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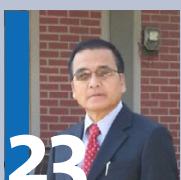
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Pray for Paris

On Friday, November 14, 2015, France experienced its own ‘9/11’. The terrorist attack on the headquarters of the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, of January 11 this year was bad enough, with 11 killed. This massacre was on a larger scale, with higher casualties (130 deaths), and with a far greater impact on Europe as a whole.

■ The terror spreads

In the first issue of *Lux Mundi* of this year I wrote about the slaughter of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya, ending as follows: ‘Let us continue to pray for our brothers and sisters on the front lines: Lord, please, protect them; Lord, comfort those who are mourning; Lord, bless their testimony to your grace.’ And also pray: ‘Lord, please, use the governments of this world to combat terrorism effectively, and restore peace and justice to those parts of the world under threat. Amen!’

November 14 has demonstrated the reality of continuing atrocities by Muslim fanatics. Not only has 2015 seen the self-proclaimed Caliphate of ISIS strengthening its grip on a larger chunk of Syria and Iraq, ISIS is now attacking cities in Europe. The prayers needed at the beginning of 2015 are needed just as much at its end.

■ Our Christian response

We cannot forget the shocking images on TV. It was astounding that this could take place in a Paris we imagined— after *Charlie Hebdo*— to be well prepared for such attacks. Those of us living in the Netherlands now realize that we could well be next on ISIS’s list.

Many of us who led church services on the following Sunday added a song in connection with the Paris carnage. In my case, we began our service by singing Psalm 130:

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!
O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
(...)
I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

Psalm 130 is a desperate cry for help and mercy—not at all triumphant, but a confession of impotence and guilt. It expresses a deep longing for God to come in the fullness of his grace and might to this dark earth.

Singing these words at that moment, in that context, was also a demonstration of solidarity with all victims of terrorism, not just in Paris, but in Beirut, across the whole Middle East, and in African nations such as Mali, Nigeria, and Kenya. Truly our earth is wracked by the terrible consequences of the Fall for human society. Indeed, all of creation is longing for deliverance from its ‘bondage to corruption’ and for the ‘freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (Romans 8:21).

■ What now?

As I wrote in connection with the massacre of the Coptic Christians, and drawing on our Augustinian tradition, we are convinced as Reformed believers that God is working in ‘multiple ways, with multiple strategies, with multiple callings, in this fallen world.’ We insist that the pacifist response (‘Don’t fight in the Middle East, just love and forgive your enemies!’) is misguided, and that the secular Rightist response (‘Let’s get rid of all these Muslims from our societies once and for all!’) is purely malicious. Pacifism denies that God uses governments to curb evil by force (Romans 13), and the secular Rightists blame an entire religious community for what a tiny minority is doing.

What is needed then? Prayer certainly! It was a great irony of November 14 that the name of a commercial clothing brand, ‘Pray for Paris’, suddenly became a popular response on social media to the terrorist attacks. A brand name, meant merely to sell clothes, was transformed in its significance.

Action is needed, too: by governments, to use the sword in a more effective way against murderous fanatics; and by Christians, to support such governments, but also to be a critical voice when rabble rousers try to blame all Muslims for terrorism. And we will, indeed, truly seek to love our worst enemies, and thus proclaim the Good News to its most virulent opponents—as the Apostle Paul was before his conversion. Governments have a genuine, but limited role. The gospel is meant for all, including all ISIS adherents. And—only the coming of the fullness of God’s Kingdom can set things totally right.

Kim Batteau | Editor



All members of the conference
[photo Wonkyo Seo]

5th Asia-Pacific Conference of Reformed Churches, October 13-16, 2015



*Dr Rowland Ward (b.1945) has been a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia since 1976, and is now in active retirement. He is the author of numerous books on church history, Christian doctrine and worship, the most recent being *A Short History of the Church in Scotland AD 300 to 2015*.*

As agreed at a meeting of the delegates from the Asia Pacific region at the ICRC meeting in Cardiff, UK in September 2013, the 5th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the ICRC was hosted by the Independent Reformed Church in Korea [IRCK] with the theme of the Sacraments.

Delegates were accommodated in the Hoam Faculty House at Seoul National University which is on the bus route direct from Incheon Airport. Each day the delegates were conveyed the 18 km to the facilities of the Riverside Church at Anyang, south of Seoul, where also most meals, including breakfast, were provided by a happy and capable staff of volunteers. We were kept in good order by the genial Prof. Sam Oh, who was also treasurer of the Conference. The generously financial support by the IRCK is worthy of note.

Each of the ten ICRC churches in the Asia-Pacific region was represented. Observers were also present from several other churches along with representatives of ICRC member churches in the Netherlands, Canada, USA and South Africa who have mission interests in the region. Including about 70 delegates from the churches, the total number attending the Conference was around 170.

The Conference was opened with welcoming greetings by the Convener of this regional conference, Rev. Prof. Heon Soo Kim of the IRCK, and was followed by worship conducted by Rev. Byoung Kil Chung, minister of the Riverside Church at Anyang. Farewell greetings were then brought by Rev. John Goris of New Zealand who

had been the Convener for the Missions Committee of the ICRC for many years and facilitated the past four Asia-Pacific Regional Conferences. Rev. Dr Rowland Ward, the Convener for Regional Conferences of the ICRC appointed in September 2013 by the ICRC Cardiff, expressed appreciation for Brother Goris' long and faithful service given unobtrusively and beneficially since 1997.

While the major papers had been provided in electronic form before the Conference, all participants were provided with two properly bound volumes of these along with the text of most devotions and church introductions. These documents had also been translated into Korean. This was of great benefit for the Korean brothers, and the translations were also projected on a screen for the benefit of the significant number of men and women from the IRCK who were present during most sessions.

The subject was the Sacraments and this was addressed in several ways: through three devotions at the beginning of each day, ten devotions during the sessions by those representing their church federation, three evening lectures and three bible studies, prepared by Rev. Professor Heon Soo Kim. Small group discussions were held also. Clearly, the programme was very full but it worked very well.

■ PAPER 1 - Towards a Reformed Understanding of Sacraments in an Asian Context by Rev Prof. Dr Mohan Chacko, India

This paper clarified the nature of the sacraments, distinguishing them from illustrations of grace, such

as washing the disciples' feet, and justifying the limitation to two sacraments each of covenantal character. Dr. Chacko stressed the primacy of God's action, as divine pledges, without ignoring the significance of human response. The Word of God is not insufficient, but our faith is weak, hence the sacraments are given for the strengthening of faith: to speak of them as an appendix to the Word is therefore not to belittle the sacraments. He considered that the sacraments are in fact necessary not merely because the Lord has commanded them but also because our faith is always weak. The sacraments are signs, but Dr Chacko considered it more fitting to speak of them not as mere pointers to realities beyond themselves but as instrumental means to work in us inwardly what they point to outwardly. In the Asian context, with religious traditions rich in symbols and rituals, we need to avoid misunderstanding and guard against indiscriminate distribution of the Supper.

Brother Chacko's emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a joyful feast resonated in discussion given that too often we can focus on our unworthiness, and the Supper as a kind of passion play, rather than seeing the elements as speaking of Christ who is our life because he was given for us and poured out his life for us. This paper was a good preparation for the papers that followed.

■ PAPER 2 - Baptism and the Gospel By Rev. Dirk Van Garderen, New Zealand

Brother Van Garderen presented his paper drawing from considerable practical experience. He demonstrated that baptism in the

New Testament is an inseparable part of gospel proclamation and experience, and in particular he utilized four key biblical terms – covenant, promise, sign, and seal. He emphasized baptism as *for us* not *from us*, so highlighting it as first and foremost a sign and seal of God's covenant. He also addressed the questions of the subjects of baptism, pointing to the inclusion of children in the Abrahamic covenant and the necessity for their explicit exclusion if they were not embraced in the new covenant. As regards the mode of baptism, he considered full immersion was by no means obligatory, and in fact the general idea of washing or cleansing was well represented by sprinkling or pouring. An appendix in catechetical form was offered as a teaching tool, and will be utilized in providing practical materials for village pastors.

■ PAPER 3 - How Should we Celebrate the Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace? – The Lord's Supper and Discipleship By Rev. Prof. Dr Hae Moo Yoo, Korea

This paper, by a respected teacher in a seminary of the Kosin churches, began with a survey of attitudes to the Lord's Supper among some Puritans, and in New England. In an Appendix Dr Yoo expanded this to indicate developments in Scotland impacted by revivals which led to extensive open air communion seasons and, when transplanted to America, further developed into camp meetings until the demise of festal communions in the second half of the 19th century. Dr Yoo noted the institution of the Supper during a normal meal. He stressed that it is

not appropriate to remember only Christ's death but the total Christ now risen, ascended, and glorified. Following out the Reformed view over against the Roman view of transubstantiation and what is commonly regarded as the Zwinglian memorial position, Dr Yoo emphasized that the Supper is more than a memorial, involving a true spiritual feeding on Christ through faith. He discussed Calvin and Luther's views of the Supper, regarding the Reformed position as providing the best solution to the issues involved.

This paper, which stimulated considerable valuable discussion, reflected the author's concern over the impact of recent secularization on the Korean church with the loss of the dynamism that characterized it in an earlier generation. His concern was for a Reformed understanding in contrast to the evangelical revivalist approach that has been typical from the beginning of Protestant missions in Korea. Dr Yoo considered a tightening of admission to the Lord's Supper, weekly observance of the same, and open-air services were appropriate measures in the current situation. If on all points the author did not convince, his emphasis on Christ as our food and drink in the Supper and on joyful celebration was deeply appreciated.

■ A good standard

The organization of the Conference by the Independent Reformed Church in Korea has set a good standard for the future. As well as providing valuable opportunities for networking, there was a visit on Thursday to Holy Covenant Independent Reformed Church and Press in central Seoul where a wonderful lunch was provided. A visit was also paid to Yanghwajin Foreign Missionaries Cemetery in Seoul and a closing festive meal and concert was held on Friday evening. A wonderful team of helpers ensured smooth running throughout the Conference. New relationships were made and old ones renewed and strengthened. We give thanks to the Lord who blessed the gathering and gave us the privilege of learning and praying around his Word.

The aim of the Regional Conferences is to benefit the wider church. The production of useful materials for village pastors in Asia-Pacific and elsewhere is underway as a result of this particular Conference.

The next Asia-Pacific Regional Conference is scheduled for Melbourne, Australia in 2019. ■



Group discussion [photo Wonkyo Seo]

Misplaced Priorities (1 Cor. 1:11-17)

Division is normal, unity is rare. Differences and divisions are accepted norms in today's world. We all have a different perspective on almost every issue in life. We may be in 99% agreement with a view, but never 100%. Even in Scriptural matters, in our doctrines and polity, we will differ in something. The human tendency is to differ more than to agree, and so we stand partly united but vastly divided.



Rev. Samit Mishra is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Free Church (Central India). In addition to his pastoral ministry, he is involved in theological training and church planting work in the rural region of central India.

Differences of opinions are appreciated and undoubtedly have many benefits. However, if they are not handled wisely they cause chaos and lead to divisions: divisions in family, divisions in community, and divisions in the church as well. The church at Corinth is a testimony to that. The Corinthian church was rich in many ways: it was rich in knowledge of the Word, rich in gifts of grace, and rich in commitment and blessed hope (1 Cor. 1:5-8). But it was a divided church, a church that contradicted the will of Jesus Christ who prayed for her unity (John 17: 22,23). What they lacked was oneness of spirit; they were not one in spirit and opinion (v.10).

We still have the same issue to decide, don't you think? The church continues to struggle with the problem of division. Today, Christians are more divided than united. How, then, can we resolve it? The apostle Paul gives an answer. The answer is simple: as leaders and believers in the church, do not misplace your priorities. Misplaced priorities lead to divisions; they caused divisions in church in Corinth, and they are still causing problems and divisions in our churches. Let us look at what priorities they had misplaced.

1. Preacher above Christ

The problem in the church was really serious. The church had to be a landmark of sacrificial love in this city of hatred and immorality. The church had to influence the Corinth community, but instead it was busy fighting within. The reason for the conflict was more serious than the conflict itself. They were followers of leaders in the church. Some belonged to Peter, some followed Apollos, others claimed to be of Paul, and

some said that they were of Christ. It was a personality-driven church and, therefore, it was divided. They forgot that all the leaders and preachers of the gospel were mere men, nothing but labourers in God's field.

God gives different gifts to different people, all be to used for the benefit of his church (12:7). But here the gifts and personalities of the preachers were causing division. Whose fault it was, we are not told. What we do know is that Paul was deeply hurt by such situations. He writes to the church of Corinth and brings their focus back onto Christ. None of the preachers had been crucified for the congregation. They came with the message of the cross, but they were not their saviour. The church in Corinth misplaced their priorities: preacher above Christ.

True unity in the church is possible in Christ alone. The very foundation of the church is the atoning work of Christ. Once a church misses this and exalts a leader, particularly on account of his gifts, the church is harmed, and believers tend to be divided. When the messenger becomes more important than the message, when the preacher's gifts become more beautiful than the cross of Christ, when a human leader becomes more attractive than the sacrifice of Christ, when the preacher sounds better than the good news itself, be cautious: division is certain.

Therefore, we have the sacrament of Lord's Supper, a perfect expression of our unity. When we participate in it in unity, we remind ourselves and affirm that we are united as one in Christ. He is the foundation of our unity, his death has united us as one body and we exalt and praise him alone.

* Asia-Pacific Conference of Reformed Churches

The 5th Asia-Pacific Conference of the ICRC was held in Seoul, South Korea from October 13-16, 2015.

The theme of the conference was the Sacraments and this was addressed in several ways: through various devotions, three lectures (by Rev. Professor Dr Mohan Chacko, Rev. Dirk van Garderen and Rev. Professor Dr Hae Moo Yoo), and three Bible studies prepared by Rev. Professor Heon Soo Kim.

This Lux Mundi issue contains a summary of the main lectures and the devotion of Rev. Samit Mishra. The main points of the Bible studies are also

included, and the conference report produced by Dr Rowland Ward.

The aim of the regional conference is to benefit the wider church, particularly through producing useful materials for village pastors. To this end Rev. Van Garderen provided a pamphlet as a Bible-based instruction and guide on the meaning of Christian baptism, using a catechetical question-and-answer format with proof texts. This pamphlet is included in a special section of this Lux Mundi issue as a helpful tool for those interested, and can be easily translated into whatever the local language may be.



photo Corinth Flickr/RG1033

The church had to be a landmark of sacrificial love in this city of hatred and immorality

2. Baptism above gospel

Paul strongly counters any cause that divides believers. One of those is certainly baptism. It is the most controversial issue: it even created conflict between the disciples of John and Christ (John 3:26). Probably baptism by different leaders was causing chaos in the church. Those baptized by Apollos claimed to be his, those by Peter followed Peter, and those by Paul wished to belong to Paul alone. But Paul tells them that they were not baptized in the name of any human leader. They were baptized into Christ and in the name of the triune God. No human leader owned them, they were owned by the triune God alone. Baptism is not a seal of the one who baptizes but a seal from God signifying that the believer belongs to God alone. They belonged to God and not to any human leader, not even to Paul.

To strengthen his case, Paul says in v.17 that Christ had called him to preach the gospel, not to baptize. He is referring to his own calling, but he is implying the same truth for the other preachers of the gospel in whose names the church was divided. The primary calling of the apostles was to preach the gospel, the message of Christ crucified. 'Go and make disciples' is the primary command of the Great Commission. Preaching and teaching the gospel should be the main concern of the preacher, and Paul was aware of that. Paul's priority was to preach the gospel, and he preached the whole counsel of God's word wherever he went. Preaching the gospel was his mission.

Sadly, it was not so in the church in Corinth: baptism was more important to them than the gospel, and it is the same even today. In some churches in India the sacrament of baptism has become the primary goal of evangelists and pastors. They preach the gospel to baptize. People are baptized immediately, even at their first hearing of the gospel. People are baptized for the wrong reasons: to get healed, to get blessed,

to get released from demon possession and curses or to get to heaven. People are baptized twice and thrice for the sake of reporting. Many mission agencies pay evangelists and pastors not for the preaching of the gospel but according to the numbers of monthly baptisms. Baptism has become the priority; it is placed over the gospel.

Believers and the church are more divided over the issue of baptism than united in the one gospel that they all preach and believe. A gospel-centric unity is overlooked due to misplaced priorities. The gospel is the core of church unity; other matters may divide but the gospel unites. Now this does not mean that we should compromise our scriptural conviction or stop teaching about baptism. What it means is that we should take proper care that we teach baptism in the context of the gospel: not above the gospel, but as part of the gospel.

■ Conclusion:

As I conclude, I confess that there were times when I had promoted myself over Christ, and occasions when I had acted in a manner that concealed the glory of Christ behind the curtain of my gifts and success. Without doubt, I had preferred less important issues of Christian faith without a gospel-centric approach, or above the gospel, and thus caused disturbance in the body of Christ. These I might have done unknowingly, but I have done them nonetheless.

So, I pray for God's mercy. May God help me to serve his church to the best of my capabilities but with a Christ-like attitude, and adorn me with the ornaments of Christ's humanity and grace so that my service to his church will not cause division but the unity for which Christ prayed: 'that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity...' (John 17:22, 23).

May God help us all so to do! Amen!

God's instrument of grace: the sacraments in the Asian context



Dr Mohan Chacko served as Principal of Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, India, for a period of over 30 years, and is presently serving there as Distinguished Professor of Theology and Mission. He is an ordained minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India.

1. Sacraments – definition and distinctions

The term 'sacrament' was used to translate the New Testament Greek term *mysterion* ('mystery,' something hidden) into Latin (*sacramentum*), and thus made its entry into theological discussion. However, neither 'sacrament' nor 'mystery' is used in the Bible to refer to Baptism or the Lord's Supper.

My own approach will be to gain a general understanding of signs, symbols, and rites in the Scripture, and from there derive a narrower meaning of the sacraments.

■ The sacramental character of revelation

We may observe from Scripture that certain things in creation are employed by God to communicate God's special revelation. The Garden of Eden itself, with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life, is real history, but also symbolic, and an actual conveyor, of God's presence and fellowship with mankind.

Later on in biblical revelation we see numerous signs and symbols that are broadly 'sacramental' in nature. Noah's rainbow, the rock in the wilderness, the bronze serpent: all are symbolic of God's word. In the New Testament, besides baptism and Lord's Supper, we can think of the love feast, washing of feet, anointing the sick with oil, ordination, marriage, etc. The following would be considered as constituting the essence of a sacrament in the broad sense:

1. Ordinary parts of creation or life are made use of for an extra-ordinary divine purpose.
2. These elements of creation (tree, rainbow, stones) have the extra-ordinary function only by divine assigination. They have no sacredness of their own.
3. Such elements served as reminders (either to God or to human beings) of God's Word – a word of promise or of threat.
4. However, they were often more than mere external reminders; they were tied into divine purposes or actions more directly, putting into effect the promise or threat through human participation/action. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil *actually effected* sin and death (Gen 3:6-7). Looking to the bronze serpent *really* brought healing (Num 21:8). In this sense, they were also *means* of blessings (or judgments).

It is evident then that the term 'sacrament' can be used in this wide, general sense.

■ Sacraments: common and special grace

Since redemptive sacraments are essentially linked with grace, we can divide the sacraments along the lines of *common grace* and *special grace*. God's grace in Christ operates beyond the elect to mankind as a whole and to the whole creation, in its protection, preservation and provision. He gives sunshine and rain to the good and to the evil. He heals and gives strength to unbelievers. He animates all of creation by his Holy Spirit. This universal or *common grace* is symbolized in the promise given to Noah, of which the rainbow is the sign.

The elect, on the other hand, are recipients of God's *special grace*, which confers to them the blessings of the Covenant through His Word. God in his dealings with his covenant people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, established and honoured various ordinances, symbols, rites and rituals for the strengthening of their faith.

If there is something that sets apart Baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is that they are *special signs of the covenant of grace*. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) highlights this aspect when it states that 'sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace'. They truly are *church* rituals, unlike anointing the sick with oil, for example, which was clearly done privately in homes (James 5:14). Baptism and the Lord's Supper are thus sacraments in a unique sense.

■ Special sacraments – God's pledge, received by faith

If we follow the covenantal character of sacraments, we may see them as essentially *divine pledges*. The divine covenants in the Bible are monergistic or unilateral (one-sided) rather than mutual. This is especially clear from Genesis 15 (where God alone takes the oath), and more significantly from Genesis 17, where the covenant of circumcision was established. *These covenants are primarily about what God is going to do for Abraham rather than what Abraham is to do for God. It is this emphasis that is retained in the Reformed understanding of sacraments.*

The emphasis on divine action, however, does not eliminate the significance of human response. Again, this is true to the nature of the covenant. Abraham believed the LORD, and he counted it to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). Abraham's faith is a response to God's promise of grace rather than a condition for receiving grace.



Food offered to Buddha in Longshan temple, Taiwan [photo Ria Nederveen]

This structure of pledge and response is beautifully kept in John Calvin's theology of the sacraments. In the *Institutes* he defines a sacrament as 'an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us ... and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels before men.' He gives a briefer definition: 'a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him' (Inst 4.14.1).

Donald Baillie (*The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers* (1957)) rightly points out that it would be more accurate to say that the sacraments 'operate through', rather than depend on, human faith.

■ Sacraments strengthen faith

For Calvin, and in the Confessions echoing Calvin, sacraments were instituted *not because of the insufficiency of the Word* but *because of the weakness of our faith*. Sacraments are a prop or aid for our tottering, wavering faith (Inst 4.14.3). Calvin's position can be supported by a pattern we see in Genesis 15. Here God reveals himself to Abraham in a vision, and proclaims himself to be Abraham's shield, and promises a great reward for Abraham. It is at the point of Abraham's wavering faith that God establishes the covenant (15:8ff). Thus the sacrament is a confirmation of the spoken word of promise, for the strengthening of our faith.

It is better to conceive both preaching and sacraments as ministries of *God's Word* – preaching as *God's Word spoken* and sacraments as *God's Word ratified*. Use of words (words of institution, oath-taking, for example) is part of the ratification. The point to note is that *both are expressions of the promise of God's Word, thus bringing preaching and the sacraments onto an equal footing rather than one as subordinate to the other*.

■ Sacraments as instrumental signs

Steve Griffin, till recently my colleague in Dehra Dun, India, at Presbyterian Theological Seminary, advocates what he calls the 'instrumental' view of signs, which he considers to be consistent with the view of Calvin and some other Reformers. Signs are external things that serve as real means 'to work in us *inwardly* what they point to *outwardly*'. We don't venerate the outward signs. But by the same token, they can be approached reverently, because through them God is pleased to work something in us when we approach them full of confidence in God's word and promise.' (Steve Griffin, *The Gift and the Promise of the Reformation* pp3,4).

2. Towards a Reformed understanding of sacraments in the Asian context

We will conclude this paper by raising some contextual concerns. What does it mean to be Reformed in one's understanding of the sacraments in an Asian context? To ask such a question is to assume that context is relevant to one's understanding of theology and practice of ministry. A brief look at our context then is necessary. My purpose here is only to alert us to certain situations rather than to prescribe solutions.

The most important factor in our context is our religious situation. Asia is a land of many ancient religions. Excluding the Semitic religions, we have many major and ancient religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Shintoism, Taoism, etc. These traditions are rich in symbols, rites, and rituals of various kinds. We need to ask how the sacraments will 'translate' into such contexts. On numerous occasions I have seen that Hindu friends who come to our worship services come forward to receive the Lord's Supper in spite of explanations given about its meaning and who are eligible to participate. They would consider it rude to be denied the elements because they readily associate it

with *prasad*, food offered to idols in temples, which is freely distributed to all. Besides the element of awkwardness and embarrassment, the sacrament becomes an obstacle. The question here is, how do we maintain the exclusionary aspect of the Supper (fencing the Table) without offending those who are genuine seekers? Some pastors in India (not of the Reformed tradition) have boldly proposed that the Lord's Supper be explained as *prasad* and served indiscriminately.

Also relevant to this discussion is the element of superstition and magic that is often a part of the rituals of other religions. The challenge that we as Reformed/Presbyterian people face is two-fold. On the one hand, we want to avoid giving the impression that there is any kind of magic involved. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and some high church traditions give perhaps tend to go too far in this direction with their rituals. Many of these rituals are very meaningful to those who understand, but appear to be magical to others. This is evident in the way they revere the elements – handled only by the priests, extreme care in serving, received in a kneeling posture, etc. A greater danger among us is perhaps our tendency to handle these things too casually. Partly at least, this is a reaction against the excesses of the pre-Reformation church. But the casual attitude with which some of our churches handle the Supper borders on the sacrilegious and is not supported by our creeds. The instrumental view of signs, discussed above, helps us to understand and handle the sacraments in a reverential and yet not superstitious manner.

Another aspect of our contemporary Asian context that we must seriously take into account is persecution. Opposition to conversion is growing in all parts of Asia, particularly in places like India. Baptism is often considered as the mark of conversion in such places. Attending a religious service is often considered innocuous whereas baptism is seen as the mark that you have changed your religion. Hence, baptismal services, especially the kind that are held openly in streams and rivers, are extremely dangerous. In such contexts, we need to seriously consider if the benefit of administering baptism is worth the risk. Some of course would argue that baptism is not necessary in such situations (using the point discussed above that baptism is not necessary for salvation). Others, however, would point out that testifying to one's faith in Christ in the face of risk is what baptism is all about.

Sacraments, particularly baptism, have been



Theological University Kampen

■ Farewell Rector Prof. M. te Velde

Professor **Mees te Velde** began his work as Professor of Post-1650 Church History, Church Polity and Church Building, on May 1, 1988. From December 7, 2009, he has been rector and chairman of the Board of Directors. At the farewell gathering on June 26, Prof. Te Velde transferred the rectorate to his successor Prof. R. Kuiper and held his farewell lecture under the title 'Kingdom of preachers – Invitation for a new dynamic of being a church'.

■ Farewell Prof. B. Kamphuis

Professor **Barend Kamphuis** began his work as professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological University in 1987. After 28 years of dedicated work, he has now retired and took leave at the start of the academic year on September 3 with a farewell lecture titled 'Hidden in God. Christology after ascension.'

■ Farewell Prof. F. van der Pol

On October 30, Professor **Frank van der Pol** took leave as Professor of pre-1800 Church History and Symbolics. Van der Pol started working at the university in May 1988, and was professor from 1991. His farewell lecture, 'The grasshopper on the way home. The relevance of a 17th century gerontological concept' stressed the important position of the elderly in the church. His successor as Professor of Church History is Prof. Erik de Boer.

■ Article on Science and Faith

In a recent publication ('*The Heart of the Academy: Herman Bavinck in Debate with Modernity on the Academy, Theology and the Church*,' in *The Kuyper Centre Review Volume Five, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015, pp. 62-75*), **Marinus de Jong** describes a discussion that took place about a hundred years ago concerning Christianity and science between Herman Bavinck, Dutch reformed theologian, and Herman Groenewegen, a Remonstrant professor. The Free University had at that point just received recognition from the government as a reformed university, and that was a very controversial matter. It is interesting that the arguments that played a role in this discussion are almost perfectly aligned with contemporary debates on faith and science. Bavinck's warning that a science wishing to deny all faith will eventually lose theology, and eventually the whole of the human sciences, now appears to have possessed prophetic power.

looked down upon in some of our Asian communities because they are seen as too exclusivistic. Some theologians have argued that baptism is a social identity-marker, like circumcision for early Jewish Christians. They point out that it serves only to *alienate* people from their family and caste and community. Baptism, they point out, is too much of a communal (narrow-minded and chauvinistic caste, regional identity) mark that should be avoided. Ultimately, God's purpose, they argue, is to break down such barriers. So some advocate giving up baptism altogether, seeking solidarity with the community of which they are a part.

Indeed, it has been documented that there are many thousands of secret believers who see no need for baptism. These are believers in Christ, but their failure to be baptized is not due to persecution but the fear of social and cultural isolation. Our purpose in this paper was to sketch an understanding of the sacraments in general that is more consistently Reformed and biblical. It seems to me that the doctrine of the sacraments is one area that requires continued reflection, in spite of the fact (perhaps, because of the fact) that the topic was controversial even from the time of the Reformation.

■ Questions for Reflection and Discussion, particularly for the Asian context

5. In the light of this discussion, which aspects of the sacramental life of your church require further attention?
6. What is more prominent in the celebration of sacraments in your church – joy or sorrow? Should there be both?
7. How often is the Lord's Supper celebrated in your church? What may be the reasons why we tend to limit the frequency of its celebration?
8. Is there sufficient justification for the view that sacraments should be administered only by a minister of the gospel?
9. Is it a good idea to have more 'rituals' in church (like the Roman Catholic 'sacramentals') so long as we distinguish them carefully from the sacraments? What may be some of the dangers in it? How do we account for actions like ordination, marriage, profession of faith, etc.?
10. Would you find fault with a church using locally made bread (like roti in India) and rice water for the Holy Communion?
11. Are preparatory services helpful in the sacrament of the Supper? What should be the emphasis in it?
12. If receiving/giving baptism is dangerous (due to persecution by family, society or state), would you insist on it, or would you counsel that it is optional?

Baptism and the Gospel

The background to this paper is the concern voiced in 2012 (Cardiff) by a number of delegates who are involved in church planting ministries in rural areas of Southeast Asia. They pointed out that gospel proclamation is often theologically shallow ('a mile wide and an inch deep'), experiential, and lacking in biblical teaching. What is lacking is a biblically vibrant understanding of the sacraments.



Dirk van Garderen (born in the Netherlands), in 1972 ordained as pastor in a Reformed Church in South Australia. Moved to New Zealand in 1978 to plant a new church. Served from 1990 as pastor in Auckland. Have taught as a part-time lecturer. Served as chairman of the Overseas Mission Board. 'Pastor emeritus' since 2013

Baptism at Sinimburu, Papua (Korowai-region) [photo Verre Naasten/Peter-Jan de Vries]



In such a setting, baptism is generally understood to be a believer's decision to follow Christ – becoming a Christian. It involves following Christ's example by going into the water by full immersion in a public place like a river or lake. It goes without saying that such a *believers' only* baptism nearly always excludes children. Their part in God's kingdom ('holiness' as per I Cor.7:14) is not considered.

The original intention of the paper presented at the Asia-Pacific conference in Seoul was to **provide a tool** for those involved in outreach and church planting in rural (often pre-literate) regions. The underlying assumption was that those involved in this ministry are associated with ICRC member churches and thus already committed to the Reformed/Presbyterian understanding of baptism as presented and defended in the Three Forms of Unity and Westminster Standards. The intention of the paper was two-fold. (1) To provide simple, straightforward and biblically sound material to instruct and equip pastors, evangelists, and church planters working in these areas. (2) To provide a tool that church planters and evangelists can implement to instruct new believers and their households on the meaning of baptism from a biblical (Reformed and Presbyterian) perspective.

Because of time restrictions, the paper (as summarized

below) focuses on the first intention, namely, providing a basic instructional framework to equip church planters and pastors working in such situations. The paper also included a pamphlet designed to be used to instruct new believers using a series of simple questions and answers with proof texts that could be taught and explained catechistically.

1. Gospel proclamation and its relation to baptism

The starting point, already available for the instruction of local church leaders, is our historical confessions and catechisms.¹

A study of Scripture highlights the *prominence* and *importance* of baptism. It is an inseparable part of gospel proclamation. The 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28.18-20) links *making disciples*, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* these new disciples inseparable. A brief survey of the New Testament, designed to provide an instructional framework, will highlight that baptism is an essential part of the gospel.² It will highlight how the proclamation and acceptance of the truth of the gospel is invariably and necessarily accompanied by means of a visible, physical sign and seal from God, namely baptism. Faith in Christ and baptism may not be separated. Repentance, calling on the name of the Lord, embracing Jesus as Lord is necessarily and publicly signified and sealed by means of baptism. Baptism is neither optional nor secondary as part of entering into and belonging to the Kingdom of God or Christ's Body (the Church). Baptism is *a part of* and *not an optional extra* in the process of making and maintaining disciples.

2. Understanding baptism from a reformed perspective

The *Reformed* understanding of baptism embraces a distinction from that of Rome and the *believers' only* view of our Baptist and Charismatic friends. For teaching and training purposes this view is best explained and defended by using four key (biblical) terms: *covenant*, *promise*, *sign*, and *seal*.

2.1. Covenant (תְּבִירָה [berit] διαθήκη [diatheke])

The word 'covenant' as used in Scripture describes a most binding, solemn agreement, pact or treaty between two parties. It was binding to such an extent that breaking it would forfeit the life of the covenant breaker. It was ceremonially sealed with a sign involving blood (signifying life). A covenant by definition immediately included the entire 'household', its servants/slaves and their offspring, and bound the household 'for a thousand generations'. It is described in Genesis 17:1-14. The core of the covenant is the promise, 'I will



Baptism by sprinkling [photo Margreet Batteau]

be your and your offspring's God'. Note well, the Lord God himself establishes it both in formulating its content and determining that Abraham and his household are the chosen recipients. This foundational covenant (the 'Covenant of Grace') remains the bedrock promise echoed continually in both the Old and New Testaments.³

It is at this point that a proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testament (Greek: διαθήκη) becomes crucial. Does the *new* covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25, cf. Matthew 26:28) replace in the sense of 'do away with' or does it *fulfil, deepen and expand* the Abrahamic covenant? The distinctiveness of a Reformed view (following Calvin) is that it *fulfils* it.

The gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, is that through or in him alone God the Father opens the door and provides the way of entering into covenant with him, of becoming an heir of promise. The covenant is 'new' not in the sense that its basic content changes, but new in that it is deeper (written upon the heart), wider (embracing whosoever calls on the name of the Lord), and more powerful (Holy Spirit powered) than the 'old'.

2.2. The Promise (ἡ ἐπαγγελία)

A covenant is a solemn, binding *agreement* between two or more parties. It necessarily contains *promises* or assured outcomes that result from it. In the most basic sense, the promises of God are fulfilled through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, which removes (washes away) the sin and guilt of the sinner, and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). Scripture uses different metaphors to describe this: members of Christ's body, citizens of God's eternal kingdom, more than conquerors, co-heirs with Christ, etc.

3. 'SIGN' AND 'SEAL'

'Sign' and 'seal' are two terms that are fundamental to the Reformed and Presbyterian understanding of the nature and purpose of the sacraments. Baptism (or, as within the Old Covenant, circumcision) is a visible sign and seal that point to an invisible spiritual reality. Romans 4:1ff highlights that Abraham and his believing offspring were justified by faith alone, not because of his meritorious works and/or his ethnicity. In other words, before he was circumcised.⁴ He writes, 'And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.' (Romans 4:11). What I want to highlight is how Paul uses the words *sign* and *seal* to signify the purpose of circumcision. God promises that he will be Abraham's God, make him a great nation, and give him a great inheritance. Circumcision was the visible sign and seal from God that he would be faithful to himself.

Several things flow from this with respect to baptism.

First, the language 'sign' and 'seal' as a description of the purpose of or reason for circumcision is equally applicable to baptism. See Colossians 2:11-12 where Paul demonstrates that baptism serves as a sign and seal of God's gracious promise in the same way circumcision did in the Old Covenant.

Second, baptism (both John's baptism and the baptism into Christ) can only be understood as a sign *from God* to give its recipient the *personal* seal of God's saving presence in his or her life. The incredulous believer, knowing himself to be totally undeserving and unworthy of God's grace, cries, 'For me?' Baptism is God's answer. 'Yes, for you. Here, in this water, in this sign, is my gilded guarantee.'

4. WHO MUST BE BAPTIZED?

From a covenantal perspective it is necessarily *believers* and only *their* children. That view rings true as biblically sound *if and only if* there is a conviction that there is continuity between the old and new covenants. The promise of covenant as signified and sealed in baptism is for believers 'and their children, for all whom the Lord our God will call' (Acts 2:39). The underlying, implicit reason for this assertion is the continuity of the Covenant of Grace. God's command to Abraham was that every male member of Abraham's extensive household were, from the age of eight days old, to be circumcised (Genesis 17). This covenant was, by its own definition, 'everlasting', 'for the generations to come' (Genesis 17:7ff) and for keeping his covenant love 'to a thousand

generations' (Deuteronomy 7:9). A covenant may be deepened, widened and extended, but never discontinued.

To suggest, as Baptists insist, that in the New Covenant the children of believers are *excluded* from the blessings and comfort of the sign and seal of God's promises is reductionistic. It robs Christian parents of the comfort God extends to their Old Testament counterparts. Believers' children are, without a shadow of doubt, holy (1 Corinthians 7:14). This holiness does not entail the gift of faith (for the *unbelieving* partner is 'holy' through the believing partner). It is covenantal, that is, being brought into a special relationship to God. Baptism seals God's promise to them as much as to their believing parents. Surely this is the promise of the God of all comfort in this fallen, death-dominated world.

5. How baptism is to be administered

Insisting that baptism is only baptism if it is by immersion imposes too much on the text of Scripture. Immersion is by all means a possible (and proper) mode of being baptized. However, both the symbolism of the act (purification, cleansing and renewal) and the examples of baptism described in Scripture most certainly lay a legitimate foundation for baptism by sprinkling. While the symbolism of being buried and raised with Christ is valid and commonly referred to the various forms for baptism that are read in our churches, it is washing, cleansing or purification that receives the greater emphasis.

The manner of baptism should not be determined by the meaning of the word 'baptism' in the Greek language, *but in its Jewish context*. In that setting, *John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* serves as an outward sign or symbol of inward renewal, cleansing or purification. Baptism into Christ symbolizes washing with Jesus' blood, the inner, spiritual cleansing of the heart. In the Reformed tradition, 1 Peter 3:21 at the very least means that baptism points to (is associated with) inward cleansing of the heart/spirit in the same way that water outwardly cleanses dirt from the body.

The concept of 'sprinkling' with either blood or water as a sign of purification is prominent in many of the instructions found in the *Torah*, in particular the book of Leviticus. In that setting, the sign and seal of the acceptance of the Law and the promise of grace contained in the 'Book of the Covenant' is the sprinkling of blood, (Exodus 24:6-8).

► Continued on page 17

You, your baptism, and your household

The purpose of this study material is to provide Bible-based instruction and guidance on the meaning of Christian baptism. Becoming and being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ your Saviour and Lord, impacts deeply on your personal life. As you will learn, that impact also extends to the life of your entire household – the members of your family. You as a believer bring blessings and responsibilities to your family and, indeed, the community. Baptism, as taught in God's Word, addresses these things. The studies are presented in a 'question and answer' format. In preparing for baptism you will be asked to learn and agree to the Bible-based answers provided. Memorize them! Recite them at home with your family. Your pastor, elder or the evangelist who is instructing you will meet with you regularly as you learn and come to understand what baptism is and means.

Dirk J. van Garderen

1. What is baptism?

It is a special sign and seal from God that seals (guarantees) to you and your children admission into the body of Christ (the church). It assures you, as a believer, of your new life and eternal citizenship in the kingdom of God, and assures your children of God's promises to them. These promises call them also to a personal response of faith.

'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.' (Acts 2:38-39)

2. How are God's children in Christ baptized?

Using water, believers and their children are baptized in(to) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

3. Why are you baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

The Lord Jesus himself commanded the apostles to baptize all who want to be his disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

'And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:18-20)

4. Why are you baptized in the name of the Father?

Baptism in the name of the Father is the sign and seal of God's holy covenant with us to be our God, and that we are heirs of his promises; fellow heirs with Christ.

'And I will establish my covenant between me and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you.' (Genesis 17:7)

See also Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ephesians 2:11-13, Galatians 3:24-29, 1 Peter 2:9-10.

'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.' (Romans 8:15-16)

5. Why are you baptized in the name of the Son?

Baptism in the name of the Son is the sign and seal of the power of Christ's sacrificial blood that was shed on the cross, the blood that takes away all our sin and guilt as surely as water washes away filth from our bodies.

'Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.' (Acts 2:38)

'He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.' (Titus 3:5-6)

'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.' (Revelation 1:5-6)

6. Why are you baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit?

Baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit is the sign and seal of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who has given us new life (hearts) to receive and believe God's promises. The Holy Spirit empowers us to persevere and bear witness to the eternal inheritance that is ours.

'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' (John 3:5-6)

'Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 2:38)

'I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove your heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people and I will be your God.' (Ezekiel 36:24-28)

'In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.' (Ephesians 1:13-14)

7. Why is water used in baptism?

Christ instituted baptism with water. The outward washing shows and guarantees the promise that, as surely as water washes away dirt from the body, so certainly Christ's blood and Spirit wash away all our heart's sin and guilt.

'I [John] baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' (Matthew 3:11)

'Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' (Acts 22:16)

'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.' (Romans 6:3-4)

Titus 3:5 (see above)

8. How much water must be used?

Baptism signifies and seals our entry into Christ's church, our being received into God's covenant as well as our washing and renewal in Christ's blood and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Entry into a living relationship with Jesus and into God's promised kingdom can be sealed by sprinkling or immersion.

Exodus 24:1-8, Ezekiel 36:24-28, John 13:1-17 (especially 13:8b)

9. Who must be baptized?

The promises of God extend to believers *and to those under their care in their household*. Baptism, fulfilling and deepening the meaning of circumcision, is now the sign and seal of the newer covenant in Christ's blood. Baptism is to be received by believers and *their children* just as in the older covenant the male children and slaves of the household were circumcised. The children of believers, along with their parents, are also members of God's kingdom and heirs of promise.

'And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and

your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.... And it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not your offspring."' (Genesis 17:9-12)

'Repent and be baptized, every one of you ... for the promise is for you and for your children, for all whom the Lord our God calls to himself.' (Acts 2:38-39)

'In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God.' (Colossians 2:11-12)

'One who heard was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well...' (Acts 16:14-15)

'The jailer at Philippi asked Saul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ... and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.' (Acts 16:30-33)

10. Do our children also belong to Christ's body the church?

Certainly! The Lord Jesus included babies and children in his promises when he said, *'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.'* And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16)

'For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.' (I Corinthians 7:14)

11. What is the responsibility of parents and the church towards covenant children?

God's will is that we, as parents and as the church community, teach and train up our covenant children to come to have a personal trust in God. That means to know, love, and serve the Lord forever. Our prayerful aim is that when such children reach maturity they may make a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

'[The Lord] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.' (Psalm 78:5-7)

'Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.' (Proverbs 22:6)

'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.' (Ephesians 6:2. See also Colossians 3:21, I Timothy 3:4, Hebrews 12:7-11)

12. What are the responsibilities of covenant children?

They are called by the Lord to receive the instruction of their parents and of the church, and follow their good examples. When they are able to make a credible profession of faith in Christ, they ought to profess that faith openly, confess their sins, call on the name of the Lord and vow to serve him always. They must do so publicly, before the Lord and his church.

'My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments...

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways

acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.' (Proverbs 3:1-8)

'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."' (Ephesians 6:1-3. See also Colossians 3:20.)

'So anyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.' (Matthew 10:32-33)

'... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' (Romans 10:9)

'But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.' (I Timothy 6:11-12)

13. Should our children, who have been baptized as infants, be baptized (again) when they publicly profess their faith in Christ and commit themselves to serve him as Lord?

No! Such children are already heirs of God's promises in Christ, and already have the visible sign and seal of this in their baptism. There is but one baptism. It is once for all.

'There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.' (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Baptism and the Gospel

Continued from page 12

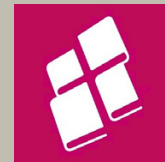
It is in particular *Ezekiel* (writing in a setting where there was no temple) that sprinkling with water to symbolize purification, washing, and renewal comes to the fore: *'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean'* (Ezekiel 36:26, but see 36:26-28).

■ Concluding remarks

My brief has been to present a bible based paper that will be useful for those who work and labour as missionaries, evangelists, pastors, and elders in rural situations in India and Southeast Asia. Clearly, the fine denominational distinctions of the West do not play a large role in these situations. It is *bible-based* basic Christianity with frills. In this paper I have contended that baptism belongs to the basics along with making disciples and teaching them (Matthew 28:18-20). Clearly, Christians are divided on this subject. The most tempting option is to go into a default mode – accept the 'believers only by immersion' option. But that default position in essence robs believers of the special help (grace!) that the triune God offers by means of baptism. If ever Christians need every ounce of comfort, encouragement, and strength God makes available, it is in front-line mission situations in this part of the world – comfort and a sure hope that extends not just to themselves, but also to their dependent children. Baptism is precisely that. Indeed, without the proper understanding and application of the biblical doctrine of baptism, we are like soldiers without armour or a key weapon. ■

■ Notes

- 1 Notice the following references: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25, 26 and 27; Belgic Confession Art. 34; WCF Ch. 28; Larger Cat. 165,166,167.
- 2 I highlight the following:
 - Each of the four gospels introduce us to the Christ by means of John the Baptist who proclaims a baptism of repentance: Matt 3:1-12, Mark 1:2-8, Luke 3:1-20, John 1:6-9, 19-28.
- 3 All of the Gospels point to the baptism of Jesus as the public act by which he first makes himself known: Matt 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-13, Luke 3:21-23, John 1:29-34, 3:22-23,26.
- 4 The climax of Matthew's Gospel is the call to make disciples, baptize them and teach them. (Matthew 28:18-20. See also Mark 16:16).
- 5 Luke introduces the second part of his message (the book of Acts) by returning to John the Baptist's ministry and highlighting the new baptism. (Acts 1:4)
- 6 Luke (in Acts) highlights the Lord's call to the disciples to be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Significantly, whenever the gospel is proclaimed to establish these new boundaries, there is a reference to baptism:
 - Jerusalem (Acts 2:38-41).
 - Samaria (Acts 8:12, 16-17. Also Simon the sorcerer, Acts 8:13).
 - Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-40).
 - Saul (Paul) immediately after his conversion (Acts 9:18).
 - Cornelius the Roman centurion and all who were in his house (relatives and close friends) (Acts 10:47-48. See also Acts 11:15-16).
 - The uttermost ends of the earth: Lydia (of Thyatira) and the members of her household (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer along with his household (Acts 16:31-34). Corinth (Crispus the Jewish leader in the Diaspora and his household) (Acts 18:8). The (Gentile proselyte?) disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7).
 - Note also Paul's reference to baptism in I Corinthians 1:10-16.
- 7 E.g. Galatians 3:29: 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'
- 8 In Romans 3.30 the terms 'circumcised' and 'uncircumcised' are used to distinguish Jew from Gentile.



Theological
University
Apeldoorn

■ TUA best educational institute

In the annual Guide on Universities and Faculties in the Netherlands, the Theological University in Apeldoorn was again, for the fourth year in a row, awarded the hallmark 'best university'. In the field of theology and religious sciences, the Bachelor Programme of the TUA received first place among many institutions. The basis of this judgment is a broad national interview among students. The TUA is grateful to be 'Topopleiding 2016'!

■ Educational conference on Karl Barth

1918 saw the first Karl Barth publication translated into Dutch, which means that we can speak of almost a century of Barth reception in the Netherlands. While much has already been written about this, a recent extensive study by Dr Susanne Hennecke on Barth's reception from 1919 to 1960 (Karl Barth in den Niederlanden. Teil 1: Theologische, kulturelle und politische Rezeptionen [1919-1960], Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Volume 142, VandenHoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2014) has induced the Vorbereitungsausschuss van de Nederlandse Barthtagung, in collaboration with the research group Reformed Traditions in Secular Europe (TUA & TUK), to organize an educational conference on January 21, 2016. Various speakers will discuss Dr Hennecke's publication and attempt to form a more complete image, paying attention to other theologians and traditions, as well as to the Barth reception in the Netherlands over the last 60 years.

News Update

How can the Lord's Supper remain restricted to believers (the baptized members), but still open toward the world as a means of discipleship and a way of converting the world and the sinners?

The Lord's Supper and Discipleship

The Institution of the Supper and the Worship Service



Prof. Dr Haemoo Yoo studied at the Korea Theological Seminary (KTS) and earned a doctorate at the Theological University in Kampen in 1990. Professor in Dogmatics at KTS.

It was a celebration of the Passover that night, the night in which the Lord Jesus instituted the Supper. In 1 Cor. 11:18, Paul mentions 'coming together as a church' (NASB). This verb appears once more in verse 20: 'coming together into one place' (KJV). These two translations should be combined together so that a church is visible around that 'one place', namely the Table. Around the Table, where the believers come together, a church is being instituted. This refers to the liturgical worship service in which the Supper takes an important place. The other elements of a worship service are Bible reading, preaching, prayer, and hymn as well as baptism and the Supper.

Baptism is the work of salvation administered to the person to be baptized. Baptism is a mystical union with Christ which grants the baptized person participation in Christ's destiny, because the baptized person dies, is buried with him, and also raised with him (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:1-11). The baptized person's destiny with the Lord is sacramentally experienced in the Supper time after time. In 1 Corinthians and the early church, only the baptized were admitted to the Lord's Supper, while at the service the non-baptized were present only during the preaching (1 Cor. 14:23ff). During the worship service, preaching and the Lord's Supper were combined. Moreover, every Sunday the Supper was celebrated.¹

■ God takes the initiative

It suffices to quote the famous definition of the church by John Calvin in his *Institutes*: 'Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail.' (*Institutes* 4.1.9) It is to say: wherever a worship service takes place, there a church exists. The preaching and the sacraments institute the worship service and, with and within it, the church. They are the means of grace, and they demonstrate that it is the Triune God who by them takes the initiative in his meeting with his congregation. Then the congregation responds to his initiative in singing, praying, and

offering. God took the initiative by electing his people and sending his Son to redeem them, and this work of salvation is repeatedly proclaimed in preaching and visibly shown in the sacraments.

Because of his initiative in the work of salvation, God is the subject in preaching and we are hearers. God is the host and we are his guests. God invites us to the worship and we, as children of his covenant, obey his invitation and receive the grace of Jesus through the Spirit. In short, by these means we come to life and are saturated with the Triune God and live in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. We are ready to fulfil our chief end to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

■ Supper as a Visible Remembrance till the Lord Comes Again

In the Supper we have communion with God the Creator who is also God the Redeemer. Therefore, the Supper is centrally important, as we are called to be his image in this world till the Lord Jesus returns. In the church service, we are, in a receiving mode, empowered to become disciples of the Lord Jesus and sent into the world to act as his disciples.

We celebrate the Supper in obedience to the command of Jesus: 'Do this in remembrance of me.' (ESV, 1 Cor. 11:24,25). The bread and the cup remind us of Jesus who was about to give himself for us on the Cross. Participating in the Supper, we remember Jesus who died for us. This embraces not only his death but also his life before the Cross, and his glorious and victorious resurrection after it! It is not appropriate to remember only his death. We should remember Jesus as a whole, *totus Christus*! At the Supper we receive all the benefits that Jesus acquired by his life, death, and resurrection, and much more.

At the Supper we receive from God and respond to what God gives. As Jesus took the cup and gave thanks (Mark 14:23; 1 Cor. 11:24), we also give thanks to God. The Supper as a communion does not exclude but includes our response, i.e. thanksgiving in faith. We thank God for electing us, creating us in his image, calling us, and giving us this bread and cup. We praise him in thanksgiving for forgiving our sins and transgressions, for Christ's sake. We give him thanks for leading us into his

The bread and the cup remind us of Jesus [photo vent. pgbarendrecht.nl]



kingdom, which has come and is to be fully revealed in the near future.

Giving God thanks, we, as recipients of this feast, renew our faith and promise to offer ourselves as living and holy sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). At the Supper we are nourished by Jesus and receive the power of the Spirit in order to live as an image of God, to his glory. Here we experience the mystical union with Christ over and over again. Christ is the Head and we are his body. Around the Table, we are granted the power to love God and our neighbours. We get ready to fight the good fight in God's world. Serving Christ in the Spirit is acceptable to God and approved by men (Rom. 14:18). Till the Master returns and calls them to give an account of their lives, his servants have to work with and increase the talents He has given, each according to his or her own ability (Matt. 25:14ff). Not only the preaching, but also the Supper is a means that empowers us to use our talents faithfully till the Lord comes. We live in a time period between his Ascension and Second Coming. In this way, in this period, we get ready to welcome the Lord, just as the bride waits for her bridegroom. This is the period of our discipleship, which has to be accomplished in this world.

■ Churches in Asia-Pacific region and the Lord's Supper

The first missionaries to Korea (1884) introduced the Sunday worship liturgy without the Supper. This is understandable, considering that in the mission field gaining new converts was the priority. Besides, most American missionaries were acquainted with outdoor revival meetings, influenced by D.L. Moody (1837-1899), which in turn were influenced by the zeal of the Second Great Awakening and Charles G. Finney (1792-1875). The first famous camp meeting in America was in 1800 led by a Presbyterian minister, James McGready (1758-1817),

with a Scotch-Irish background. In the highlands of Scotland, communion seasons had been in vogue since the Reformation. In the earliest camp meetings, the focal point of the gathering was the receiving of communion. At the camp meetings in America, the Presbyterians and the Methodists welcomed each other to their communions, but the Baptists adhered to a restricted communion, meant only for those baptized as adults. In the course of further development, the meetings broke denominational walls and promoted interdenominational voluntary movements, such as missionary societies. In general, the later revivalism used singing and preaching as means of conversion, and the meetings ended with the baptism of new converts instead of communion.

The theology of the Second Great Awakening differed from that of the earlier revival tradition. The leaders of the First Awakening in the 1740s, such as J. Edwards and G. Whitefield (1714-1770), had emphasized the inability of sinners to save themselves, and the good pleasure of the sovereign will of God. However, the theology of the Second Awakening suggested that God had bestowed on all people the ability to come to Christ.

The overemphasis on preaching above the sacraments in the American churches had another deeper historical root. Over against the Anglican liturgy, the Puritans simplified the liturgy and stressed preaching more than the Lord's Supper. Even for the Reformers, it was easier to underscore preaching than to reform the liturgy as a whole. The result was the simplification of liturgy, and this line runs through the Puritans and the revivals in America to the Korean church and to the mission fields operated by the Korean missionaries. We can trace this lack of respect for the Supper also in the other young churches in Asia and the Pacific.

We need to be biblical and Reformed, and so overcome our minimalizing of the Supper, and return to the biblical teaching itself. We have to actualize the Supper in the present situation, and proceed further, rather than get stuck in the discussions of the Reformers. I propose that we together seek to revitalize the Supper according to the original institution of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper should be treated as being just as important as preaching, although not in all aspects. The Roman Catholic Mass is not a legitimate interpretation of the Supper, but the frequency of the Supper in the Mass is more commendable than the Protestant practice.

■ The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace and Discipleship

As we have seen above, the Supper cannot be isolated from the liturgical worship service, because wherever the Supper takes place, there a church exists. This means that the Supper should be celebrated at every worship service.

The Supper is a feast! It was instituted during a meal, and as such can be celebrated exuberantly. However, this has not been the case in the whole history of Christianity. One of the reasons might be that the Supper was instituted at the celebration of the Passover by Jesus. However, it is certainly appropriate in the Supper to commemorate Jesus who was slain and who has risen. If we commemorate the whole Christ in the Supper, we also look forward to his Second Coming and the marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7,9).

It should be admitted that the Protestant churches, including the Reformed churches, do not regard the Supper as highly as they should. The Reformers abhorred and condemned the Mass as a show, and instead stressed preaching and hearing. However, it is not legitimate to neglect the importance of the Supper which the Lord himself instituted.

I believe that it is desirable and actually essential to celebrate the Supper weekly at the worship service. The Reformation worship service originated from the noon prayer meeting of the Middle Age, thus without the Supper. It should be remembered that a liturgical worship service without the Supper is really not worthy to be called a liturgical worship service. This practice in the long history of Protestant worship services should be changed, for Protestant believers have the right to enjoy the Supper weekly. 'The sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner, if it were dispensed to the Church very frequently, at least once a week. ... Thus we ought always to provide that no meeting of the Church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms. ... Each week, at least, the table of the Lord ought to have been spread for the company of Christians.' (Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.43, 44, and 46)

Can the Supper be understood and used as a means of conversion, a converting ordinance? It is our conviction that only

those who have made a credible profession of faith and who lead a moral life may be admitted to the Supper. Participation in the Lord's Table is participation in the communion between the Lover and the Beloved, something which can only be undertaken by those who already belong to Christ. For the most part, the Puritans in the early history of the American Christianity neglected sinners outside their congregations in order to preserve the purity of membership. Although they acknowledged preaching to be the principal means through which God converts men, ministers addressed themselves more to saints than to sinners, in sermons designed less to plant the seed of faith than to nourish it where it already grew. It seems to me that we would do well to seek to combine restricted communion with searching for new saints by preaching and, if possible, by the Supper celebrated in the same manner as the communion seasons of Scottish history. The church ought not only to gather the converted, separate from the world, but should continually seek to gather new believers *in* the world, reaching out to the unconverted.

We mentioned the phenomenon of the Scottish communion seasons. I believe that such communion seasons deserve our attention as models for seeking to gather new believers *in* the world, reaching out to the unconverted. In Scotland, several days' gatherings, with many sermons, periods of fasting, singing, and praying together took place in preparation for and in celebration of the Supper, ending with thanksgiving. I believe that such collective meetings, with the pattern of the old communion seasons, are to be recommended in our day, in a society where individualism dominates and respect for community is hardly found, even in the church itself. A festal meeting once or twice a year will encourage believers to enjoy communal fellowship, emphasizing spiritual discipline, and to be encouraged to live a life of discipleship every day. And unbelievers can be invited to attend.

In conclusion, the Word is the principal means of grace and arouses faith, whereas the sacraments only preserve it. However, both of them are the means of grace which make us visible as the body of Christ in this world. The sacrament of the Supper is, no less than the Word, a means of grace instituted by Jesus to empower us to follow him in the world. We eat and drink him not only by hearing his Word, but also by participating in his Supper. It would be truly a blessing if we could participate in it every Sunday and be filled with the power of his Spirit who makes us partakers in Christ for the glory of God. That is a great calling, to celebrate the Lord's Supper at every church service, until Jesus comes again, and the triune God be all in all forever! ■

■ Notes

- 1 *Didache*, 14,1; Justinus, *Apologia* 1, 65 & 67.

Historically, many terms have been used to refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Most notably, terms such as sacramentum or mysterium have been used. But the former does not appear in the Bible; the latter does, but never to refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Sacraments – Sign and Seal



Heon Soo Kim has been a minister of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea since 1997 and became a professor of this church's new Theological Academy in 2010. He served as the convener of the Asia-Pacific Conference of the Reformed Churches in 2015)

The terms 'sign' and 'seal' were used by the 16th century Reformers in the process of correcting the Roman Catholic Church's false view of the sacraments. Not only do these terms appear in the Bible but they also adequately express the nature of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In that regard, it would be greatly beneficial to us in understanding the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper to study Genesis 17 and Romans 4, in which the terms 'sign and seal' are used.

1. The Covenant of God Almighty and the Sign of that Covenant (Genesis 17)

The covenant in Genesis 17 begins with the Lord's proclamation to Abram who was ninety-nine years old: *'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.'* When Sarai remained childless, Abram sought a human way to attain a child; and when Ishmael was born Abram put his hope in him (cf. Gen. 17:18). To this Abram who was weak in faith the Lord came and said he was to walk before him and be blameless.

God Almighty said, *'I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you'* (Gen. 17:7). In chapter 17 the word 'covenant' appears 13 times (9 times as 'my covenant', 3 times as 'everlasting covenant', and once as 'the sign of the covenant'). God could have said 'our covenant', since it was a covenant formed between him and Abraham, but he called it 'my covenant' to signify that he alone would achieve the covenant. God Almighty promised to give him a son that would be born not by wisdom and strength of men but by the power of God alone, and through that son, God himself would fulfill his covenant.

God said he would establish his 'everlasting covenant' with Abraham as well as Isaac and their descendants who had not been born. The eternal God was declaring inclusion of the unborn children in his everlasting covenant (cf. Deut. 29:14-15).

After having promised Abraham the everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:4-8), God told him to perform circumcision (17:9-14). Knowing Abraham's weakness to grasp fully the everlasting

covenant, God told him to perform circumcision as the 'sign of the covenant'. God gave him such a sign in order to demonstrate the covenant he had made with him, and to give him assurance of it.

But it is necessary to examine more carefully the expressions in this section on circumcision. God referred directly to circumcision as 'my covenant' (17:10, 14) and 'everlasting covenant' (17:13). He was speaking of circumcision as not only the 'sign of the covenant' but his *covenant itself*. If we were to understand circumcision solely as the *sign* of the covenant, it would be easy to think of it as a secondary matter, separate from the actual covenant; but God called circumcision 'my covenant' and very clearly revealed that he intended to fulfill that covenant himself.

Finally, in order to know properly what God Almighty said about the covenant, it would be good also to consider together the tangible fulfillment of the covenant—the birth of Isaac. Therefore we must consider all the events leading up to chapter 21, in which Isaac is born, in order to properly understand the covenant established by God Almighty. Chapter 18 records the episode in which the Lord revisited Abraham, accompanied by two angels. At the table the Lord told Abraham that Sarah would have a son. God Almighty had visited the unbelieving Sarah and, with the Word of his covenant, he worked faith within her. Chapter 20 records the incident of Abraham's lie, which permitted



► Seal of Hezekiah [photo nd.nl]



ritual circumcision [photo Yonatan Sindel/Flash90]

Abimelech king of Gerar to take Sarah away to his palace. About this time Sarah probably would have been carrying the seed of the covenant in her womb, but the king took her. It was a crisis, but through the Almighty God's intervention, Sarah was kept safe. Chapter 21 summarizes the previous events. *'Now the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had said. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had said to him'* (21:1-2). God's 'saying' appears three times here. Sarah was able to bear Isaac because God came to Sarah and did for her as he had said in his covenant.

2. The Sign and Seal of the Righteousness of Faith (Romans 4:11, 13)

Romans 4 teaches systematically that Abraham was justified not by observing the law but by faith. We should pay close attention to Romans 4:11 and 13 in particular, because the words 'sign' and 'seal' appear in them.

Abraham received the *sign of circumcision* after believing and being justified. He was declared righteous by faith in Genesis 15:6 and received circumcision in Genesis 17. Therefore the circumcision Abraham received can be understood as a sign and seal of being God's people who have already been justified by faith. Now, the apostle Paul does not say circumcision is the 'seal of Abraham's faith', but clearly states it is the 'seal of the righteousness that he had by faith'. It is true that Abraham received circumcision after he believed, but circumcision was not a 'seal of his faith'; instead it was a 'sign and seal of the righteousness he had by faith'. In other words, circumcision is a sign and seal of *the gospel promise that righteousness comes by faith*.

The apostle Paul says that Abraham '*received circumcision as a sign*', and we must pay attention to the expression '*received*'. In Genesis 17 when God established the covenant, he *promised* to be their God and *commanded* Abraham to perform

sign of circumcision also is a *gospel* received as a gift. What was given as a duty of the covenant was also the gospel, given by grace.

This everlasting covenant that God fulfilled through Christ is for Christians of the New Testament times. Christ was crucified '*in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit*' (Gal. 3:14. cf. 3:8-9). Therefore those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). The everlasting covenant God established with Abraham pointed to Christ, and in Christ the Christians of the New Testament age are included in that covenant as well. It is, literally, an *everlasting covenant*.

3. The Sign and Seal of the Covenant

We can learn a lot about the nature of the covenant from God's visitation to the 99-year old Abram. First, we learn about the *relation between the Word of God and the sacraments*. We see that God's Word works faith in their hearts and the sacrament (circumcision, in this case) strengthens their faith. When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees he already had faith in God's Word, but it is in Genesis 15:6 that his righteousness by faith is publicly acknowledged, and in chapter 17 his faith in God Almighty grows to the point when he has Isaac in his advanced age. Abraham and Sarah were given Isaac through their faith (cf. Rom 4:19-21), but they had come to have this faith because the Lord came to them twice and spoke to them. It was the Word of God that roused within them faith in the promised child, and circumcision that strengthened their faith. Second, we learn that God *sovereignly* established the covenant. Even after God's first visitation to Abraham, Sarah still did not believe. Then the Lord visited them again to work faith in Sarah. In spite of their unbelief, the Lord established his covenant with them, and he himself fulfilled that which he had called 'my covenant' and an 'everlasting covenant' (cf. Rev. 1:8).

Third, the covenant of circumcision reveals God's *boundless love*. The Almighty God came down to establish his everlasting covenant with a man of weak faith, and after finishing speaking with Abraham he went back up to heaven (Gen. 17:22; cf. 18:33). Here we see God's infinite love. Because man is unable to fully understand this great and boundless love, God established, as the covenant's sign and seal, circumcision and the Passover—baptism and the Lord's Supper, to aid his covenant people. ■

* the sign of circumcision also is a gospel

circumcision. The two parts of a covenant, promise and duty, are made explicit; and performing circumcision belonged to the duty of the covenant. But in Romans 4 it says 'he received circumcision as a sign...' (verse 11), thus suggesting that the

Mission Field Report of the Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India

Background Information The Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India (RPCNEI) has existed as a missionary church since April 8, 1979 in Manipur. Since its inception the church has been active in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ across the northeastern states of India and her neighboring country Myanmar by sending and supporting missionaries. The RPCNEI sent out its first missionary outreach team to Wangnu, in Manipur in 1979. Since then we have continued to expand our area of activity to Karbi Anglong, Assam, several districts of Tripura, Kuki Nala, Cachar district of Assam, and even to Myanmar.



Rev. Ros Infimate is the present Secretary for Mission of the Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India.

At this moment the Reformed Presbyterian Church is active in the following Mission Fields & Missionaries:

1. Tripura Mission Field – 13 missionaries
2. Karbi Anglong Mission Field – 10 missionaries
3. Manipur Mission Field – 7 missionaries
4. Cachar Mission Field – 1 missionary
5. Myanmar Mission Field – 6 missionaries

There are 37 full time missionaries working in these 5 mission fields, solely dedicated to witnessing to the gospel of Christ. In each Mission Field there is a Field Superintendent who is responsible for supervising the work of missionaries.

The missionary endeavor of the RPCNEI is a collective effort of 105 local congregations, centrally coordinated and monitored from the headquarters (Synod office). During the year 2015 orientation meetings, trainings, and seminars were organized at the headquarters level as well as at the grassroots level. Through routine monitoring visits and regular consultations the secretary served as a link between the local congregations via the presbyteries with the missionaries. Besides the routine visits a team of leaders from the headquarters visited the mission fields during the first quarter of the year in order to acquire knowledge about the situations, and to hold a consultation seminar for missionaries. Usually this type of visit has multiple purposes: to practically assure the missionaries that they are not alone, assuring them that the headquarters and all the congregations are behind them. Secondly, the leaders report what they have seen and experienced to the congregations. The reports usually motivate church members to participate in the missionary work through various means.

■ Missionary Training

In order to equip the missionaries, a missionary training was jointly organized by IEM and the RPCNEI on August 29-30, 2015 at Churachandpur, Manipur on the following topics:

1. Missionary Goal Setting
2. Cross Cultural Communication
3. Mission in the 21st Century
4. The Person of the missionary in the Mission Field
5. Paul's Missionary Journeys
6. Mission in the Bible

There were 28 missionaries in total participating in the events. Besides this training a grassroots level workshop was also organized under the leadership of the respective Field Superintendents.

■ Church Visitation Program

During the year all missionaries visited the sending churches and presented their stories and motivational talks to the congregations. Missionaries also presented the needs on the mission field, and they combined this opportunity with raising funds for new church building construction. This year they collected funds for Sarojini, which is now under construction. Besides having visiting church missionaries, they also had an exchange visitor for the purpose of mutual learning and facilitating strategic thinking in their efforts to reach out to more people in an effective way.

■ New Missionaries

On August 9 2015, a commissioning service for four new missionaries was held. By God's grace the following new young men and woman were sent out to different fields.

1. Mr Thangminlun M.Div
2. Mr Som Bahadur Tamang M.Div
3. Mrs Mary Timungpi B.Th
4. Mr Rosanglien B.Th.

Following the commissioning ceremony service they all travelled to their respective fields. We are praying for them, and look forward to seeing good results from them.

■ Extension of Mission Field

This year the Mission Committee decided to extend its mission field to the southern part of Tripura. A survey was conducted as part of a feasibility study about the desired and proposed new field. As a result of the survey a decision was made to work among the Riang people of South Tripura, mostly from Animist and some Hindu sect backgrounds. The place/field and the people have been identified, along with a dedicated missionary who is ready to begin the task. However, there are no new financial commitments from churches and indi-



Commissioning ceremony service
[photo Ros Infimate]

viduals. The harvest is plentiful, the workers are ready, but not enough supporters can be found. I assume that Jesus would say, “My house is full, but my field is empty; who is willing to work for me?”

■ Church Building Construction

Wherever new believers are found, they are gathered and form a fellowship and then eventually a church. The task of evangelism is not complete simply by bringing people to Christ. They need shepherding and discipling. For this purpose, the RPCNEI is committed to the construction of new churches wherever there are reliable believers who can become a witnessing church. In 2015 a new church building was constructed in Sarojini for 17 families. Part of the cost was sponsored by churches from South Korea. A new church building was also inaugurated this year in Diphu, where the mission field office is located.

■ Schools and Christian Education as a means to Evangelism

School education is another means of reaching out to society as well as the children of new believers. In Tripura we have 2 schools at Bagbassa and N.G. Para. We praise God for churches, organizations, and individuals who willingly made contributions towards the school building construction. In N.G. Para we have a Child Development Centre in cooperation with Compassion East India. At present we are supporting 250 children. The children are provided with an evening meal and study guidance. Faith education and moral

education (the latter as the government prescribes) are also provided as part of their routine. Where a parent is not a Christian, the church is primarily responsible for communicating faith to these precious children.

Hapjan, Karbi Anglong is another education centre for underprivileged children. There are more than 100 students attending this school. The missionaries in this location are reaching out to society through the school. In most cases, children are the link between missionaries and their parents. In this same location the Women’s Missionary Society constructed a beautiful church building, which was completed this year.

■ Missionary Quarter

In some places missionaries could not find houses or huts for rent. In this case the church is compelled to build houses or living quarters for the missionaries. With the help of the Lord, three living quarters at Hamren and Upper Hapjan, Karbi Anglong, and Tongchera, Tripura were constructed this year.

■ New Believers in 2015

It is a joy to share that God has blessed our humble labours with 108 new believers in 2015, who professed their faith in Christ and were baptized! The new believers come from Meitei, Karbi, Nepali, Halam, Ranglong, Riag, Kachari, Falam, Choro, Adivasi and Deb Burman.

■ Oppositions and Challenges

In spite of the fact that we have much good news to share, there are also some uneasy stories to share. Through our missionary outreach two families from Thong Timung Bosti, Karbi Anglong became Christians. On hearing of this conversion story, the whole community turned against them, and, as a consequence, they were driven from the village. They became wanderers in their own land. The two families were taken to Diphu, and houses were constructed by church members on land voluntarily offered by members. In Timung Bosti no Christian is known to have entered the village. Regardless of their opposition and their hatred of Christianity, this village will remain our target, and we are preparing to enter this location next year. Let us all join together in prayer that the Lord would give us wisdom in finding the most appropriate strategy/strategies.

We praise our Lord and living God because of the zeal and enthusiasm of our missionaries who walk miles ahead of us as good soldiers of Christ!

Response to the Church and Israel issue

A waiter at a Jewish resort delivered the hot meals to his customers' table, left them for a few minutes, then returned and asked, 'Is anything alright?' It isn't so much that Jews like to complain as that they *notice* things. Their warm, gregarious nature then naturally looks to share their observations...indiscriminately. One customer answered, 'You asked.' (At least *that* was alright!)



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That 'noticing' faculty may underlie a number of Jewish traditions in which a dominant sentiment is mitigated by its opposite: hope is injected into mourning, sobriety into joy. An instance where both are exhibited may be seen at every Jewish wedding: at the climactic moment in the ceremony Scripture holds to be the very emblem of joy, the groom stomps upon and smashes a glass wrapped in linen which had been placed under his heel. It is a commemoration—a commemoration of the *destruction* of the Second Temple, an event that signalled our second (and longest) expulsion from the land. It is a reminder to celebrants that, however great a Jew's joy, he belongs to a people still in *galut* (exile).¹ Bitterness is injected into the sweetest moment, just as other traditions provide for the reverse.² The above occurred to me while reflecting on the *Lux Mundi* issue (September 2015) devoted to a treatment of questions about Israel and the Church. I instantly and truly rejoiced to see this important reminder of the abiding, the still-vital love, appreciation, and regard of the Dutch Reformed for both the Jewish people *and* things Jewish, anchored, as always, in the Holland-er's supreme regard for Scripture and the covenants revealed therein.

Yet, at the same time, I could not help but lament what appeared to be a kind of *tentativeness* hovering o'er

this historic connection: not so much wrong answers as contentment with no answers; less a rejection of truth than a *subdued ardour* for it; not a *departure* so much as a willingness to peruse travel brochures—which *facilitate* departures. Of course, a vague sense joined to a good hunch does not produce solid conclusions. It is therefore incumbent upon me to specify where this alleged ambivalence might be seen.

It is seen in the core section of what might be thought of as the lead article, which was also the longest. It attempted to provide a fair survey purporting to be a blueprint for a Biblical view on the Church and Israel. At best its success was partial. Its treatment of the following critical question left me scratching my head, baffled. The question: *May the church legitimately expect a future, large-scale conversion of the Jewish people to Messiah Jesus, prior to His consummative return?*

Now, we recognize some might answer that question with a yes; some might answer with a no. Some might answer, 'Ik weet het niet, ik weet het niet' (Dutch for 'I don't know, I don't know'). But whatever our answer, it should *not* be Yes *and* No, a combo appearing with frightening regularity of late in Reformed churches, including the Liberated.

■ Romans 11 and the future of Israel

Coming to cases, on page 11 of the September LM, we read, 'Does Romans 11 have anything to say about the future of Israel?' Instead of a loud 'Yes!' (the correct answer), the very question seems to signal an unravelling in the calm of the authors. The once smooth writing gives way to the appearance that the writers got velcroed to Elvis Presley, and with him got attached to 'a fuzzy tree' where they proceeded to get 'all shook up'. I'm teasing, of course, but nevertheless find myself groping for a way to understand what it is they provide for an answer.

You see, they no sooner posit the question than they begin equivocating, first by suggesting: 'It is important to note that Paul here speaks of a divine mystery

* From the editors:

The following article is a critical response of Rev. Steve Schlissel to Yachad's article in the last issue of *Lux Mundi*, 'The Church and Israel: Blueprint for a Biblical View.' We place it aware of the diversity of opinions within the orthodox Reformed community on this sensitive subject. It is our intention to give room for various voices within the context of a commitment to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, and so invite us all to think more deeply, and hopefully more biblically, about 'The Church and Israel.'

(11:25);³ which they explain this way: ‘This expression tells us that what is happening here is beyond our comprehension.’ At this point, I hear an announcement: ‘Elvis has left the building.’

I intend no offence to the authors, and acknowledge that what had been originally written in Dutch may have suffered in translation, but – however that may be, what is offered as the first level of an answer is simply *wrong*. In fact, the word ‘mystery’ – as used in Romans 11:25 (and other places by Paul) signals the author’s intention, *not* to leave us in lugubrious darkness but rather to tell us plainly what we ought to know. Now I need to say that being guided into ambiguity like this, whether deliberate or inadvertent, is usually encountered in writings attempting a theological bait and switch. Again, I am NOT accusing the authors of *anything* sub-honest. But granting integrity still demands recognition that what we are told is honestly *180 degrees away* from the truth *at this point*.

■ Mystery?

Paul, as most readers surely know, is wont to use ‘mystery’ in a formulaic introduction, a signal that something which had *previously* been unknown *has been made known* – *not* that it is beyond our comprehension. This use of ‘mystery’ in the New Testament is itself no mystery – at least in 2015. It is widely known and is seen in the notes of any decent study Bible, *in loc cit*. It is *not* a declaration of ‘You’ll never get this’, but one of ‘I’m going to clarify this for you *now*’.

Paul is *not* admonishing readers, ‘Make the best of your permanent ignorance’, but is illuminating them. How could anyone read Paul’s words in their context and miss that? Paul introduces the *content* of the mentioned ‘mystery’ by insisting it is something about which ‘*I do not want you to be uninformed*’. He even tells us *why* he wants us to know it, i.e., for our moral improvement: ‘that you may not be conceited’. If the Bible is the Word of Almighty God – and it is – we ought, *a priori*, to reckon it impossible that we should find in it pabulum akin to ‘There’s something I want you very much to know. I want you to know it because it will really help preserve your Christian character. However, it’s beyond your comprehension. Therefore, forget it.’ I’m sorry. I *do* understand there is a hefty list of questions to which we are not given answers *this* side of eternity. But I am challenged to understand how those that *are* answered – *in the same text where they are asked* – can be blithely moved on to that list.

Though space requires me to be brief, I emphasize that I am not picking on one wrong word or idea, then making a mountain from a molehill. For whatever reason, the introduction of Israel’s *future* marked the unravelling of what had been, until then, some reasonable reflection. *After* asking about Israel’s future, coherence fled, Elvis is gone. After that we have a series of statements with no discernible connection one to the others. Moreover, they defy being constructed into anything like a co-

herent answer to the question at the section head. In the end we are told ‘All Israel’ is ‘an expression of fullness’. Well, that’s a real help. If it weren’t so obvious it would be funny.

■ Restoration of Israel?

Are we to expect that a great number of Jews will come into the truth of Jesus before the consummation? The article advises caution here, because ‘quantity itself is not what Paul here has in mind.’ Does Paul foresee a restoration of Israel? ‘Various interpretations are possible’, and ‘We need to be cautious...for the text does not allow a compelling choice.’

That, my friends, marked ‘the limit’. I felt that if I didn’t offer a response, my sanity would be in jeopardy. Why? Because the questions raised *and unanswered* in that piece—*Wait. It’s worse*. The questions raised but then *portrayed as unanswerable*, have, in fact, and in our own Reformed tradition, been cogently and forcefully, clearly, and repeatedly answered – answered with restraint, honour, and passion. It’s a paining shame that some seem not to have heard. Please – *please!* – allow me to share in this small, humble space, a mere smattering, a sample, a tiny display of our tradition’s outstanding prowess and scholarship, exhibited, thank the Lord, where it does most good, i.e., in making sure, humanly speaking, that God’s open Word remains *wide open* to his people, served by ministers who rightly interpret it, and give its *sense*.

Let me introduce these citations with an essential observation. There is most certainly a compelling guidance for us in the text. Grasping it requires one simple observation: in 11:1 Paul asks if God has rejected the Jewish people. His proof that God has not is made along the lines of the elective principle, of a remnant, as it were.

But in 11:11 there is an IMPORTANT modification to what will henceforth be under consideration. Paul switches from a focus on Jews who *believe* to a new issue: the greater portion of the Jews – his contemporaries, who did *not* believe. Failure to account for this shift has been fatal in many commentaries. A remnant (1-10) proves there is not a wholesale rejection by God of Israel. But verse 11 asks if those who stumbled – the UNBELIEVING majority of the Jews – have stumbled so as to fall beyond recovery. Paul’s answer begins, ‘God forbid’, and continues for much of the remainder of the chapter. The chapter’s answer to the question that short-circuited *Yachad* is clear, even though it’s set in the negative.

Has God rejected the Jewish people? His answer is, 1. Not all (verses 1-10); 2. Not always (11:ff). Another way to grasp it: Has God rejected His people? In part/until. Not completely, not forever. Now let’s appeal to a couple of biggies.

■ Citations from Reformed tradition

I begin with a giant of yesteryear, Herman Witsius, writing on Romans 11:25-26: ‘*When the fullness of the Gentiles is brought*

in, all Israel will be saved: That is, as our Dutch commentators well observe, not a few, but a very great number, and in a manner the whole Jewish nation, in a full body...They depart from the apostle's meaning, who, by 'all Israel,' understand the 'mystical Israel,' or the people of God, consisting both of Jews and Gentiles, without admitting the conversion of the whole Jewish nation, in the sense we have mentioned.'

Witsius took explicit exception to the sort of fuzziness that marred the *Yachad* treatment of Romans 9-11. Concerning 'all Israel,' they wrote, 'The quantity itself is not what Paul here has in mind.' It isn't? Paul had spoken of Israel as having become 'enemies of the gospel' (11:28). But weren't *all* the early believers and apostles and evangelists themselves Jewish? Then naming the nation of Israel as gospel enemies can *only* mean *substantively*, in a *statistically significant* manner, that is, the great majority. The numerical implication for expected reversal of Israel's condition demands a corresponding reversal of percentages (not precise but apparent). 'If their transgression [unbelief] means riches for the [Gentile] world, how much greater riches will their fullness bring?' Clearly, 'fullness' has at least a numerical dimension.

For spice, consider this whopper of a statement from 165 years ago. Published in a British Evangelical magazine, it constitutes a blazing contrast to the yes/no in the *Yachad* article. 'We believe that it is not denied by any considerable number of Christians, or by any respectable class of interpreters, that the Jews, as a nation, will be converted to Christianity...This is so clearly taught in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that one could scarcely deny it and retain his Christian character.' Wow. Those are very strong words.

God permitting, I hope to delve more deeply in the next *Lux Mundi* into the problem of how our strategy for reading Romans has tended to separate us from the very purpose and goal of the letter. For now, two more citations and I'm leaving with Elvis. The first recalls one of the past century's most able expositors, Prof. John Murray. He had begun expositing Romans 11 while *disbelieving* 'ethnic' Israel to be the bearers of a divinely promised (and therefore certain) future restoration to Messiah Jesus. But he found himself bowing before the inspired text, holding that one would be less than honest to employ an elastic definition of 'Israel' in a context where it was used repeatedly and solely of that peculiar, ancient people. And although Murray had the handicap of being Scottish rather than Dutch, he nevertheless was a favourite of Cornelius Van Til, who told this writer, 'He [Murray] could

see more in Scripture with one eye [Prof. Murray had a glass eye] than most can see with two.'

Speaking of Van Til, the man he described to me as 'the finest Christian gentleman he had ever known', the esteemed Geerhardus Vos of Princeton, had this to say (and it is said so well, Dr Vos gets the next to last word): '*The elective principle, abolished as to nationality, continues in force as to individuals. And even with respect to national privilege, while temporarily abolished now that its purpose has been fulfilled, there still remains reserved for the future a certain fulfilment of the national elective promise. Israel in its racial capacity will again in the future be visited by the saving grace of God [Rom. 11:2, 12, 25]....*' 'To the events preceding the Parousia belong, according to the uniform teaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, the conversion of Israel (Matt. 23:39; Luke 13:35; Acts 1:6,7; 3:19, 21; where the arrival of 'seasons of refreshing' and 'times of restoration of all things' is made dependent on the [eschatological] sending of the Christ to Israel), and this again is said to depend upon the repentance and conversion and the blotting out of the sins of Israel; Romans 11, where the problem of unbelief of Israel is solved by the twofold proposition: (1) that there is even now among Israel an election according to grace; (2) that in the future there will be a comprehensive conversion of Israel (vss. 5, 25-32)⁴

Amen. ■

■ Notes

- 1 If this were a fuller treatment of traditions, I'd discuss how the glass-smashing itself is not taken as altogether dim, but instead as a reminder of the hope of restoration, similar to the Passover refrain, 'Next year in Jerusalem!'
- 2 Some may see in this a connection to the famous Reformed axiom, 'Both/and.'
- 3 The article had a typo, reading 11:24. It is corrected above.
- 4 *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*, ©1948 Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Tenth Printing, p79, *The Pauline Eschatology*, ©1979 Baker Book House, p88, and *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, p35, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr, ©1980, Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co.

Jesus said,
“I am the light of the world.”

John 8:12