

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

January 1, 2018 • Volume 94 • No. 7

The great God is our God

Rev. Ron VanOverloop

The cursing and liberation of the earth

Rev. James Laning

Recognizing the catholic/universal church

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani

State funding of private schools

Mr. Brian VanEngen

The foolishness of preaching in missions

Rev. Daniel Kleyn



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$27.00 per year in the US, \$39.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$27.00
esubscription free to current hardcopy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prc.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

Prof. Russell Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

Church news editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

Contents

Meditation

- 147 The great God is our God
Rev. Ron VanOverloop

Editorial

- 149 Ecclesiastical self-examination in the PRCA
Prof. Barrett Gritters

God's wondrous works

- 152 Foundational Principles (10)
The cursing and liberation of the earth
Rev. James Laning

When thou sittest in thine house

- 154 What time is it?
Rev. Richard Smit

Strength of youth

- 156 Recognizing the catholic/universal church
Rev. Jonathan Mahtani

Church and state

- 158 State funding of private schools
Mr. Brian VanEngen

Go ye into all the world

- 160 The foolishness of preaching in missions
Rev. Daniel Kleyn

RFPA annual meeting

- 162 "Seal not the sayings":
Publishing God's truths in the last days
Mr. Joshua Hoekstra

Reports

- 165 Classis West
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Activities

- 166 News from our churches
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan

The great God is our God

“Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.”

Psalm 48:1, 14

This text is a beautiful confession of faith. It is a beautiful confession to make as we begin a new year.

We do not know what will happen to us in 2018. Who will be born and who will die? What afflictions will enter into our lives? What will happen in our family? What will take place in our church? We know very little about tomorrow!

But we do know who will be our God each day of this coming year, and every second of each day. The great God who *has been* our God, who *is* our God, will be our God in 2018. In fact, He will be our God for ever and ever.

We need not fear. This God will guide us. Literally He will carry and lead us.

Who is this God?

The word “this” obviously distinguishes the only true God from all the gods of the Gentiles and the gods of man’s imagination. “This God” is the Most High Majesty, the great three in one, the One glorious in every attribute infinitely and eternally. Of the existence of this God we are fully persuaded, even though He is Spirit, invisible to the eyes of His creatures. He is the One who did great things in creation. He did even greater things in redemption.

This God is *Jehovah*, the eternal and perfect “I am.” He is the Self-existent and the Self-sufficient One. He needs nothing outside of Himself. And He is this eternally, that is, unchangeably. There is no necessity within Him to have something that is not already Himself. We deliberately do not say, “...that is not already His” because Jehovah does not *possess* His attributes; He *is* those attributes.

When this God creates, it is a wonder that is inconceivable to any human. And, then, when this God is

pleased to establish and to maintain a special relationship of love with a people who are not only dust but sinners of the vilest sort, we must realize that this is astounding. As Jehovah, there is nothing within Him that requires Him to do this. Further, from our viewpoint He is under no obligation to bestow this relationship on any sinner. We should never stop adoring the depths of His mercies!

For sinning saints to know this Jehovah God, they must lean completely on the knowledge given by the Spirit through the holy Scriptures. Any accurate knowledge of Jehovah God is to be found in the Bible, that is, in His self-revelation. It is essential that we think of Him as accurately as possible. We are not to think of Him as we want Him to be. That is a looking at Him without faith. Our faith will have us constantly checking His Word to be sure that what we think of Him is in harmony with His self-revelation.

The psalmist begins the Psalm by declaring, “Great is Jehovah.” He is great in magnitude. He is great in extent. He is great in His being. He is great in every one of His works, both those works He performs within Himself and those He performs outside Himself. Jehovah is so great that no creature can conceive of just how great He is. He is great in every perfection. He is immeasurably great in power, in wisdom, in holiness, in justice, in goodness, in faithfulness, in grace.

This greatness is seen in His works of creation and providence, where He is King and Lord of all. We take a car ride up a very high hill, stop at an overlook, and look at the tiny houses below. We take a plane to 30,000 feet on a clear day and realize that a man below is too small to see. And, then, we are to remember that this God is far above and beyond what we can see. We gaze up at the majestic snow-covered mountains or into the depths of the Grand Canyon and we are put into stunned silence before their Creator. We gain a small grasp of the greatness of the universe in a planetarium. And we see an infant just taken from the darkness of a womb and we are amazed at his Maker. We have a little understanding of His greatness in creation. “According to thy name, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth”

(10). Our praise of this Creator and Sustainer cannot be too much, too earnest, too reverential, or too constant. The praise from all the angels, every human, and every work of His hands would not be sufficient.

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made. I see the stars. I hear the rolling thunder; Thy power throughout the universe displayed. When through the woods and forest glades I wander, and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees; when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze; then sings my soul, "How great Thou art!"

The greatness of Jehovah God in His creation is exceeded by His greatness in His work of gracious redemption. God's work of redemption is implied when the Psalm uses a variety of expressions to refer to the redeemed church: "the mountain of His holiness," "the city of the great King," "the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God," and "Mount Zion." Then there are the references to the various aspects of the church: "her palaces," "thy temple," "the towers thereof," and "her bulwarks."

This description of the church is from the viewpoint of the old dispensation. The amazing wonder of the church is the fact that this is what this God has made His dwelling place, the revelation of His holiness and lovingkindness together, devoted to His honor. She is the work of God's "lovingkindness," which "will establish it forever." His work of saving unto Himself sinners at the cost of His Son displays a greater greatness of God. It is the greatness of His beautifying grace. It is only because of Jesus' death that God and His church can dwell together, for that is what makes every elect sinner to be forgiven and righteous in God's sight.

This work of redemption is described by the psalmist in the language of types and shadows. In verses 4-8 he describes a historical event when the holy city of Jerusalem was given a divine/miraculous deliverance from a surrounding enemy. The greatness of the enemy (their kings) marveled, trembled, and hasted away. Fear took hold of them, and great pain. The strength of their navy was utterly and irrevocably broken. God was and is graciously pleased to take on Himself the responsibility of defending and preserving His church. Every child of God, and all of us together, have experienced deliverance from a most powerful enemy—our sin and sinfulness.

This makes God so very worthy of praise—praise that proclaims His lovingkindness, mercy, faithfulness, grace, and love.

And when I think that God His Son not sparing, sent

Him to die, I scarce can take it in. That on the cross my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin. Then sings my soul [and our souls together], "My God, how great Thou art!"

"This God is *our* God." With this God we have a relationship! It is one of possession. He is "our God."

To be able to say that this God is ours means He must first have taken us to be His. He is ours because we are His. In election He chose us to be His people, giving us to His Son. In the covenant of fellowship, this God has us as His friends.

Also, let us realize that before anyone can say that God is *our* God, he must say that He is *my* God. I am His and He is mine. This is because I belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to me. I am bought to be His by such love. The result is that my life, my praise, my all, are His and not my own.

This confession of faith is made by believers together. Jehovah is *our God*. This is to be our confession together. We will not be going through the new year alone. We will be walking with the other members of Christ's body. Walking together will help us make and keep this beautiful confession.

That we rightly know this Jehovah to be our God will be evident in our giving of praise to Him together as a great choir. Our praise is worship. Our praise is rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great a love for us. Our praise is our serving Him by serving each other.

This God is our "guide." This means that He is faithful and constant to bring us, to carry us, to shepherd us all the way home. He guides us by His counsel. He feeds and leads us in the ways of peace and life. He guided the church of the old dispensation by sending the ten plagues, dividing the Red Sea and Jordan, bringing daily food and drink, and defeating every foe. His Spirit leads us into the fullness of Christ, guides us into all truth, directs us into the Father's love, and leads us to the land of uprightness.

This relationship of God being our God is "for ever and ever." While no man can say that His possessions are his forever, Jehovah is ours not only today, but every day of this new year. He is ours in every age of time, and into all eternity. He is constant and unchangeable in His love for us, so that nothing can separate us from His love. While we experience many changes in the course of a lifetime on earth, this relationship will never change.

And that is the reason why He guides us "even unto death." This means that He always guides every member

of His body and the church as a whole from beginning to the end. As He led Israel through “Jordan” (which means “death,” but now “conquered death” because He guides us through it), so He will guide us through our individual deaths. He is guiding us with every detail of our life until then. When the earth dissolves like snow before the great fire, this God will still be guiding us through it all.

As we begin a new calendar year, we must have our minds filled with the awareness of this God. He is Je-

hovah. He is our God. And He is our Guide for ever and ever.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim, “My God, How great Thou art!”

To God be the glory! He is worthy of all praise!



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Ecclesiastical self-examination in the PRCA

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2017, p. 125.

With the New Year upon us, it is customary to think of improving ourselves personally. Christians may want to read more, eat less, adopt an exercise regimen, develop different entertainment practices, or change spending habits. True, one person may be inclined to self-examination more than another, but we all do well to consider ourselves regarding correcting personal flaws and promoting spiritual growth. The apostle Peter warns that, if there is not growth in a man, he may well be led away with the error of the wicked and fall from his own steadfastness (II Pet. 3:17, 18).

But the new year also serves as an occasion for *ecclesiastical* introspection, what I have called “ecclesiastical self-examination.” Recommending this, I am well aware that, if there are only a few who are inclined to *personal* introspection, there are probably fewer yet inclined to reflecting on the spiritual condition of their church. But the Reformation calling in the motto *Semper Reformanda* expresses a biblical principle that *requires* churches to examine themselves. Serious and regular ecclesiastical self-examination is necessary.

So I return to the question: Are we willing and able to do this? Is the PRCA in her membership willing to be serious about examining herself in the light of the Word of God and making reforms by that Word of God? Are

we? We must give more than lip-service to *Semper Reformanda*.

Asking the right questions

In the last editorial, I ended by suggesting three categories of questions for this self-examination, in connection with both doctrine and practice: 1) What have we *lost*? 2) Where is the church *slipping*? 3) What could be *improved*? We ask them with the prayer that God will make us willing to see ourselves as He does.

Is it possible that a *doctrine* that in the past was taught regularly is no longer being taught or is rarely expounded and applied today? Are there *warnings* that our fathers heard from our pulpits that our children would be surprised to hear today? Or are there *practices* among us about which our grandparents, if they observed them, would be rightly alarmed?

If we have lost something in the preaching, one reason may be that the preachers have allowed one important exhortation, too frequently made, to elbow aside other exhortations that ought to be made. Or they have given one important doctrine preeminent place, the result of which is that other important doctrines get short-changed. If a minister, for example, always refers to faith as a bond, *at the expense of* faith as knowledge,

trust, and activity, he could be leading his flock into doctrinal error. He would not be wrong to speak of faith as a bond. But he would be wrong nevertheless, because he omits faith's other dimensions. Sanctification, to use another example, can be preached at the expense of justification (or vice versa), or the efficacious calling at the expense of election or some other vital truth. The same is true with regard to the Christian life. So focused on *one* important commandment—perhaps one commonly violated in other churches or in society—a church could fail properly to emphasize another commandment. The church or churches (or preacher) have become imbalanced. This is not just lack of wisdom, but error that must be corrected.

All this shows that it may take effort to determine whether something has been lost or is slipping. That is, ecclesiastical self-examination is not as easy as asking whether there are any heresies propagated among us, or any ungodly life-style promoted, or even a *conscious* refusal to give some necessary exhortation. If it were that easy, most churches could conduct the exercise quickly, conclude smugly that they are fully and robustly Reformed, and go on their merry way...in error.

Ecclesiastical self-examination, like personal self-examination, takes diligent work and honest reflection.

When the PRCA began almost 100 years ago, one parting word from her mother church was that, although the departing ministers were orthodox in the main ("reformed with respect to the fundamental truths") they exhibited a tendency towards one-sidedness. The PRCA rejected and still reject that charge, believing that it was a way to cover up the doctrinal errors of common grace. But the expression itself—an "inclination to one-sidedness"—expresses a possible fault in churches, one for which churches should examine themselves. Specifically, in the 1920s, our fathers were charged with over-emphasizing the sovereignty of God. The charge was denied by saying that it is impossible to over-emphasize the sovereignty of God. Of course, every Reformed believer can appreciate that denial. But Reformed believers must also be aware that a person *could* over-emphasize God's sovereignty: by talking about sovereignty so much that other doctrines, also important, rarely get mentioned. There is no balance. In *that* way, a man or a church could truly be guilty of a *tendency towards one-sidedness*.

My prayer is that every reader, especially elders, will be willing to admit that it is possible to be guilty of this. Faithful to our Reformed tradition of *Semper Reformanda*, we will do so.

Then, where may the church be slipping, so gradually perhaps that she does not notice it? Had she been

thinking and watching—had she cared—it would not have been difficult to see and avoid. Or, where may improvements be made? *Grow* in grace (II Pet. 3:18)! *Increase* in the fruits of your righteousness (II Cor. 9:10)! Be *sure* that the increase is "from God" (Col. 2:19). The sanctification of a church is like the sanctification of individuals: they make *progress* in holiness. If there is not progress, there will be decline.

Whom to ask?

Sometimes a friend may be our best help to point out our weaknesses.

A minister acquaintance recently told the humorous story that, walking home after church one morning, his wife complimented him on his very good sermon. As his pride began to swell, he was instantly deflated by the rest of her sentence, "...and you need to listen to it." We ministers need such blunt help at times.

We as congregations and denominations need help too. But who will give it if we do not ask? Likely very few, unless they know that we have shown genuine openness to their help.

Who, outside one's congregation or denomination, will say in Christian charity, "Your worship has this weakness." Or, "Your denomination would be much more effective if you would consider..." Or, "Your church magazine betrays this blind spot." Why would we not ask our neighboring congregation, or our friends in Northern Ireland, the Philippines, and Singapore—who are our sisters? Or our brethren in Australia or other lands where mature saints have mature opinions about church life, but do not share our long, Dutch Reformed traditions?

They may well have good opinions, worth *hearing*, even if *hearkening* to them may not be required in every case. The Namibians and South Africans about celebration of the Lord's Supper—why did we let go the tradition of the common cup and the one table? Our Irish friends, who have a much older Psalm-singing tradition than we have in America, will have good opinions about singing the Psalms. The Australian brothers could speak about worship more broadly. The Germans about how to involve women in the church's care of the poor. Our Filipino, Indian, and Burmese brothers would be able to say some powerful things about Americans' affluence. The Singaporeans about the importance of higher education, the place of sports in the Christian's leisure time, or how to live with the painful reality of unbelieving family members.

These are my informed guesses about what they could say. Would we want to ask them? At the same time, would *they* want to ask us what we may see in them that they do not see?

Help to analyze ourselves at present may also come from “friends” in ages past. That is, we should ask “the question of history.” Of course, the caution is always necessary: “Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?” (Eccl. 7:10). But the wise preacher’s warning is a warning against *sentimentalizing* history, not against *learning* from it. And history is a valuable friend to help us evaluate ourselves regarding our present spiritual condition.

Every month, for many years now, my own congregation has published in her monthly newsletter old church bulletins. These are *old*. Starting in the 1940s, with about four bulletins each month, we are now coming to the bulletins of the late 50s. The old mimeographed bulletins are a delight to read—I always turn to them first. Some of what I read makes me laugh. I can visualize Rev. G. Vos, late on a Saturday night, sitting upstairs in the parsonage or church with his typewriter, writing some things no minister today could get away with. Some of what is there makes me thankful that we have learned some things in the past 50 years. But some things make me reflect on what may have been better “in the olden days,” with regard to the life and worship of the people of God. That is healthy. We ought to read our own history.

Besides old church bulletins, where can we find this history? We could speak to the old members of the congregation before the Lord gives them their eternal reward. We could pick up some of the yellowed and out-of-print pamphlets, or sit down in the church library by the almost twelve linear feet of old *Standard Bearers* or (almost as long) *Beacon Lights*. History! Learn from history. How does our church today compare to the church of 50 or 100, or 500 years ago?

And then, because the church is catholic (and we give that more than lip-service, too), we ought to read other churches’ writings. There are other Reformed churches in the world and edifying magazines. Our sisters and friends have some also: the *British Reformed Journal* of the brothers in the UK, the *Salt Shakers* from the youth in Singapore, or the *Evangelical Presbyterian* published by our EPC brethren in Australia. PRCA members ought to read more than PRCA publications.

This becomes a reminder to me and all other PRCA writers to be explicit in leading the readers to history, to Reformed *tradition*, to the fathers and their writings, and sometimes (without watering down Reformed tra-

dition) to the breadth of that tradition and the ability to take different opinions on some non-essential or non-confessional matters—like supra- and infra-lapsarianism, eternal and temporal justification, the frequency of Lord’s Supper celebration, reading the law weekly or not....

If church members in one denomination insulate themselves from the Reformed community—present and past—they make it impossible to be always reforming.

Someone asked me recently whether I would be willing to give a speech or speeches about elder training. If I were to give that speech, it would not be complete hyperbole to suggest a short one: “Read history; end of speech.”

Who will help us see ourselves as God sees us?

Should we be fearful for the PRCA?

That is a question every church member, especially the officebearers, ought to ask, carefully.

If we find a ‘conservatism’ that is more nostalgic than knowledgeable, indeed, we ought to be fearful. If we commonly hear, “Because we have *always* done it that way,” with no explanation of the *why* of that tradition, we should be fearful. If we sense steady refusal not only to reform in some particular area, but even to consider the *need* for constant re-formation, we should be afraid for ourselves. These signs do not bode well for the denomination of which we are a part.

And if such a mentality would continue, it would evolve quickly into an ecclesiastical “super-bug,” an ecclesiastical infection resistant to all treatment. The assumption that all is well (“We are Reformed, after all!”), mixed with a dose of ignorance (“Who needs to read?”), combined with a measure of unwillingness to engage in self-examination, these will bring about the church Herman Hoeksema called “a dead church with a dead ministry.”

If, on the other hand, the church leaders are wise, balanced, not reactionary, careful in their instruction regarding *Semper Reformanda*, warning about the deep ditches on *both* sides, we can be grateful that God gives hope for our church.

Let us be strong, quit ourselves like men, and fight (I Sam. 4:9) for the continued welfare of the church that is not ours, but the Lord’s.

If, on the other hand, the church leaders are wise, balanced, not reactionary, careful in their instruction regarding *Semper Reformanda*, warning about the deep ditches on *both* sides, we can be grateful that God gives hope for our church.



God's wondrous works

Rev. James Laning, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa

Foundational Principles (10)

The cursing and liberation of the earth

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2017, p. 376.

Before man disobeyed God, there was no corruption and death among the creatures of the earth. It was when man sinned that something happened not only to him but also to the earthly creation. The earth was cursed. The whole creation began to corrupt. Living creatures began to die. The creation as we see it today is not the way that it once was.

No death before the fall

From the book of Genesis and the rest of Scripture we know both of these facts:

- 1) God created all things in six real days.
- 2) None of the earthly creatures died until man sinned.

Those who deny the first of these teachings tend also to deny the second. Yet both of these are foundational. Believing them is of utmost importance.

The six days of creation were real days. No one reading the beginning of Genesis would come away thinking that those days were extremely long periods of time. At the end of the record of each day we are told that the day consisted of just one evening and just one morning. The phrase is repeated six times, which serves to stress the importance of our taking note of this. Further proof is found in Exodus 20:11, where we read that the seven-day week consisting of six days of labor and one day of rest was patterned after the seven days that God tells us about in Genesis 1 and 2.

Many argue that it makes no difference whether you think those days were single days or long periods of time. Yet it does. The long-period theory contradicts the explicit testimony of Scripture concerning those days. Furthermore, those holding to this theory usually maintain that animals were dying for many years before a man walked on this earth. Yet Scripture says there was no death in the world until Adam sinned.

When God created the world, He said that it was “very good.” In this good world there was no death. It was not until man sinned that death came into the world: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Rom. 5:12a). “For since by man came death...” (I Cor. 15:21a).

By *man* came death. Before there was a man, death was not in the world.

The first paradise in Eden was a picture of the heavenly paradise in which there will be no death. Isaiah speaks of the new creation in the beginning of his prophecy:

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (Is. 11:7-9a).

Toward the end of his prophecy, Isaiah brings up this subject once again: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bull-ock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Is. 65:25). In the new earth the lion shall not hurt in God's holy mountain. It will not hurt man, nor will it hurt other animals. It was because of man's sin that the lion hurts today. It was not like this originally in the earth.

John Calvin, in his commentary on Isaiah 11:7, was correct when he wrote:

For this reason, he says, that straw will be the food of the lion as well as of the ox; for if the stain of sin had not polluted the world, no animal would have been addicted to prey on blood, but the fruits of the earth would have sufficed for all, according to the method which God had appointed.

Death is an enemy. It was not present in the creation when it was first made. Nor will it be in the new creation when all our enemies will have been destroyed.

Why animals died when Adam fell

So if it was man that sinned, why did the animals begin to die? To understand this, we must believe what God says about man being distinct from the animals. God created man in His image and set him over the animals and the rest of the earthly creation: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Adam was to have dominion over “all the earth,” which includes all the animals that God had made.

Then, when the king over the earthly creation sinned, corruption and death came upon not only him but also the earthly creation over which he ruled. We see this right after man sinned, when God told Adam that now the ground was cursed and would bring forth thorns and thistles:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17-19).

Corruption now characterized the ground and the plants, and in this ground man himself would corrupt and return to dust.

There are other passages, such as the following from Hosea and Jeremiah, that refer specifically to animals suffering because of man’s sin:

By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away (Hos. 4:2-3).

How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds (Jer. 12:4a).

Plants wither and animals suffer and die because of the wickedness of man. This suffering and death go back to man’s first sin in the Garden of Eden. When we see all this withering, suffering, dying, and corrupting, we are to remember that this is due to our refusal to listen to our Creator.

The promised liberation

Although corruption characterizes the earthly creation today, our Lord has promised that when He returns the creation itself shall be fully delivered from the bondage of corruption:

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21).

When we believers, the children of God, are liberated from corruption, then the creation also will be delivered. Just as the creation became corrupt when man became corrupt, so the creation will be liberated at the same time that we are liberated.

Christ, the ruler over all in heaven and earth, delivers not only His people but also the creation. We and the creation are safe with Christ. He has delivered us from the curse. The gospel we are proclaiming is good news not only for us but also for the entire creation.

So, as we look out at the creation today, we are to remember that it is very different from what it once was. Yet, we are also to view the creation in hope, believing God’s promise concerning how wonderful it very soon shall be.

When we believers, the children of God, are liberated from corruption, then the creation also will be delivered. Just as the creation became corrupt when man became corrupt, so the creation will be liberated at the same time that we are liberated.



When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Richard Smit, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

What time is it?

This is a common question in our homes. Usually, an answer is not far away with many wristwatches, smartphones, and various clocks in our houses. However, more important than what the time is in our particular time zone is the current time in history. For the covenant family, this question and God's answer is fundamental for a pure confession, godly life, and realistic hope in the increasing spiritual darkness of this world.

Since the beginning, God is the timekeeper of history. He does not need a physical, atomic clock to measure and govern time. He made time. He fully knows and comprehends the wonder and essence of His creature, time. He owns time. He governs time. He makes it possible for man to measure time. He regulates His continuum of time through the predictable and regular movements of the earth, the moon, and the sun in their marvelous and divinely synchronized orbits. He stands above time in His eternity. Even when He works in time among the children of men by His providence or works our salvation by His Word and Spirit, He remains from everlasting to everlasting, God.

Our God has a clock. He does not have an earthly clock in heaven. His "clock" is a way to describe His counsel in which all things in history in their respective eras are determined and fulfilled by Him. Just as our analog clocks have hands and markings on them, so Jehovah's "clock" marks out distinct periods in history and arranges all of the details therein. Some of those hours are very long: lasting one or two millennia. Other hours are very short, only covering a brief period of time in history. In spite of the varying lengths of the different eras in history, they all have one feature in common. Each hour in history sets forth another major revelation of God's eternal covenant of grace in Christ alone with a view to its final realization in the new creation.

The Lord declares in His Word that we are in a certain hour on His clock. The hour is not the first, in which Jehovah made the heavens and the earth and for a brief time enjoyed unconditional and free covenant fellowship with Adam and Eve in Paradise. It is not the

hour of the history of Noah and the great worldwide Flood. It is not the hour of the Lord's suffering and redeeming death for His sheep alone.

What time is it? Our heavenly Father answers: "Little children, it is the last time" (I John 2:18a). The word "time" may also be translated "hour." Thus, we understand that today we live in the last or final hour.

Beyond this final hour, the Lord has no additional hours marked on His clock. He has no additional hours in which supposedly the church is absent from the earth, great tribulation falls upon the earth, or Jesus reigns for a millennium in an earthly kingdom. He has marked out no additional hour of a millennial reign of Christ from heaven in a world governed by Christianity, either outwardly by its principles in the governments of the world or in the regenerated hearts of most men. Our Father has not prepared a future hour of worldwide peace in which the church will blossom far beyond a small remnant of mankind prior to the final appearing of Christ.

Little children, it is the final hour. This hour began at the ascension of Christ and Pentecost. Now, almost 2,000 years later God's clock still measures out and unfolds the final hour. Because the day of the Lord is at hand (I Pet. 4:7), soon the clock of God shall strike the end of history and the awesome wonder of the final appearing of the Son of Man in His glory shall take place.

Just as little children might ask their earthly fathers to show them the proof of the time, so we may properly ask our Father in true faith in order to learn "What is the evidence that it is the final hour?"

One of the main indications that we are in the final hour is the presence of the many antichrists in the world that lead up to the great Antichrist (I John 2:18). Indeed, we see many antichrists today who not only *oppose* God and Christ but also behave as though they *are* God and Christ. These many antichrists include cult leaders as well as the papacy and pope of the Roman church. These all are governed by the Lord to prepare the world for the great Antichrist, who will have all men worship and bow down to him and who will gain control over the whole world in his powerful king-

dom. We see now at this moment in the final hour that the political, economic, sociological, technological, and religious ingredients for the Antichrist are coming together quickly. The increase in world unity towards one world government and the speed at which this currently develops indicate clearly that we are in the final hour.

In addition, there is the evidence of the world's development in iniquity. The world more boldly and openly defies God. Man openly claims sovereignty in all spheres of life, including the fundamentals of marriage and gender. Man claims the authority to determine marriage and even to decide what his gender will be. The world increases in its immorality and ungodliness, and in its hatred of the only true religion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking beyond the ripening wickedness of the world, we notice ongoing disasters throughout the creation. There is the awesome intensity of typhoons, the devastation of earthquakes, the spread of diseases, and man's inexcusable unbelief and impenitence in response to these judgments of God in the earth. All this declares that we are in the last hour.

Then, too, there is the evidence of apostasy. We see and weep over Reformed churches who have rejected repeated warnings and who increasingly maintain the unbiblical doctrines of theistic evolution, post-millennialism, a conditional covenant, justification by man's act of believing and good works, and common grace as their creedal fundamentals. Moreover, unfaithful Sabbath observance, worldliness, materialism, and lack of time for kingdom work, family devotions, and Bible study become an increasing threat to the faithfulness and life of even our own churches.

However, in the midst of the deepening darkness of this last hour there is the small, bright, and fundamental light and voice of evidence that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The preaching of the gospel by the direction of Christ and His Spirit continues to advance miraculously through the globe from nation to nation, island to island, and people to people. According to election Christ knows His sheep. He works quickly and meticulously, gathering them out of every nook and cranny of the creation and their darkness. While His Word preached serves the condemnation of the ungodly whereunto they were appointed, yet His Word preached also marvelously gathers the remnant of His elect sheep and their seed into His everlasting covenant of grace. In the service of that spread of the gospel, we also observe the ongoing translation work of the Word of God into new languages. Indeed, it is the final hour!

Now, how should we and our children respond to this Word of God? Shall we do as the world does in the

final hour, and live and celebrate in its wickedness as though there is no judgment day and no Judge of heaven and earth? Shall we join with the world and so be put to shame? Let us beware, and teach our covenant seed to flee the wickedness of this world.

Shall we be deceived by false prophets who tempt us with a false comfort that the Antichrist and great tribulation have been fulfilled in the first century A.D. already? Let us beware, and warn our children of the false prophets and their false hopes for the future.

Shall we be afraid for Christ's church or for ourselves personally in this final hour? Fear not, little children of our heavenly Father, because this final hour belongs to Him. The Father has closely connected this hour to the central hour on His clock of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ our Lord. The hours on His clock, even the last moments of the final hour with all of its darkness and persecution for the church, are all the hours that serve His wonder of salvation in Jesus Christ. The final hour with all of its details even today is moved forward by God precisely in providential sequence for your final salvation. Thus, we may believe that, being adopted with the blood of Christ and made His children by the Spirit of regeneration and renewal, the final hour of history is the final hour of God's fulfillment of His everlasting covenant of grace with us and our seed for the sake of Christ alone.

Let us as covenant families respond to the final hour in true faith and humble gratitude. Let us seek the grace of God to maintain by the Word of God and His truth that spiritual separation of the antithesis in holiness and thanksgiving to God. Let us pray for the grace to be preserved through this final hour in true faith by the chief means of grace in worship on the Lord's Day and by means of our personal and family worship with the Word of God and prayer. Let us be willing and prepared to labor and suffer reproach and persecution for the sake of God's doctrine and glory. Let us trust our heavenly Father that although the final hour of history will be the most difficult for the true church of Jesus Christ, yet it will also be the hour in which the wonder of His almighty, sovereign, electing, and irresistible grace for the gathering, defense, and preservation of His church shall shine the brightest. Our Father is faithful and able to deliver His people through the final hour into the coming everlasting day in glory with Him.

What time is it? Little children, it is the last hour, but not for very long anymore. Soon, and by faith alone "...we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promise of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen" (Belgic Confession, Art. 37).



Strength of youth

Rev. Jon Mahtani, pastor of the Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

Recognizing the catholic/universal church

This article is not about a church denomination. It is not about a false institution called the Roman Catholic Church, which preaches popish heresy, administers idolatrous sacraments, and punishes those who live according to truth. Neither is this article about false churches today who mean by the term “universal” that God loves and ultimately saves every single person, no matter their religion. By catholic or universal church, I do not refer to these unfaithful organizations, nor do I refer to any denomination at all. Rather, the catholic or universal church is God’s elect believers, regardless of place, race, or face; nation, vocation, or denomination. This church includes a diverse multitude of God’s people, mysteriously united with one Spirit, the same Christ, and true faith in God (see Belgic Confession, Art. 27 and Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 21 for more thorough definitions).

As one of the most important and fundamental articles of our Christian faith, we confess every Sunday in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe *an* holy catholic church.” Let us beware that we neither say nor mean, “I believe *in* the holy catholic church.” By improperly replacing the singular article “an” with the preposition “in,” we express dependence upon church as though she is God! This was the very error that the Reformers combated. While there should be a proper love for church, a real and present danger we must consciously avoid is idolatry of church.

What we confess when we say, “I believe *an* holy catholic church,” is faith in God’s preservation (especially by the Holy Spirit’s power) of such a church. It is to confess that God’s people, though divided by differing congregations and dispersed to different locations, are yet spiritually united in one church. It is to confess that the people of my local Protestant Reformed church or denomination are not the only elect believers. It is to confess that if (God forbid) our beloved denomination apostatizes or disbands and fellowship among believers becomes difficult to find, God still will have His church preserved, “and the gates of hell shall not

prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18b). Is your confession on Sunday evening a sham—a meaningless repetition—or a sincere conviction? Do you truly believe *an* holy catholic church?

To remind the local church of this truth, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to address the church of Corinth in this way: “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (I Cor. 1:2). Through this verse, God says to us, “Yes, my beloved Protestant Reformed Church, I recognize that you are a church of God in your specific locale. But remember, that I see you, *along with others in My catholic church in every place*, who call upon the name of Jesus Christ the Lord—not only yours, but equally theirs!” To a true particular congregation or denomination like ours, God gives the honorable name “church.” And yet, to His elect people everywhere who believe in Him, He also bestows the same title of “church.” Because God Himself does, we must also recognize the importance of both particular church and universal church.

There are two dangers to avoid—two ditches or extremes that I warn you young people about. One hazard is emphasizing the local church or denomination while minimizing or forgetting the universal church. The second is stressing the universal church while diminishing the importance of a local true church.

It is my opinion that Protestant Reformed people lean toward the first ditch more frequently. If we think of church only (or mostly) as one specific congregation or denomination, neglecting the perspective of the Scripture and our confessions concerning the church catholic, then we will actually believe that those outside of our denomination are not (or mostly not) saved. Perhaps we will not explicitly speak such folly, but our proud, demeaning, and hateful behavior and manner of speech will communicate it. I write this with full awareness that there is slander against

our people. False accusations come as persecution against our churches in these last days. The allegation that we think we are the only ones is often a lie. But is it purely slander? Or does our conduct portray an overemphasis on the local church and denomination and an intentional amnesia concerning the universal church? While debating (as we should) against error and heresy, what is our attitude toward these brothers and sisters in God's universal church?

Let us be sure that we remember to recognize the universal church as we witness of the truth in this world. If we deny the universal church and speak of (or imply) our local church or denomination as the only true church(es), we tragically fall into Roman Catholic heresy. The very reason that our Reformed confessions (like the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism) speak so adamantly about the truth of the universal church is to combat such Roman Catholic ecclesiology. That false denomination teaches the lie that only those who are members of her are in the universal or catholic church. Men like John Wycliffe and John Hus, followed later by Martin Luther and the Reformers, insisted on the basis of God's Word that the church was universal—broader than the one Roman Catholic Church from which they separated. To forget the universal church is to attack a Reformation truth and to revive Romish heresy.

Even worse, it is to attack the triune God. The Father has elected unto Himself these beloved children whom we ostracize. The Son has shed His blood to purchase these citizens of heaven whom we anathematize. The Spirit works invisibly in the hearts of these image-bearers whom we judge. With fear and trembling, therefore, let us confess sincerely, "I believe an holy catholic church!"

As you stand boldly upon the truth of the universal church, beware also of a second ditch. The trend among self-proclaimed Christians in the world and in America today is to emphasize the universal church, while denying (or minimizing) the local church or denomination. Two results often take place when the local church or denomination is spurned.

In the first place, many who minimize the local church feel that *faithful membership* in a true church is not necessary. But Scripture clearly speaks against this! Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." The Belgic Confession, after emphasizing the catholic church in Article 27, underscores the necessity of membership in the local church in Article 28: "We believe, since this holy congregation

is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church." Our confession means, on the basis of Scripture, that outward membership in a local church is visible proof of our salvation. Those who refuse to join a true local church display that they are not yet saved.

In the second place, others who minimize the local church often deny the importance of joining a *faithful church*. They might agree to the necessity of membership in a church, but they claim, "It really makes no difference where I am a member as long as it has some resemblance to church and makes me feel good." The problem with that mentality is an ignorance of Scripture's warning of apostasy, the road that many churches are taking. Ignored also are the three marks of a true church that we are to use to evaluate churches. The corporate responsibility of each member to support the truth through his/her respective churches is especially forgotten. I Timothy 3:15 explains that the local church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." Thus, God's people who join a church are supposed to do so for the very purpose of upholding and promoting the truth through their church. When men and women join a faithful church, their membership communicates, "I believe as truth the doctrines of this church, and I want these doctrines defended and disseminated." On the other hand, when men and women join a church unfaithful to God's Word, their membership communicates, "I believe the false doctrines held by this church, and I want these lies protected and propagated." Faithful membership in a faithful church is of great importance!

My direct assertion that we must work to recognize the universal church should not occasion the misunderstanding that it matters little what church we join. Let us never compromise truth and wound our consciences by joining local churches that we know hold to unbiblical positions. But as we gather in the sanctuaries of our beloved faithful Reformed churches, let us also never arrogantly and heretically imagine that we are solely the people of God. Avoiding these errors, let us confess boldly the beautiful truth, "I believe an holy, catholic church."

To be continued....



Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

State funding of private schools

The Supreme Court recently decided a significant case addressing the separation of church and state. This case did not receive a lot of media attention, but is important for a couple of reasons. First, the case gives some indication of the current direction of Supreme Court jurisprudence related to church and state issues. Secondly, the case involved issues of separation of church and state in the context of a private school, and therefore has ramifications for our covenant schools as well as for our churches.

The case is *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc., v. Comer*,¹ and began when the church applied for a grant offered by the state. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources was offering grant funds so that organizations could purchase recycled tires to resurface playgrounds. The resurfacing was done in part as a safety measure to provide a more cushioned playing surface for children. The Trinity Lutheran Church operated a daycare and preschool that had been a separate non-profit organization, but had been reorganized as a part of the church's legal organization. The school completed an application for the grant program for its playground.

Grant applications are typically “scored” to see which applicant's projects are most in line with the stated purpose of the grant. Although the school's grant application scored well, ranking 5th out of 44 applicants, the school was denied funding because of its affiliation with the church. The reason for the denial was that the Missouri *Constitution* provides that “no money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect or denomination of religion.”² Like the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States *Constitution*, this language is intended to prevent the establishment of state religions. This language is also similar to language in the constitutions of approximately three dozen other states, which means that the ruling in this case had implications for the law of many other states as well.

The church filed an action challenging the denial as improperly discriminating against the church because of the church's religion. The church argued that this was a violation of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. *Constitution*, as well as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Free Exercise Clause counters the Establishment Clause by providing that while the government cannot establish state churches, it also cannot restrict the Free Exercise of religion. The Equal Protection clause is designed to prohibit a state government from denying any person within its jurisdiction “the equal protection of the laws.”

The federal district court denied the claim, citing as precedent a 2004 case, *Locke v. Davey*,³ where applicants were denied an educational scholarship that was to be used to pursue a devotional theology degree. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the district court, stating that even though the grant to the school would be permissible under the federal *Constitution*, it would be in violation of the more restrictive language of the Missouri state constitution anti-establishment clause, as quoted above.

The Supreme Court reversed the lower courts, finding that the state's action violated the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, stating that it denied “the Church an otherwise public benefit on account of its religious status.” The Court distinguished the *Locke* case because the plaintiff in the *Locke* case was denied state funds because he intended to use them to pursue a religious purpose—a theology degree. The Court noted that this case was different in that the purpose—playground resurfacing—was neutral, but that the church was being discriminated against solely because it was a church. Because the Court found a violation of the Free Exercise Clause, it did not address the Equal Protection Clause argument.

The fact that the Court's decision was divided with seven justices siding with the church and only two against gives some indication of the current direction of

1 *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc., v. Comer*, 582 U.S. ____ (2017).

2 Missouri *Constitution*, Article I, Section 7.

3 *Locke v. Davey*, 540 U.S. 712 (2004).

the court. The court has been divided in recent years into a conservative wing consisting of Justices Scalia, Thomas, Roberts, and Alito, and a liberal wing, consisting of Justices Ginsburg, Breyer, Kagan, and Sotomayor. Justice Anthony Kennedy has often been the deciding vote on many cases, siding with the liberal wing at times and with the conservative wing at others. After Justice Antonin Scalia passed away suddenly, Justice Neil Gorsuch was appointed by President Trump and it was anticipated that his jurisprudence would align closely with that of former Justice Scalia.

In this case, Justices Roberts, Kennedy, Alito, Kagan, Thomas, and Gorsuch concurred in the majority opinion, with Justice Breyer concurring in the judgment alone. Justices Ginsburg and Sotomayor dissented, stating that the decision weakened the longstanding commitment to separation of church and state. Justices Thomas and Gorsuch filed concurring opinions in which they expressed disagreement with the Court's narrowly tailored ruling. Both expressed that they felt that the *Locke* case was being interpreted to allow "mild" religious discrimination. Justice Gorsuch, in particular, emphasized the importance of Free Exercise of religion. He took issue with the Court's distinction based on the "purpose" to which government funds were used. With regard to the *Locke* case, he stated that it did not make a difference whether the funding recipient was a religious man studying for a vocation, or a man studying for a religious vocation—either way the freedom of religion should be protected.

The Court's emphasis on the Free Exercise Clause is somewhat encouraging. Under the legal protection of the Free Exercise Clause, the church in this country has enjoyed the ability to proclaim the truth, to educate her children in the light of that truth, and to further develop and expound on the doctrines of that truth. We know that someday the witness of the church to that truth will be silenced by the world, but we still seek to proclaim that truth for as long as possible. With that goal in mind, the Court's emphasis on protecting the Free Exercise is encouraging.

The *Trinity Lutheran* case involved a school run directly by a church, but the same arguments can be applied to our own schools, which we establish so that our religious doctrines can be incorporated into all aspects of the teaching. We must take great care in emphasizing this aspect of our schools, because the law seems to recognize more easily churches and the organizations run directly by churches as "religious" institutions. The protection afforded under the federal Free Exercise clause should be claimed over against any state-law attempts to restrict our instruction of our children.

While the emphasis on Free Exercise is encouraging, there are aspects of the *Trinity Lutheran* decision that can also be seen as negative. The case involved state funding of private school operations. One danger in this is that private schools may rely more and more on state funding. Many advocates of "school choice" cheered the decision as being a step forward for private schools and homeschoolers. The concern with this is that with government funding comes government control, even if not directly. For instance, comparisons are often drawn between discrimination based on sexual orientation and discrimination based on race. The courts have previously decided that the government can withhold economic benefits from private schools that discriminate based on race.⁴ While the government cannot discriminate based only on religion, the courts could easily decide that the state has an overriding interest in preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation that trumps the Free Exercise, just as with discrimination based on race. The government could threaten to take away funding of any school that refuses to endorse sexual immorality in a "non-discrimination policy." If private schools become dependent on government funding, it will be much harder for those schools to make a public stand for the truth.

The other concern with public funding to private schools is the specter of state-sponsored religion. As the minority in the *Trinity Lutheran* decision points out, the legal doctrine of separation of church and state has been long standing in our country. The reason for this separation was, in part, the experience of our forefathers with the state churches of Europe. In Revelation 17 we see the prophecy of the woman, representing the false church, riding on the back of the blasphemous beast, representing the anti-Christian world power. The idea of the false church working closely with the government is nothing new, and as the wall of separation between church and state falls, we can see how that coalition can rise in our own country. The idea of getting funds from the government to aid in education may sound appealing to parents paying taxes while struggling to pay tuition, but that combination rarely bodes well for the church.

In summary, the Court's renewed focus on the Free Exercise Clause gives hope that the church's ability to worship and proclaim the Word may continue for a time. However, we should also be careful that our churches and schools do not become reliant on the state. May the Lord graciously give us the discernment to navigate in a way that is honoring to Him.

4 *Bob Jones University v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983).



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

The foolishness of preaching in missions

Some missionaries today are foolish, and some are not. Some are considered foolish, who in reality are not. Others are considered not foolish even though they are.

Many believe that a missionary is foolish who insists that his work is chiefly the work of preaching the gospel. They say it is foolish for a man to devote his life to preaching the Word of God. How foolish to spend forty or more hours each week making and preparing sermons—there are much better and much more important things to be done. How foolish for the missionary to make preaching central in his work and central in the worship services of churches, groups of believers, or any gathering of interested individuals. How foolish for him to stand behind a pulpit and explain a few verses of the Bible for fifty minutes or so. And how foolish for him to expect people to sit and listen to two of those lengthy sermons each Sunday.

The reason many consider this foolish is that they believe it is ineffective. According to them, the missionary's method is flawed. They question whether the missionary is really in touch with the people. Does he truly understand what their real needs are? If he did, surely he would be busy addressing those needs in more concrete ways. But he thinks he must preach. What possible good does the preaching of lengthy, doctrinal sermons accomplish? How can preaching help people who are poor and suffering? How can exposition of the Word of God benefit a broken family or a corrupt society?

Their conclusion? The missionary who devotes his time and work to preaching the Word of God is foolish. And preaching itself is foolishness. It is all a senseless and useless exercise. It is a waste of time—the missionary's time as well as the time of those who come to listen. It is utter folly.

Those who think this way will then claim that the missionary who is not foolish is one who is up with the times. He is wise because he is focused on addressing the earthly circumstances and needs of people and society. He is smart enough to realize that the people find sermons boring and irrelevant. He is wise enough to

know that the need of the hour is social work among the poor and oppressed. He therefore concentrates more on building houses for the poor, establishing orphanages, and such things. He also wisely adapts the worship services to include much more exciting activities, such as music, testimonies, and movies. These things will be much more uplifting than preaching. These activities will attract those who are lost, will stir up the souls of the listeners, will produce great changes in people's lives, and will result in greater numbers being saved.

But which of these men (missionaries) is, in reality, a fool? And which one is wise?

The fool is the one who does not make preaching central in his work in the church and on the mission field. In contrast, the truly wise minister and missionary is the one who preaches Christ Jesus and Him crucified. He is wise who always preaches the Word of God, and who in every sermon sets forth the gospel that gives hope and comfort. He is wise who continues to preach it, and never sways from his purpose to do so, even when he is called a fool for doing so. In spite of the ridicule, he always preaches the Word to any and every audience the Lord is pleased to give him.

The reason such a man is not foolish is that God Himself says so. The preaching of the gospel by a man whom God has called and sent to do so is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The lost sheep must hear the voice of their Good Shepherd (John 10:4). In John 10:16, Christ said, "Other sheep I have...them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice." In this verse Christ declares Himself to be the true missionary who brings the elect into His flock. The way in which He does that is by causing them to hear His voice. And that voice of Jesus Christ is heard, not through music or choirs or movies, but through the faithful preaching of the Word (Rom. 10:14-15). The way in which Christ gathers and builds up His church is not by means of social work or community projects, but by the faithful preaching of the Gospel.

So why then does the Word of God speak about the "foolishness of preaching" (I Cor. 1:21)? Is this pas-

sage teaching that this is, in fact, the truth concerning preaching? Is Paul, who wrote these words, stating that he considered preaching to be foolishness? Does God consider preaching to be foolish? Must we view preaching that way?

In I Corinthians 1, Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, is not stating what he or God think about preaching, but what the opinion and judgment of the ungodly world is. The wicked consider preaching to be foolishness. The preaching is foolishness “to them that perish” (I Cor. 1:18).

That this is so is understandable, for the wicked know nothing of the mighty power of the gospel to save. It should be no surprise that the wicked ridicule the missionary who is determined always to know and to preach Christ and Him crucified. It is to be expected that the world mocks those who are interested in and who return each Sunday to sit under the sound preaching of the Word.

However, sad to say, it is not only the world who does this. The idea that preaching is foolishness is becoming more and more the opinion (even the prevailing one) of all too many so-called Christians, churches, and missionaries. They laugh at preaching. They ridicule preachers. They judge preaching to be old-fashioned, boring, and mostly ineffective as a means to save the lost. They therefore abandon it and replace it with other methods—methods that are the fruit of their own imaginations. All too many churches and missionaries consider themselves to be wiser than God.

What they fail to realize is that their methods are doomed to fail. It may be true that what they do results in some interest in Christianity. But entertainment does not save people. Music does not save people. Community projects do not save people. These methods do not humble sinners. These methods do not comfort, nor sanctify, nor preserve sinners in salvation. Those who use these methods may think that preaching is foolishness, but in reality what they have invented in the place of preaching is foolishness.

God eternally decided to save a people from all nations on earth and from all ages of world history. He decided that He would save that people through the death of His Son on the cross. But God also eternally decided the method He would use to make that salvation a reality for them. He did not leave it up to man to determine how best to make salvation real for those who are lost. God Himself determined the method that

would produce Spirit-worked faith, that would turn from darkness to light, and that would give personal assurance of forgiveness and life eternal.

God’s method is preaching. God makes plain that preaching is not foolishness, but wisdom. If it is abandoned and replaced, there is no hope of salvation. But if we stick with the method He has ordained, marvelous things are accomplished—things that have eternal ramifications. God’s Word will serve as a savor of life unto life, and a savor of death unto death. Preaching will produce the marvelous fruit of the salvation of the elect.

God could have decided on a different method. God’s hand is not powerless to save in other ways. However, it is not a question of what God is able to do, but a question of what God has decided to do. He has determined to use the preaching of Christ crucified. What the world considers foolish is what God says is wise. What many churches today say is ineffective is what God uses to accomplish the mighty wonder of transforming a sinner into a saint.

There is a significant reason why preaching is the God-ordained method. That reason is that preaching honors and glorifies God. If the salvation of men and women depended on and resulted from such things as movies, music, entertainment, or moving testimonies,

then the praise for man’s salvation would be for those who perform these things. But when men and women are saved by preaching, it is very clear that their salvation is not

the work of man. For God uses what the world labels as foolish and weak, namely, a man who is himself a sinner simply standing in front of fellow sinners speaking about the Son of God dying on a cross. God uses weak means. God uses a method that makes the man who preaches seem foolish in the eyes of men—doing a pointless work of giving a powerless speech. God uses this method so that it is clear that the work of giving new, eternal life to a sinner is not man’s accomplishment but the mighty work of God alone. God’s method ensures “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (I Cor. 1:29). In the end, the missionary preacher is nothing. What stands out is the work of God, so that He alone receives the praise.

May we, by the grace of God, be wise in our mission work. Let us always preach the gospel, the whole counsel of God. Let us always focus on preaching Christ crucified. For that is what God has determined and promised to use to save those whom He has ordained to life eternal.

There is a significant reason why preaching is the God-ordained method. That reason is that preaching honors and glorifies God.

“Seal not the sayings”: Publishing God’s truths in the last days

Jesus said in Revelation 22:7–10,

Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

This year we commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Before the Reformation, the Bible was a banned book. The Roman Catholic Church was nearly successful in sealing “the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to a church door and was guided by God’s hand to initiate the Reformation. God used the Reformation to restore His church, revive and sharpen many truths, and put His Word into the hands of His people. The Reformation initiated an explosion of spiritual development and writing that has continued to this day. The RFPA stands in the line of this history. For nearly one hundred years the RFPA has been blessed to publish God’s truths penned by faithful authors.

We must not “seal...the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” Herman Hoeksema reminded us in *Behold, He Cometh* that “the book, therefore, must not be closed, and the sayings of this book must never be sealed. Its contents must be transmitted to the church. And it must be expounded by the church in the midst of the world. They must read it, understand it, and testify of it.” This is certainly the calling of the church, but the RFPA, an association whose members are part of the body of Christ, has an important role as well. As members and supporters of this association, we fulfill our calling in the office of believer by ensuring that God’s truths are published in these latter days.

In this past year five books were published, the *Standard Bearer* was published on its regular cadence, and

many new blog posts were published. These publications reached far and wide. A pastor of a small PCA church in South Carolina wrote, “I very much appreciate the books and theological perspective that I share with you good folks in the Protestant Reformed Churches.”

Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer by Prof. Herman Hanko and Mark Hoeksema guides us through fascinating doctrinal controversies in the early church, during the time of the Reformation, and in the modern era, which take us around the world and expose the errors of Pelagianism, Roman Catholicism, Anabaptism, Arminianism, and others. The book emphasizes the teaching of the great theologians, such as Augustine and John Calvin, on God’s particular grace, which is always irresistible and never fails or is frustrated.

Less than the Least, memoirs of Cornelius Hanko, follows his life from childhood to death and chronicles his school days, seminary training, six pastorates in five states, and retirement. Given the strong family ties in the Protestant Reformed Churches, there is a bit of historic interest for many as they find references to family and friends. A reader from Grand Rapids wrote, “I really enjoyed this book and learned much!” Another Grand Rapids’ resident stated simply, “Brings back many memories.”

Gospel Truth of Justification by Prof. David Engelsma was published specifically to help the RFPA mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of the church of Jesus Christ. Essential to the Reformation was the gospel truth of justification by faith alone. This book on justification celebrates that glorious work of Christ. It also maintains, defends, and promotes the Reformation in our present, perilous times. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is so fundamental to the gospel of grace that an exposition and defense of this truth are in order today and always. The true church of Christ in the world cannot keep silent about this doctrine. To keep silent about justification by faith alone would be to silence the gospel. Regarding this book, Rev. Angus Stewart wrote, “It is a superb contemporary work on this glorious doctrine.

It is also refreshing because so many of the critiques [by others] of [N. T.] Wright and the new perspective on Paul are weak and half-hearted.”

Knowing God in the Last Days: Commentary on 2 Peter by Mark Hoeksema is an explanation of the general epistle of Peter to the early New Testament church. The primary theme of the letter is the knowledge of God, a concept that occurs many times and in various contexts throughout the book. This short epistle contains a wealth of instruction for the church today. The secondary theme of 2 Peter is the application of the knowledge of God to the last days in which we live. Especially in his third chapter, Peter reveals to the church the knowledge of God as it relates to the end times. Based on exegesis of the Greek text, this commentary gives a clear explanation to God’s people regarding necessary and important aspects of today’s Christian life.

Called to Watch for Christ’s Return by Rev. Martyn McGeown, a new author for the RFPA, was published last year. This was a test case for bringing additional books to market without overloading the book club. This book was successful and sold in the first year about two-thirds of a typical book club publication.

The RFPA continues with many book projects, including translation work. In 2011 the board appointed a special committee to develop a long-range plan that included research into Dutch works worthy of translation into English. As a result, in 2016 the RFPA released *The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary* by Bastiaan Wielinga. His book was first published in the Dutch language in 1906 in the Netherlands. Since the translator of this commentary died shortly after finishing her work, the RFPA had to search for another translator. The search led to Dr. David Schuringa, and this year the RFPA commissioned him to translate Wielinga’s commentary on the Lord’s Supper Form. After he began translating this book, he wrote to the RFPA:

When I am translating Dr. Wielinga, I feel like I am on holy ground and need to remove my shoes. This man is so Reformed and knowledgeable, with a warm pastor’s heart, that every page is worth gold.... I am amazed at the foresight of the publishing company to make this available in English, as it will be a treasure chest for Reformed pastors who love our heritage, and inspire them to see anew the wonder of our Lord’s Supper Form, especially if their Dutch is rusty. I am confident the book will also find its way to the bookshelves of armchair theologians in the pew.

Many RFPA publications have been translated into other languages. Noteworthy is the 2011 translation

into Korean of *Come, Ye Children* by Gertrude Hoeksema. To date, over 1,500 copies have been sold in South Korea. This same title is being translated into Tagalog (the language spoken in the Philippines). The RFPA is bringing its professional resources to bear on this project, as well as some available funds. Since we are not a mission organization, we will not fund the entire project. However, we have personally banded together as a publishing association with the common belief that God’s truths must go forth to all nations, and that projects like this will benefit our fellow saints in other parts of the world. Anyone interested in providing financial support for this project should contact the RFPA.

RFPA materials travel around the world, sometimes quite literally. Recently Sharon Kleyn, wife of Rev. Daniel Kleyn, shared this story with us: A copy of *Saved by Grace* was delivered to the Philippines. This book was picked up by a person who regularly attends one of the churches with which the missionaries have contact. The book traveled with him to the Netherlands, where he gave it to his employer. Writing back later to this man that had given him the book, the employer stated,

Thank you very much for your present, the book *Saved by Grace*.... I am excited to receive such a book from a business friend, which is really uncommon! The title *Saved by Grace* is very close to my heart, and the faith in God through Jesus Christ, grounded on the Bible, is my daily source of life. Also, I fully underwrite the Calvinist doctrine, which is the closest to the Bible.

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* travels to 2,200 subscribers living in the United States, Canada, Northern Ireland, Ireland, England, Scotland, The Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Hungary, Singapore, Romania, South Africa, Central Africa, Uganda, Namibia, India, Indonesia, and Italy. The authors and editors take seriously the admonition to “seal not the sayings.” In the August issue, Rev. Kenneth Koole warned us of the grievous decisions by the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands to allow women to serve as deacons, elders, and even ministers. He warned also of the insidious way that these decisions are so often justified by quoting Scripture! Rev. E. Guichelaar warned us of the continuing governmental encroachments on the authority of the home with the adoption of Bill 89 by Ontario’s government. In the same issue Prof. R. Cammenga reminded us of the treasures of the Reformation that shine in the Second Helvetic Confession. He wrote,

God alone through Christ alone—that was the gospel of the Reformation. And that is the gospel for all time and in every age and among all peoples. This is the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. This is the reason

on account of which Christianity that is true to Christ cannot accommodate the false religions. The gospel is never Christ *and*, but is always Christ *alone*. Christ is the Way to the Father, and there is no other way to the Father.

Issue to issue the *Standard Bearer* publishes the sayings of Scripture. One reader in Canada wrote, “May God continue to mightily use and bless your work in His name.”

It has been several years since the *Standard Bearer* has undergone a significant design change. While the content of the *Standard Bearer* will always take precedence to its appearance, the two must work together. During the last few years, the membership and marketing committee has been discussing a complete redesign of the magazine. The goals were to publish a periodical that is pleasing to the eye, easy to read, and maintains its distinctively Reformed content. The new design was revealed in the October 1, 2017 issue. The biggest change is that the magazine will now be full color, which requires a subscription rate increase. However, the RFPA is subsidizing half of the increase the first year; subscribers will pay just an additional \$3. The new subscription rate is still reasonable for the oldest, continuously published, subscriber-based, Reformed periodical in North America.

On the blog last year Rev. Joshua Engelsma reminded us of the importance of publishing God’s truths, reading them, and living them:

If we claim the name Reformed and celebrate the Great Reformation, then we ought to know the truths of Scripture that were restored to the church at that time. And knowing them, we ought to confess them. And confessing them, we ought to defend them. And then what lives in our hearts and is confessed with our mouths must characterize our lives. And this all because we love these truths of the Bible. Far from being a cold, superficial confession of what our forefathers clung to before us, there is a warmth and fervor and zeal for them living in our hearts.

The RFPA has added a few more men to the pool of blog writers this year. The topics are wide-ranging and thought-provoking. Topics covered this year include Islam by Rev. M. McGeown, subjects related to the Reformed Baptism Form by Mike Feenstra, spiritual disciplines of the Christian life by Rev. R. Barnhill, and social constructionism by Rick Mingerink. A blog subscriber from Uganda wrote, “I appreciate the blogs and have especially loved the series on spiritual disciplines.” A Canadian subscriber wrote, “I have thoroughly enjoyed all the writers’ posts. Excellent idea.” At least

one blog is posted each week. You can start receiving these interesting and informative blog posts by joining our email list. Contact the RFPA office by email (paula@rfpa.org) or phone 616-457-5970.

After the success of *Gottschalk: Servant of God* by Connie Meyer, the RFPA officially launched its children’s division in January 2017 with the hire of Miriam Koerner as the coordinator. She is currently working with Connie on a book for young children who love the Reformed faith—an ABC book that teaches about God’s almighty power and saving promises to His saints. We are also working with other authors on several projects, including picture books about doctrine, a new book of Bible stories, and Christian realistic fiction. As lovers of the doctrine of God’s covenant of grace with believers and their seed, supporters of the RFPA will find our future children’s books to be an excellent resource in raising their sanctified children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

This year marks significant changes in the RFPA staff. Alex Kalsbeek is the newest addition to the RFPA staff. In early September Alex took up the new position of sales and operations manager, which combines most of the work formerly handled by Tim Pipe and Evelyn Langerak. Alex is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan, with his wife Cynthia and their four children. He earned a B.A. degree from Calvin College and taught several years at Heritage Christian High School in Dyer, Indiana. He also served as the executive director of the Federation of Protestant Reformed Schools. For the last three years, Alex has been the business manager for a local company. Alex has the skills and experience to benefit the RFPA for many years. After thirteen years as business manager, Tim Pipe retired at the end of August. Evelyn Langerak also retired in August after twenty-two years at the RFPA, twenty as the book coordinator. Both Tim and Evelyn have labored tirelessly for the RFPA; their work has been critical in the process of building up and strengthening the organization. Tim helped us improve our business model and Evelyn helped us become a reputable, independent book publisher. Their work has been appreciated by many; board members especially have benefited from their experience and faithful labors. Please take time to thank Tim and Evelyn for their work. Paula Kamps has taken on the role of book coordinator and is transitioning some of her administrative duties to Miriam Koerner. Miriam continues to coordinate the children’s book division. The additional administrative duties allow Miriam to spend more time in the RFPA office.

Through the years the RFPA has been blessed with

substantial gifts from several sources, which include church collections, individual gifts, estate gifts, and gifts that accompany payments of book and subscription invoices. The RFPA Board invested a large estate gift received about five years ago and developed guidelines regarding the use of these invested funds. The RFPA used some of these funds to implement ebooks, install a new sign on the property, improve the website, and reduce the retail price of the commentary on the Baptism Form and the ten books in the *Triple Knowledge* series. These funds will be used for the latter purpose when the commentary on the Lord's Supper Form is published. These funds are also being leveraged in a significant way for two major investments, the children's book division and the salary of the sales and operations manager. We hope that these investments will generate sustainable growth, so that the RFPA can continue to publish books for adults and children and reach new

markets. We are thankful that the Lord has blessed us with gifts that allow us to make these investments.

In concluding this year's secretary's report, I turn to Rev. McGeown's book, *Called to Watch for Christ's Return*, in which he reminds us that "the calling comes to every member, young and old. Serve Christ! Serve Him in your home. Serve Him at school and university. Serve Him in the church. Serve Him in the workplace. All your time and resources belong to Him." We can readily add, serve Him through the work of the RFPA. Serve Him in reading! Serve Him by encouraging others to read what we publish!

The RFPA is called to serve Christ in its publications. This is why we work together. This is why we serve on the Board. This is why we busy ourselves with the publication of materials. To this cause we dedicate our time, our resources, and our talents. "Seal not the sayings." Let us publish God's truth in these last days.

Reports—Classis West

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Classis West held a special meeting on Wednesday, November 29, in Lynden PRC. The purpose of this meeting was to examine Pastors-elect Brian Feenstra and Stephan Regnerus, who had accepted the calls extended to them by Immanuel PRC (Lacombe) and Lynden PRC, respectively.

The night before Classis, Lynden held a special worship service at which Pastor-elect Regnerus preached a specimen sermon on Romans 12:1-2. On Wednesday morning, after Classis was constituted, Pastor-elect Feenstra preached a specimen sermon on Revelation 5:1-17. Classis approved both sermons, and then proceeded to examine the men in ten different subject areas for 20 minutes each. The oral examination lasted until mid-afternoon. Both men gave a good account of their knowledge, convictions, and spiritual character. Classis West, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies from Classis East, unanimously approved their examinations and advised both consistories to proceed with their ordinations. Pastor-elect Regnerus' ordination in Lynden took place Friday, December 1, and Pastor-elect Feenstra's ordination in Lacombe occurred on Sunday, December 10.

Lynden PRC did a fine job of hosting the meeting of Classis, and the delegates had several opportunities to enjoy good fellowship with each other and with the congregation.

The expenses of Classis totaled \$14,964.87. The next meeting of Classis is scheduled for March 7, 2018, in Loveland PRC.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Stated Clerk, Classis West



Pastor-elect Brian Feenstra, (and wife Tabitha), and Pastor-elect Stephan Regnerus being informed of successful classical examination.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdom, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

In the November 1, 2017 issue of the *Standard Bearer* the trivia question was asked: How many surviving original members of the PRCA are there? Then we had to admit we did not know. Well, now we do. Answer later in this column.

School activities

We call your attention here to an exciting, upcoming event planned for April 12, 2018, D.V. For the first time ever six Protestant Reformed high school choirs will join together for a mass concert! Students from Covenant Christian High School (Grand Rapids, MI), Faith Protestant Reformed Christian School (Randolph, WI), Heritage Christian High School (Dyer, IN), Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School (Redlands, CA), Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School (Loveland, CO), and Trinity Christian High School (Hull, IA) will unite in song that evening in the B.J. Haan Auditorium at Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA. That just might be worth planning a trip to northwest Iowa to hear! I think it would be! Start planning.

Sister-church activities

Plans are coming together for the 2018 British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference, to be held in South Wales from July 21-28, 2018. The BRF Conference is a great opportunity to explore various parts of the British Isles while enjoying sweet fellowship with God's people from all across the earth, as well as being edified by the sermons and lectures planned for the week. If you are planning on traveling overseas in 2018, have a look at the BRF Conference and consider making it your destination. Sister Lisa Ong has kindly agreed to be CPRC's booking secretary for the conference again, so please contact Lisa regarding registration.

The theme, sermons, and speeches of the BRF 2018 Conference are as follows: The Reformed (Christian) Family—According to the Word of God

- Saturday evening introductory speech: Rev. M. McGeown

- Sunday services—A.M.: The God of the Living (Matt. 22:23-33) (Rev. A. Lanning)—P.M.: (Rev. A. Stewart)

- Six main Conference addresses:

1. The Divine Origin of the Family (Rev. A. Lanning)
2. The Authoritative Content of the Gospel (Prof. D. Engelsma)
3. The God-Fearing Man and His Virtuous Wife (Rev. A. Lanning)
4. The Reformed (Christian) Family: Parents and Children (Prof. D. Engelsma)
5. It Is Good to Be Single (Rev. A. Lanning)
6. Unbiblical Divorce and Adulterous Remarriage: A Scandal (Prof. D. Engelsma)

- Special lecture: Spousal Abuse in the Christian Community (Prof. D. Engelsma).

More information can be found at: <https://www.britishreformed.org/conference/category/2018-wales-topic-the-family>.

Minister activities

On November 26 Rev. B. Huizinga, pastor at Hope PRC of Redlands, CA, announced his decision according to God's will that he decline the call extended to him from First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI. First's Council then drew up the trio of Rev. C. Griess, Rev. J. Mahtani, and Candidate D. Noorman.

Also on November 26 Rev. J. Engelsma, pastor at Doon, IA PRC, announced that God had led him to decline the call extended to him from Southwest PRC in Michigan. Southwest Council's new trio included Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. J. Mahtani, and Candidate D. Noorman. In all cases we thank God for clear revelation of His will. May God be with our vacant congregations in this time of need.

On November 26 Rev. R. Smit was installed as missionary to the Philippines in Doon, IA PRC. Rev. J. Engelsma led the service, preaching from II Timothy 2—"Committing the Gospel to Faithful Men." Rev. Smit's emotional inaugural sermon that evening was taken from Psalm 121:5—"Jehovah Your Keeper." May the Lord of the harvest be with the Smit family in this time of transition. They left the States on Christmas Day and are now living in the same home they left about three years ago.

Pastor Andy Lanning preached his farewell sermon on December 24 in Covenant ERC of Singapore after of-

ficiating at the Lord's Supper in the morning service that day. Candidate Dave Noorman traveled to Singapore to supply the pulpit there for three weeks. Emeritus minister Rev. A. denHartog will supply their pulpit from the end of January through the end of June. The CERC plans to ask the June 2018 PRCA Synod to provide them with a minister-on-loan. If synod approves this request, a calling church would likely be appointed and a trio made from which to call the minister-on-loan. We pray that God will continue to supply our sister in her need!

Classis West convened November 29 in special session at Lynden, WA PRC. The examinations of pastors-elect Brian Feenstra and Stephan Regnerus took place, with these young men being unanimously approved and ordinations held—December 10 and December 1, respectively. We thank God for these young men. May He be with them in their labors.

Young people's activities

The YPS of Wingham, Ontario, Canada recently held a volleyball tournament to raise funds for transportation to the PR Young People's Convention this summer.

Congregational activities

The Trinity PRC (Hudsonville, MI) book club planned to begin a new session in January, hoping to choose a new book for discussion soon.

Reformed Free Publishing Association

Did you know that the Reformed Free Publishing Association has a blog? Their writers publish edifying, relevant content several times each week—content that

is not published anywhere else. By reading the blog, you will stay up-to-date on current church issues like antinomianism and covenant views. You will also have access to insightful book reviews and to articles on topics such as social constructionism, seminary life, and spiritual disciplines. Sign up for their mailing list at the bottom of their homepage (www.rfpa.org) and every blog post will be delivered straight to your email inbox.

Trivia answer

Through careful research, including a survey of our churches in North America, we can now reveal that, to the best of our knowledge, there are eight (8) surviving original members of the PRCA. Their memories must be interesting and many good stories over all that time could be told, we are sure. We are thankful to our faithful God that He has kept them faithful through the years. And may He be their guide in days to come.

They are listed as follows alphabetically by last name:

Mrs. Eleanore Bol, Hudsonville, MI PRC

Mrs. Johanna Bomers, Hope PRC of Walker, MI

Mrs. Dolly Geers, First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI

Mrs. Florence Haveman, First PRC of Holland, MI

Mr. Cornelius Jonker and his wife Truda Jonker, Grandville, MI PRC

Mrs. Marion Ondersma, Southwest PRC of Wyoming, MI

Mr. Richard Poortinga, PRC of Crete, IL

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Tim and Linda VanDyke and family and Tim and Kathy Decker and family in the death of their mother and grandmother **Mrs. Catherine Marie VanDyke**. We pray that they may receive comfort and assurance from the Word of God in Revelation 14:13: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Rev. Carl Haak, President

David S. Miedema, Clerk

Teacher needed

The **Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The school will be starting from grades 1-3, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Announcements continued

Teachers needed

The Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School in Doon, IA, is seeking a teacher for grades 3 and 4 for the 2018-2019 school year as well as an Administrator. For more information or to apply please contact Brent Wynia—712-470-2757, brentwynia@hotmail.com or Joey Mantel—712-470-6493, jsmantel@outlook.com

Classis East

Hudsonville PRC will be hosting an officebearer's conference on January 9, at 7:30 p.m., the night before the next meeting of Classis East is held. The topic is "Family Visitation," and the speaker is Prof. B. Gritters.

Teachers needed

Adams Christian School, a K-8 school located in Wyoming, MI, is in need of teachers for the 2018-2019 school year. We encourage all interested individuals to contact Rick Mingerink, school administrator (rickmingerink@gmail.com) (616-531-0748) for more information.

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- Jan. 7 "Confidence in Christ's Coming" Heb. 10:35-37
Jan. 14 "Arming Ourselves for Christ's Return"
I Thess. 5:8-10
Jan. 21 "Arming Ourselves for Christ's Return (2)"
I Thess. 5:8-10
Jan. 28 "Preserved Blameless unto Christ's Coming"
I Thess. 5:23, 24

Walking in the Way of Love

A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer

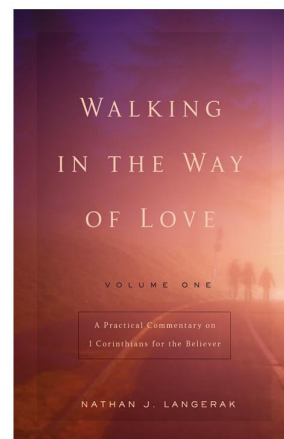
by Nathan J. Langerak

Walking in the Way of Love is a commentary on and application of the words of 1 Corinthians for the believer and the true church of Jesus Christ to teach them about the vitally important way of love, as that contradicts the chatter of the world and apostate church about love.

The commentary is laid out with believers in mind. Each chapter of the book focuses on a single aspect of the main theme of love. The chapters are designed to stand alone. Each chapter begins with an introduction to help the reader see the particular subject of the chapter in its immediate and larger context in the epistle of 1 Corinthians.



Volume One includes chapters one through nine of 1 Corinthians.
This book will be sent automatically to book club members.



Coming Soon!