early Dutch missiology. The churches would be well served by a careful reading (or translation) of the Dutch sources. Latin would help, too, for Voetius' main work, which includes much about missions, *Politica Ecclesiastica*, has never been translated. There is precedent that teaches. There are "old paths" in missions, too. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

On Sunday morning, September 9, the Sunday School classes of the Byron Center, MI PRC were invited to meet briefly after their morning service to present their collection money, taken over the summer months, to Rev. J. Kortering. This gift was to be used to translate and print a study book on the Heidelberg Catechism for boys in an orphanage in India.

Starting on September 14, Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, began leading a Bible study at Trinity College, where some twelve PR students are enrolled this year. Present plans call for the group to meet once a month to study "The Armor of God" given in Ephesians 6. We are also happy to include here a sort of follow-up to that Bible study. Rev. Mahtani writes in Bethel's next bulletin that the first Bible study at Trinity was very encouraging, with some sixteen students in attendance, and there were at least three or four others who called to express interest but were unable to attend. Rev. Mahtani even went so far as to invite all sixteen students to Bethel

for Sunday worship services on October 1. All sixteen planned to come to both services and also join the YP/YA after the evening service. Rev. Mahtani also invited all the students to the parsonage for a meal between services. But he also mentioned that although the Mahtanis had invited them for a meal, he was sure that his wife, Esther, would appreciate some help with the food, and they were looking for any offers to prepare a dish to help feed sixteen hungry college students.

In conjunction with the beginning of the catechism classes at the Byron Center, MI PRC this fall, a Men's Bible Study will once again meet at the same time. Byron Center has done this in the past, giving the fathers who drop off their children for catechism something profitable to do instead of the quick stop at the grocery or hardware store during classes.

The annual Fall Fellowship Supper was held at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, on September 13. Everyone, whether older, younger, or in between, was encouraged to make an extra effort to come for this time of fellowship with others in their church family. It was noted that many members of First live quite a distance from each other and do not often visit in each other's home, so their fellowship times at

church are especially valuable. Rev. J. Slopsema also gave a ten-minute talk to encourage the members of First in their Bible study attendance for the year.

Sunday evening, September 10, members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC enjoyed a coffee after their evening worship service to bid farewell to Pastor-elect Andrew Lanning, his wife, Stephanie, and their two children, Jessica and Eric, before they took up the work of pastor and family at neighboring Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

Having successfully sustained his examination by Classis East on September 13, Pastor-elect Andrew Lanning was ordained and installed as pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on September 15. Rev. Lanning became Faith's sixth pastor since their organization in 1973. Rev. S. Key, Rev. Lanning's father-in-law, conducted the worship service, with Rev. K. Koole, moderator for Faith, reading the form. Rev. Key's sermon theme was entitled "To the Angel of Faith Church," based on Revelation 1:20 and 2:1. The collection taken was appropriately for the Faith Seminary Student Fund. There was a time of fellowship following the installation to welcome the Lannings.

The following Lord's Day, September 17, Rev. A Lanning preached

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his inaugural sermon from Nehemiah 8:8 under the theme, "Giving the Sense of God's Word," looking at the meaning, the possibility, and the result. Praise God for granting to us pastors and preachers of the Word. We pray that Rev. Lanning's ministry be faithful and fruitful to God's glory in the church.

Denomination Activities

Seminary Convocation was held at the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on September 6. Prof. B. Gritters spoke on the topic, "Ministers and (their) Mothers."

The annual fall Adult Bible Society League Mass Meeting was held September 19 at Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Rev. J. Laning, pastor at Hope, spoke on the topic, "Laboring for the Meat That Endures."

The Hope Heralds, an all-male choir from west Michigan, presented

their annual late summer concert at the Grandville, MI PRC on Sunday evening, September 10. This was followed September 12 by a concert at the Kalamazoo, MI PRC to mark the beginning of their fall catechism and Bible study season, and the following Lord's Day, September 17, at the South Holland, IL PRC.

Mission Activities

With the concurrence of the council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and the Domestic Mission Committee, an offer was presented to the seller of a church property in Pittsburgh. The offer was accepted, and as of this writing the finalization of this purchase is now under way. We rejoice in God's goodness shown to our Pittsburgh Mission in the answering of their prayers for a church building.

In news from the newly organized Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, we read recently that their pastor, Rev. A. Stewart, conducted a lecture in the Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl South Wales under the theme, "Covenant Baptism."

Minister Activities

Pastor Paul Goh was installed this summer as the pastor of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. We rejoice in God's goodness to Rev. Goh and commend him to God's all-sufficient grace and wisdom to perform the work of a pastor. Pastor Lau Chin Kwee, whose health is not good, transferred his membership to the Covenant Church.

Rev. Chris Connors of the Launceston EPC of Australia accepted the call to Brisbane EPC. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 7, 2006, our parents and grandparents, **MR. and MRS. MICHAEL ENGELSMA**, celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary.

We give thanks to God for the years He has given them together and for His faithfulness toward them in their marriage. We are also grateful for the covenant instruction they have provided us. Our prayer is that the LORD will continue to sustain and bless them in the years to come.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- ❖ Mark and Liz Langerak
Meghann, Kayley, Trevor
- ❖ Sam and Heather Copple
Braden, Mitchell, Tyler, Drew,
Katie, Ethan
- ❖ David and Jaime Ritsema
Clayton, Devon, Elyse
- ❖ Jason and Lois Engelsma
Evan, Annica
- ❖ Luke Engelsma
- ❖ Seth Engelsma

Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Peter and Nell Faber in the death of Pete's brother,

MR. WILLIAM FABER.

May they find their comfort in God's word in 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. William Langerak, President
Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and the consistory of Hull PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Egbert and Henrietta Gritters, along with their children, in the passing of Henrietta's brother,

ART BRANDS.

Our sympathies also go out to Bruce and JoAnn Korver in the loss of their uncle. May they find comfort in God's Word: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

NOTICE

The council and congregation of Hull PRC, along with their pastor,

REV. STEVEN KEY,

wish to express their thanksgiving to that great Shepherd of the sheep, Christ Jesus, for the twenty years of faithful service that Rev. Key has given to our denomination. We pray for God's continued care for him and his wife as he serves as an instrument in God's hand to proclaim the gospel in the midst of the churches. We confess with David in Psalm 23:1, 2, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Hull PRC wish to express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Brian and Pauline Kroese, along with their children and grandchildren, following the passing of Brian's father,

CHARLES W. KROESE.

May they find their comfort in God's Word in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

October 15, 2006/Standard Bearer/47

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 17, 2006, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, **MR. and MRS. JOHN BOBBYL, SR.**, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, D.V. It is with great joy their children give thanks for the many years God has graciously given our parents together. They have truly been a blessing in their godly example of marriage.

Our prayer is that God may continue richly to bless them on their earthly pilgrimage as they walk in the fear of our Lord.

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the LORD who hath given me counsel" (Psalm 16:6, 7).

- ❖ George and Mary Lynn Postmus
John, Nathan, Lisa, Cathy
- ❖ George and Jayne Bodbyl
George & Michelle
(Olivia, Emma)
Marcella
Michael & Monica VanderKolk
Emily
- ❖ John and Jane Bodbyl
Craig & Jennifer Coleman
(Caleb, Logan, Jacob)
John II, Jeremy, Jason, James, Julia
- ❖ Thomas and Gretine Bodbyl
Marie
Douglas & Larissa Mingerink
(Braylon)
Joel & fiancée Laura VanPutten
Nate, Eric, Stefan
- ❖ John and Joan Mulder
Elizabeth, Lynnelle, Jodi
- ❖ Daniel and Anna Mae Bodbyl
Bradley & Amanda Schut
Tina, Rosanne, Seth
Hudsonville, Michigan

Lecture

Loveland PRC
Evangelism Committee
October 31, 2006
7:30 P.M.
at Loveland PRC

Speaker:
Prof. David Engelsma

Topic:
"Justification and Good Works"

copies available on tape
or CD upon request

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Hull PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to their members Terry and Shelley Dolieslager and their children in the death of their father and grandfather,

DARRELL DOLIESLAGER.

We rest in the promise of God's Word in Psalm 121:1, 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Ike Uittenbogaard, Asst. Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 26, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

HARRY and MARY KAISER,

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We thank our heavenly Father for the blessings of the covenant that they have taught us, and the godly example they have shown. May God continue to bless and keep them in the years ahead. Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

- ❖ Bern and Linda Zandstra
Ben & Teresa Zandstra
Meri Beth
Patricia and Rebekah (in glory)
- ❖ Dan and Julie Kaiser
Ross, Alex, Mitchell
- ❖ Doug and Julie Kaiser
Nathan
- ❖ Tim and Joan Kaiser
Matthew, Joel, Jonathan, Amy, Kristin,
Rhonda, Stefan, Seth
Byron Center, Michigan

NOTICE

South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School is currently seeking applicants for a Discovery Center (Resource Room) teacher. Interested applicants should contact the Administrator, Mr. Ryan VanOverloop

[school - 708.333.9197;
home - 708.825.1716]

or the Education Committee Chairman,
Mr. Ryan Regnerus, at 708.474.6321.

Reformation Day Lecture!

Tuesday, October 31, 2006
at 8:00 P.M.

Prof. Herman Hanko

(Professor Emeritus of the
Protestant Reformed Seminary)

will speak on:

*The Reformation and
True Piety*

Location:

Wingham

Protestant Reformed Church

181 Augusta Street

Wingham, ON

call 519-357-1082

for more information

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 6, 2006, with gratitude to God for His covenant faithfulness, our parents and grandparents

MR. and MRS. MARVIN KAMPS,

celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, appreciate their godly example to us and covenant instruction. We are thankful to God for the many blessings He has given to them, and to us through them. May our heavenly Father continue to bless them in their marriage and keep them in His care for years to come. "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

With love,
from their children and grandchildren

PUBLIC LECTURE

On October 27, 2006
at 8:00 P.M.

*The Latest Attack on Grace in the
Reformed Churches: Justification
by Works — A Covenant Heresy*

SPEAKER:

Prof. David J. Engelsma,

Professor of Theology
in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

AT

Grace Community Church
3500 New Holland Street
Hudsonville, Michigan

SPONSORED BY

the Evangelism Society of
Southwest PRC

There will be opportunity for questions.