

WHEATON

CROSS † CONNECTIONS

Not But Then This...

By Edward J. Gabrielse

Editors Note: *Pastor John asked for a one month reprieve from writing his "But Then This..." article. With the acknowledgement of his faithful submissions to date, it is a pleasure to give him a bit of a break.*

I just finished looking up the word "fession" and I am told there is no such word. That kind of destroys the underpinnings of my quest for what it is that I am in favor of, "Pro" and what I am opposed to, "Con".

Next, I looked up the word "fess". Did you know that a "fess" is "...an ordinary in the form of a broad horizontal band across the middle of an escutcheon?"

I didn't either.

The reason for interest in the idea of Professions or Confessions is the recent action of our Synod in recommending that the Synod of 2012 adopt the Belhar Confession as one of our foundational creeds, co-equal with the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt. The vote was 127 in favor and 40 opposed. This action, of course, simply activates a period of time for discussion prior to a vote. And, the precedent seems to be that if there is some kind of serious opposition it will be remanded to a study committee for another 3 years, ad infinitum, until a consensus develops, or not.

The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. It was drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church under the leadership of Allan Boesak. It has been adopted by the Uniting Reformed Churches of South Africa. It has also been approved by the Synod of the Reformed Church in America and is awaiting the ratification by two thirds of their Classes.

The Confession addresses three issues:

1. The unity of the church and unity among all people.
2. Reconciliation within church and society.
3. God's justice and expectations of the church.

On the surface, who could disagree with such lofty sentiments? It is only when looking at the details that a number of issues begin to appear. For example, some of the strongest advocates for approval see it as applying to the Iraq war, immigration policy, minimum wage increases, the embargo of Cuba, global economics, green house gas emissions, abortion, social welfare, taxation, full rights of same-sex couples and almost every other category of perceived social injustice (Algernon Peak, <http://Blessedlonging.com>).

In another example the statement from the Confession, "That God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged." is simply untrue. God is only their God in a special way if they are in Christ. The writers of the confession are exhibiting liberation theology (<http://ironink.org>).

To think of it another way, why would God bless, for example, an Abraham if as a recipient of those blessings he would become less special to God? And why would so many Psalms include pleading for physical blessings if the answer to such prayers resulted in

estrangement?

God is against all the unredeemed, but enthusiastically on the side of his redeemed children regardless of financial status or victimhood. In fact, he may use financial reversal, disaster or persecution as a way of bringing them closer to him.

In another example, it should be noted that the three confessions which we use, deal with how we are to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Belhar Confession focuses instead on what the church should do to pursue a politically correct, multicultural, ecclesiastical social order.

And finally, in the December issue of the Banner, Pastor Bob Cummings expresses his frustration in that, while one goal of the Confession is unity, for himself and others like him (including Elders and Deacons) who are unable to agree and sign the Form of Subscription it means the loss of ordination status and being excluded from the CRC.

These are but some of the objections that have been raised by others to the adoption of the Belhar Confession by the Christian Reformed Church. To date, I have heard almost no discussion in our fellowship about the pros and/or cons of adopting it as one of our confessions.

MISSIONS

OUR FRIENDS WITH THE UGLY MOTHER

By Ben Michelson

Have you ever wondered what your life might be like today if you had grown up in a completely different family? What if you had grown up in a Muslim family? Would you be a Muslim too?

Unlike Christians, most Muslims never make an individual choice to adopt their faith. "Being born in a Muslim family does automatically

make you a Muslim and part of the Muslim community," says Mazhar Mallouhi, an Arab follower of Jesus.

"Muslims need never publicly or personally appropriate faith as is expected in the Christian tradition of baptism or confirmation; on the contrary, they must take decisive action if they want to remove themselves from the community." ("Comments on the Insider Movement," St. Francis Magazine, October 2009)

"There are actually very few ways to publicly reject my [Muslim] community, but one sure way is to publicly embrace Western anti-Muslim politics, polytheism and idolatry, which in Muslim understanding is what people do when they convert to Christianity." (Ibid.) Most Muslims think that Christians worship three Gods—God the Father, Jesus, and Mary.

"Although I am born a Muslim," Mallouhi continues, "I am not obligated to practice all of the customs of Islam, nor am I obligated to believe all of its religious doctrines. But the day I reject Islam outright, I disavow myself of my culture, my family, my community and my people. There are many ways to bring the gospel into this confessional home, and...the words I use to describe a life-changing relationship with God through Christ, and my attitude, will determine how the community understands and reacts to my journey." (Ibid.)

Pointing out the flaws of Islam will never be a fruitfull way to approach Muslims. It will only lead to a fight. "I inherited Islam from my parents and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ," says Mallouhi. "Islam is my mother. You don't engage a person by telling them their mother is ugly. No matter how hideous your friend's mother may be, you don't say to him, "Your mother is ugly. Even if he knows she is, his initial reaction will certainly be to fight you."

Mallouhi instead urges Christians to relate to Muslims with an attitude of love and humility....In our efforts to reach out to Muslims, let us refrain from insulting their mother. Not because she isn't ugly, but rather because we love our enemies as friends.

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I might share in its blessings.” I Cor.9:19,23

Letter to the Editor

Re: Battling Billboards

By Pastor John

I enjoy bloopers a lot. But I checked this one because I had a difficulty believing that the Presbyterian church was not instead an extreme fundamentalist or cultish church. Those are often the folks who want to reduce the new creation to just human souls and that responded to altar calls when they were alive. “If it is Presbyterian,” (I was thinking), “they are very unique and probably cultish snake-handlers or something.” So I was wanting to find out if the Beulah Cumberland Presbyterian Church might in fact be of some fringe denominational stripe. I come to find out that such a church (at least according to some of the blogs) doesn’t exist at all and that the whole thing is a cyber-prank with (probably) the intention of piling up some more ridicule of Christians.

I once preached a sermon here entitled “Will There Be Any?” and started by wondering aloud if I might be re-united in heaven with the very ornery dog that I had as a boy. The conclusion that I came to and that I believe the scriptures teach is that it will be a new creation from stem to stern and that anything that the Lord made and pronounced “good” will be there, but now free from all curse and sin. So whether or not “Blitz” will be in the new creation or whether

any other individual created thing or being (human or otherwise) will be there is beyond my ability to judge. Such calls are reserved for God alone. But rocks? Mountains? Dogs? Music? Work? Entertainment? Stories? “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs (Isaiah 35:6-7;). “And God was pleased through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:20) – His call.

A fellow pastor one time wondered if there would be country music in heaven. His answer was “Yes, but only those who like it will be able to hear it.” I’m looking forward to plenty of it with the maudlin and adulterous stuff removed!

Manhattan Declaration

By Edward J. Gabrielse

In a show of Christian unity, members of the Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical branches of the church have drafted a document called the Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience (<http://www.manhattandeclaration.org>).

This declaration calls upon all people of goodwill, believers and non-believers alike to consider carefully the stances in favor of the rights of the unborn, the sanctity of marriage as between one man and one woman and religious freedom including the right to express deeply held convictions freely and publicly.

It states that Christians who sign this declaration should be expected to advocate zealously for each of these positions in government rulings and in the public square. And it draws a line in the sand by stating that these Christians, inspired by the examples of Dr. Martin Luther King and Saint Paul, will go to jail rather keep quiet on these issues.

The declaration was released on November 20th. It was accompanied by about 150 signatures. Among the original signatories are Cornelius Plantinga, Richard Mouw, Duane Litfin, Chuck Colson and many other Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox leaders. Each of these leaders signed on their own behalf, rather than as a representative of an organization or church. In about three weeks, the number has swelled to nearly three hundred thousand.

This declaration is not a creed or a confession in the sense of statement of corporate beliefs. Rather it is a statement of personal commitment, a place to stand against the buffeting of fashionable ideologies.

If you feel this is a statement with which you concur, on the website noted above, you can add your name.

For those without convenient internet access, there are a small number of printed copies on the table near the mailboxes.

Science and Faith

By Dave Dykstra

My strong interest in Science and Faith began in 1996 when I joined a lunch/email group at AT&T called the "Dining Philosophers" which discussed the "big questions" of life such as "what is the meaning of life" and "how did we get here?" It was the first time I was exposed to a very intelligent, militant atheist and it caused me to do a lot of searching. I was a bit unhappy with my Christian education for leaving me so unprepared. I think Christian schools do better these days. I have since read many books, articles and blog postings on the subject of Intelligent Design, listened to many podcasts, and seen many videos.

My searching led me to Hugh Ross and "Reasons to Believe" which taught me a lot about how science has found many incredibly

amazing things in the last half-century that strongly support faith in the God of the Bible. There is a western Chicago chapter of Reasons to Believe that meets frequently, usually in Wheaton at the home of the leaders of the chapter Bob & Mary Clapper. For more information on Reasons to Believe see <http://reasons.org> and for more information on the Chicago chapter of RTB send email to reasonstobelievechicago@yahoo.com.

Within the past year Dave Sikkenga introduced me to the American Scientific Affiliation, which is an organization of scientists that are Christians. The ASA has a long history; it was founded in 1941. Many Christian Reformed people are active in the ASA. They don't take a position on Intelligent Design but take a scholarly approach and publish many articles on both ID and theistic evolution, in addition to many other issues of interest to Christians in science. They too have a local Chicago chapter, and they have recently begun meeting every other month at Wheaton College. For more information on the ASA see <http://asa3.org>, and for information on the local chapter see me or Dave Sikkenga.

For the past three and a half years I have worked at Fermilab, and for the last couple of years I have been a member of the Fermilab public Arts & Lecture Series committee.

Committee members get to help choose who the artists and lecturers will be. I am especially happy to have had a part in getting the speaker for January 2010. On Friday, January 22, at 8:00pm, Dr. Jim Shapiro from the University of Chicago will give a public lecture entitled "Evolution in the 21st Century." I will most likely be the host for the lecture.

I suggested Dr. Shapiro to the committee after reading about him in the book "The Edge of Evolution" by Michael Behe. Dr. Shapiro is not an Intelligent Design supporter, but his research is on non-random mechanisms of evolution. To see more information on this lecture you can go to <http://www.fnal.gov/culture> and click on "Lecture Series". To stay updated by email of the events in the Arts & Lecture series at Fermilab click on "Subscribe".

About one month later on Thursday, February 18, beginning at 7:00pm, at Waubensee Community College in Sugar Grove, IL, the persuasive Intelligent Design video "Unlocking the Mystery of Life" will be shown to the public. Following the video there will be a panel discussion with Paul Nelson (who is a featured scientist in the video and from the Chicago area) and Perry Marshall (of cosmicfingerprints.com) representing Intelligent Design and two faculty members from the college science department representing neo-Darwinian evolution. This event came about because last year the college showed the anti-Intelligent Design documentary "Flock of Dodos" and said they wanted it to be just the beginning of a series on Intelligent Design and evolution. They had a panel discussion then attempting to represent both sides but they didn't succeed in getting anyone who knew hardly anything about ID on the panel or even supported it. I contacted them afterward to suggest the "Unlocking" video and I offered to find people more knowledgeable on ID for the next panel. A few months ago they followed up on my suggestion. I had previously communicated with Perry Marshall for other reasons, and I asked Bob Clapper of the Chicago chapter of Reasons To Believe for another suggestion and he put me in touch with Paul Nelson. I contacted them and happily they both agreed to participate. I pray that the event will open up the eyes of many to the awesome Designer God.

Business Board Update 11/09

By Jim DeHaan

The board members are: Heather Bossenga, Jim DeHaan, Paul Eldersveld, Bob Gerritsen, Dave Nelson, Eric Olson, Rob Vandermeer and Steve VanZee.

For many of the past years Paul Eldersveld has led this board, and he continues to provide his

knowledge and time, as well as leading the sub-committee in charge of the exterior improvements.

Board matters are not restricted to our property and grounds, but can, and have, included staffing, such as church secretary and janitorial, numerous legal compliance issues ranging from fire prevention, alarms, lighting, ventilation, and water valving inspections. Security and insurance needs are just as important as the continued need for repairs and the dealings with dozens of contractors and service providers.

Even the use of our facilities must be coordinated through the church secretary to avoid conflict in use of rooms and areas.

Although we, as congregation, have now updated and modernized our facilities, there are many installations that are 30 to 50 years old, such as our piping, air handlers and electrical panels. New facilities such as the ministry center also need care.... and many people contribute to that with love.

We are grateful for the talent that God has provided us, since in addition to board members, there are many more who give freely of their time and abilities. Some names that come to mind (and that is not all inclusive): Dan Sytsma, Mike Richardson, Sue Anderson, Steve Vogel, Foster Rooks, Leslie Sytsma, Ed Gabrielse, and many more who quietly do things without recognition. A number of contractors sometimes also donate their time.

Now that budget time is here, we can see business board headings that include: secretarial and custodial services, office equipment and supplies, finance, utilities, various insurances, HVAC, grounds, elevator, water treatment, security, etc..

Next year we will strive to minimize the number of capital improvement items, although these always have been extensively discussed and frequently directed to council prior to action.

Thank God for the many people who make things happen. We know that your prayers, talents, time and money are gifts not only to God, but also to each other.

Bible Scholars Award

By Edward J. Gabrielse

Please join me in congratulating William Fan in winning the \$25 gift certificate. It is in his parents mailbox this morning. He has not missed a single issue in the past year. He answered all but one of the 108 questions correctly.

William deserves our heartiest praise and recognition. Let me suggest that everyone takes the time to shake his hand and congratulate him on this accomplishment.

We, and by that I mean the entire church, are very proud of what you have accomplished, William. When you were baptized, the entire church promised your parents that we would help them to help you grow to love and serve the Lord. Your winning of this award is recognition that your parents are doing their job and that we have in a small way been able to help and encourage them.

Increasingly, William, you will have the responsibility for your own growth in the fear and love of the Lord. We all hope this award is an encouragement in that quest.

Today, we begin a new contest for Bible Scholars. Any one who is between the ages of 7 and 12 anytime during the calendar year of 2010 is eligible to compete.

Again, the prize is a gift certificate of \$25 which will be awarded in the January 2011 issue of Cross Connections.

Inconvenient

By Emily Dykstra

Initially this week (one of the last weeks before Eve was born) felt as long as a football field and I was wondering how I'd maintain my sanity. However, thanks to the furnace trouble (that's french for "the furnace that gave me what for"), I'm already at Wednesday and hoping, anticipating and begging God for some delivery action at week's end.

I have had some more ponderings lately. They're not so much the meek Mary ponderings as I had hoped, but still...

Because of our furnace trouble the past week, Morgan and I have often had to hightail it out of our abode to make room for contractors. Yesterday we pulled a 9 to 5 so that the contractors could put in our new furnace. I was told it would take 6-8 hours. It took 12, but that's okay because this morning we had heat. Wonderful, wonderful heat.

In an effort to stay warm yesterday, I spent the morning doing errands and crashing in random coffee places while Morgan went to preschool. Then we squatted at a friend's house for the remainder of the afternoon until dinnertime.

If there's anything I learned yesterday, it's this: Very pregnant women should not be nomadic. They should spend their last days of swollen-footed bliss on a couch watching reruns and milking the heck out of their girthly situation. They should not be waddling anywhere. Except to the bathroom.

But yesterday's excursions were necessary, I understood that. And I was thankful for the kind vendors and friend who took me in.

On my slushy and slow way home through the snow I was thinking to myself that very thought: very pregnant women should not be wandering anywhere. Not the city. Or the malls. Or the countryside. And certainly not *gasp* over the ground of Bethlehem because some

crazy dude MUST take a census RIGHT NOW.

Hmmm.

My understanding is that Mary and Joseph had roughly a 5 day excursion to Bethlehem. And while their mode of transportation is not known, I'm sure that it wasn't a pleasant experience. At times I'm tempted to ask God if He provided well for His Son to be born.

A last minute census.

A funny marital engagement.

Very odd, even shady, visitors popping up uninvited.

It's not very "Almighty" feeling... less than ordinary. It seems inconvenient and not well thought out.

I was humbled last night as I thought about that bothersome census. It quieted my complaining thoughts about the troublesome furnace and the blustery weather. But even more than that, I was thankful that God Almighty wanted to show His people that Jesus was made like us in every way: including the inconveniences of life.

Prayer Group

By Joyce Van Der Molen

We know that prayer is a Christian's most effective weapon against the dark forces of the evil one. We are keenly aware of this as reported to us through the letters of missionaries supported by our church.

Our leader, Grace Huitsing, is the liaison between the missionaries and our church. She provides a guide that shares news of the missionaries, along with their concerns and praise for answered prayer. The needs of our church and church family are also a focus of our prayers.

The Prayer Group meets twice a month on

Wednesday at 7:15 pm in the Ministry center. Won't you consider joining us whenever you are able, as we use the powerful resource of intercessory prayer? Your presence is valuable, whether praying audibly or silently.

We will miss Larry Kendrick who was a faithful member of our group and our prayers go with him and his dear wife.

Council/Board Schedule for 2010

January 11

Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board (8:00)

23

Saturday Nominations Meeting

February 08

Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)

22

Quarterly Council Meeting (7:00)

March 08

Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board (8:00)

April 05

Congregational Meeting

12

Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)

May 03

Executive Committee to slot new council positions

10

Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board (8:00)

30

Installation Sunday

June 07

Quarterly Council Meeting (7:00)

14

Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)

July 12
Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board
(8:00)

August 09
Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)
23
Quarterly Council Meeting (7:00)

September 13
Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board
(8:00)

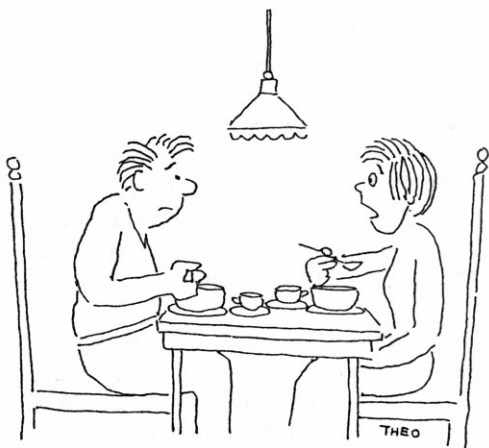
October 11
Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)

November 08
Shepherding Board (7:00) and Ministry Board
(8:00)
22
Quarterly Council Meeting (7:00)

December 06
Elders (7:00) and Deacons (8:00)
13
Congregational Meeting (7:30)

Theo's View

Editor's Note: *This is the fifth in a series of insights on our spiritual journey that Theo left us.*



What if We Had Never Been Born?

Council Meeting

November 23, 2009

By Dave Sikkenga, Clerk

1. Proposed budget presented by Steve VanZee was discussed, some modifications made and motion to accept with modifications passed.
2. Motion passed to pay 100% of ministry shares for 2009 before replenishing existing General Fund deficit (carried over from 2008), providing adequate funds received in the General Fund. However, payment of necessary local General Fund expenses will remain a higher priority than paying ministry shares if funds are limited.
3. Motion passed to make the 5:00 pm evening service time permanent.
4. Acknowledgment made (submitted by Business Board) of significant efforts by Susan Anderson during secretary transition and by Dave Nelson for parking lot improvements.
5. Discussion of pastoral transition (spring 2011):
 - Executive Committee will be meeting Dec 13 to continue establishing plans and objectives for this process.
 - Search Committee expected to be established in Spring of 2010
 - Update on process to be given at December 14 Congregational Meeting
6. The council sees the need to establish a Committee to oversee acquisition and maintenance of art work for the church and

ministry center. Three church members have been asked for their willingness to work together to establish the mandate and responsibilities of this committee.

7. Nominations for elders and deacons (to be installed mid-2010) will be conducted on Saturday, January 23. The congregation should submit nominations to any elder or deacon prior to that date.

Humor Me:

Remember it takes a college degree to fly a plane, but only a high school diploma to fix one...a reassurance to those of us who fly routinely in our jobs.

After every flight, UPS pilots fill out a form, called a 'gripe sheet,' which tells mechanics about problems with the aircraft. The mechanics correct the problems, document their repairs on the form, and then pilots review the gripe sheets before the next flight.

Never let it be said that ground crews lack a sense of humor. Here are some actual maintenance complaints submitted by UPS' pilots (marked with a P) and the solutions recorded (marked with an S) by maintenance engineers.

By the way, UPS is the only major airline that has never, ever, had an accident.

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

*

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

*

P: Something loose in cockpit

S: Something tightened in cockpit

*

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

*

P: Auto pilot in altitude-hold mode produces a

200 feet per minute descent...

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

*

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed.

*

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

*

P: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

S: That's what friction locks are for.

*

P: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

S: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.

*

P: Suspected crack in windshield.

S: Suspect you're right.

*

P: Number 3 engine missing.

S: Engine found on right wing after brief search

*

P: Aircraft handles funny.

(I love this one!):

S: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right and be serious.

*

P: Target radar hums.

S: Reprogrammed target radar with lyrics.

*

P: Mouse in cockpit.

S: Cat installed.

*

And the best one for last

*

P: Noise coming from under instrument panel.

Sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer.

S: Took hammer away from midget

Kids Korner

1. How many were at the Last Supper with Jesus?

2. How long is a Millennium?

3. Which Old Testament book tells about the life of Abraham?

4. What people wanted to know the secret of Sampson's strength?

5. Who was the only female Judge of Israel?

6. The Lord said that he was the Alpha and the Omega. What does Omega mean?

7. Who was Joseph's mother?

8. Who was the first King of Israel?

9. What was Belteshazzar's other name?

10. Who was the cousin of Mordecai?

11. Who wrote a riddle about a lion?

12. Who called down fire from heaven?

Look it up

1. Matthew 26:19-20

2. Revelation 20:4,6-7

3. Try to find it

4. Judges 16:4-5

5. Judges 4:4-14

6. Revelation 22:13

7. Genesis 30:22-24

8. I Samuel 10:21-25

9. Daniel 1:7

10. Esther 2:15-17

11. Judges 14:16-18

12. II Kings 1:10

From Kid's Bible Q&A, published by
Barbour Publishing, Inc.
Used by permission

Note: If you are between the ages of 7 and 12,
Sign your name and put your answers in my
Mailbox (Gabrielse) by January 17. Watch for
your name in next Month's Cross Connections.

Last year's winner of a \$25 gift certificate was
William Fan. He got 107 out of 108 questions
correct. See if you can beat his record. There
are nine issues and 12 questions per issue.
Don't miss a single one. In case of a tie, two
awards will be given.