

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

November 15, 2017 • Volume 94 • No. 4

Giving thanks for God's mercy

Rev. John Marcus

The White-Qadhi dialogue

Rev. Martyn McGeown

The blessing of wisdom (Eccles. 8:1-5)

Rev. Thomas Miersma

Cover

Rev. William Langerak

God's armor for us: the girdle (17)

Rev. Brian Huizinga



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.

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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

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Meditation

Rev. John Marcus, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

Giving thanks for God's mercy

O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Psalms 136:1

Long before Thanksgiving was observed as an annual event in North America, the Israelites of old gave thanks to God after bringing in the harvest. "Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine" (Deut. 16:13). The feast of tabernacles pointed forward to the day when God will tabernacle with men in the new heavens and the new earth. Evidently, the picture of the harvest pointed the Old Testament saints to the reality of God's gracious salvation. We do well then to see God's abundant provision in the context of His mercy towards us.

Some make it a practice on Thanksgiving Day to mention various things for which we are thankful. It is good to thank the Lord for family, friends, food, shelter, and clothing. But if we stop there, without reference to the ultimate goal for all these things, we fall far short of the thankfulness we owe to God. If we are not thankful for God's mercy, we cannot be truly thankful for anything. On the other hand, if we are thankful for God's mercy, we will be thankful for everything.

Psalms 136, as a whole, is an exhortation to give thanks to the LORD. The psalm begins with three calls to give thanks: "O give thanks unto the LORD," followed by "O give thanks unto the God of gods," and then again, "O give thanks unto the Lord of lords." And lest we forget what the psalm was about, the inspired psalmist closes the psalm with, "O give thanks unto the God of heaven."

The unmistakable matter for which we ought to give thanks is God's enduring mercy. The idea is so important when it comes to expressing proper thanks to God that the psalmist repeats the refrain no less than 26 times: "for His mercy endureth for ever."

God calls us to thank Him for mercy. The word "mercy"

in the psalm refers to God's lovingkindness and tender affection.

He is tenderly affected toward Himself as the highest and sole good. Thus, mercy is God's in a special way. Mercy is one of His perfections at the very core of His being. Thank Him for who He is in Himself.

Then thank Him that He shows mercy to us. In His lovingkindness and tender affection, God wills us to be perfectly blessed in Him. He wills for us to taste His own blessedness. Thank Him for covenant mercy.

Thank Him for compassion that delivered us. He remembered us in the past even when we were guilty and corrupt sinners. He knew we were His enemies, but He still loved us. He remembered the mercy promised to our forefathers. He remembered His holy covenant. He visited and redeemed His people through His only begotten Son. He paid the ransom for our sins on the cross. Thank God, He remembered us.

Thank Him too that He remembers us in our low estate today! He delivers us from our enemies. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). He applies that salvation to us by His Spirit. He grants the verdict in our hearts that our sins are fully covered. He works in us to fit us for heaven. Thank God for present mercies.

Even more wonderful is this mercy to us knowing that it endures for ever!

In reading the psalm, we might tire of the repetition regarding the truth of God's mercy; but that would be a wrong response. In fact, the repetition provides a powerful picture of the enduring nature of God's mercy. Not a phrase falls off the lips of the psalmist without the mention of God's enduring mercy. Every work that God has done in history flows from God's mercy to His people.

Never are we so far from God that His mercy and goodness are not with us. Even as the sun gives its light though its rays are blocked by the clouds, so too we may not always see God's mercy and experience it consciously, but it always pursues us. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I

will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Ps. 23:6). Goodness and mercy are like two shepherd dogs that constantly watch and guide the sheep. God’s goodness and mercy relentlessly pursue us.

How can we be so sure that mercy will always follow us? Because God is good. He is good in Himself. But that means He is also the overflowing fountain of all good. He is good yesterday, today, and tomorrow; the fountain of His mercy never runs dry.

Wonderfully, we can see God’s mercy!

Mercy is not an abstract thing hidden in eternity. We see His mercy in all His works.

God’s people of old saw His mercy in the great wonders He performed (cf. v. 4). Give thanks to God, who by wisdom made the heavens, that stretched out the earth above the waters, that made the sun, moon, and stars. All of these things are manifestations of God’s mercy. He stretched out the dry land above the waters in order to give us a place to live and for Him to display His mercy. He made the sun to warm the earth and lighten our day in order to provide for us and show us His mercy. Thank God for the manifestation of God’s mercy in His creation.

But, thank Him especially for His gracious redemption. God gives us a picture of that plan in His redemption of Israel out of Egypt. God delivered them from a horrible bondage. He preserved them in the wilderness. He blessed them with a land flowing with milk and honey.

Mercy is why Jesus came into the world and suffered God’s terrible wrath on the cross to redeem us. At no time in history was mercy more clearly displayed than when Jesus Christ suffered the torments that we deserved in order to deliver us.

O, give thanks for His mercy manifested to us and reaching us in the midst of our misery! Though we deserve to be damned for our sins, mercy delivers us from the guilt and from the powerful grip of sin. Mercy preserves us through the wilderness of this world in the midst of trial and hardship. And, mercy will give us the full blessedness of heaven.

Mercy conquers all our enemies!

It was not Israel’s strength that overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. It was not Israel’s strength that conquered Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan, those great and famous kings. God conquered these enemies! So too, God sets His mercy on us and nothing can stand in its way. Not the Devil. Not the world. Not my own sinful flesh. Nothing can stop God’s mercy from coming to us.

Just as God gives food to all flesh, He cares for us.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matt. 10:29). If God never forgets the sparrows, then certainly He watches over us. He upholds and governs all things in the whole of creation, in order to manifest His mercy to His children.

Glorious enduring mercy!!

In light of the gracious manifestation of such glorious enduring mercy, surely we owe it to God to give thanks to Him. That is why the psalmist commands us to “give thanks.”

Sometimes the same word is translated “be thankful.” Other times the word is translated as a command to “praise.” The Hebrew root has the meaning of casting or throwing with the hand. From there, it gets the idea of broadcasting. That is what God would have us do: broadcast the message. From the heart, openly and publicly acknowledge God’s tender affection towards us. Do not keep it a secret. God’s mercy is too marvelous for that. Gratefully acknowledge what is certainly true: God is a merciful God! Tell others, He has been merciful to me!

To whom must we give thanks? Give thanks unto the LORD. Give thanks to Jehovah, the great I AM. Our faithful covenant God deserves our gratitude. Give thanks to Him who is infinitely above us. Give thanks that He condescends to us poor creatures of the dust.

“O give thanks unto the God of gods.” He is supreme and mighty above all thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, and all that are called gods. “O give thanks unto the Lord of lords.” The Lord rules providentially over all rulers. The very rulers who rule over us must answer to Him. “O give thanks unto the God of heaven.” The God who rules in heaven must also rule over all the earth. The kings and kingdoms of the earth must serve His purposes.

Give thanks to Him *together*. The original command is given in the plural. Gratefully acknowledge His mercy in the congregation. Give thanks together because He remembers us and redeems us as one body, joined together. Yes, in private too; but especially in unison.

What a glorious imperative in the text! To be told to do what I love to do. I want to praise my God for His mercy.

Even by means of this imperative, our new man is made more willing to give God the praise that is due. He is made willing to think on the enduring mercy of our faithful covenant God. He is made willing to give thanks for the harvest and the bountiful supply of food and things we enjoy each day in light of that mercy.

Now come back around the table again and think about all the things we are thankful for. We might have family, friends, food, shelter, health, fame, and riches; but if we lack God's mercy, we are truly miserable creatures. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Take away God's mercy and all the things in the world become a curse to us.

On the other hand, take away all the things connected with this life. But, if we have God's mercy, then we have a mountain for which to give thanks. Give thanks to God for His enduring mercy.

Let us give thanks for all the things God gives us. But do not forget God's enduring mercy that flows out of His goodness. That is bringing us to dwell in His house forever.



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Giving thanks for the Lord's provision

The Protestant Reformed Churches annually observe the "National Thanksgiving Day" with a special worship service. They have bound themselves to do so by Article 67 of the Church Order, which states: "The churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also [a list of eight days, and] the National Thanksgiving Day." The observance of special days has a Reformed tradition which can be traced back to the church order adopted by the great Synod of Dordt, 1618-19.

We realize that there are differences within the Reformed camp on this matter. Even sister churches of the PRC do not observe all these days with special worship services. Other faithful churches officially reject having such regular special services. On the one hand, they desire to honor and maintain the Lord's day as the official day of worship ordained by God. On the other hand, they are leery of the empty formality and superstition connected with a church calendar of special days that developed in the church in the Middle Ages. Reformers like Calvin and Knox insisted that the Lord's day is the only day when believers should be required to attend official worship services. We respect this view.

Yet we believe that these special services may be allowed. Most of the special services listed in Article 67 commemorate an aspect of the saving work of Christ—His birth, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out of His Spirit. Other special services have a different emphasis. Two of the special services required by Article 67 involve the significant matter of the believer's daily bread—Prayer Day, when believers come together to ask God's blessing on the labors exerted for

earning their daily bread, and Thanksgiving Day, a service for thanking God for supplying their daily bread. It is the latter that we address in this editorial.

Let it be clear, first, that the Thanksgiving Day service is intended to be an opportunity for a congregation to worship and thank God for His earthly provision. It is not a time for thanksgiving generally. Of course, the Bible commands us, "In everything give thanks" (I Thess. 5:18), and even that we are to be "giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). While it is legitimate for a minister to point out in his Thanksgiving sermon this calling of daily thanksgiving, that is not what this special service is about. It is specific thanks for God's fatherly care in providing for the material needs of the congregation for another year.

It is entirely proper that the church give thanks to God in this official way for His provision. The church is to live in conscious dependence on God—not only for the spiritual needs and blessings, but also for the material. This is plain from the prayer that Jesus taught His people, which includes a petition for physical necessities—"Give us this day our daily bread." The Heidelberg Catechism expounds the meaning of this petition in Lord's Day 50:

...be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessings; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in Thee.

Whether congregations do this officially in this time of the year or not, the believer sins grievously if he does not acknowledge with sincere gratitude God's fatherly provision of food, clothing, shelter, and all that the Lord gives day after day, year after year.

In the countries of Canada and the United States, believers by and large have very much material provision for which to give thanks. The economy in North America has been very good in the last year or so. Unemployment is down. Business profits are up. While not everyone enjoys the same level of prosperity, it is obvious that, economically speaking, the times are good. It is necessary that believers acknowledge God's abundant supply. We have more than we need, much more.

But there is more to consider. For many, many years, the Lord has been providing for His church in North America at a higher level than the church in the rest of the world. One significant benefit for a believer traveling to different parts of the world is that he experiences the reality that believers in most countries struggle economically far more than most believers in North America. Recent visitors to the Protestant Reformed Churches from Namibia and South Africa observed that life in America was not a difficult one. Having visited both of those countries, I can only agree—life for believers there is far more difficult. Even in such prosperous countries as Northern Ireland, Germany, Singapore, and Australia, people do not have the disposable income that wage-earning Americans have. Food, fuel, clothing, housing, and energy costs are significantly lower in the United States of America. And, significantly, in those countries, as well as in Canada, the socialist systems can deduct as much as half the income of the average worker.

So, the question is, why? Why has God for many years, and even to the present day, given to the Protestant Reformed Churches the kind of material prosperity that we have, so that even the poor among us are rich by the standards of most countries? We must not conclude that riches equal blessing, and surely not a worthiness of blessing. John Calvin, commenting on Hosea 9:1 writes that we ought “not rejoice, though great prosperity may smile on us; but let us rather inquire, whether God has a just cause of anger against us.”

Rather, the answer is, that we may with these bounties seek the kingdom of God. This was Jesus' command when giving instruction concerning the proper attitude toward and use of material things (Matt. 6:19-34). The Lord instructed the citizens of His kingdom that they are not to worry about their daily provision, for if God provides food for the sparrows and clothes for the lilies, how much more for His people. But the Lord also admon-

ished them not to lay “up treasures for yourselves upon the earth” (19). And, as regards seeking material things, He warned, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (24).

As the serious-minded believer approaches Thanksgiving Day, he not only gives humble thanks to God for the material abundance, but he also faces the question of how he must use these material things. The guiding principle is “seek ye first the kingdom of God.” The key to this is seeking *first*. What does the Lord expect from His people?

“First” here is not simply a matter of chronology, that is to say, the first thing a man must do before he does the rest. That would be rather easy. If a man earned a paycheck of \$1,000, he could simply take \$100 (his ten percent), give it to the causes of the kingdom, and it is accomplished. The other \$900 could be spent as he pleased. However, this is not what Jesus means.

Rather, “seeking first” demands that with each one of the dollars of his paycheck a man is seeking the kingdom of God. He must support the causes of the kingdom obviously, but he must also be seeking the kingdom of God in and through his purchases of groceries. He must seek that heavenly kingdom as he buys a hammer or a computer, a refrigerator or a minivan. Seeking first the kingdom of God is a total commitment of one's life, not merely his money. But it has that practical application, and indeed the Lord spoke it, in the body of instruction on material things.

That principle of the use of money is only a small part of the greater, all-encompassing theme of the believer's life and confession—I am not my own. The believer joyfully confesses that he belongs to God—chosen eternally in Christ, purchased body and soul with His blood, delivered from death and the bondage of Satan by Christ's Spirit. John Calvin expressed it well:

We are not our own; therefore, neither is our own reason or will to rule our acts and counsels. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature. We are not our own; therefore, as far as possible, let us forget ourselves and the things that are ours. On the other hand, we are God's; let us, therefore, live and die to him. We are God's; therefore, let his wisdom and will preside over all our actions. We are God's; to him, then, as the only legitimate end, let every part of our life be directed.¹

Calvin later applies this to the “proper use of earthly blessings” (3.10.1). He reminds us that the Lord “tells

¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.1, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1957). All quotations of the *Institutes* are from this translation.

us that to his people the present life is a kind of pilgrimage by which they hasten to the heavenly kingdom. If we are only to pass through the earth, there can be no doubt that we are to use its blessings only in so far as they assist our progress, rather than retard it.” In another place, Calvin states that “Scripture...reminds us, that whatever we obtain from the Lord is granted on the condition of our employing it for the common good of the Church, and that, therefore, the legitimate use of all our gifts is a kind and liberal communication of them with others” (3.7.5). Calvin further instructs: “And lest we should have omitted to perceive that this is the law for duly administering every gift which we receive from God, he of old applied that law to the minutest expressions of his own kindness. He commanded the first-fruits to be offered to him as an attestation by the people that it was impious to reap any advantage from good not previously consecrated to him” (3.7.5).

The Lord has given to the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches much. We receive it with thanks-

giving. We must sanctify all with prayer. In the grace and providence of God, this abundance enables the small denomination of churches fully to support three missionaries to the Philippines and another domestic missionary. It has enabled the churches to support completely its own seminary—for over 92 years now. Material prosperity makes it possible for the members to establish and maintain twenty Christian schools at a cost of over \$12 million annually, and to make plans for more. Members also support printing of books and numerous magazines, including this one. Other Christians around the world view all this with astonishment. How God has blessed us!

Let it be, then, that we live in the consciousness of our Father’s abundant provision. As sinners, we forfeit the right to a crust of bread. Yet as God’s children, we recognize His goodness in every gift we enjoy from His hand. We consecrate all to His service, praying that it may be accompanied with His blessing.

To God alone be the glory.

Letters

Appreciation for the RFPA and the *Standard Bearer*

Greetings. I was so thankful to read that dear Annemie Godbehere’s work on the Reformed Baptismal Form has been published. She was working on it during the two years or so when I corresponded with her prior to her going to glory.

Also, may I express my thanks for Rev. Michael De Vries’ meditation on “Sowing and Reaping” [Oct. 1, 2017]. Like the rest of your pastoral articles, it is both sobering and timely. It was good, too, to see Martyn McGeown’s report of the vindication of the Bristol street preachers. I spent several years in the 1980s preaching in England’s city squares and cathedral precincts, and was often challenged and told to move on by the police. But the Lord converted one university student, even though we had been moved to another site, and silenced other objectors. Clearly, our sovereign God is not to be outdone by mere outraged enemies of the gospel.

And although (as J. C. Ryle used to say) we cannot expect all the Lord’s people to agree on everything until we reach heaven, it is gratifying to see that we in the Reformed constituency can agree on so much, when the world lies in the Wicked One, and the potsherds of the earth are left to fight against each other. What a comfort to know that God’s elect are safe now, and shall be safe forever.

With kindest regards,

Rev. Dr. John M. Brentnall
(retired former editor of *Peace and Truth*,
the magazine of the Sovereign Grace Union)

“What God begins in us He will finish in and through us”

I appreciated Rev. Ron VanOverloop’s article in the August 2017 *Standard Bearer* entitled “What God Begins Shall Be Fully Done,” but was disappointed by his last two sentences, where I believe he does not represent the Canons of Dordt as accurately as he could, and consequently departs from the proper thrust of the rest of his article, where he stresses that all aspects of our salvation are of God from beginning to end. In his last two sentences, when referencing Canons, V, 12 and 13, he fails to reference and expound a vital part of Article 12, the words “consideration of” when referencing our confidence, when he paraphrases the Canons by writing, “This confidence is an incentive to be serious and constantly striving to practice gratitude and good works. This confidence makes one more careful to continue in the ways of the Lord, *so that* (emphasis mine, CCD) we experience His gracious countenance....”

The Canons do not reference the benefit of confidence itself as an incentive, but rather the “consideration of” that benefit (and its associated benefits that are listed). The words “consideration of” are vital because such consideration directs our attention away from any possible mistaken notion of the worthiness of our good works. This humble consideration is then not used by the Spirit as an incentive to do good works *so that* we obtain the experience, but as an incentive to live humbly by faith lives of thankfulness to God for bestowing those benefits and that experience in His mercy and by His grace in and through us unworthy sinners.

According to the measure of mercy God displays and grace He gives in His sovereign good pleasure, the Spirit also uses this humble consideration to provoke us to more “fervent prayers” to solicit yet more mercy and grace needed to express more thanks and to seek His glory yet more by doing yet more good works.

Charles C. Doezeema
Member of Hope PRC, Walker, MI

Response:

Dear Brother Doezeema,

I am glad that you are willing to write because you believe that you found something that was in error. However, I am convinced, brother, that you are seeing things that are not there.

First, let me summarize what you see to be in error.

You declare that the last two sentences in the meditation on Philippians 1:6 are a departure from the emphasis that all of salvation is of God implying, in your mind, that the last two sentences ascribe something of salvation to man. You believe that the failure to reference and expound the words “consideration of” (in Canons, V, 12) leads to the possible danger of attributing worthiness to our good works. Further, you believe these two sentences made the “incentive to do good works” to be the way to “obtain the experience of assurance.”

I acknowledge that I could always say something in a better way. However, I cannot see how the last two sentences of the meditation even imply that salvation is not completely of God and how they even hint at the worthiness of our good works. I consciously used the beautiful language of the Canons of Dordt. In the first of these two sentences I borrowed from the language of Canons, V, 12, and in the second sentence that of Canons V, 13. Also, I fail to see any difference between “this confidence” and “the consideration of this benefit,” for both serve as incentive to the practice of gratitude and good works.

I believe that you are putting meaning into the words that I did not mean and that I did not say. I say, as the

Canons do, that the assurance of our perseverance “is an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works.” This does not even imply the worthiness of the good works. That you see this makes me wonder if you are working from the assumption that any talk about doing good works or any admonition to do good works takes something away from salvation being all of God and implies the thinking that our good works have worthiness.

Also, brother, do you realize that you added something? You perceive that the confidence of preservation and perseverance is an incentive to do good works *so that* we obtain the experience. Not at all. Rather, I wrote what is my conviction, namely, that the experience of assurance and the confidence of God’s preservation and our perseverance (Canons V, 9) is the incentive. The assurance and confidence of our perseverance is not the way we obtain the experience. It is my conviction that the “confidence of persevering” renders those recovering from backsliding

much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord, which He hath ordained, *that* (emphasis added) they who walk therein may maintain an assurance of persevering, lest by abusing His fatherly kindness, God should turn away His gracious countenance from them, to behold which is to the godly dearer than life, the withdrawing whereof is more bitter than death (Canons, V, 13).

Homer C. Hoeksema writes the following about this part of Canons, V, 12:

Hence, the article sums up the whole matter in the words: “so that the consideration of this benefit is an incentive to serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works.” As we said in our correction of the translation, this is not simply a matter of moral obligation, of what the consideration of this benefit *ought* to do. But it is a matter of fact. It *is* an incentive. This doctrine, therefore, is not harmful to a life of gratitude; on the contrary, it fosters gratitude and good works. This spontaneous response of the Christian who has this hope in him is that it becomes his earnest purpose and striving to show thankfulness to God, Who has done such great things for him and in him, and to walk in all good works (*The Voice of Our Fathers*, 2nd edition [RFP, 2013], 737).

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Ronald VanOverloop



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland.

The White-Qadhi dialogue

The dialogue itself

Readers of the *Standard Bearer* are perhaps familiar with Dr. James White, director of Alpha and Omega Ministries in Phoenix, Arizona. White is famous as a Christian apologist, having debated atheists, Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims around the world. Some of his debates with Muslims, held in Mosques in England, South Africa, and other places, include titles such as "Trinity and Tawhid" (Yusuf Bux), "Is the Qur'an the Word of God?" (Muhammad Musri), "Did Jesus and Mohammed Preach the Same Thing?" (Adnan Rashid), "Is the New Testament We Possess Today Inspired?" (Shabir Ally), "Is the Qur'an a Reliable Record of the Teaching of Mohammed?" (Yusuf Ismail), "Crucifixion or Crucifiction?" (Ahmed Deedat), and "Could God Become a Man?" (Abdullah Kunde).¹

White considers himself a student of Islam, not because he wants to convert to Islam—he certainly does not—but because he desires *accurately to represent* his opponent in debate, which is a worthy and laudable goal. Christian honesty demands that we "falsify [no] man's words" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 112). To that end, White has learned Arabic in order to understand the Qur'an in its original language and he has sought out the best in Muslim scholarship. Again, such commitment to understanding one's neighbor's religion *so that one can witness to him effectively* is admirable. His quest brought him into contact with Dr. Yasir Qadhi.

Dr. Qadhi is the resident scholar at the Memphis Islamic Center in Memphis, Tennessee. He is an expert on the *hadith* (plural: *ahadith*), the sayings of Mohammed, an authoritative Islamic source alongside, although not equal to, the Qur'an in the Islamic religion. Having corresponded for years, the two men finally met in January 2017 in Memphis.

Although White is an accomplished debater, the meeting was *not* a debate, but a dialogue held on two consecutive evenings, advertised as "Christians and

Muslims: Agreements and Differences." It could be designated as "inter-faith dialogue," although I prefer to avoid the term because it conjures up ideas of ecumenical and even syncretistic compromise, which the event certainly was *not*, although it has been criticized as such in the intervening months. Both Dr. White and Dr. Qadhi entered the "dialogue" committed to their respective beliefs, but seeking, with their respective communities, to *understand one another*.

The reason that I specifically sought out [Dr. Qadhi] is that I sense in him a kindred spirit on the other side of the chasm that divides us as regards our theology and our beliefs. He is a consistent Muslim. He believes what he says. He wants to seek for consistency amongst his people and in his own practice. And so when you have two believing people, one Christian and one Muslim, come together and say, we need to discuss not only what divides us, but also where do we have similarities? How can we live in the same community? ... As a Christian I want you not to have fear of the Muslim people, but to have *love* for the Muslim people.... We are not seeking this evening to sweep our differences under the rug and say that they don't matter.... How do we get along? How do our communities talk to one another? The sad fact of the matter is that those conversations simply are not happening.... There won't be any compromise because we both believe very firmly in what we believe and what we profess, but how in light of that do we *get along* (JW1, 1-5)?²

You will notice from White's opening statement that the purpose of the discussion is *not* how to worship together (that is impossible), but how to be *good neighbors*

¹ These and many other debates can be found on the YouTube channel of Alpha and Omega Ministries, <https://www.youtube.com>.

² The two videos can be found on the YouTube channel of Memphis Islamic Center: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=updt-j99Fp80> (Christian Muslim Dialogue Part 1) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2tPHLOej1w> (Christian Muslim Dialogue Part 2). In quoting from the two videos, I use the following key: JW (James White), YQ (Yasir Qadhi), 1 (first video), 2 (second video), with the number referring to the approximate time in the video. Thus, JW1, 1-5 means, "James White, first video, 1-5 minutes" and YQ2, 9 means, "Yasir Qadhi, second video, 9 minutes."

with respect to one another, and how to understand one another. Qadhi echoes White's sentiment:

Our commitments are not going to be watered down, but that doesn't mean that we can't get along...and have genuine love and care and concern together as peaceful neighbours.... We desire to remove fear, distrust, hatred, and suspicion (YQ1, 6-9).

We have some serious theological differences, but...we are commanded to treat everyone with love, kindness, compassion, and mercy (YQ1, 61).

In the second video, when he introduces White to the Muslims gathered in the Memphis Islamic Center, Qadhi explains his motivations:

[I sense in White] a brother in a faithfulness that is very similar to mine—it is *not the same faith*, but I do not question his integrity, I do not doubt his commitment, and I do not challenge his sincerity. And I know he feels the same way about me (YQ2, 9).

Rather than come together for debating, which has its place...why not introduce one another to our respective communities and show that, you know what, we can fundamentally disagree *without hating one another* (YQ2, 10-11)?

At the end of the second video, White laments:

Many of my people [Christians] *fear* you [Muslims] when we are commanded to *love* you (JW2, 50).

I can disagree with you openly and firmly, but as long as I have demonstrated to you that I want to know you by accurately representing you, you folks [Muslims] are the best people in the world (JW2, 51).

What White and Qadhi did, therefore, was to begin to tear down the walls of suspicion that have been erected between Christians and Muslims with the result that they cannot even talk to one another about their respective beliefs. If the Christian harbors suspicion against his Muslim neighbor that he (supposedly like all Muslims) is an ISIS-sympathizer who is simply biding his time before he kills him, how can there be any meaningful dialogue? If the Muslim thinks that his Christian neighbor worships three gods and has committed the unpardonable sin of *shirk* (*shirk* is the sin in Islam of associating creatures with Allah), how can they get along as neighbors? How can doors be opened to present the gospel to Muslims?

We may add here that one does not present the gospel to Muslims—or to anyone else—by ranting at them or even insulting them with inflammatory rhetoric with respect to their deeply held religious beliefs. One witnesses by explaining carefully and respectfully who Jesus is

and what salvation is, while contrasting the gospel with the errors of Islam.

Indeed, part way through the first video White and Qadhi express the conviction that the other is *not* on the path to salvation, so far are they from considering one another fellow believers *in the same God*.

I pray for Yasir Qadhi. If I am praying for Yasir Qadhi, I am not changing God's heart, but he is changing my heart. He is making me into the kind of person who is going to be concerned about your welfare, concerned about your health, concerned about your safety, concerned about your family. He's changing me (JW1, 88-89).

On the first evening (held in Grace Bible Church, Olive Branch, Memphis), Qadhi was able to explain the Five Pillars of Islam, the sources of Islamic doctrine (the Qur'an and the *ahadith*), the Islamic understanding of Jesus (as a prophet of Islam, virgin-born, but not crucified or resurrected), the Islamic view of salvation, and why he disagrees with ISIS. In fact, Qadhi has received death threats because of his condemnation of ISIS (YQ1, 58-59). His explanation and contextualization of some of the Jihadist texts in the Qur'an, for example, is interesting and merits further study. With respect to Surah 9, for example, Qadhi contends that the non-Muslims were given four months to vacate Mecca, during which time they would be given safe passage, before they would be subject to execution: "this verse does not provide a *carte blanche* to kill all infidels" (YQ1, 73). Incidentally, White argues elsewhere that the Islamic sources (Qur'an, *ahadith*, etc.) are not consistent, but if we are permitted to contextualize the slaughter of the Canaanites in the Bible, are Muslim scholars not permitted to contextualize their texts in the Qur'an?

On the second evening (held in Memphis Islamic Center), White was privileged to present important Christian concepts to a Muslim audience: the Trinity, the death of Jesus Christ, the justice and mercy of God, original sin, justification, and the differences between different branches of Christianity (Protestants and Roman Catholics, and so on). These opportunities would simply not have occurred had White not shown the Muslim people love and respect.

The Christian fallout

Sadly, since the events in Memphis have become more widely known, White has received heavy criticism from Christians. The event has been misrepresented; White has been attacked as a compromiser and a "useful idiot" for Islam; and he has had to devote considerable time and effort to defending his actions. Some have objected to the promotional banner's use of the word "fellowship":

“stay with us afterwards for a time of hospitality and fellowship.” While “fellowship” was an unfortunate choice of words, the context (which determines the meaning) is clearly a reference to conversation over refreshments: throughout the two evenings White and Qadhi rejected the notion of *spiritual fellowship*. Others have objected to the idea of co-belligerency with Muslims, which is a legitimate concern: I personally do not believe that Christians and Muslims should cooperate in culture wars over the sanctity of marriage, abortion, and other issues, but since that was not the main point of the evening, it is a stretch to accuse White of establishing an “unequal yoke” with Qadhi. Still others do not like White’s use of “believing Muslim.” But, clearly, White means that Qadhi sincerely believes in Islam, not that he is a believer in the biblical sense! Others are aghast that White should give a platform to a Muslim to speak in a Christian church. However, this was not a worship service or Bible study, and no one was sneaking a heretic into the church to deceive the sheep: everyone knew that Qadhi is a Muslim! Still others are politically motivated—it suits them to have Christians and Muslims live in mutual suspicion.

We have to ask ourselves—what do we think about the Muslim people? Do we fear them; do we resent them; or do we view them with disgust and hatred? If we do, we have precisely the kind of attitude toward

Muslims that the Jews had toward the Samaritans and Gentiles in the New Testament, an attitude that Jesus condemns.

We must get beyond our political objections to the mass immigration that has brought so many Muslims into Europe and America—and we *can* have legitimate concerns about that. We must love our Muslim neighbor, whether or not we agree with the policy that brought him here. Our neighbor is the person whom God has placed on our pathway, *regardless of how he came to be on our pathway*. When God puts the neighbor before us, he says, “Love *this* neighbor—love him by respecting him and by seeking his welfare.” Love him, even if he is a Muslim. We cannot do that if we label all Muslims filthy dogs, for example, or share unflattering memes about Muslims on social media: “[I must not] dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my [Muslim—MMcG] neighbor... [I must] show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness toward him” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 105, 107).

If the blasphemous and injurious persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, could be saved (I Tim. 1:12-16), is it not possible that some of our Muslim neighbors belong to the election of grace? Shall we not, like White, seek to become all things to all men—without compromising the truth of the gospel—that we might win some (I Cor. 9:19-22)?



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The blessing of wisdom

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2016, p. 105.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-5

“Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed” (Eccl. 8:1).

The conclusion reached in the preceding chapter is that wisdom, which is of God, true spiritual wisdom and understanding, is a rare gift of God in a fallen world. Fallen man walks after his own carnal wisdom, which is the folly of sin. The problem is “...God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29).

To this must be added that God’s wisdom transcends

man’s understanding, even the understanding of those that fear Him, so that as Solomon sought out wisdom and understanding, he was compelled to say, “That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?” (Eccl. 7:24).

The way of wisdom for man is to seek it first of all in God’s Word: God’s revelation of Himself, His will, and His law teach wisdom. The wise man is instructed of God therein. The path of wisdom leads one who fears God away from himself and his own imagination to submission in humility before God. In that walk in the Word and will of God is to be found God’s blessing. This leads Solomon to a certain admonition or coun-

sel to keep that Word of God with reverence, for God maintains His Word in His sovereignty and judgment.

He approaches this admonition by way of a rhetorical question: “Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?” Solomon declares repeatedly in the book of Proverbs that wisdom is the principal thing to be sought after, to be desired more than gold, and that it is the gift of God. To have this gift is to be a wise man who “knows the interpretation of a thing,” that is, discerns and understands the meaning of things.

The blessing of wisdom is twofold. First of all, “a man’s wisdom makes his face to shine.” The shining of God’s face is a figure of His turning in favor upon us, rooted in His grace and love. Here the figure is, in a sense, a reflection of God’s favor, in the face of a man who has wisdom and understanding within by God’s grace. It gives him an inner peace and joy reflected in his face. The face of the wise man reflects that joy and peace, and manifests it in a peaceable spirit.

Secondly, the effect is that the boldness, that is, fierceness and hardness of his face is changed. Wisdom works a humbling of pride, yielding a gentle spirit. A sanctifying grace of God, it breaks the power of a sinful human nature that is hard and self-willed. It works a change that bears the fruit of meekness, humility, and submission. It leads away from sin into a pathway that lives out of having peace with God.

The way of wisdom is the way of faith in the fear of God that takes heed to His Word. “I counsel thee to keep the king’s commandment and that in regard of the oath of God” (Eccl. 8:2). This verse and the following section have been variously understood. It is possible to understand it, as some do, as referring to the fifth commandment to honor the king as an earthly magistrate. This does not well fit the immediate context nor the full language of the text that follows. It is better to understand the text and what follows as being preeminently of God as *the* King, in His Word, sovereign majesty, and judgment. The thought parallels Ecclesiastes 5, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God...for God is in heaven, and thou on earth...” (Eccl. 5:1, 2).

The admonition or counsel (the words “counsel thee” are added) is to keep the commandment; literally, the mouth of the king, that is the word that proceeds out of His mouth: His will and judgment, and hence commandment. To keep that word, when it is God’s Word, is to hold it by faith in the heart, to regard it with respect, and to walk in obedience to it. He adds “in regard of the oath of God,” or even, in the matter of the oath of God. This expression is difficult, as it may refer to what God has sworn or to what man has sworn before God. The latter is perhaps the starting point. For Solomon has spoken in

Ecclesiastes 5 of one who is rash with his mouth and hasty in heart to speak a vow in the presence of God, and then seeks a way to annul it (Eccl. 5:2-6).

In his prayer at the dedication of the temple and the bringing of the ark into it as the emblem of God’s throne, Solomon prayed, “If any man trespass against his neighbor, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: then hear thou in heaven, and do and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness” (I Kings 8:31, 32). It is that prayer that God declares to Solomon He has heard, appearing to him the second time (I Kings 9:1-9).

While the house of David, as God’s anointed kings, must judge the people in righteousness in harmony with such an oath, it is God’s judgment that is on the foreground in Solomon’s prayer. If the text is to be understood of an earthly king, then it is to be limited to the throne of David, the messianic throne, God’s visible representative as king, in Solomon as type and Christ in its fulfillment. God speaks His Word and maintains it. He judges among men, including our words and works. Entering His presence, we enter the place of the judgment of the king, also with our oaths and vows. He holds them. He who keeps the Word of God in his heart and walks in obedience, regards his or her oaths or vows in the light of the majesty and righteousness of the king before whom we speak.

Thus the admonition follows: “Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of the king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doeth thou?” (Eccl. 8:3, 4). Ultimately, it is in the sight or presence of God that we stand. Into that presence of God we consciously come in prayer, in worship, and in all our spiritual activities. Before that presence a child of God would come in the Old Testament when he entered the temple to pray (Eccl. 5:1), and when he entered the throne room of God’s anointed king. Careless irreverence before the majesty of the king had no place there then, nor does it now before God in Christ in heaven. God’s throne is a throne of righteous judgment.

“Stand not in an evil thing....” Before that holy throne sin, especially unrepentant sin, has no place. Yet such is the pride and folly of sin that, just as in the case of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable, or as Cain and his sacrifice, men enter God’s presence in the arrogance of sin and rebelliously stand before him. “Stand not in an evil thing,” is therefore the warning. For the king is KING and His will prevails. That will of the holy King of heaven and earth is a holy and sovereign will. He declares, “My

counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Is. 46:10, see also Eph. 1:11).

While an earthly king may manifest a measure of sovereignty as a tyrant, God’s sovereign kingship is absolutely holy in power and judgment. Where His Word is, there is also indeed the power to perform His will, to bless and to curse in judgment and to carry out that blessing and curse in judgment. Of God above all, none may say “what doest thou?” He is truly God and we are but creatures of the dust, and by nature inventors of evil things.

But that means also that God carries out His judgment in time in His providence according to His own counsel, will, and purpose that are often hidden from us. Judgment may seem delayed in time. This is part of the concern with which Solomon struggles in the rest of the chapter. But he lays here the foundation, in calling us to submission before the king, to a patient waiting upon His will and in wisdom to rest in His Word, which He will surely perform, for His Word never returns unto Him void.

Thus he arrives at the blessedness of wisdom in the

fear of God. “Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing; and a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment” (Eccl. 8:5). The words rendered “feel” and “discerneth” in the verse are the same word in the original Hebrew. The word means to know something by experience and, thus, to be able to discern something with a certain measure of understanding. Keeping the commandments of God guards one from sin and evil, and while trouble and trials do come in God’s sovereign providence, yet He makes all things work together for good to them that love Him (Rom 8:28). Submitting himself to God’s will, in wisdom, a wise man knows God as a righteous Judge who will, according to His own time and purpose, render just judgment. He will deliver the righteous and judge the wicked. Such understanding works a patient waiting upon the will of God in trial and affliction, giving peace to mind and heart.

Let us then seek earnestly for this blessing of wisdom at the mouth of the King, Whose word is pure and whose testimonies restore the soul.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Cover

Although rather plain, the word ‘cover’ communicates a rich variety of meaning. Its basic idea is simply to hide or conceal. But depending on the type, purpose, object, or means of concealment, ‘cover’ can mean to hide temporarily (mask) or hide permanently (obliterate); to hide from sight, hearing, knowledge, creditors, enemies, or memory; and so can be in order to clothe, adorn, beautify, smother, destroy, shield, guard, protect, and even pay.

With regard to God, His glory covers the heavens (Hab. 3:3). He covers Himself with light as with a garment (Ps. 104:2). He covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth (Ps. 147:8). He covers the pastures with flocks and the valleys with corn (Ps. 65:13). He shall fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).

In judgment, God covered the mountains under the whole heaven with the great flood (Gen. 7:19). With frogs and locusts, He covered the whole land of Egypt (Ex. 8:6; 10:15). With the Red Sea, He covered all the chariots, horsemen, hosts, and Pharaoh of Egypt (Ex. 14:28). The entire camp of murmuring Israel He covered with quail (Ex.

16:13). Sinners He covers with anger and shame (Lam. 3:43; Obad. 1:10). The living He covers with the shadow of death (Ps. 44:19). The dead He covers with worms (Job 21:26).

The ungodly cover their hatred with deceit, cover their mouth with violence, and cover their violence with a garment (Prov. 10:11; 26:26; Mal. 2:16). But in life, the Lord covers them with shame, reproach, and dishonor (Ps. 71:13; 89:45). And in death, He covers their name with darkness (Eccl. 6:4). In the day of judgment, they shall say to the hills, “Cover us” (Hos. 10:8; Luke 23:30). But in that day, even the earth shall no more cover her slain, everything covered shall be revealed and everything hid shall be made known (Is. 26:21; Luke. 12:2).

With regard to us, the Lord covers us even in our mother’s womb (Ps. 139:13). He covers us in the shadow of His hand and says, “Thou art my people” (Is. 51:16). He covers us with robes of righteousness as a bridegroom adorns himself with ornaments and a bride with her jewels (Is. 61:10). He covers our head in the day of battle (Ps. 140:7). He covers us with His feathers so that under His wings we trust (Ps. 91:4).

Most blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven; whose sins the Lord covers (Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:7). He that covers his own sins shall not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13). Mercy through Christ our Mediator. With His innocence and perfect holiness, He covers in the sight of God our sins wherein we are conceived and brought forth, and covers all our remaining infirmities as well (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 36, 81). Faith relies and rests upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. And this is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, giving us confidence in approaching God without fear, terror, and dread, and without following the example of our first father, Adam, who trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig leaves (Belgic Confession, Art. 23). And in the day of His coming, Christ will

destroy the covering cast over all peoples and nations, for He will swallow up death in victory (Is. 25:8).

Long ago, the Lord promised that although darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people, “He shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee” (Is. 60:2). We, upon whom this light of God’s love has now shined, cannot and may not cover it up with a bushel (Luke 8:16). So when shamed (insulted), the wise man will cover it, while the fool is quickly angry (Prov. 12:16). When told the transgression of others, the man who loves God’s church will cover it, while the schismatic repeats it (Prov. 17:9). And although we must be sober and watchful in prayer for the end of all things is at hand, we are told that above all things, we must have fervent love among ourselves, for love covers the multitude of sins (I Pet. 4:8-9).



Taking heed to the doctrine

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

The kingdom of God (5): The restitution of all things

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2017, p. 274.

We have been considering an erroneous view of God’s kingdom that is being taught by some of the professors at Calvin College, Dordt College, and some others. These colleges describe themselves as institutions designed to train students to be “agents of renewal in the world,”¹ and exhort us to join them in an effort to improve “the world.” To assure us that we are called to do this and that our efforts will not be in vain, they point us to God’s promise to renew all things.

Yet the renewal of which the Scriptures speak is quite different from the “renewal” these instructors seek. Although they frequently speak of the renewal of “the creation,” they have their eye on human society outside the church. This society, they maintain, can be morally improved, and Christians, they say, are to be working with this world toward this goal.

Over against this view the previous articles in this series have set forth the following:

1. God’s kingdom is the church. The citizens in God’s kingdom are the same as the members of the church. To be outside the church is to be outside God’s kingdom.
2. When Scripture speaks of Christ as “the King of all the earth,” that does not mean that unbelievers are citizens of His kingdom. Rather, it means that Christ’s kingdom consists of the elect gathered out of all the nations of the world.
3. Christ does indeed rule outside the church, but there He rules with a rod of iron, dashing His enemies to pieces.
4. Passages that speak of God uniting in Christ “all things in heaven and earth” are not calling the church to unite with the world, keeping our minds focused on *earthly* things. Rather, they are referring to the fact that believers on earth are united with those in heaven. Together with those in glory we have our minds and hearts set on *heavenly* things, not *earthly* things.
5. To be renewed is to be freed from corruption and

¹ From Calvin College’s webpage that summarizes “who we are,” <https://calvin.edu/about/who-we-are/>, accessed September 19, 2017.

conformed to Christ. The church in Christ is the only renewed human community that there will ever be.

It is the church and not this world that is being renewed. To be renewed, after all, is to be saved. If those outside the church are being renewed, that would imply that even those outside of Christ are being saved. Not surprisingly, some who hold to this erroneous view of the kingdom use God's promise concerning "the restitution of all things" to teach precisely that: the doctrine of universal salvation.

Universal salvation?

Soon after Christ ascended into heaven the apostle Peter spoke of how Christ would one day return and restore all things:

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:20-21).

Peter is speaking here of the day of Christ's return, when all things will be made new. At that time the wicked will be forever cut off from the earth, the believers will be completely freed from sin, and the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption. Yet some say that the "all things" spoken of here may include those who die unconverted, and perhaps even the demons.

This is the position of three Calvin College professors who together wrote *An Introduction to Christian Theology*. In this book they speak enthusiastically of those who have held to such a view:

Whatever the form, this universalistic hope has been a minority but persistent voice in the history of Christian theology, embraced by a litany of notable theologians. Its first major advocate was Origen, who tentatively proposed the possibility of an *apokatastasis*, a final restoration of all things (cf. Acts 3:21), including even the devil. Origen was followed in this inclination by both Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, among others, as the notion of universal reconciliation found greater play in Eastern Orthodoxy. Represented by the Anabaptists and pietists in the West, this universalistic strain was renewed by Schleiermacher, and even seems to be an implication of the theology of Karl Barth. Whether liberal, neo-orthodox, or otherwise, one can find many hopeful advocates of *apokatastasis* in contemporary theology.²

Having spoken positively of those who have held to this "universalistic hope," the authors encourage us to do the same:

But as regards the *scope* of salvation, which extends to all of creation, including in principle both Christians and non-Christians, we lean in an inclusivist direction. Such a universal scope currently remains a matter of Christian hope.... But since universal salvation remains a *possibility*, it is something we can *hope* for....³

Such is where this erroneous view of the kingdom leads.

This quote also serves to point out that there are those who use the phrase "all creation" to mean "Christians and non-Christians." It sounds better to speak of God saving "the creation," and so they prefer to use that phrase. Only occasionally, as in the quote above, do they make known that they entertain the notion that those who die unconverted and even the devil may be included in that "creation."

It is forbidden and indeed impossible for us to hope for what God has told us is not His will. Desiring the repentance and salvation of a wayward child who is still alive is far different from hoping that even those who die unconverted will be saved. We must reject the latter idea. In fact, we must preach that such will not be the case.

In Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that the unconverted will not be saved:

Q. 87. Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?

A. By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolator, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

The "all things" that will be restored

God does not leave us in doubt about what is included in the "all things" that shall be restored. Repeatedly He has told us that only those who believe in Christ will receive everlasting life. Those who reject Christ and despise His kingdom will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). The earth itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21), and there will be both animals and plants with us when we dwell in the new earth (Is. 11:6-7); but the ungodly will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

We sing of this in the Psalms. We speak of God's tender mercies being over all His works, and then we confess that the unbelievers will be excluded:

2 Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 409-410. The term *apokatastasis* is a transliteration of a form of the Greek word translated "restitution" in Acts 3:21.

3 *Christian Theology*, 372, 410. The emphasis is in the original.

The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works (Ps. 145:9).

The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy (Ps. 145:20).

In other words, the ungodly who reject Christ are excluded from “all his works.”

What will happen when Christ returns was illustrated by what happened when God sent the great Flood.

Righteous Noah, his house, and the animals with him were preserved. So was the earth itself and the plants. But the ungodly perished. As it happened then, so will it happen again. Trusting in Christ just as our father Noah did, we patiently wait and look forward to our Lord’s coming, comforted in knowing that we are safe in the Messiah with whom God has established His everlasting covenant.



Ministering to the saints

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Psalter revision: Governing principles (5) music

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2017, p. 473.

I am explaining why the interdenominational Psalter revision committee proposes changing some of the music of the Psalter. In our previous article, we noted the two main reasons. One was that the tunes must serve the lyrics; certain tunes are more appropriate for the lyrics than others. Another was that the tunes must serve the congregation by enabling her to sing the lyrics well. A tune that the congregation cannot sing well, even if set to beautiful lyrics, does not serve well. The revision committee is evaluating the music (tunes) of the Psalter with these points in mind.

At the very end of that last article, I gave a third reason for proposing changes to some of the music of the Psalter. That third reason was that some Psalter numbers are rarely sung, begging the question whether a change of music would serve the congregations well. In this article, I will give support for this third reason.

Data gathered

Before the committee delved in earnest into the work of Psalter revision, Mr. Josh Hoekstra compiled data regarding how often individual Psalter numbers are sung in our churches.

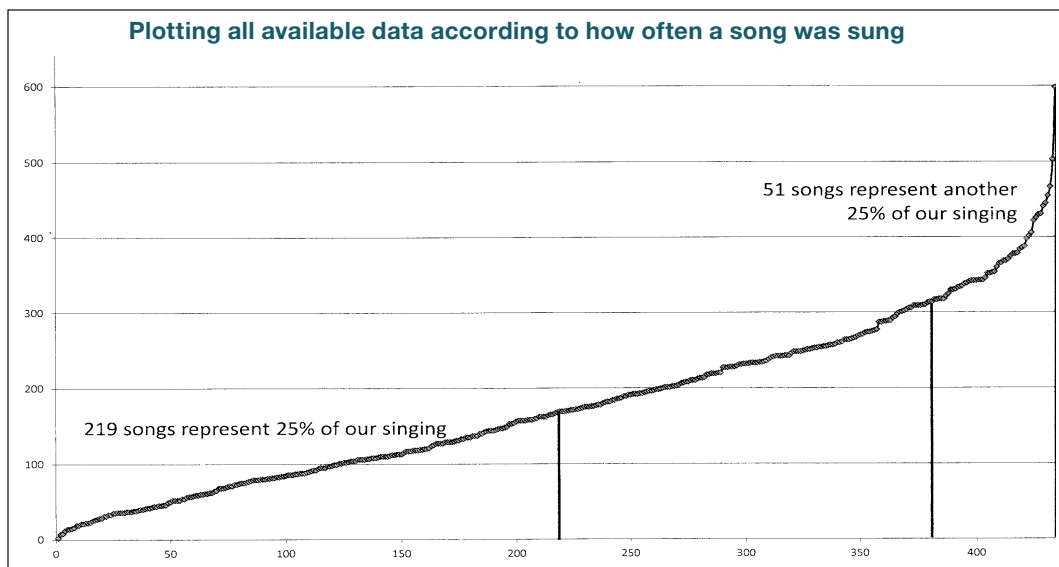
With one exception (data gathered from the Grand Rapids Heritage Reformed Congregation [HRC], covering the years 2008-2015), the data is exclusively from the PRC. This means that the version of the Psalter from which this data is collected is the PRC version, which ends with Psalter number 434, so Psalters 435-450 are not included in it. By using this data, the committee

makes an assumption—a reasonable assumption, even though without conclusive proof—that the frequency with which the HRC and Free Reformed Churches (FRC) sing any particular number is roughly the same as that with which the PRC sings it.

This data is a *broad* sample of the PRC’s use of the Psalter. For one thing, it includes every Psalter number sung in every church in the PRC in 2015. For another, it includes a sampling of data from individual PRCs over a longer period of time: Byron Center PRC from 1984-1994, Hudsonville PRC from 1994-2003 and 2012-2014, and other PRCs from 2006-2015, whose bulletins were publicly available.

This data contains 77,189 “data points.” One “data point” refers to one Psalter number being sung one time by one congregation. If one congregation sang four Psalter numbers at a worship service, and had 110 worship services a year, it would produce 440 data points a year. So 77,189 data points could be gathered from 175 congregations over the course of a year, or from 30 congregations over the course of almost six years. I reiterate: this is a *broad* sample.

To ensure the accuracy of this sample and its usefulness for our purposes, the data does not include the doxologies that the various congregations sing at each service. This omission of the doxologies explains one curiosity. According to the data, Psalter numbers 196 and 197 make up 9 data points—that is, were sung a total of 9 times out of 77,189. In reality, they were sung over 1500 times in 2015 alone. But the data is not



skewed by songs that are sung at every worship service.

I lack the space to present the complete data, and desire not to bore my readers with statistics. Rather, I cull from the data the points that I think are important.

Frequently and infrequently sung Psalter numbers

The data demonstrates that certain Psalter numbers are sung more frequently than others. Even if no data were collected, this point is obvious; you can be glad we did not spend millions of dollars to conduct this study!

The helpfulness of the data is that it identifies *which* numbers are sung more frequently, and *which* are seldom sung. I will present the top 22 Psalter numbers in each category. I picked the number 22, because it is 5% of 434, so represents 5% of our Psalter.

The 22 Psalter numbers that we sing most frequently make up 9,232 of the 77,189 data points. To restate: 5% of the Psalter accounts for 12% of the songs collected in this data. In order from most frequently sung to least (top down), these top 22 Psalter numbers are 83, 140, 381, 203, 71, 51, 403, 134, 241, 278, 360, 69, 426, 368, 29, 408, 27, 187, 349, 163, 251, and 217.

The 22 least frequently sung numbers, in order from least to most frequently sung (bottom up), are 167, 414, 410, 432, 433, 148, 19, 178, 219, 361, 93, 105, 412, 180, 155, 46, 119, 122, 118, 314, 189, and 296. Together, this 5% of our Psalter was sung 488 times—about .63%.

That 5% of our Psalter makes up 12% of our singing, while another 5% makes up less than 1%, begs the question: *why*? The answer does not come readily. One number might be picked often because it is the minister's or congregation's favorite. Or, perhaps a minister was preaching a sermon series that led him to pick certain numbers rather than others. Some numbers might be picked seldom because the minister does not like the tunes, or the congregation does not know them. But

no *one* answer explains why particular Psalter numbers are sung frequently or infrequently.

Because no *one* answer can be given, the committee is not necessarily proposing a change to every tune of those numbers that are rarely sung. But the committee is ready to ask the question: does the congregation not sing the number because the tune is not singable? Or does the tune not serve the lyrics well? Can some improvement be made?

Frequently sung psalms

The data also indicates which *psalms* are frequently and infrequently sung.

Following is a list of the 20 most frequently sung psalms, with four more pieces of information: the number of times they have been sung in our data sample, the number of Psalter numbers based on that psalm, the percentage of the 77,189 data points that they represent, and the percentage of Psalter numbers based on that psalm. After presenting the data, I will help you understand it.

Psalms	# times sung	# Psalter numbers	% data points	% Psalter numbers
119	4,329	23	5.75	5.3
103	1,742	8	2.26	1.84
51	1,595	5	2.07	1.15
25	1,529	10	1.98	2.30
22	1,484	5	1.92	1.15
116	1,208	5	1.56	1.15
16	1,161	4	1.50	0.92
40	1,135	5	1.47	1.15
145	1,134	6	1.47	38
73	1,117	4	1.45	0.92
84	1,111	6	1.44	1.38
65	1,104	8	1.43	1.84
118	1,097	5	1.42	1.15
89	1,081	4	1.40	0.92
19	1,046	6	1.36	1.38
98	992	5	1.29	1.15
23	963	5	1.23	1.15
122	950	3	1.23	0.69
48	917	4	1.19	0.92
27	879	4	1.14	0.92

To evaluate this data, compare the last two columns. If the numbers in these columns are relatively close, one

could conclude that a congregation is singing from a certain psalm an average number of times, considering how often a versification of that psalm appears in the Psalter. Psalms 119, 145, 84, 19, 98, 23 are sung about as often as one could expect, considering how many selections from these Psalms are included in our Psalter.

When the number in the first of these two columns is significantly greater (“significantly” can be as little as .5 of a %) than that in the second, we have indication of a “favorite” psalm, sung more frequently than others. Psalms 103, 51, 22, 116, 16, 40, 73, 89, 122, 48, and 27 are obviously favorites; on average, they are sung more often than the number of selections in our Psalter would lead one to expect.

When the number in the first of these two columns is less than in the second, we have evidence that a partic-

ular psalm, though popular, is not overused. Psalms 25 and 65, though sung frequently, are not sung as often as one might expect, considering how many selections they have.

The data presented in this section might appear to give no warrant for reviewing the music of the Psalter. But consider this: the first 13 psalms mentioned above (following the list from Psalms 119 through 118) account for 25% of the songs we have sung. About 9% of the psalms account for about 25% of our singing! At least one reason for this would be that some of the psalms are longer, and have more versifications. Another reason is that some are favorites. Neither of these reasons are bad. But they beg the question—what about the psalms that we do not sing often? Are we singing from some psalms at the *expense* of others?

Infrequently sung psalms

This data gives warrant to review the music of the Psalter, especially in the case of those psalms which are not frequently sung. Following is a list of the 25 least frequently sung psalms.

Psalms	# times sung	# Psalter numbers	% data points	% Psalter numbers
129.....	21	1	.027	.230
74.....	32	1	.042	.230
123.....	39	1	.051	.230
114.....	43	1	.056	.230
120.....	45	1	.058	.230
60.....	46	1	.060	.230
52.....	52	1	.067	.230
10.....	61	2	.079	.460
13.....	61	1	.079	.230
58.....	61	1	.079	.230
59.....	66	1	.086	.230
57.....	71	2	.092	.460
64.....	72	1	.093	.230
6.....	78	1	.101	.230
83.....	79	1	.102	.230
54.....	82	1	.106	.230
134.....	82	1	.106	.230
28.....	87	1	.113	.230
20.....	90	2	.116	.460
53.....	103	1	.133	.230
14.....	110	1	.143	.230
131.....	117	1	.152	.230
3.....	126	2	.163	.460
109.....	129	2	.167	.460
21.....	130	2	.168	.460

One thing this data underscores is that many psalms (37 in all) have only one versification in our Psalter; an-

other 41 have only two versifications. Sometimes the second versification is a completely different rendition of the psalm (for example, Psalm 109 in Psalters 300 and 301); other times, the two Psalter numbers make one complete versification of the psalm (Psalm 57, in Psalters 154 and 155).

Also, this aspect of the data reveals that selections from these 25 psalms were sung a total of 1883 times; 17% of the psalms account for less than 3% of our singing! In fact, to give a broader statistic that is based on the data, 83 psalms (55% of the divine Psalter) account for the “bottom” 25% of the songs we sing. We sing from 67 psalms, or 45% of the divine Psalter, 75% of the time!

Why do we sing from some *psalms* less often than from others? Again, no *one* reason can be given. Some psalms are shorter—an understandable reason. But the question that must be faced is whether by singing from some psalms more than others, we are overlooking some of the experiences of the child of God in life. Are we focusing on the Christian’s *joy* more than on his *suffering*? Are we ready to sing the imprecatory psalms, which ask God to judge the wicked? (Psalms 6, 52, 58, 83, and 109, all found in the list above, are imprecatory psalms).

The questions do not have obvious answers, and neither the committee as a whole nor I individually are arguing for a certain answer. However, in evaluating the music of the Psalter, the Psalter revision committee is asking the question, To what degree does the music of the Psalter number contribute to its being seldom used? God has given us 150 psalms to use for singing in worship. As much as possible, we should sing them *all*—not that we must sing them all as frequently as the

others, but that we should make a conscious effort not to ignore any.

I present this much of the data as further explanation as to why the committee would consider changes to the music. In some instances, the proposed changes will involve adding tunes and lyrics. In other instances, it

will involve keeping the current lyrics but pairing them with different tunes.

Having explained more why we would consider changing some tunes, let us turn next time to the principles which guide the committee in evaluating them.



Strength of youth

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

“To teach them war” God’s armor for us: the girdle (17)

Previous article in this series: August 2017, p. 446.

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth....”

Ephesians 6:14a

Having heard our marching orders, “Be strong in the Lord!” (Eph. 6:10), and how to carry them out, “Put on the whole armor of God!” (Eph. 6:11), we now proceed to a treatment of our battle armor. God fashioned this armor in Jesus Christ and through His effectual command—“Put it on!”—will fit it to us.

In Ephesians 6 the inspired apostle teaches a spiritual lesson by using the illustration of a Roman soldier. Everyone knew what a soldier looked like, for Roman soldiers were stationed everywhere from Jerusalem to Rome. In the earthly soldier’s armor Paul is given to see the spiritual realities like truth, righteousness, peace, and faith needed in our spiritual warfare.

The first piece of armor is the girdle or belt. The text reads, “Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about (or, having girded yourselves) with truth.” The command would be, “Gird your loins!” And that is the first charge in equipping ourselves: “Gird your loins!” A girdle? Before all else? The way to victory is in tightening our belts? Indeed, we gird our loins with truth.

The truth

Truth! Gird your loins with *truth*! The Christian life is one of ongoing spiritual warfare, and the very first exhortation to the soldier arming himself for battle concerns *truth*. Truth is first. In everything truth is first. In battle truth is first.

How contrary this instruction of Scripture is to the pre-

vailing attitude in Christianity and Protestantism today. In almost direct contradiction of this word of the inspired apostle, the church today rejects truth and clamors for a certain spirit. Not truth. Not objective truth. Not doctrine. Not creeds. Not catechism. Not sermons. Not books. Not study. Not systematic and orderly instruction in the Bible. But this vague, warm, nebulous spirit of brotherhood and fellowship, this universal holding of hands and praying together and joining together, this feeling that if everyone in Christianity would participate in the brotherhood, start loving each other, and stop causing division over doctrinal differences, we could conquer the world of evil—*this* is the way to victory. Of course, a spirit of fellowship, brotherhood, unity and communion is absolutely vital in the church (read Eph. 4); but that has its basis in, and only in, the truth (keep reading Eph. 4).

How important truth is! Should you say to me, “I don’t want to be indoctrinated with all kinds of cold, abstract, heady theological propositions; I just want to have a relationship with and love Jesus. I just want to live for Jesus,” then I ask you, “Who is Jesus?” Is He *man*, for He slept on a boat? Is He *God*, for He calmed the storm? Is He both? How? And how can you know? Try to answer satisfactorily that fundamental question, “Who is Jesus?” without knowledge of biblical truth.

How important truth is according to the Bible! With profit you could read and study these passages in praise of truth (John 1:14; 4:24; 8:32; 14:6; 16:13; Gal. 3:1; II Thess. 2:10-12; I Tim. 2:4; III John 4). Jesus is the truth. Worship is rendered in truth. Jesus’ Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Truth liberates. Apostasy begins with no love for the truth. God wills that all kinds of men

come to know the truth. Believers love to see their children walking in truth. It is only fitting that the call to battle begins with a call to gird our loins with *truth*.

Truth is that which really is. The truth is that God is. God is God. God is great, glorious, and gracious. From eternity God determines all things for Himself and for His glory and for the salvation of His church in Jesus. The apostle gives the biggest picture of truth in Ephesians 1:9-10. "...that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." The grand truth is that God is God, and He is working to bring everything in heaven and in earth together in Jesus Christ for the praise of His name.

To understand that big picture of the truth we have to ask and answer many questions from the Scriptures. What is the Bible? Who is God? What is He like? What does He do? What is the origin of the universe and man? Who is man? What is man's natural and spiritual condition? Who is Jesus? Where is He right now? What did He do, and what is He doing? What is salvation...salvation from what...salvation unto what? What is the covenant? What is the church? Why is the church important? What is the end of all things? What will happen to this world? When will Jesus come, and what happens when He does come? What is and what will His kingdom be like? All of these questions have answers, and the answers are found in the Bible as truth. The answers are formulated with words like: inspiration, predestination, Trinity, creation, total depravity, Mediator, propitiation, atonement, regeneration, justification, communion of saints, parousia, and bodily resurrection.

Our *understanding* of truth develops over time. Although the Ephesians had the same truth we have, our understanding of it is deeper as the Spirit of truth leads us into the truth. If the truth of God is like a large city, called the city of God, then the Ephesian Christians were looking at the city from atop a high mountain. From the mountain peak they saw the whole city of truth down below. But as history in the new dispensation progresses, the church gets in a helicopter and flies down to the city to get closer and closer, seeing individual buildings and even windows, which could not be seen from the mountain. And eventually, the helicopter lands—maybe we could say that is heaven. Then the people of the church get out and walk up and down the city streets and even go into buildings. Perhaps a saint enters a jewelry store of God's heavenly riches and sees behind the counter sparkling diamonds revealing the glory of the Trinity. That saint sees something that was

always revealed, but no one could ever see it from the mountain or from the hovering helicopter or even from outside the door. So it is that by the Spirit we grow in our understanding of the truth of God and of Christ and of God's purposes in Christ.

Often our understanding is sharpened through controversies. Although Paul explained to the Ephesians election and faith, neither he nor they could articulate the doctrine of election as we can today with the first head of the Canons of Dordt written after the Arminian heresy. What a marvel that we are here today in our beloved Protestant Reformed churches in the year 2017 and with the profound understanding of the truth that God has given to us through controversies in our own history!

Truth!

The girding

Gird your loins with truth!

Having his loins girded meant the soldier was *ready*. In Paul's day, people commonly wore a long, loose-flowing robe. When it was time to run or work, a man would gather the flowing ends of his garment and bind it to his waist with his girdle or belt. For example, before fisherman Peter started working the nets and pulling in a big catch, he girded his loins so he would not be encumbered. In his first epistle (I Pet. 1:13) Peter uses that figure, saying, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind...." While the Roman soldier did not wear a robe as long as the common man, neither did he wear a neatly fitted uniform like policemen or soldiers today. He still had that outer garment that would flow and the girdle to keep it tight to his body, so that he could maneuver swiftly and freely. He was ready.

Furthermore, the sword was in a sheath attached to the belt. If the soldier's loins were not girded, his sheath was not ready. Additionally, the soldier fastened the bottom of his breastplate to the girdle. If his loins were not girded, his breastplate would be unattached at the bottom. To gird your loins was to *ready* yourself for battle.

Before anything else we are expected to have our loins girded. The girdle itself is not a weapon or protection. In fact, Ephesians 6 does not speak of a *thing*—a girdle, but of an *action*—girding. Girding is fundamental to readiness.

Girding is the spiritual activity that can be summarized in six words: Learn. Know. Believe. Love. Confess. Live. To gird your loins with truth means: Learn the truth. Know the truth. Believe the truth. Love the Truth. Confess the truth. Live the truth. The power of the Lord Jesus in which we are strong is His power to gird. Jesus was crucified for our sins of rejection

of truth, ignorance of truth, unwillingness to confess truth, and for our sin of not living the truth but living the lie of sin. He died for those sins. He was ready to do that. Then He rose again with salvation for us in the power of faith to learn, to know, to believe, to love, to confess, and to live the truth. When the soldier in church is girded, he says, “By grace in Jesus Christ, I am ready for war.”

How urgent that we have our loins girt with truth. It does not matter how sharp our sword or how impenetrable our breastplate, if we are not girded, we are not ready.

Satan hates girding. Satan hates it when you are a child and you learn your catechism; and when your parents say, “Did you learn your ‘Essentials’ (of Reformed doctrine) lesson and the assigned extra work? Let me make sure.” Satan hates it when the father actually takes time for some heartfelt explanation of the Bible at the dinner table; for if all the father does is mindlessly trudge through a column of printed text with some uninspired reading, it is unlikely the children, whether five or fifteen years in age, will learn any truth. When your father takes family worship seriously, he is going around the table tightening your girdle. Satan hates that.

What about you personally? Satan hates it when you say, “Enough looking in the mirror already, enough self-infatuation, enough staring at my phone and sharing pictures and sending texts, enough browsing this website and all these posts, enough playing this digital game; it is high time I concern myself with something of substance—the Bible, a devotional, a book.” Satan hates it when Reformed young people go to a public university or a Christian college, having learned the truth, because those students are ready for him with girded loins. Satan hates it when church members take Bible societies seriously, and even form their own Bible study with a few friends and agree to read a book together or study a topic together because they love God and His truth. Satan hates it when we get together and instead of talking about the usual, someone asks a doctrinal question that generates a lively discussion of some aspect of the truth. Satan hates it when young people go to a church to hear doctrinal preaching of the truth. Satan hates it when the youth read the *Standard Bearer* and *Acts of Synod* and actually know a little bit about what is going on in and outside of their denomination.

Satan hates girding because when we learn, know, believe, love, confess, and live the truth, we are ready for him. Woe to the youth whose loins are left ungirded or who rip off their belt and toss it aside, for they will be caught unawares by a wily enemy far superior to them. Gird us, O God of our salvation!

The standing

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” Girded, we stand in the day of evil.

When the devil comes with his spear of despair and catches you all alone in your bedroom one Friday night thinking you have no friends, you have no life, you have no future, you have no abilities, and you are a worthless human being no one would ever want to employ, befriend, or date, you won’t be ready and you might even do something very harmful unless your loins are girded with truth. Girded with truth, you stand! This truth: “God’s Word is true. Satan’s lies are false. God says He loves me. *He loves me!* He gave His beloved Son to die for my broken soul and is already conforming me to His image!”

When the devil comes to your college classroom to tempt you with vain philosophy or a cute unbeliever, how will you stand? Girded with truth, we stand! This truth: “God is glorious and sovereign, and even though I cannot put my finger on the precise error of this new teaching, I know it is incompatible with Scripture. And though all the emotions of my soul crave a relationship with this cute unbeliever, I know I cannot cleave to my God *and* an unbeliever.”

Should the devil, under various guises, appear at the meetings of the church’s broader assemblies with the goal of eradicating the doctrines of our Reformed faith, how will the church stand its ground and defend its heritage? If we do not have youth (particularly you young men!) who are reading (primarily the Bible!) so that they are theologically aware, we will not stand. In the generations to come we will fall to the odious schemes of the devil and falter when battle draws near. Gird us, Lord! Having girt us with truth, the Lord will use us as His instruments to rout Satan.

When the devil comes in great tribulation tempting us to deny Jesus Christ or suffer job-loss, imprisonment, or even martyrdom, we will stand with our loins girded with truth—the truth of eschatology and what things must shortly come to pass before heavenly glory is revealed in us.

When the devil comes in the day of great calamity and affliction, we are ready. The phone rings...your loved one is being loaded into the back of the ambulance. The doctor walks in...the tumor is cancerous. The letter came in the mail...the college or employer denied your application...or the bid for the job was not accepted and now there is no work the rest of the year. Now the devil will lure you into doubt, despair, hopelessness, anger against God, bitterness against others, or sulking silence. Ready? We are ready. We have been ready since the time we were little children and our father and mother sang the songs of Zion with us around

the table, “Jehovah is my light and my salvation near, who shall my soul affright, or cause my heart to fear.”

If all we have is a spirit of brotherhood, we have almost nothing. The ungodly wicked have that spirit. Watch them in the hospital room, at the scene of the crash, or at the cemetery. They hold hands, embrace,

and weep. But without truth they have nothing to say. “What shall we say to these things?” Nothing. They cannot stand. What a pity.

Having our loins girt about with truth we shall stand, declaring the truth, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Reports—Classis West/East

Report of Classis West

While Classis West did not officially convene until Wednesday, September 27, two noteworthy events took place the day before.

First, an officebearers’ conference was held in Hull PRC. In connection with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the conference was entitled “The Five Solas and How They Matter for the Ministry.” Rev. C. Griess spoke on “Scripture Alone,” Rev. A. Brummel on “Faith Alone,” Rev. E. Guichelaar on “Grace Alone,” Rev. R. Barnhill on “Christ Alone,” and Rev. B. Huizinga on “God’s Glory Alone.” The speeches were a great encouragement to all assembled. If you were not able to attend the conference but would like to hear the speeches, go to Covenant of Grace PRC’s page on Sermonaudio.com.

Second, on Tuesday night the delegates of Classis assembled with the congregation of Hull PRC to hear the specimen sermon of Pastor-elect Matthew DeBoer, who had accepted the call to serve as pastor of Edgerton PRC. Mr. DeBoer preached on Psalm 91:1-2 and gave evidence of his abilities to feed God’s sheep.

The following morning Classis convened to hear the oral examination of Mr. DeBoer. He was examined in the six sections of Reformed doctrine, knowledge of Scripture, knowledge of the confessions, controversy, and practica. Classis West, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies from Classis East, unanimously approved his examination and advised Edgerton PRC to ordain him to the

ministry. Edgerton did this at a special worship service on September 29.

Classis also approved the request of Lynden PRC for the emeritation of her pastor, Rev. Ronald Hanko. His emeritation will be effective on October 15, and he and his wife plan to move to Spokane, WA to be closer to their son, Neal. Classis expressed its deep appreciation to Rev. Hanko for his 38 years of faithful service in our churches and on the mission field.

In other matters, Classis advised a consistory to increase the censure on an impenitent member. Increased subsidy for one of our churches was approved. The following schedule of classical appointments for Immanuel (Lacombe) PRC was approved: November 5 and 12—Rev. Brummel; November 19 and 26—Rev. DeBoer; December 3 and 10—Rev. Griess; December 31, January 1, and January 7—Rev. Engelsma; January 21 and 28—Rev. Langerak; February 11 and 18—Rev. Key; March 4 and 11—Rev. Huizinga; March 18 and 25—Rev. Guichelaar.

With his accepting of the call to serve as professor in our seminary, Rev. Doug Kuiper tendered his resignation as Stated Clerk of Classis West, a service he has performed for almost 10 years. Rev. Joshua Engelsma was appointed to replace him.

The expenses of Classis totaled \$8,433.31. The next regular meeting of Classis is scheduled for March 7, 2018 in Loveland PRC.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk, Classis West

Report of special meeting of Classis East:

After preaching their specimen sermons and upon receiving the approval of their preaching from Classis East and the Synodical Delegates *Ad Examina* of Classis West, the Pastors-elect Joe Holstege and Justin Smidstra were examined extensively on the six loci of Reformed dogmatics, and their knowledge of the Scriptures, confessions, controversy, and practica. Both Pastors-elect gave excellent demonstrations of their knowledge and training in all these areas over roughly 5 hours of oral questioning. Upon the conclusion of

their examinations, there were unanimous decisions to approve of their examinations, to recommend that Zion PRC proceed to the ordination and installation of Joe Holstege, and likewise to recommend that 1st PRC of Holland do the same for Justin Smidstra. With much thanksgiving to God, we rejoice in His provision of these ministers of the gospel to the PRCA. Two other items that were covered were pulpit supply for 1st PRC of GR and also the appointment of Rev. W. Langerak as their moderator while they are without a pastor.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk, Classis East



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

There is currently in circulation in the PRC a blue spiral-bound book entitled “Survey of PRCA Consistories and Congregations: The Psalter.” Do you know how many songs are in it? Answer later in this column.

Mission activities

A Reformation Day Conference was held October 31 in Provident Christian Church in Marikina, the Philippines. The theme: “Reformation 500, the Anniversary” was to be expounded by speakers Revs. D. Holstege, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit.

On October 1 Rev. Richard Smit accepted the call of Doon, IA PRC to be the third missionary to the Philippines. Rev. Smit’s installation in Doon has been approved for November 26 in the morning, and he will preach his inaugural sermon in the evening, D.V. We are thankful to God for sending another man into this abundant field of labor! The Smits hope to move in late December.

Sister-church activities

A delegation of the Contact Committee of the PRCA visited the PRCP in the Philippines as well as the CERC of Singapore October 26 through November 6. The delegation of Rev. Richard Smit and elder David Kregel continued the CC’s work of establishing a sister relationship between the PRCA and PRCP and of doing church visitation with the CERC.

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore recently celebrated her 30th anniversary as a congregation. We congratulate our sister on her significant milestone and pray that she may continue to be a shining example of the Reformed faith in that far-away land.

Minister activities

A farewell supper for Rev. Ronald Hanko and his wife Nancy was held in Lynden, WA PRC on October 14 with a program following. Rev. Hanko preached his farewell sermon on Sunday, the 15th of October. May God continue to use Rev. Hanko for the good of the churches also in his retirement.

On October 22, Rev. Andy Lanning of the CERC of Singapore accepted the call from Byron Center, MI PRC to be her next pastor.

After considering calls from Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI) and Lynden (WA) PRC, Candidate Stephan Regnerus accepted the call of Lynden PRC on October 22.

As Rev. R. Smit has committed to taking up the labors in the Philippines, First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI announced

the new trio of Revs. A. Lanning, B. Huizinga (Redlands, CA), and C. Griess (Calvary, Hull, IA).

School activities

The 2017 PRTI Teacher’s Convention was held October 19 and 20 at Adams Christian School with over 200 teachers from around the country in attendance.

Congregational activities

Work has been done at the newly purchased property in Indiana by Peace PRC. Dirt work and drainage work along with seeding of new grass is accomplished. The siding on the church building has been removed and Tyvek plastic installed. The first layer of asphalt is down, with another layer anticipated in the spring. The building will have all new windows and doors and will be like new when the remodel is complete. The Bible study kick-off supper was held at the “new” church in October. Exciting times for Peace PRC!

All women of the Siouxland area churches were invited to attend the Fall Ladies League held at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA on October 24. Rev. Cory Griess spoke on “Katharina Luther: Encouragement from a Woman of the Reformation.” An offering was received for Protestant Reformed Special Education. A dessert luncheon followed the program. Women of all ages were invited to come and join together!

Evangelism activities

On October 13, the Evangelism Committee of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI sponsored a speech by their pastor, Rev. Nathan Decker, entitled: “Living Wisely in a Digital Age.” Missed the speech? You may find it on Trinity’s Sermonaudio channel.

Denominational activities

Classis East met in special session on October 18 at Georgetown PRC to examine Pastors-elect Justin Smidstra (Holland PRC) and Joseph Holstege (Zion PRC). After classical approval, installation and ordination services were held for Pastor Holstege on October 20 and Pastor Smidstra on October 24. We are thankful to God for guiding these young men to this point in their lives and ministries! May He continue to bless them as they take up their labors to His glory!

Trivia answer

There are 42 songs in the sample Psalter Revision booklet, covering Psalms 73-89 and present-day Psalter numbers 201-243. Each family in the PRCA should have one. You should be using it so that you might complete the survey form in the back of the book. Many congregations have scheduled and

News from our churches continued

are scheduling Psalm-sings so that they might become better informed about the survey sample. There are significant changes. Some of the present Psalter numbers have been removed, or have been transposed into a lower key, or have had their words fitted to new tunes. Synod has chosen to inform the congregations regarding the work of the Contact

Committee to revise the Psalter. Families and single members will return separate surveys to their consistories. Then the consistories will each complete a survey of their own based on those findings. This work is to be completed soon. More trivia next time.

Also, survey results regarding surviving original PRC members are coming in. More on that soon.

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

Announcements

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to God for their prayerful upbringing and example of faith, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **William and Anita Lenting**, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on November 24, 2017. We pray that God will continue to bless them richly in their marriage. “For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

Randy and Shelley VanDerNoord

Neal and Ashley VanBaren

Owen, Noelle

Dewey and Erin VanDerNoord

Jamie, Renee

Ross and Alexis VanDerNoord

Clark, Dale, Abigail

Frank and Rachel Hillegonds

Jack, Elizabeth, Jonathon

Greg and Jennifer Lenting

Sam, Emma, Noah, Madalyn, Lily, Luke

Brian and Amber Lenting

Carolyn, Alexis, Sydney, Zack, Savannah

James and Melissa Ophoff

Amanda, Jed, Alex

Nathan and Allyson Vis

Sophie Grace, William

Crown Point, Indiana

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 West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will hold a special meeting in Lynden, WA, on Wednesday, November 29, 2017, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Lynden PRC’s consistory.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk of Classis West

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The *Standard Bearer* digital index (Volumes 1-93) is now available for purchase. The cost is \$10.00. To order, visit www.rfpa.org.

Temporary Zion PRC parsonage

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