

The Standard Bearer

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“To Die Is Gain”

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Philippians 1:21

The Word of God before us has been and continues to be one of precious comfort to God’s people throughout the ages. For what it does is connect both life and death together in one sentence. Therefore, its scope is all-comprehensive. It addresses all our life and living, in every sphere and department; and it addresses our death as well. It speaks to us all because all we who live, young and old, unless the Lord returns in our lifetime, must die!

This verse we consider begins with the word “for.” That tells us that it is the reason for what Paul had written in verse 20. Paul says there, at the end of the verse, that he knows and is confident that Christ will be magnified in his person. The reason for that is that for Paul, to live is Christ and to die is gain.



What an astounding confession Paul makes when he says, “to die is gain”! It is an astounding confession in the first place, when you consider his difficult circumstances

Rev. Lee is pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois.

in life. Through no fault of his own, he was a prisoner awaiting sentencing, not knowing whether he would live or die. Paul was not trying to escape his difficult circumstances. There are some who wish that they could die, and who consider it to be a profit to die because, in their estimation, earthly life is no longer worth living. Perhaps the “quality of life” is no longer what it was. Perhaps there is what appears to be nothing but agony and suffering in one’s life. For whatever reason, a person’s perspective on life is gloomy and dark, and one might be led to say, “to die is gain.” But this was *not* Paul’s perspective. Nor was Paul wanting to end his life when he said “to die is gain.” For that would make no sense at all and would be in contradiction to what he had said earlier, “For me to live is Christ.” Paul was content with life and lived a purposeful life in Christ!

In the second place, and much more, Paul’s confession “to die is gain,” is astounding when we consider what it means to die. What is the fact and reality of death? Death is a dissolution! The apostle himself put it this way when he said that “our earthly house” will be “dissolved” (cf. II Cor. 5:1). That refers to our earthly body. In death, this earthly body of ours *dissolves*! What was once flesh and bones, what was once warm, alive, and moving ceases to be! It is no more! This earthly body

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Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

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

United Kingdom Office

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

Rep. of Ireland Office

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

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of ours is no more. And when our earthly body dissolves and we are no more, so also our earthly relationships dissolve and will be no more! No more will there be the husband-wife relationship. No more will there be relationships to children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. And yes, in the case of a child who has died, no more will there be relationships to grandparents or to parents who are given the task to bury the child!

The reality of death is experienced, no more keenly and painfully than by those whom the deceased leaves behind, in a threefold way. First, the experience of death by those left behind is *final*. No longer will the person's smile be seen; no longer will the person's voice be heard; no longer is he around. His seat at the dining table will be empty. His absence is permanent, lasting, final. Second, the experience of death by those left behind is *loneliness*. That absence of the one who is deceased is felt every moment, every hour, every day. All that is heard in the home is the sound of a ticking clock. The company, companionship, and friendship that are lost is especially felt by the spouse left behind. He or she is lonely. And therefore third, the experience of death is also one that causes great *sadness* to those left behind. How real and true an experience this is for all who have experienced the loss of a loved one!

And so, from all we have said about death, how can the apostle say, "to die is *gain*"? Everything we have said would lead us to conclude that on the contrary, death is a *loss*! Is that not the experience of the loved ones left behind? Is that not the language of the obituary? Is that not what is communicated by those who offer their condolences and sympathies in Christ, "Sorry for your *loss*"? And to be sure, death is a loss—when you look at it from the viewpoint of man in every way. For the worldly man who died, he has lost *all* he has worked for. He has lost his earthly possessions. He has lost his status in society. He has lost all that he has accomplished. He is all but forgotten as the sands of time bury him among the sons of men who have gone on before him. It is all a loss! And for such a one who dies in his sins, and dies apart from Christ, it really is all a loss! For such a one who knows not that sin is his true misery, that death is nothing but a carrying out and completion of the death sentence that began long ago from fallen father Adam, it is all and only a *loss*! And yet, there is the astounding confession in holy writ, "To die is *gain*."



Why? The reason Paul gives is the first half of verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ." That goes hand-in-hand with and is the reason for Paul saying, "To die is gain."

What Paul means when he says, "For to me to live is Christ" is this: Christ was Paul's all in all. Christ's goals were his goals. Christ's words were the very words by which Paul lived. What Christ loved, Paul loved; what Christ hated, Paul hated. Paul found all his meaning in life in Christ. Paul's life and purpose for living was to glorify Christ. This is clear from all that Paul writes under divine inspiration in Philippians. It is evident in chapter 1, where Paul tells us he was content and joyful to see *Christ's* gospel being preached, albeit not by him but by others. It is evident in chapter 2, where Paul calls the Philippian saints to let "the mind of *Christ*" be in them, to govern their thoughts and attitudes towards one another. It is evident from and so powerfully expressed in chapter 3 especially by verses 7-10: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for *Christ*. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of *the knowledge of Christ Jesus* my Lord: *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things*, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and *be found in him*, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may *know him*, and the power of *his resurrection*, and the fellowship of *his sufferings*, being made conformable unto *his death*." And it is evident from and concisely put where he tells us, "I can do all things *through Christ* which strengtheneth me." Christ was Paul's all in all! So for Paul, to him to live is Christ!

This explains why Paul or anyone can truly say, "to die is gain"! And it is not so hard for us to see why this is and must be so. We see this plainly and easily by replacing "Christ" in the verse with something else. For to me to live is *to obtain enough wealth and have a nice house or two*, and to die is gain? How can that be, when one is separated from all earthly possessions at death? For to me to live is *to have success and recognition in my job and career* and to die is gain? How can that be, for worldly success and recognition from peers will also die with us when we die? For to me to live is *to satisfy the lusts of my flesh, the lusts of my eyes, and the pride*

of life, and to die is gain? How can that be, when Jesus commands us to love not the world, and also tells us, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (cf. Matt. 16:26a). No, for Paul it was clearly, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Because his life on earth is defined as a co-extension of Christ, he can make the astounding confession, “To die is gain.”

It was so for Paul. Is it for us? What word or words would we fill in the blank with, “For me to live is _____”? Only when our answer is truly and sincerely Christ and Him alone can we truly say together with Paul, “Yes, for me too, to die is not loss, but gain”!

And yet, there is a deeper reason and explanation for the statement, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” It is none other than the great love of our heavenly Father in Christ our Savior at work in us! That is the deepest reason and explanation! In His great love to us from all eternity, God gave us to Jesus to redeem by His death. Because of that, our redemption was accomplished at the cross. Because of that, the grace of the Holy Spirit of Christ Himself lives and works faith in us so that we know Him and love Him. We love Him because He first loved us! We live in Him because He

lives in us! We live for Christ and confess Him to be our all in all because He lives in us! And because Christ has conquered death and the grave for us by His death on the cross, death for us who believe is no longer a frightening judgment and wrath of God as it is to all the impenitent, but a door that leads into heaven! That is why the children of God say, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” You say that, do you not, dear reader?



The truth and confession of our text is a truth of abiding comfort and unspeakable joy! Certainly, it was so for Paul. Whether he lived or died, there was blessing in store for him. If God would have him continue living, he would continue living for Christ, in Christ, and by the power of Christ, doing His will, and be used to advance God’s cause and church on earth. And if God would have him sentenced to death, it would be far better for Paul because his faith would become sight when he would go to be with Christ in heaven! What joy and gain it would be either way for Paul! And so it will also be for all of us who truly share in Paul’s confession. May it be that we do so and grow in embracing it more and more! ☞

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Teacher Training: A Seventy-Year Felt Need

Since the time that Protestant Reformed schools were proposed, there has been an awareness of the need for training teachers for those schools. And especially as school societies formed in various congregations and, one after another, schools materialized,

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2017, p. 220.

teachers longed for training to equip them for giving distinctly Protestant Reformed instruction. The churches understood the need. It came into expression in the requests to synods for a Normal School, and for the Protestant Reformed seminary to give some instruction for the teachers. Synods reacted positively to those requests. Yet, the movement to organize an insti-

tution to provide teacher training came to nothing. That may well be due in large part to the realization that a Normal School is not the work of the church institute. Rather, just as the schools are the responsibility of the parents, so also providing teachers for these schools is a parental calling.

However, although the attempts to establish a Normal School did

not result in any institution being formed, the desire for teacher training did not die. Teachers themselves, as well as ministers and other church members, recognized the crying need for adequate training for the teachers. This editorial will recount some of the efforts to equip teachers for their high calling in Protestant Reformed schools.

In the 1950s the professors of the seminary demonstrated a keen interest in the cause of teacher training. The Theological School Committee reported in the 1950 *Acts of Synod* (Art. 26) that if a course was organized for such instruction, Rev. George Ophoff was willing to teach it. In fact, the TSC added, Rev. Ophoff was already deeply involved, for “two years ago a Teachers’ Club was organized in Grand Rapids which has been meeting once per week ever since, with Rev. Ophoff giving them instruction.” Busy college students and busier teachers (teaching in multiple grade classrooms) met once per week! The other professor, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, was just as willing to provide courses for teachers. He drew up a “Normal Course for Elementary Education.”¹ In it he outlined four areas needed for such a course. Specifically:

- I. Psychology and Pedagogy.
- II. History of Education.
- III. Principles of Education.
- IV. Methods of Teaching.

It is obvious from the outline that this course should equip teachers for

¹ The date that Herman Hoeksema wrote this document is not known. It is included in notebooks that I inherited containing papers for teacher seminars. The earliest date found is 1957.

giving solid *Protestant Reformed* instruction. Under “History of Education,” for instance, is this comment: “It stands to reason that this must be a critical study in the light of Christian, more specifically, in the light of Protestant Reformed Principles.” The section on “Principles of Education” begins, “What, in the light of Scripture and according to our Protestant Reformed Principles, is the purpose of Education?” Suggestions for “Methods” include “how to teach, from a biblical viewpoint, the art of reading, of arithmetic, of geography, of writing, of music, of history, etc.” At the same time, Rev. Hoeksema reminded everyone that more was needed to be a teacher, namely, a broad education, “including some mathematics, history, two or three foreign languages, etc.” But the teacher in the Protestant Reformed school must have training, *Protestant Reformed* training.

How long Rev. Ophoff’s weekly meetings with the “Teacher Club” continued is not known. Nonetheless what is known is that teachers continued to seek growth in their knowledge of and ability to give distinctive Protestant Reformed teaching. In March of 1956, the boards and faculties of Adams Street Christian School and Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School met in order to discuss the possibility of an organization for teachers. The outcome of this meeting was the birth of the Protestant Reformed Teachers’ Institute.² Previously, many of

² This history is recounted in several articles in *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, Vol. 30, #1 (Fall, 2004). The entire issue is profitable reading.

these teachers attended the conventions of an association for teachers in the National Union of Christian Schools. But they wanted a professional group that would equip them for teaching in Protestant Reformed schools. The teachers hoped to meet monthly to discuss various papers, and they determined to hold an annual convention. In April of 1956, the first PRTI convention was held from early afternoon into the evening. And the PRTI never stopped meeting. Eight to thirteen teachers attended those early meetings, along with prospective teachers. Ministers spoke; teachers wrote papers. They were laying the foundations, setting forth the principles, and discussing proper methods of Protestant Reformed education. The course laid out by Rev. Hoeksema was the guide.

Eventually, the PRTI started publishing their own magazine for the development of Protestant Reformed education—*Perspectives in Covenant Education*. That was in 1975. The magazine is still being published today.

The original Constitution of the PRTI indicates the teachers’ desire to be equipped to be Protestant Reformed teachers. This is clear from the Basis of the organization, which is “the Word of God as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity and *as these are applied in the educational principles of the Protestant Reformed Schools*” (emphasis added). It is even more evident in the three proposals stated in Article 3 (emphasis added):

1. To study materials related to

the field of education in conjunction with the Word of God in order *that we teachers may be better qualified to teach from a Protestant Reformed viewpoint.*

2. To create a medium through which we may produce materials *of a specific Protestant Reformed nature* to be used in our own schools and *thereby to making our schools more distinctive.*

3. To create a means through which we teachers may work towards more unity and understanding between our Protestant Reformed Schools.

That same desire in the hearts of the parents came into expression in the formation of the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools later in 1956. Over the years, this organization has supported study projects by Protestant Reformed teachers, the printing of the fruits of these studies, and educational seminars. Agatha Lubbers points out that both the Federation and the Teachers' Institute were formed by individuals who "saw the need for the development and further preparation of the teachers in the specific instruction that teachers and parents were called to give students and covenant children in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools."³

From my experience, the profit from all these endeavors can scarcely be measured. As a senior in college, I was shaped by the seminar

on Reformed education led by the (then) Rev. David J. Engelsma (published as *Reformed Education*: by the FPRCS in 1977; later by the RFPA). As a teacher, I cheerfully made the 730-mile trek to Grand Rapids for the conference held every Fall. The meetings provided fellowship, encouragement, sympathy, enrichment, and spiritual and educational development. We returned home eager to teach—feeling a wee bit more prepared to teach!

The point is, all through the history of Protestant Reformed schools an acute awareness of the need for training of Protestant Reformed teachers has existed. Teachers desired it, parents saw the need, and boards united to help provide it. Men with vision and a love for the schools urged action. A brief history of the PRTI relates, for example, how

(a)t a mid-year session of the teachers' institute in early 1980, Mr. Jon Huiskens made a presentation on Protestant Reformed teacher training. He suggested that we initiate a training program of our own, possibly beginning with a single course such as philosophy of education. A year and one-half later...a panel of three men gave presentations on teacher training. Rev. D. Engelsma spoke on the importance of establishing a training school for our teachers. He pointed out that the present system of teacher training was unsatisfactory.⁴

Over the years, numerous calls have been issued for the establishment of a Reformed college, or at the least, an institution that would work together with other colleges but give training to Protestant Reformed teachers.⁵

That brings us to today. Where are we today, almost 70 years since the initial requests for synod to get involved in teacher training? Almost 70 years since Rev. Hoeksema drew up the "Normal Course" and Rev. Ophoff met weekly with the "Teachers' Club"? The need for teacher training has been recognized all through these years. The desire to be equipped for distinctive, Protestant Reformed teaching has motivated men and women to spend untold hours writing, presenting, and discussing papers on a host of educational topics. It is time to provide more than these helter-skelter topics and sectionals, as profitable as they can be. Our teachers need a formal and complete course of instruction that will cover the necessary material systematically. As parents and grandparents, we have demanded from our teachers distinctive Protestant Reformed instruction, but have not provided the training they need to give the high level of excellence that is required of them. We have neglected in our duties for too long. It is time to proceed. ☞

³ "The Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute and the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools: Their History and Relationship," *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, Vol. 30, #1 (Fall, 2004), 16.


⁴ Tom DeVries and Jon VanOverloop, "Moments of the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute," in *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, Vol. 30, #1 (Fall, 2004), 9.

⁵ The most explicit and informed came in "An Open Letter Concerning Reformed Higher Education," *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 59, #21, (Sept. 15, 1983), 496-498.

Note of Appreciation

Just to let you know how pleased I am to get your magazine, the *Standard Bearer*. I am greatly blessed by reading articles in them. This month's article [January 1, 2017] by Rev. Rodney Kleyn in "Believing and Confess-

ing: The Normal Christian Life," I have read over and over again. A real blessing to me in my Christian walk. Thank you all.

Sam Fluke,
Northern Ireland 

N. T. Wright's New Perspectives on the Cross

Introduction

Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI) hosted its thirtieth "January Series" in January 2017. Appearing, he informed his audience, for the fifth time, N.T. Wright, former Bishop of Durham in England, and current research professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, gave a speech in connection with the (Henry J.) Stob lecture series with the title, "The Royal Revolution: Fresh Perspectives on the Cross," on Tuesday, January 24.

Wright is the most popular contemporary proponent of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), so it is not surprising that he is now offering a fresh (or new) perspective on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Wright's "New Perspective" on Paul

Before we report on his latest speech, we should review the main tenets of Wright's NPP.

First, Wright redefines the concepts of "justification" and "righteousness." The Reformed, biblical, and creedal explanation of justification is that righteousness is a legal status in which one is in harmony with or in conformity to the standard of God, which is summarized in God's law. To be justified is to be declared righteous, that is, to be declared to be in harmony with God's standard, on the basis of the perfect work of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Jesus Christ, namely, His lifelong obedience and His atoning sufferings and death, is imputed or reckoned

to the account of the sinner, and that righteousness is received by faith alone without works.

Wright denies the possibility or the necessity of the imputation of God's righteousness in Christ. For Wright righteousness is simply God's covenant faithfulness, by which He puts right what evil has done in the creation and keeps His promises to His people. Justification for Wright is not so much a matter of personal salvation, but is to be declared, on the basis of faith, to be part of the covenant community—the New Israel—that God vindicates now and on the Last Day.

Moreover, Wright understands Paul's fierce polemic against the Judaizers in Galatians and elsewhere not as a battle between justification by faith alone versus the notion of justification by the works of the law (because, argues Wright, Paul and his Jewish contemporaries *never* believed in salvation by works in the sense that the Reformers understood), but as a controversy over how one is declared to be part of the vindicated (or justified) community. Therefore, according to Wright's reading of Paul, the apostle argued that one is declared a member of the church *on the basis of faith*, while the Judaizers insisted that one cannot be declared a member of the church—that is, justified—without circumcision and obedience to the (ceremonial) laws of Moses. For that reason, argues Wright, when Paul disputed about circumcision—even to the point of anathemas—he was not disputing about salvation, but about who was a member of the church.¹

How, then, is one personally justified according to Wright's NPP? By believing that Jesus is Lord, one is

¹ Notice Wright's avoidance of the phrase "by faith alone," a fatal omission, and his use of prepositions—justified *on the basis of* faith. The Reformers, following Scripture, teach that justification is *by* or *through* faith alone. Faith is not the basis. Faith is the means or instrument of justification.

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

brought into, and declared to be a member of, the new covenant community, the church. At that point, on the basis of faith, one is “justified.” However, to *remain* one of God’s people, a believer must continue to believe and to be faithful. That is, continued justification and salvation—and final justification and salvation—depend on good works. On this point, Wright writes:

This declaration, this vindication, occurs twice. It occurs in the future, as we have seen, on the basis of the entire life a person has led in the power of the Spirit—that is, it occurs on the basis of “works” in Paul’s redefined sense. And near the heart of Paul’s theology, it occurs in the present as an anticipation of that future verdict, when someone, responding in believing obedience to the call of the gospel, believes that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead.²

Thus Wright’s position, which includes a denial of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner, is simply a scholarly version of the old heresy of justification by faith and works.

Wright’s “Fresh Perspectives” on the Cross

Having dismantled the great gospel truth of justification (dismantled, at least, in his own mind—in reality, the truth stands), Wright is now bringing “fresh perspectives” to the cross.

Wright reinterprets the cross so that it is no longer seen as penal, substitutionary atonement. Dismissing that as a “theory,” Wright urges us to embrace a story or a “narrative.” Penal, substitutionary atonement is the truth that the Son of God in our flesh suffered the punishment (penal) due to us for our sins in our place (substitution).

² N. T. Wright, “New Perspectives on Paul” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 258; cited in John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Nottingham, IVP, 2008), 100. Notice the basis of justification is “the entire life a person has led in the power of the Spirit”—Believing reader, the life that you lead in the power of the Spirit is the *imperfect* obedience that you, out of sincere love, but in much weakness, have rendered to God in gratitude for your salvation. Will you dare appear before God on *that* basis, instead of on the basis of the perfect obedience and atoning sufferings and death of Jesus Christ? That is where Wright’s theology would lead you, which will issue in damnation on the Day of Judgment.

That view of the cross means that God imputed our guilt to Jesus Christ, which view Wright rejects because, remember, he dislikes imputation—both the imputation of our sins to Christ and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us.

Instead, Wright views the cross through the lens of Genesis and Exodus. He sees Jesus as the one who has come to bring Israel and the world out of darkness. Drawing from Exodus, Isaiah, and John, he describes the world as “in the grip of the Pharaoh, the dark Babel-gods, and the ruler of this world.”³ Jesus, proclaims Wright, came to “accomplish the new exodus for which Israel had longed.” Tragically, laments Wright, the church has misread the gospels and misconstrued the cross:

When Paul, quoting the early formula, says that the Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, it is this complex narrative full of doom and glory that he has in mind. Proof texts are for the birds, or more accurately, for neo-Marcionite rationalists. What matters is the story, the true story.

Referring to John 12, where Jesus prophesies the casting out of the prince of this world because of His death and resurrection, Wright remarks,

Jesus’ death will be the means by which the power that has gripped the world of Greek and Jew alike will be overthrown by the greater power, the power the world never imagined, the revolutionary power of a royal love which loves its own and loves them to the end. Then it will be time for the Greeks to come in, freed from the powers that have hitherto enslaved them.

Why has the church, according to Wright, got the cross so tragically wrong? First, “we have erected a different structure with Israel’s Scriptures as merely a source for random prophecies, which can be fitted into the redemptive narrative which we have gleaned or constructed from elsewhere;” and second, “we have misread the sacrificial tradition of ancient Israel”:

³ The speech was streamed live on January 24, 2017. I was able to listen to the speech on Calvin College’s website, <http://calvin.edu/directory/series/n-t-tom-wright>, from which speech I have quoted extensively in this article.

Animals were not being subjected to a vicarious death penalty. They were killed so that the blood, itself a gift from God, would cleanse the sanctuary and maintain the heaven and earth reality in the midst of an as yet unredeemed world.

Wright lays three charges against the church—we have Platonized our eschatology, we have moralized our anthropology, and “we are in danger of paganizing our soteriology.” In explanation of that third charge, Wright declares,

Instead of hearing that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, they [the people of the world] hear [that] God so hated the world that he killed his only Son.

What, then, did the cross of Jesus do or accomplish? According to Wright,

The dark powers have been defeated so that the powers of love may flood the world.

Jesus draws unto himself, as if by a magnet, all the evil in the world.

Evil is gathered into one place and does its worst.

Jesus, representing Israel, representing thereby the whole human race, and equally representing and embodying the Creator God himself, took upon himself the weight of evil hanging over all flesh.

*Wright leaves us
with no real atonement,
no gospel and,
consequently, nowhere
to hide on the
Day of Judgment.*

“And,” Wright adds, “this, not some cheap and logic-chopped scheme, is why there is forgiveness of sins, why Gentiles are now freed from the enslaving powers to become members of God’s family.”

Somehow, then, Jesus took to Himself all human evil (and even all cosmic evil), and by His death He conquered evil for everyone. This does not explain I Corinthians 15:3, that “Christ died for *our* sins.” If He did not bear the punishment due to our individual transgressions of God’s law, what did He, in fact, accomplish in His death? And why is Christ’s death of personal benefit to us? Wright rejects the caricature of his own making: “this in no way implies...that God is an angry malevolent tyrant who demands someone’s death, or someone’s

blood, and is indifferent as to whose it is.”⁴


Reformed Christians teach that (1) God is angry—that is why propitiation, or the turning away of His wrath is necessary; (2) God is not malevolent—He is perfectly holy, righteous, and good; (3) God is not a tyrant, although He is absolutely sovereign; (4) God is not indifferent as to whose blood or death is required to satisfy His justice—only one who is true God and true righteous man, that is, only the incarnate Son of God, qualifies to be the Mediator; and (5) the giving—and even killing—of God’s Son is not hatred, but love: God loves us by giving His Son in our place, and the Son loves us by giving His life in our place in loving obedience to His Father, so that we might be saved.

Wright’s view is not a “new” or “fresh” perspective on the cross. Certainly, he emphasizes *part* of the truth.

Christ did, by His death, conquer evil, crush Satan’s head, cast out the prince of this world, and spoil principalities and powers (Col. 2:14-15). But His death accomplished that because the power of death is sin (I Cor. 15:56), which Christ removed by satisfying the justice of God against our sins. Wright’s view is really a version of Gustaf Aulén’s (1879-1977) *Christus Victor* theory, which presents Christ as the victor or conqueror who has defeated the powers of darkness by His death on the cross, delivering

man from the power of Satan, *without satisfying God’s justice against sin*.

Wright is an eloquent and engaging speaker, and undoubtedly when many heard him expatiating upon “a larger vision of the biblical narrative,” they hung spellbound on his every word. But for all his rhetorical flourishes Wright leaves us with no real atonement, no gospel and, consequently, nowhere to hide on the Day of Judgment.

How shameful that Calvin College continues to allow Wright to propagate his errors on the campus of a college and seminary named after the great Reformer! 

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 476; cited in Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 52.

Of Idols or Images of God, Christ, and the Saints

(Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 4, A)

Images of God

Since God as Spirit is in essence invisible and immense, he cannot really be expressed by any art or image. For this reason we have no fear pronouncing with Scripture that images of God are mere lies. Therefore we reject not only the idols of the Gentiles, but also the images of Christians.

Having set forth the truth concerning who God is, the truth that He is the triune God who is one in being and three in persons, the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) devotes an entire chapter to a specific negative application of this truth. In this chapter, the SHC echoes the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in its exposition of the second commandment, that God is pleased to “have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word” (Lord’s Day 35, Q&A 98).

Over and over again, the Scriptures condemn idolatry, including both the artisans who make images and the people who make use of them in worship. Read Psalm 115:4-8, which describes the folly of idolatry: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” The passage ends with words that are a searing condemnation: “They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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Wherever the gospel comes, it intends to put silversmiths and all other makers of images out of business (cf. Acts 19:23ff.). And wherever the gospel has taken hold, as in the days when Hezekiah brought reformation to Judah, the faithful “went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all” (II Chron. 31:1).

God *cannot* be represented by an image. Since as to His essence God is “invisible and immense” (omnipresent), He cannot be reduced to an image occupying time and space, whether a carved image, a molten image, a painting on canvas, or a drawing on paper. It is simply impossible that the God who inhabits eternity can be represented by a block of wood, a chunk of metal, or colors on a canvas. It simply cannot be done. Idolatry is foolish and the idol is a vanity.

And God *may not* be represented by an image. This is the will of God in the first and second commandments. Condemned is the worship of the idol gods of the heathen. This would include Baal, Asherah, Milcom, Molech, Chemosh, Diana, Venus, Jupiter, or Mercury. Included are the idols of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, as well as the traditional religions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Also condemned is the worship of the true God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ revealed

in Scripture, under the form of an image. That was what the golden calf represented that Aaron fashioned for the children of Israel not long after their deliverance from the land of Egypt. Concerning the calf Aaron said to the children of Israel: “These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 32:4). The calf clearly was intended to represent Jehovah God, the true God, Israel’s God who had delivered her out of Egypt. That was also the case with the golden calves fashioned by Jeroboam and placed by him in Bethel and in Dan. He said about the calves, “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (I Kings 12:28). Jeroboam did not introduce the worship of a new god in Israel. Rather, he introduced a new way in which to worship the true God. All such idolatry and image fashioning and worship are condemned by Scripture.

The defense of the use of images that is often given is that the image is not actually God, but is only intended to be an aid in the worship of God. Even the heathen were not so foolish as to suppose that the block of wood or chunk of precious metal was actually their god. Even they taught that the image merely represented their god,

which image was an aid to them in the devotion that they paid to the god.

But for all that, an image can never be an aid to the worship of God. For an image is invariably a lie—a blasphemous lie. For that reason the prophet in Jeremiah 10:8 calls the stock “a doctrine of vanities” and in Habakkuk 2:18 says that the molten image is “a teacher of lies.” It ought not to be too difficult to understand that this is true. God is the sovereign, almighty God who rules over all things. The idol is a powerless block of wood or piece of metal that must needs be carried about by the one who worships it. God is omnipresent, “immense” says the SHC. But the image occupies a certain limited place—the spot where it is set by its owner. God is invisible, whereas the image is visible. God is unchangeable, whereas every statue, picture, and painting is subject to decay and the ravages of age. God is omniscient, that is, all knowing and all wise, whereas the image is a dumb piece of wood or stone that cannot see, hear, or think. And most of all, God is the Savior of all who put their trust in Him. The graven image cannot help any who cry out to them or put their trust in them.

Images of Christ

Although Christ assumed human nature, yet he did not on that account assume it in order to provide a model for carvers and painters. He denied that he had come “to abolish the law and the prophets” (Matthew 5:17). But images are forbidden by the law and the prophets (Deuteronomy 4:15; Isaiah 44:9). He denied that his bodily presence would be profitable for the church, and promised that he would be near us by his Spirit forever (John 16:7). Who, therefore, would believe that a shadow or likeness of his body would contribute any benefit to the pious? (II Corinthians 5:5). Since he abides in us by his Spirit, we are therefore the temple of God (I Corinthians 3:16). But “what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (II Corinthians 6:16).

Included in the prohibition against making and worshipping images of God is the making of images of Jesus according to the SHC. “Carvers and painters” are not to make merchandise of images of Jesus. Although the confession grants the real and full humanity of Jesus, it does not grant the argument often made from that truth in defense of pictures and paintings of Jesus. For it is also true that Jesus is very God, God in our flesh. And since He is God, He is included in the prohibition of the second commandment. The SHC sets forth the Reformed consensus on this issue.

Regrettably, by our day Reformed and Presbyterian churches have abandoned this position. Images of Jesus clutter Bible-story books, Sunday-school papers, catechism material, Vacation Bible-school curricula, and much of the instructional material that is used in the Christian schools. Most Christian publishers have no qualms about including pictures of Christ in their books. Many churches have stained-glass windows and banners hanging from the rafters of their sanctuaries that depict Christ. In the recent Christmas season, nativity scenes adorned many front yards of Christian homes, crèches

were placed at the front of many church sanctuaries, and thousands of Christmas cards were sent that contained pictures of the baby Jesus in the manger. Undoubtedly, paintings of the Last Supper, Jesus' crucifixion, and His post-resurrection appearances and ascension will be common fare in the upcoming Lent season.

All of this is contrary to the historic Reformed position and, more importantly, is contrary to Scripture. Several years ago, to his lasting credit, James I. Packer, in the very first edition of his classic *Knowing God*, spoke out against this familiar form of breaking the second commandment. I remember that when I first read it, I was shocked that someone in our day would actually speak out against the prevailing practice and risk being called extreme and nitpicking. He wrote that "there is no room for doubting that the [second] commandment obliges us to dissociate our worship, both in public and in private, from all pictures and statues of Christ, no less than from pictures and statues of His Father." Those who have "some pictures of Christ on [their] walls...ought to think twice about" them.¹

It is a striking fact that at the time that Jesus lived His

¹ James I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 40 and 44.

earthly life, in the providence of God, there were no cameras or cellphones for taking pictures and posting them on the Internet or on Facebook. Never did He, so far as we know, pose for a painting or a sketch. Absolutely no likeness of Him has survived from the time that He lived and walked on this earth. In His inscrutable wisdom, God saw to it that no image of Christ was made or preserved for us today.

This condemns all the icons and images, the crucifixes and statues that are so much a part of the false worship of the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. These are justified as "books to the laity," and defended as aids to the instruction of the simple. But rather than to be aids to worship, they are a corruption of worship. Rather than being a blessing to those who use them, the use of them incurs God's wrath and brings down the judgment of God.

Away with these images and icons! Rather than these representations of the Son of God, our Savior, what God's people need is the preaching and teaching of the gospel. For, in the language of the Heidelberg Catechism, God "will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word" (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 98).

Images of Saints

And since the blessed spirits and saints in heaven, while they lived here on earth, rejected all worship of themselves (Acts 3:12f.; 14:11ff.; Revelation 14:7; 22:9) and condemned images, shall anyone find it likely that the heavenly saints and angels are pleased with their own images before which men kneel, uncover their heads, and bestow other honors? But in fact in order to instruct men in religion and to remind them of divine things and of salvation, the Lord commanded the preaching of the Gospel (Mark 16:15)—not to paint and to teach the laity by means of pictures. Moreover, he instituted sacraments, but nowhere did he set up images.


The second commandment does not forbid the making of all images (likenesses). This is the radical view of the Amish, whose ancestors were the Anabaptists of Reformation times. They apply the second commandment in such a way as to forbid all images. And so they will not pose for pictures and will not allow family portraits to hang on the walls of their homes. The second commandment does not forbid all making of images.

The second commandment forbids especially two

things. It forbids making an image of God. And it forbids the making of an image of any personal being or creature, whether saint or angel, animal or tree, as an object of devotion and worship. This is exactly the practice of the Roman Catholic Church. It was her practice at the time of the Reformation and it is still her practice today. Especially is this true of images of the blessed virgin Mary. But images of other of the saints adorn their homes, yards, automobiles, and places of business,

before which images “men kneel, uncover their heads, and bestow other honors.” All honor paid to men that is due to God alone, whether paid to them personally or to their likenesses, is a violation of the second commandment of God’s law.

This paragraph of Chapter 4 of the SHC emphasizes two important truths. First, the will of God as to the means “to instruct men in religion and to remind them of divine things and of their salvation” is the means of the preaching of the gospel, “not to paint and teach the laity by means of pictures.” Secondly, the visible helps that God has instituted for all the members of the church on account of the weakness of their faith are the sacraments:

“He instituted sacraments, but nowhere did he set up images.” God knows that we, earthly creatures that we are, need the help of something that is visible as an aid to the gospel. That need He met by means of the sacraments. In the sacraments, not in paintings and statues, we are given visible help by God Himself for the strengthening of our faith. We ought to trust in the wisdom of God and thankfully make use of His provision for us so long as we sojourn in this world. We ought to make use of His provision for us until the day dawns, when we will no longer need these helps because we will possess perfectly the reality. 

Chapter Five

Premillennialism (13):

Critique of the Premillennial Explanation of Daniel 9 (cont.)

Introduction

As I pointed out in the preceding article in this series, the vision of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24-27 is of the greatest importance to dispensational premillennialism. The Daniel passage is as important to premillennialism as Revelation 20. Wholly and exclusively a prophecy about the nation of Israel, not at all about the church, the passage is explained by premillennialism as forecasting the return of the captive Jews to Jerusalem and their rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

Explaining the weeks as weeks of *years*, premillennialism understands the sixty-nine weeks of verse 25 as 483 years between some decree or other commanding the Jews to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and some time or other in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah. The period consisting of seven weeks and of sixty-two weeks of verse 25 culminates in the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus.

In a stunning piece of exegetical legerdemain, premillennialism then separates the last, seventieth week of the vision from the preceding sixty-nine weeks by the entire time of the present age—already more than two thousand years. These years are the time of the gathering of the church. The seventieth year is yet in the future in AD 2017. There is, of course, absolutely nothing of this in the text itself. Premillennialism sucks this separation

Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks out of its dispensational thumb.

During the seventieth week, which is still future, Antichrist will arrive on the scene. For half of the week, that is, according to the (non-literal) interpretation of the week of premillennialism, three and a half years, Antichrist will make a friendly covenant with the Jews, who will have returned to their ancient homeland in Palestine. In the middle of the week, he will turn against national Israel, persecuting, killing, and exerting himself to destroy Israel.

At the very beginning of this seventieth week, Jesus will return part way to the earth in order to rapture the church out of the world into the air, so that the church does not get in the way of God's all-important dealings once again with national Israel, the Jews. The seventieth week belongs to Israel.

At the end of the seventieth week, so runs the premillennial fantasy, Jesus returns to the earth in order to deliver Israel from Antichrist and in order to establish on earth an earthly kingdom of and for earthly Israel—the kingdom of God in earthly splendor and power. This Jewish kingdom will last for a thousand years—the millennium.

The preceding article began the Reformed critique of this fanciful, arbitrary explanation of Daniel 9, calling attention to Herman Bavinck's searing criticism of the premillennial exposition of the vision of the seventy weeks.

This critique now continues.

Basic Criticism of the Premillennial Explanation of Daniel 9

Viewing the premillennial explanation of Daniel 9 as a whole, there are three basic objections to the explanation. First, premillennialism can offer no proof that the weeks of the vision are definite periods of seven years each. That the weeks are weeks of years is mere assertion on the part of the premillennial theologians. They are dogmatic about this, but the contention is mere assumption. For this assumption they lack any biblical proof. Nowhere in the Bible does the term "week" mean 'seven years.'

The second objection to the premillennial explanation of Daniel 9 is even more devastating. The passage

does not indicate in any way that the seventieth week is separated from the preceding sixty-nine by a huge span of time—at least, some two thousand years. This gap between the sixty-ninth week and the seventieth week is essential to the premillennial use of the passage. The gap allows for the delayed appearance of Antichrist and for the parenthetical salvation of the church. But the insertion of the gap is nothing but a very bold bit of "eisegesis," that is, reading into a passage something that is not there. The seventieth week follows the sixty-ninth week, but *at once*, as one year ordinarily follows another. As are the sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy, so also is the seventieth week *past history* in relation to AD 2017.

The third objection concerns premillennialism's flagrantly erroneous interpretation of verse 27. Premillennialism identifies the "he" of the text as the coming Antichrist. It explains the "covenant" that "he" makes with many as Antichrist's earthly covenant with the nation of Israel. And it would have Christians to suppose that the sacrifice and oblation to which Antichrist puts an end are the animal sacrifices that God once again will permit and approve on the part of the restored earthly kingdom of Israel. To this grievous error on the part of premillennialism I return in my positive explanation of the passage.

The Reformed Explanation of the Vision of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9

The angel, Gabriel, made known to the prophet *one* period of seventy weeks. Literally, the angel spoke of seventy "sevens," "sevens" being the Hebrew word for "week."

Seventy is a symbolical number in the Bible. Seven is the number of the covenant of God with His people in the Messiah, Jesus. Ten is the number of fullness. The number seventy, therefore, symbolizes the fulfillment of the covenant of Jehovah God, the covenant of Jehovah with Abraham and his seed.

The premillennialist will object to explaining the number symbolically. He will insist that it be explained literally, as a definite period of time. Our response to the premillennialist is, "Do that! Take 'seventy weeks' literally! Then you have a period of 490 days." This, the premillennialist refuses to do. He himself does not want a literal explanation of the seventy weeks. A literal explanation of the seventy weeks yields 490 *days*. With

490 days, the premillennialist can do nothing for his premillennial theology. He wants to understand the seventy weeks as seventy weeks of *years*. But interpreting weeks as weeks of *years* is a non-literal interpretation. Interpreting the seventy weeks as seventy years is neither biblically symbolical nor biblically literal. It is arbitrarily and falsely premillennial.

The seventy weeks are, in fact, the period of time from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of Jesus the Christ, as the period of the fulfillment of the covenant of God with His people. In this period, the covenant (symbolized by the number seven) will be fulfilled (symbolized by the number ten).

Understanding the seventy weeks is not a matter of computing dates and numbers. The Reformed Christian is fundamentally uninterested in juggling dates and calculating calendar years. That the actual time in view in Daniel 9:25 was between 500 and 600 years is irrelevant to the prophecy.

This one period of seventy weeks ends in an event in which six things are realized, according to verse 24: finishing the transgression; making an end of sins; making reconciliation for iniquity; bringing in everlasting righteousness; sealing up the vision and prophecy; and anointing the most Holy.

All of these spiritual acts were accomplished by Jesus Christ at His first coming, from the incarnation through the resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The seventy weeks of Daniel 9 terminate in that first coming of Christ, so that the entire period symbolized by the seventy weeks is, from the standpoint of the beginning of the twenty-first century AD, past history. Nothing of the seventy weeks, particularly the seventieth week, is still in the future.

... to be continued. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

Teaching Our Covenant Children about Work (2)

In the first article on this subject I discussed the important role that parents have in teaching their covenant children about our calling to work. This calling is obviously central to their lives. Work will consume much of our time and energy and interest in life. Work is part of the cultural mandate God has given to man. This mandate continues after the Fall, but must be directed by the higher purpose of Christian living, which is seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all things.

The Christian has the obligation to support himself or herself. If the Lord gives a spouse in marriage to them and children afterwards, husband and wife together have

the solemn obligation to care for their household. One who does not do so is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5: 8).

Every Christian has the obligation to support the church of Jesus Christ and the causes of His kingdom in the world. He must work to obtain the necessary resources to do all of this. The Christian has the obligation to support Christian charity, chiefly through the work of the deacons in the church, though also if possible through institutions of mercy. According to the admonitions of Scripture, the Christian must work diligently with his hands in order that he might have something to give to those who are in need (Eph. 4:28).

The Christian in his daily occupation must keep the primary purpose of seeking the kingdom and its righteousness first. We are admonished not to set our hearts on becoming rich in the world. The glory of

Rev. denHartog is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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Christ must motivate us in all of life. We are called to do our daily work heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. The praise of man, honor and glory among men, are not of greatest importance, but righteousness and truth and faithfulness to our Lord. Our Christian homes must teach our children extensively about all of these things.

As parents, we must seek to teach our children about daily practical things of Christian living. This is beautifully emphasized in Deuteronomy 6 where the Lord commands parents to teach their children when they sit in their house, or walk by the way, and when they go out and come in. There is and must be a daily training going on in our homes by precept and by the example of our own lives as parents. What an impact the daily example of our lives has on our children! This includes attitudes and perspectives we ourselves have as parents in life, what we place the greatest emphasis on, spend the most time on, and take the greatest interest in.

Years ago, life was much more simple than it is in our modern time, though this may not be as true as some might sometimes imagine. Life on earth after the Fall has always been difficult. False imaginations concerning the simplicity of the past should never be used to excuse ourselves for our failures in meeting the challenges of life in our modern world.

In days gone by, daughters learned homemaking from their mothers, both by instruction in the skills required and by the example of their mothers. Skills of good homemaking should be considered important even today for our covenant homes. Sons commonly learned the trade of their fathers or were trained to take over the farm or business. Today, often after children grow up, they will take on very different occupations than their parents. Quite often they will engage in occupations requiring much higher standards of education and much more training. Always maintaining the right spiritual perspective in these matters is a great challenge, and requires earnest spiritual mindedness on the part of parents.

In order to learn to work, children have to be trained in their homes to be disciplined, energetic, and hard-working. In some homes children grow up without ever being given regular responsibilities and tasks to perform in their homes. This will not be for their future

good. Children of rich families sometimes are trained in laziness and irresponsible living. They imagine that somehow they have an inalienable right to the riches of their parents, and to demand that parents provide for the satisfaction of all their desires and wants in life. In the covenant home, children should be given routine duties to perform ("chores" as they were called on the farm where I grew up). They must be required to work hard, to be diligent and not lazy.

I have read studies that indicated the powerful influence of mothers and fathers in the home on motivation in the minds of children and on discipline in their lives. Children have a strong sense of receiving the approval and appreciation of their parents. Many of the highest achievers among children describe with thanks the incentive good parents were in their lives. Putting a Christian perspective on this, we would say it in the words of Proverbs 31 and its description of the virtuous woman. Her children shall arise and call her blessed.

The above considerations do not mean that we should make the lives of our children a burdensome drudgery. Childhood is also a time when our children should be carefree. The joy of playing and time for developing friendships with fellow Christian children should not be denied them. This also will be important for them. Parents must be careful not to overburden their children. Children who are overstressed will often develop psychological and spiritual problems. Too much emphasis on academics and setting too high a standard for achievement can do damage to the soul of our children. Yet childhood is also a crucial time for training in the more serious callings we all have as mature Christians in the world.

Training in the home must encourage our children to develop their God-given skills and talents in the days of their youth. This will enrich the lives of our children and also prepare them for their broader calling in life in the church and in Christian society. A significant example of this is training our children in musical skills, perhaps in playing a musical instrument or developing the gift of singing. What a blessing it is for the Christian home when children have been trained to accompany and support singing at the piano or organ or with other musical instruments! Such training will manifest the Christian

joy of the home mentioned by Paul in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

There are so many areas of life on earth that children should be encouraged to take an interest in and enjoy. There is the sanctified use of sports, which teaches valuable lessons when it is used as part of life and fellowship with others and not merely to promote sports heroes idolized by the world.

God's creation is so glorious and full of His riches. Children can be encouraged to develop an interest in many different areas—mechanics, gardening, the multitude of sciences, and various forms of art. There are so many ways that interest in these areas of life can enrich the lives of our children themselves and at the same time contribute to the multifaceted life we have in the communion of the saints and in Christian society.

We seek the help of Christian schools for the training of our children. We are truly thankful for all the help they can and do give. On the other hand, by the grace God, Christian schools are a great help in their task when parents do their part with good parenting at home, maintaining Christian motivation and perspective for their children.

Parents can encourage their children by sitting down with them and taking an interest in the subjects children are being taught in school. Children should continually be encouraged and admonished in Christian love and genuine concern. They need to be corrected when that is needed, but also properly encouraged in the challenges and rigors they face in their lives. So many opportunities arise as we train our children during the God-given years they are in our covenant homes. As parents, we must lay hold on these opportunities and not let them pass or be occupied with so many far less important things in our lives. Our children will be in our homes for only a short time.

In our modern-day culture there is much emphasis on the difficult sciences, like math, physics, electronics, and the computer sciences. Training in these areas will often greatly benefit children in finding good occupations later in life, which will help them provide for their families and the church. To be a well-rounded Christian in many areas of life, a broad liberal arts education is of great value.

Foundational to such a broader perspective on life is reading. Parents do well for their children's future when they instill an eager interest in reading at a young age. This too, of course, must always have a spiritual perspective. Guiding our children to read good books, including specifically Christian books, is so very important. In

most cases leaders in the church among us must be well read in sound doctrinal books. That begins in our homes. We must train the future leaders of the church in our covenant homes. Theological study and discussion helps greatly to accomplish this purpose.

It was rightly said by a famous Christian leader that our children must be taught that all of our life in this world is religious. When we encourage the development of the minds and gifts of our children, this

will benefit them greatly in their study and deeper understanding of the Word of God and, hopefully, their commitment to the truth in their lives.

How well we know this by experience after years of being a pastor in the catechism class! How obvious the fruit of good parenting of children in the home becomes in the attitude, discipline, and understanding of their children! What tremendous spiritual benefit we give to our children when we teach them the proper attitude to learning the truths of Scripture and the doctrines of Christianity. Real, careful preparation for catechism is the responsibility of parents in the home.

Well-rounded and comprehensive parenting is a great task! Let us pray daily for the wisdom and grace, and for self-sacrifice and God-centered purpose to perform it.



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Missionaries That Hazarded Their Lives

According to Acts 15:22-23, a letter had been adopted by the churches that summarized the answer of the apostles and the elders in regard to a doctrinal disturbance by the Judaizers. They argued that it remained necessary for the Gentile Christians to be circumcised according to the law of Moses for proper church membership and for salvation. In response, the church declared that God had revealed that circumcision was not required for church membership or for salvation. Since this is exactly what the beloved Paul and Barnabas had been teaching in their first missionary journey, the church publicly exonerated them and confirmed their faithfulness to the Word of God.

However, the adopted letter commended the beloved Paul and Barnabas not with words such as “faithful men” or “orthodox men,” but rather with much more emphatic language: “...men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). The necessity of this particular commendation was, as John Calvin pointedly writes, “indirectly to reprove those rascals who had never suffered anything for the sake of Christ, and came out of their seclusion to disturb the churches, which had meant so much to these undaunted soldiers of Christ.” In that regard the divinely inspired, ecclesiastical commendation ably served its immediate purpose.

This inspired commendation also serves as an example for missionaries to imitate in their labors. A foreign missionary ought to seek, by the mercy of our Lord, that this might become a commendation that summarizes his labors in the service of the Lord in the sphere of those in the darkness of idolatry.



When writing this commendation under the inspiration of God, fresh in the minds of the council was the history of Paul and Barnabas in their recent missionary work in Asia Minor.

Rev. Smit is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In Acts 13:45, we read that “when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.”

In Acts 13:49-50 we read: “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.” Although we are not told specifically what form the persecution against Paul and Barnabas was, yet we are told that the vehement opposition to the preaching of the gospel by Paul and Barnabas resulted in an expulsion of the brethren out of Antioch, no doubt by some physical force and by threats to the life of the brethren.

Again, in Acts 14:19, we learn that “...there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” Later, Paul did not object to this treatment but confirmed in submission to the Lord of the harvest that this was the way in which the church is saved. “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Besides the physical and spiritual hazards that they had faced at the hands of the world, wicked Jews, and the Judaizers, the apostle Paul and his co-laborers would continue to hazard their lives frequently in their travels and labors according to the long list of examples recorded in II Corinthians 11:23-33. Indeed, Paul did hazard his life in many ways in his missionary labors.

That Greek word for “hazard” has for its root meaning the idea “to give or hand over.” The authorized Dutch translation (1637) has the word *overgegeven*, from which we can readily get the sense of the original Greek word. Along with that idea, “hazard” then means “to expose oneself and become vulnerable to risk.”

The apostle Paul and Barnabas obediently handed

their lives over to the call of the Lord to preach the Word to the lost Jews and then to the Gentiles. In so doing, they handed over their lives to the demanding workload of that calling. They also willingly exposed themselves to the certain results of that work in Asia Minor and beyond, which included the sweet fruit of the gathering of believers and their seed as well as the bitter fruit of opposition, persecution, imprisonment, and death.

This is the sort of commendation a foreign missionary needs to pursue in his labors. He must willingly hand over his life to the call and will of the Lord in order to serve Him in his specific field of labor among those in the darkness of idolatry.

However, in doing so, he must be careful not to fall into one of two extreme errors. On the one hand, he should not desire to be insulated from the perils and risks of his mission work and so become reluctant to give over his blood, sweat, and tears for the work of missions. He must be willing, when necessary, to give up the comforts and conveniences of life to which he may have become accustomed for faithful service. On the other hand, he should not hazard his life with reckless abandon, forsaking all concern for the reasonable safety and well-being of himself and his family. He should not so hazard his life that he rushes headlong into burnout or to a home life that suffers inexcusable neglect.

Rather, the missionary ought to hazard his life within his God-given limitations, with much wisdom, and in the specific sphere of labor to which the Lord sends him through the calling church. Consequently, the missionary must be willing to expose himself to all of the normal results, both positive and negative, of faithful labor under Christ.



The worthy cause for which the missionary hazards his life is described in Acts 15:26 as simply “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The cause was not many other things that might become a real temptation for the Lord’s servants. The cause for Paul and Barnabas was not their names and reputations among men. If that were so, they would have had no issue with the people worshipping them as Mercury and Jupiter at Lystra and would have avoided public stoning.

If the cause was his own earthly comfort and wealth,

surely Paul would have quit the ministry after being stoned at Lystra and gone on to something like tent-making, or growing vegetables by the Sea of Galilee.

If the burden on his heart was himself and not the call of the Lord, the well-being of the churches, and the extension of the kingdom of Christ to the Gentiles, Paul would never have climbed out from under that pile of Lystran stones, dusted himself off, and walked with pain right back into the city that stoned him. He would have given up and not continued the next day and weeks with Barnabas in the visitation of the Asia Minor churches with dedication and enthusiastic exhortations.

The cause for their willingness to hazard their lives was the name of our Lord Jesus Christ alone. Interestingly, this text is the first one in Acts in which this full name of Christ is written out. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the full revelation of the truth of the triune God in all of His glory. That Name declares the sum total of all of the truth concerning Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and glorified at the right hand of the Father in omnipotence and absolute sovereignty. That Name sets forth the full revelation of the triune God as the sovereign and unchangeable God of His covenant in Christ and with His seed, the elect according to His eternal counsel and good pleasure in Christ. That Name sets forth all of the sound doctrine according to godliness concerning Jesus Christ. To that one and only worthy cause of God’s truth and unchangeable purpose in Christ Jesus for the salvation of His elect, Paul and Barnabas handed over their lives and became vulnerable, especially to the negative fruits of the ministry of the Word in the spiritually hostile environment of the world.

To the cause of the name of Christ a foreign missionary must be willing to give over his life and so become vulnerable to the resulting pains, inconveniences, disappointments, heartaches, loneliness, uncertainties, oppositions, and various forms of persecution that faithful service on a mission field brings according to the Lord’s will and providence. He must give himself to the cause of the Name set forth in our beloved Reformed truth and practice as rooted in the infallibly inspired Word of God. Like Paul, he must labor diligently for the establishment and maintenance of newly instituted gatherings of believers and their seed, if the Lord so grants that good fruit.

Further, that Name is the only power by the Holy

Spirit to make a godly missionary willing to hazard his life for Him. By nature, no faithful missionary today would ever want to commit his life to the will of God in all aspects of missionary service for the noble cause of Christ and His truth. Never. He is prone to do the work for personal, carnal motives of the praise of men. He is prone to complain and quit, demanding from the Lord far more comfortable, more convenient, or less lonely working conditions. He would complain to the Lord for the hatred and contradictions that the work receives, and he would question unbelievably why he and his family need to bear a unique cross of suffering in their mission work and life. Not one missionary of himself would willingly or for the right reasons give his life over to the hazards that the Lord wills to come upon faithful missionary service for His glory.

But, in that very Name is the missionary's only hope, strength, power, mercy, grace, wisdom, righteousness,

and sanctification for true success and growth in hazard-ing his life for the sake of Christ's church. That Name is both the content of a missionary's preaching and the power unto faithful labor. He needs that Name to be written on his heart. He needs to pray without ceasing in that Name for the Father's continued blessings on himself and his labors. He needs a full zeal, knowledge, and assurance of the sound doctrines of that Name. He needs to be equipped by His Spirit to hand over his life to the call of the Lord of the harvest to serve in a little part of His field for the cause of His most excellent Name.

May the Lord graciously grant our missionaries such faithfulness in their labors, that in His mercy He will reckon them in the judgment worthy of this same commendation: men that have hazarded their lives for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ☞

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor



Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer, by Herman Hanko and Mark H. Hoeksema. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. 272 pages. \$24.95. Hardcover. [Reviewed by Rev. Douglas Kuiper.]

To know the history of the development of a particular doctrine is beneficial. The history of the development of a doctrine that is truly based on Scripture is the record of the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the church into her understanding of that particular truth (John 16:13). When a doctrine corrupts God's Word, the history of its development exposes the doctrine as false.

The volume under review is the history of the development of the idea of the well-meant offer (WMO). Coauthoring this history are Prof. Herman Hanko (emeritus, PRC Seminary), who wrote chapters 1-10 and 13-14, and Mark Hoeksema, who penned chapters 11-12. As Hanko is the primary author, and as I will make specific references to the portions that Hanko authored, I will refer to Hanko as the author, without meaning to ignore or slight Hoeksema in the least.

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.

The Book's Value

The book's value is threefold.

First, it sets forth a history of the doctrine of the well-meant offer (WMO). I am aware of no other book-length treatment of this history. This book is unique in providing such a history.

Second, by tracing the historical development of the doctrine, the book exposes the error of the WMO. Had an advocate of the WMO written this history, one would expect him to defend and promote the WMO as being biblical, Reformed, and confessional. He would likely argue that Calvin and the fathers of the Synod of Dordt, who certainly did use the word "offer," meant by it the WMO. Such an author would probably contend that the "declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology" (to borrow the wording of the Christian Reformed Church's statement of the first point of common grace adopted in 1924) prove that the WMO was widely accepted from the time of the Reformation.

Hanko's purpose is the exact opposite: his doctrinal survey demonstrates that the doctrine is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions and is, therefore, a heretical error. Hanko correctly notes that we must determine from Scripture alone, and not from the histori-

cal development of a doctrine, whether a doctrine is true or false (xi). Yet when the historical root of a doctrine is another doctrine that the church has rejected as incompatible with the teachings of Scripture, the present day flowering of that doctrine is immediately suspect, and can be refuted with the same Scriptures. Hanko traces the root of the WMO to Amyraldism, an error that the faithful Reformed church rejected (chap. 4). How can something that was wrong in its root be right in its flower? Hanko demonstrates that the use of the word “offer” by Calvin and the fathers of Dordt was not identical to its use by the WMO advocates (pp. 24-33, 51-55). Hanko shows that Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and many other “Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology” interpreted Ezekiel 33:11, Matthew 23:37, and II Peter 3:9 differently than do the advocates of the WMO.

Third, the book’s value is to reveal that, running in a parallel track to the history of the WMO, the *opposition* to the WMO by faithful men and church bodies also has a long history. We who oppose the WMO are not new in our opposition, nor do we stand alone. It may *seem* that we stand alone, but when we consider the history of the opposition to the WMO, we must realize we do not.

In this connection, Hanko makes at least five references to a church body that came to oppose the WMO independently of the PRCA, before having any official contact with the PRCA. I refer to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Not infrequently, the Spirit of truth leads two or more bodies of believers to the same conclusion regarding a doctrinal point, though giving them different incentives to develop the doctrine, and leading them down different paths historically. No one denomination develops truth all by itself.

These values of the book make it worthwhile reading. I encourage you to read it. Are you afraid that the book will be “over your head”? The book is not so much doctrinal as historical, the chapters are not overly long, and Hanko’s style is easy to follow. If you regularly read the *Standard Bearer*, you can handle this book, even if you read it only a chapter at a time.

The Book’s Weaknesses

My role as reviewer requires me to point out the book’s weaknesses. I assure the reader that these weaknesses, though real, do not detract from the book’s value overall.


Although the book contains a few scattered statements as to what the WMO is and on what assumptions it rests (xii-xiii, 62, and others), nowhere does the book devote a section to a brief but comprehensive statement regarding these points. I suppose this omission is due to this book being the written, developed version of a course that Hanko taught in the Protestant Reformed Seminary to seminarians who would be familiar with the WMO. Perhaps also this omission implies that most readers of the book will know of the WMO.

However, this omission is regretful. We ought to know what that doctrine is, of which a history is here given. Many in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles, lacking the fuller knowledge expected of seminarians, would benefit from an introduction or first chapter which explains the WMO.

A second weakness is that Hanko, who is generally very clear, at times contradicts himself, or gives with his left hand what he took away with his right.

Hanko quotes A.A. Hodge, who said of the external call of the gospel: “God intends that its benefits shall actually accrue to every one who accepts it” (122). This Hanko declares to be an “astounding and unwarranted statement,” but in the next sentence says “With some effort even this quotation could be interpreted as being biblical.” Hanko is not suggesting here that WMO advocates would interpret it as biblical; that goes without saying. He is saying that WMO opponents could interpret it as biblical, “with some effort.” But if it is unwarranted, must it not be unbiblical? If it is interpreted as being biblical, is it not then warranted?

He also judges the Westminster Confession to be weak both “in failing to exclude certain views promoted by the Davenant men” and “in failing to define clearly its idea of the well-meant offer” (90). He then says in the next paragraph: “Any form of Arminianism—also such as represented by Amyraut and Davenant—and the whole notion of the well-meant offer were excluded from the formulation of this great assembly” (91). These two statements leave one puzzled. Did, or did not, the Westminster exclude these ideas?

Its weaknesses notwithstanding, this book is substantive, solid, and Reformed. For exposing the WMO as heretical in its root, it does the Reformed cause a great service. 

Trivia Question

You may realize that Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has 15 member churches today. Do you know how many congregations there were in Classis West in 1951? Answer later in this column.

Young People's Activities

The Grandville, MI PRC Young People's Society recently hosted an elegant Italian dinner for members of their congregation, with proceeds helping to offset this year's convention expenses.

School Activities

Supporters of the Loveland Protestant Reformed School made money for the school by delivering flowers for Valentine's Day on February 13 and 14 for Lowe's Flowers, a local business. A pleasant way to help the school...driving around delivering beautiful and aromatic flowers for a day!

Congregational Activities

The Protestant Reformed Student Orchestra (PRSO) presented a concert of classical, sacred, and fiddle music on Thursday, February 16. This year, the concert location was at St. Cecilia Music Center in Grand Rapids. The PRSO also has a new website; go to prso.org to learn more about the Student Orchestra!

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

A quote to ponder from a PRC church bulletin: "I've never met a Christian who is healthier, more mature, and more active in ministry by being apart from the church. But I have found the opposite to be invariably true. The weakest Christians are those least connected to the body. And the less involved you are, the more disconnected those following you will be. The man who attempts Christianity without the church shoots himself in the foot, shoots his children in the leg, and shoots his grandchildren in the heart." Interestingly said.

A farewell program to recognize Rev. Arie denHartog's emeritation was held at Southwest PRC on Friday, February 24 after the annual congregational potluck meal.

Minister Activities

Rev. Andy Lanning, pastor of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, considered the call to First PRC of Holland, MI, declining it on February 12. Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, considered the call to Southwest PRC of Wyoming, MI, announcing his decline on February 12. Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of Cornerstone PRC, after considering the call from Doon PRC to be the third missionary to the Philippines, also declined it on February 12.

Denominational Activities

Classis West met March 1 at Hope PRC of Redlands, CA, while

Classis East is scheduled to meet next on May 10 at Byron Center PRC.

Young Adult Activities

COLORADO RETREAT: Come to the special 25th Colorado Young Adults Retreat from August 14-18, 2017, as they return to the original location of the first retreat, Covenant Heights Camp! Limited registration opens Monday, March 6 for all Young Adults ages post-high to 35. More information will follow.

Sister Church Activities

Printed by permission from a recent Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore's bulletin:

Today we witness the Confession of Faith and Baptisms of the Lehnert family. Not only is it a great joy to welcome an entire family into the church, but we also have the opportunity to observe a Confession of Faith, an Adult Baptism, and two infant/child baptisms. Because of the many elements involved in this, it is worthwhile to review the order in which the sacrament will be administered today. We will begin by reading the Introduction of the Form for the Administration of Baptism, followed by the first section, "To Infants of Believers." We will then jump to the second section, "To Adult Persons," followed by the Prayer. We will then ask the Lehnert family to rise and come forward to the front of church to answer the questions.

The first set of questions will go to Curtis (father), who was already baptized as an infant, so we will ask him the questions for "Public Confession of Faith." The second set of questions will go to Esther (mother), who has not been baptized, so we will ask her the questions for adults from the Baptism Form. The third set of questions will go to Curtis and Esther together regarding the baptism of their children. The entire family will then be invited to the platform, where Esther will be baptized first, followed by Gabriella and Roman. We thank God for adding this family to CERC, as well as for all of those who have recently made Confession of Faith and have been baptized.

Truly God is good to His covenant people!

Mission Activities

The annual Foreign Mission

Committee/Doon PRC Council delegation to the Philippines left February 2 and returned February 14. Rev. Allen Brummel (Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD) and his wife Crysta along with Doon elder Alan DeBoer made the trip. Seminary students David Noorman and Brian Feenstra filled Heritage's pulpit in Rev. Brummel's absence. After travel delays the delegation landed safely in Manila....a day late.


Rev. Daniel Holstege and family are adjusting well to their new home in Antipolo. After being there a few weeks, they were over the time change and jet lag; but it will take a while to adjust to the culture change. They are able to sleep through the crowing of the neighborhood roosters and have experienced jeepneys, trikes, trains, and traffic. But according to Rev. Holstege, they have not yet had an opportunity to ride a carabao. Perhaps that will happen in the future.

We continue to keep the Holsteges and Kleyns in our thoughts and prayers. The Holstege family's papers have been transferred to Doon PRC.

The Classis of the PRCP met February 25 at the Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela City.

Trivia Answer

Instead of 15 member churches, Classis West had only 11 in 1951. They were Bellflower and Redlands in California; Doon, Hull, Orange City, Oskaloosa, Pella, Rock Valley, Sioux Center in Iowa; Edgerton, Minnesota; and Manhattan, Montana. Only four of the 11 exist today, as God used the history of 1953 to powerfully prune this portion of His vineyard. More trivia next time.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Bill and Julie Reinholt in the death of Julie's mother, **MARIE ELLERHOLZ.**

May their comfort be found in God's Word where we read, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Steve DeVries, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Victor and Gina Solanyk, the family of Eric and Stacey Solanyk, the family of Darren and Karyn Solanyk, and Chad Solanyk in the death of Victor's mother, **MRS. CLAUDIA SOLANYK.**

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" (II Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Pastor Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to David Harbach and Carol Harbach in the death of their mother

JEAN HARBACH.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 16:11 "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Rev. K. Koole, President
H. DeVries, Asst. Clerk

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School of Winham is in need of a multi-grade teacher for the 2017-2018 school year. There is grade flexibility with grade assignments, etc. and the board is willing to work with an interested individual's preference. Please contact Jim Siertsema at jimsiertsema@gmail.com or cell 519-955-5665 or Preston Crich at prstncrch@gmail.com for more information and to apply.

Gospel Truth of Justification

by David J. Engelsma

AD 2017 marks the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of the church of Jesus Christ. In 1517 the Reformer Martin Luther affixed the ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, the act by which Jesus Christ began his reformation of his church. Essential to this Reformation was the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone. This book on justification is intended by the Reformed Free Publishing Association and the author to celebrate that glorious work of Christ.

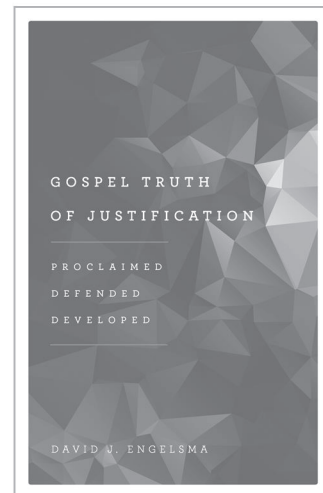
But the purpose is more than a celebration of the beginning of the Reformation. It is to maintain, defend, and promote the Reformation in the perilous times for the church at present. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is so fundamental to the gospel of grace that an exposition and defense of this truth are in order always. The true church of Christ in the world simply cannot keep silent about this doctrine. To keep silent about justification by faith alone would be to silence the gospel.



Coming Soon...

Preorder your copy: CALL: 616-457-5970 or EMAIL: mail@rfpa.org

This book will be automatically sent to Book Club members.



Call to Aspirants to the Ministry

■ All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2017 - 2018 academic year should make application at the March 16, 2017 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 16 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

Reformed Witness Hour

March 2017

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Date	Topic	Text
March 5	"Sunday: A Day of Rest"	Exodus 20:8-11
March 12	"Honor Father and Mother"	Exodus 20:12
March 19	"Do Not Murder!"	Exodus 20:13
March 26	"Sexual Purity"	Exodus 20:14