

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • January 1, 2017

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Running Into the Strong Tower

The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Proverbs 18:10

With this issue we are once again at the beginning of a new year. Many thousands will greet each other with a "Happy New Year." Many of these will do so thoughtlessly, not realizing the implications of their words. Others may do it out of habit, not caring whether that happiness is realized or not. Some say it with doubt or fear, not knowing whether that happiness will be theirs or not.

In all of this there is an element of wistful vanity. For what blessing can we bestow upon another if the blessing of God is not upon us? What real happiness is it that does not have its source in the eternal city that hath foundations, but instead in the temporary earth that is surrounded by death?

In general, the new year will be much like the old. It will be a year of labor and sorrow. There is not a way out, for this is reality. What then shall the church say? Shall she join the world in its vain pursuit of a happiness of this world? Shall she boast of chariots and horses, tanks and guns, in order to put her confidence in them?

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God forbid! Rather, we should mention the name of the LORD, for it alone is a strong tower.

The truth of God in Proverbs is often emphasized by contrasts. In verse 11 we see the rich fool who puts his confidence in riches, who is not rich in God, who belongs to the unrighteous rich. Riches are contrasted with the name of the LORD as the ground of our confidence. The figure of a city as an imaginary stronghold stands opposed to the solitary high and strong tower. This is the vain safety of the unrighteous as he hides behind his imaginary wall contrasted with the sure refuge of the righteous in the tower.

The calling of the church is to draw this contrast sharply at all times. It may seem dangerous to leave the city of things that are seen and run to a solitary tower, yet there is no other way. You must choose either-or, for you cannot put the tower of God in the city of the rich fool. The righteous alone run to this tower, and that by faith. Here, he is safe.

The strong tower as designated in the text is the name of Jehovah. He reveals Himself to us, first of all, in His creation. The name of the LORD is in all the works of His hands, as seen in Psalm 8:1, 9. The brute creation reveals God in the sun, moon, stars, mountains and valleys, oceans and seas, forests and fields. He is also revealed in the living creation: man and beast. All are called forth by His Word and are so many letters spelling the name of the Most High. He causes the sun to rise and to set,

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

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

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Subscription Price

\$24.00 per year in the US, \$36.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$24.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$12.00.

Advertising Policy

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

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

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clouds to gather and the rain to fall on the thirsty land. He makes the seed to sprout and prepares food for man and beast. He directs the whole creation to the end that He has determined from before the foundations of the world: the glory of His everlasting kingdom (Ps. 75:1).

Yet God's name is not revealed in all its glory in the creation; that is only so when we see it in the name of and in the light of Jesus. It is only when we behold the whole glorious name of the LORD from the standpoint of that one name that it becomes the strong tower of refuge into which the righteous runs for safety. Apart from that one name, the revelation of God in the things that are seen surely brings the name of God to us as a name of power and might, to be glorified and feared, but it also reveals the wrath of God. It proclaims that God is angry with the wicked and that He will visit them in judgment and punishment in time and eternity (Rom. 1:18). Man by nature does not flee to such a name, for it is a terror for him. He flees as far from it as possible. It is a name of consuming fire. Who would flee to that? It speaks to us in the curse that all creation bears—thorn, thistle, barren desert, roaring volcano, in hail and fire, in pestilence, death and war.

But the name of Jesus reveals to us God as the God of salvation. It is not simply another name for them that seek refuge in that high tower; but in the light of the name Jesus, the creation that speaks death takes on new significance, so that we are not filled with fear but are assured of salvation. It is God's eternal purpose to glorify Himself in the revelation of His name. For that purpose He ordained His Son to be Christ, the Head of the church, the Firstborn of every creature. He gave the church to Christ in order that all the fullness of God in Christ might shine forth in everlasting beauty. He determined that this church in Christ should be glorified through the deep way of sin and death unto righteousness and the everlasting life of the resurrection. That name was revealed in Christ's entire ministry as the reconciliation in the accursed tree and death of the Son of God (II Cor. 5:19), and in His resurrection and ascension. And when He makes all things new, God shall tabernacle with men forever more.

We have in our text a figure of a refugee that is pursued by enemies in an open plain. The enemy rushes in from all sides, determined to destroy him. There appears to be no way out. But, in the center of the vast open plain, he sees a solitary tower rising. Into it he runs for safety.

So it is with the man that runs into the safe retreat of the name of Jehovah. He is in a hostile country with many enemies surrounding him, all seeking his destruction. This includes the powers of darkness, the forces of sin and death, the devil and the world, the sufferings of this present time, sickness and pain, want and famine, greed and hatred, prison and death. But the name of Jehovah is revealed to him as a safe retreat. It is a tower that rises above the world of things that are seen. It is strong, for it is the name of eternal and unchangeable love that will never let those who seek refuge in it perish. It is the name of almighty power, against which no enemy can prevail. It is the name of infinite wisdom that has designed all things to be subservient to its purpose: the safety of those that seek refuge in the tower.

The running into this tower is an act of faith, as seen in the figure itself. If you flee into the tower when you are surrounded by enemies, you cut off every means of escape. You risk everything in that tower and put all your stakes in the safety of that tower.


So it is with the name of Jehovah. It means that you place complete confidence in that name, trusting in Him as the God of your salvation in life and in death, in peace and in war, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity. Therefore, your trust is in nothing else but His name. This implies that you are fully assured that the name of the LORD is powerful to save, no matter what powers of darkness may oppose or threaten your destruction. It also implies that you are conscious of your need, your sin and guilt, your death and helplessness, all your miseries, and that you take them all to that tower in the confidence that in it there is escape from them all.

Thus, the antithesis must be maintained. It is either-or, God or mammon. If you put your trust at all in mammon, you cannot at all put it in Jehovah. For deliverance from death unto everlasting glory you seek refuge in Christ as the resurrection and the life; or you plead entrance on the basis of your own deeds.

The runner in this case is the righteous because the running is an act of faith and only the righteous possess faith. He is delivered in principle from the power and dominion of death by the Spirit of Christ, and walks in newness of life.

This righteous runner is safe and is assured of his safety. Not in the sense that the sufferings of this present time do not affect him, but in the sense that these and all things work toward his salvation.

Therefore, in the light of this truth, may you have a happy and blessed New Year. May it be understood that this benediction has no reference to the imaginary happiness of the fool in the rich man's city, but only to the

real and imperishable happiness of those who run into the strong tower of the name of the LORD. In that tower there is happiness for the new year—and forever. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

The Need for Excellent School Teachers

Good Christian schools are required of Reformed believers according to the Church Order of Dordrecht, Article 21. Good Christian schools need good Christian school teachers. The eighteen Protestant Reformed schools will continue to seek these high quality teachers. The training of covenant youth demands excellence from every point of view. School boards must be seeking teachers with “high marks” for their ability to teach well, effectively and interestingly. Schools must have teachers with doctrinal understanding of and zeal for the (Protestant) Reformed faith.

As an aside, it should be obvious that school board members who seek these qualifications in teachers must themselves have a very good knowledge and understanding of the Protestant Reformed faith. How can school boards interview and decide on teacher qualifications—doctrinal qualifications—if the members of the boards do not know the doctrines, or are not zealous for them? And how shall they evaluate the current teaching without a sound foundation in doctrine of their own? Perhaps this sheds new light on the qualifications for school board members.

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2016, p. 124.

As we have seen, excellent teachers will have the ability to teach and have doctrinal understanding. Those are foundational qualifications. Teachers interpret the Bible. They define and explain doctrines such as the creation, the covenant, grace, love, sin, the atonement, marriage, and the church. Teachers must have a solid biblical and creedal (that is, Reformed) foundation. More, however, is desired. We continue to set forth qualifications for an excellent Protestant Reformed teacher.

Teaching as Calling

An excellent teacher will understand that teaching is a calling. This includes, first, that God calls one to be a teacher. The teacher's conviction is: “Teaching in a Christian school is my work.¹ I will not be satisfied in any other kind of work. My desire to be a teacher is part of my conviction that this is my calling before God.” The work of teaching will not go well for someone who is not called to be a teacher. Either he will soon

¹ Recall that in reference to the schools I use the terms “Christian” or “Protestant Reformed” interchangeably. The schools referenced in these articles are those established by members of Protestant Reformed congregations. At the same time, the qualifications set forth for a Christian school teacher have broader application than merely to teachers in these schools.

quit (or be released) and find other employment, or, he will slog along year after year, going through the motions, teaching poorly. The work is extremely demanding mentally, emotionally, and physically. Teaching requires untold hours of preparation, grading, studying, and evaluating, to say nothing of meetings. Truly, the teacher's work is never finished. He can always do more. Besides, the troubles that a teacher encounters are too numerous, and the earthly rewards (that is, pay) too small. Without a strong sense of calling, a teacher will give up, or become bitter, jaundiced, and unprofitable.

Concerning teaching as *calling*, secondly, the teacher's calling extends also to the place, that is, to the school where God calls one to teach. The issue confronts a college graduate when it is time to make applications to the schools. The question burdening the soul must be, “Where will the Lord have me teach?” The teacher will have desires and preferences, but he ought not ordinarily limit his applications or his thinking to one or two schools. To compare it to the seminary graduate, surely no one would expect that a graduate makes his list of the churches and concludes, “These are my top two choices for churches, and surely I will never be a preacher in ____.” And if

the college graduate receives contracts from more than one school, the dollar amount is not the deciding factor. Rather, the issue is where the Lord wills that he teach. (Who would want the minister considering a call to make the decision based on the salary offered?) Prayer, reflection on the needs in the respective schools, an honest appraisal of one's own abilities to fill the needs, and yes, personal circumstances—these will give the graduate the answer he or she is seeking. If you receive a contract from one school only, then you know God's will.

There may well be times when a teacher is in a school that is not her first choice. But God calls her not only to teach there, but also to exert herself to teach well and effectively. And she does, convicted that God has a purpose and a good work to perform there. Keep in mind that when God calls to a particular labor, God also equips one to perform the work. God creates the individual teacher with the necessary gifts to teach, but also supplies the grace to perform the duties of the calling in the place to which He calls.

The requisite *calling* to the work means that a man enters the field of education only through much prayer—he pleads with God to direct his way. He must be convicted that God has called him to teach. He looks not for a mystical experience, nor listens for a still small voice. Rather, the call starts with a desire to teach. Then he examines himself for the gifts. He might wisely ask those who know him well (including especially his teachers) to evaluate his gifts for teaching. Perhaps the need

for teachers urges him on, and he arrives at the conviction—teaching is my God-given vocation in life.

Only a Teacher

A Reformed believer who is convicted of the call to teaching will then give his life to teaching. This is his first love and delight. He does not want to be a teacher *and* an insurance salesman; not a teacher *and* a carpenter; not a teacher *and* a plumber. He gives himself to the calling God gave him. Completely.

This conviction makes it exceedingly difficult to be a mother in the home *and* a teacher in the school. I have great admiration for mothers who, for the love they have for Protestant Reformed schools and for the covenant youth, have assisted the schools by teaching. The sacrifices that they have made, the strain on them, resulting in strain on the home, family, and marriages—only these godly mothers in Israel and their families know. God has used them and blessed them, their students, and their families.

But this ought not so to be. One of the fundamental objections raised against home schooling is the heavy burdens placed upon the mother, who is responsible for the physical, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional care of the home and family. How then can it be legitimate to take a mother out of the home to teach in the school? Emergencies arise, and one must guard against radical stands. But these instances where mothers have come out of the home to teach in covenant schools make the need for more teachers all the more obvious, and compelling.

Teachers must desire to be full-time teachers. They want to develop. They

need hours, many hours, of study in order to continue growing. They need to read broadly—theology, in education generally, in their area of instruction, and simply, good literature—to develop and stay fresh. A teacher, called by God, desires to be the best teacher he or she can be. Would to God that the schools had the commitment to pay teachers the kind of money that would enable teachers to give their lives—twelve months of the year—to the calling of teaching.

Love for Children

This is the *sine qua non* of teaching. Do you love covenant children? If you do not, do not go into education. You cannot fake it. You cannot pretend. A teacher cannot possibly hide her true feelings for covenant children. They will know. Parents will suspect. God will discern, and judge. Love is not some fuzzy, gushing, smiling, emotional activity on display to impress others. Rather, love is a choice made by a sanctified will, a will that is informed by Scripture. It is a choice to love the children for Christ's sake, that is, because they are His. Love gives of self. Love seeks the good of others. Love for covenant children in teachers results in astounding self-sacrificing for the good of the youth. It desires their spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development above the wellbeing of self.

Do you love children? Not sure? The test is not hard. Examine your heart and the motives for teaching. Either a man enters teaching for himself—his ego, his personal or professional advancement, his financial advantage; or, he teaches

because he loves the covenant youth. Anyone who is considering teaching must be able to answer this question: Is it for me, or for them?

100% of the Time

A teacher is a teacher 100% of the time. The position of a Christian school teacher is as close to an office in the church as one can have. A teaching position is much like a minister of the gospel in this respect. A minister is not always preaching, teaching, or preparing sermons. He has free time, relaxing time. He might shop in the store, sit at the beach, or attend a basketball game. But he is, 100% of the time, a minister. The people view him that way.

Likewise, a teacher. He cannot act a fool or live in immorality, and then say, “But I did not do that when I was teaching! That was my free time.” No, a teacher is a teacher 100% of the time. Folly and sin in his life will do immeasurable damage to his effectiveness and may well result in his deserved dismissal.

Also like a minister, a teacher is “on call.” His “after school” hours are not “his own.” He is a servant of the parents, desiring to serve the covenant youth. Complete devotion, 100%.

Hard Work

You are thinking about pursuing the calling of teaching. Stop for a moment and answer these questions. Do you know how to work? Do you enjoy working hard? In teaching, there is no substitute for hard work. Admittedly, in all fields of labor hard work is a good thing, usually advantageous to the diligent worker. The general rule

is that a hard worker will grow and improve in what he does, and thus will advance. Yet in other fields, any number of workers get by, allow others to pick up the slack, and life goes on with a minimum of effort.

Not so in teaching. Day after day after day, the teacher stands before a classroom of students. They are watching, waiting, and listening. The time has come. The teacher must teach. He must have a lesson prepared. He must give the information, interpret it, and apply it. If he has not done his work adequately, he has nothing worthwhile to say. Or having failed to grow by new studies, what he says is old, tired, and uninspiring. And he has no one to pick up the slack. He will fail.

Teaching, excellent teaching, requires hard work and long hours. A lack of work will result in a lack of development as a teacher. That lack of development will produce boring, lack-luster instruction. And that, in turn, kills the joy of teaching. A teacher who will not work hard, year after year, day after day, hour after hour, will not experience the joy of teaching.

Surely more can be said about teacher qualifications; and experienced teachers and administrators could add much to this list. A good teacher enjoys learning. A good teacher knows and uses good grammar. A good teacher is spiritually minded—he loves God, His Word, and is interested in spiritual things. And so the list could grow. We stop here with some of the essentials. The intent is that a young person can consider this and face the question—do I have these qualifications?

And others can spot youth with these qualities and encourage them seriously to consider teaching.

Why is all this required in teachers in Protestant Reformed schools? Is the “bar” set too high? The requirements too stringent? No, far from it. For two reasons: on the one hand, the children instructed, and on the other, the material taught.

First, the children instructed are the future of the church. They are to be reared in the fear of the Lord. They are being prepared for life in the covenant home, the church, and in society. In all areas of life, they will live as God’s covenant people. If the children are not prepared to live as God’s people in all spheres of life, the church itself will suffer significant damage, if it continues to exist.

But there is more. The children, covenant children, are God’s children. Ultimately, they are not the parents’; they are God’s. Into whose hands will you commit your beloved sons and daughters to be taught, disciplined, and directed? That would be cause for care and concern enough. But into whose care and keeping will you commit God’s children? Before God, parents must give answer: “What did you do with My children?” Can we set the bar too high?

The other reason for the high demands and qualifications is the material to be taught. This is the exceedingly difficult part of being a *Protestant Reformed* teacher. When we grasp this, we will understand the need not only for excellence in teachers, but also the necessity for *training* our teachers.

... to be continued. 

First

Everyone, it seems, wants to be first. Understandable, for to be first is to be best or have the most of some ability or power, which usually brings riches or honor. This appeals to us. And we often imagine that if only we, or our children, our team, business, or nation, were first, life would be much better. But this isn't true, for Jesus said, many who are first shall be last (Mark 10:31). And so we would do well to consider from the Word what it truly means to be first.

Scripture celebrates many firsts, and even as we do, firsts with regard to time. The very first day of the very first year was when God created light (Gen. 1:5). Salvation and deliverance are often associated with the first day of a new year, as when Noah uncovered the ark to discover a new creation (Gen. 8:13). In the first month of the year, Israel was freed from the bondage of Egypt, celebrated with the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover, first set up the tabernacle, crossed over Jordan into Canaan, and returned from Babylon (Ex. 40:2; Josh. 4:19; Ezra 7:9).


The most notable first, however, is Jesus. Boldly, He declared, I am *the* first (Rev. 1:17). He meant this absolutely—something to remember especially when tempted to waggle our own first finger high in the air with similar claims. In whatever sense we or anything else might be first, Jesus is first of all. In fact, if Jesus were not *the* first, there could be no others—no first creation, first day, first Adam, or first estate (Rev. 21:1; I Cor. 15:45; Jude 1:6); no first covenant or first principles (Heb. 5:12; 9:1); no firstborn, first love, first works, or first resurrection; and certainly no one who is last could ever be first (Rev. 2:4-5; 20:6; II Tim. 2:13; Matt. 20:16).

As the first, Jesus is the source and cause of all things. Jesus, who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty, is the beginning (Rev. 1:18). He is the beginning in whom God created the heavens and the earth, and by whom all things were made (Gen 1:1; John 1:3). Jesus is the first whose hand laid the foundations of earth and

spanned the heavens (Is. 48:13). He is the first who alone declares the end from the beginning, commands from of old the things that shall be, whose counsel stands, and who does all His good pleasure (Is. 41:4; 46:10). Jesus is also first because He is the eternal and perfect revelation of the being, works, and will of God. Jesus is first as the faithful and true witness, the wisdom of the eternal thoughts of God, the Alphabet and the Word who is the living exegesis of God spoken already on the first day of creation, revealed by the apostles and prophets, and written in Holy Scripture (Rev. 1:11; 3:14; Prov. 8; John 1:1).

The ultimate explanation for why Jesus is first is this: He alone is the eternal and natural Son of God living in the bosom of the Father, as the express image of His person and brightness of His glory, daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him and declaring Him (Prov. 8:30; John 1:18). And He is first because at the appointed time, God sent this same, only-begotten and eternal Son into the world to assume human nature by the Holy Spirit, so that Jesus is not only the firstborn son of Mary but firstborn of every creature (Matt. 1:25; Col. 1:15). As firstborn Son, Jesus is given the power, authority, and kingdom of God, and is made King of kings; even the angels must worship Him (Num. 8:16; Col. 1:19; II Chron. 21:3; Ps. 89:27; Heb. 1:6). And as the Son of God, Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren, given responsibility to gather, defend, and preserve them as the church of God written in heaven (Rev. 8:29; Heb. 12:23).

Only through faith in Jesus, can we who are last, be first (Matt. 20:16). Even though He is the first, He first suffered many things to redeem us from among men as firstfruits unto God (Rev. 14:4). Only because He first loved us, are we begotten by the will of God as firstfruits of His creatures (Jam. 1:18). And only because He is the first begotten from the dead and firstfruits of them that sleep, will the dead in Christ rise first (I Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 4:16).

Therefore, seek not to be first. Rather, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; seek Jesus, the first, and be assured that all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33). 

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The Normal Christian Life

Lord's Day 33

Question 88. Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

Answer. Of two parts: of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Question 89. What is the mortification of the old man?

Answer. It is a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Question 90. What is the quickening of the new man?

Answer. It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Question 91. But what are good works?

Answer. Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

How does the Bible describe a true Christian? Is one a Christian simply because he believes that the Bible is true? Is a believer defined by what and how much he knows? Is she a Christian because she does not do, say, or watch certain things that are accepted behaviors in the world? She doesn't drink, swear, or watch movies—does this make her a Christian? Is the Christian a person who no longer sins, one who has overcome all evil desire?

On the flip-side, is one *not* a Christian because his theological understanding of Scripture is not complete? Is she *not* a believer who is tempted by lust? Does his notorious sin mean that he is no longer or perhaps never was a Christian?

What defines the Christian? What makes you a Christian?

The answer? The Christian is not defined first by what he/she does or does not do, nor by what he/she knows or does not know, nor by the thoughts he/she has or does not have. Rather, the Christian is defined by who or what he/she is spiritually. The true believer is one who has been made a new creature by the regenerating

power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the result is that the child of God knows and confesses certain things, lives a certain way, rejects certain things, thinks heavenly and spiritual thoughts, and has desires that are in line with God's own will/desire; but these things do not make you a Christian. They become true because you are a Christian.

And this new thinking, desiring, speaking, and doing are never perfect on this side of heaven.

This Lord's Day of the Catechism describes the basic elements of the normal Christian life, the believer's Christian experience in this world. We are changed, but not yet perfected.

Good Works

The previous Lord's Day taught the necessity of good works.

But what is truly "good"?

Most people give a "humanitarian" answer to this question: doing some good deeds that serve the common good of humanity—recycling and the Red Cross. The Catechism, however, answers it by looking higher, to God, our Creator. Then good works are those that (1) proceed from a true faith, (2) are performed according to the law of God, and (3) are done to His glory.

This means that the only ones who truly do good

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works are believers, for their obedience springs from a heart of love for God, the positive principle of the law (Matt. 22:37-40). And they do good with God's glory in view, not merely for "humanitarian" reasons.

It also means that the teaching of common grace, which says that "civic good" is an evidence of God's gracious work in the unregenerate, is not Reformed. Truly good works do much more than help people, and spring from a much deeper source than mere good intentions.

And, it also means that the Christian is "zealous of good works." Where faith is, where love for God is, where there is a delight in the law of God, and where one aims at God's glory and not just human good, there will be a life of works that is pleasing to God.

The true Christian is not defined simply by what he does for others, but by a heart of love for and delight in God, which aims at His glory above all else.

What motivates you to good works? Is it the praise and recognition of men, or the glory of God?

The normal Christian lives a fruitful life.

True Conversion

Our good works, however, are stained with sin, and this is why we need to hear about true conversion.

In giving a biblical definition to conversion, we should not limit ourselves to the date and time when one became a Christian. Nor is conversion the reforming of a few habits or sinful behaviors in one's life. Neither is it merely your act of turning to God, or your "acceptance" of Jesus into your heart. Conversion is not your story or testimony to share with others.

When the Bible speaks of conversion, it refers to the work of God's Spirit in the heart of an elect person, by which his heart is given new spiritual life and is infused with the power to believe the gospel and turn in faith to Jesus Christ and away from sin. This is not the result of human persuasion, for no man can do this work in the sinner's dead soul. Rather, conversion is the sovereign work of God's grace in the hearts of those whom He has chosen (Acts 11:18). In our natural state, the "old man" has complete control over us; it is only by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit that we turn away from sin to serve the living God.

Though there may well be a definite, conscious moment that one receives the Holy Spirit, has his spiritual

eyes opened, and turns for the first time in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ, this does not receive emphasis or attention in Scripture's discussion of conversion. Instead, Scripture speaks of conversion in terms of daily repentance and a continual living by faith (Heb. 12:1-2; I John 1:8-10). All of life is repentance. The test of whether one is truly converted is not one's "testimony," but one's present and ongoing life and experience as a Christian.

"Conversion" and "repentance" are in fact synonyms in the Bible (Acts 3:19). The word for repentance means, in the Greek, "a change of mind," which points to something much deeper than a modification of behavior. The one converted begins to see and understand things from a heavenly and spiritual perspective, especially the things that concern himself. He begins to see himself before God.

The result is that he repents. True repentance involves the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), a heartfelt sorrow and hatred for one's sin (II Cor. 7:10), and a turning from sin to God (Col. 3:5-10). This repentance is called in the Catechism, "the mortification [or putting to death] of the old man."

The sorrow of true repentance is accompanied by faith in Christ and joy in God. As we hate and turn from sin, we at the same time love God and turn to Him. We look in faith to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Substitute, and our hearts are filled with love, gratitude, and delight in God. This is what the Catechism calls "the quickening [or bringing to life] of the new man."

Living in daily repentance is the normal Christian life.

Progress in Sanctification

Even though we continue to sin daily, believers in this life do grow and progress in their life of holiness. The Christian life is not stagnant or static, but ought to be one of spiritual growth, onward and upward.

The Scriptures speak of this progress, both from the point of view of it being God's work in us, and from the point of view of our calling to grow. In Philippians 1:6, Paul writes, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Again, in Philippians 2:13, he says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." While we are preserved by God's grace in salvation, we are also empowered by His grace to grow more and more into the image of His dear Son.

At the same time, we are called to grow and progress spiritually. Philippians 2:12, the verse immediately preceding the one just quoted, calls us to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” In I Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12-14, New Testament believers are chided for their lack of spiritual growth. Peter speaks of “grow(ing) in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18) and of desiring the pure milk of the Word “that ye may grow thereby” (I Pet. 2:2).

Sometimes we think of this growth as mostly external, an increase in good works or victory over a particular sin in our lives. But from a subjective point of view, growth in grace is much deeper. It is a continual and growing awareness of the depths of sin in one’s heart, and a greater sorrow over sin—“more and more to hate sin.” It is realizing that while I may have been able to overcome or change a sinful habit in my life, there is a deeper root to that sin in my heart. I may repent from adultery, but I recognize that there is lust in my heart for which I also need repentance.

The closer we come to Christ, the more we become like Him; and the deeper our fellowship with Him, the greater is our awareness of our sin and the greater is our experience of His grace. Also, as we grow in grace and repentance, the more we know that we are pleasing to God, and the more we experience the joy of walking with Him.

Central to our growth in sanctification is the Word of God, read privately and heard in the preaching. “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). Through the reading and memorization of Scripture, and through hearing the indispensable preaching of the gospel, we grow and progress in holiness.

The normal Christian life is one of progress in sanctification.

A Lifelong Struggle

So long as we remain on this earth, we will not become perfect in holiness. In fact, we only ever have a small beginning of the new obedience. Because of this, the struggle with sin remains with the believer until the day of his death. This is what Paul writes about in Romans 7 when he says, “The good that I would I do not; but the

evil that I would not, that I do.” And again, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind” (vv. 19, 22, 23).

Every true believer knows this to be true, from his own experience; but rather than despairing over this, we should see God’s purpose in leaving us, while on this earth, to deal with the remnants of sin and the old man.

Why do we still struggle with sin? What is God’s purpose in this?

First, God wants us to be humble. When our experience is victory over besetting sin, we are immediately tempted to an even greater sin: pride. So, Paul says, God gave him a thorn in the flesh “lest [he] should become exalted above measure” (II Cor. 12:7). Worse than lust or murder is the sin of pride, which says, “I don’t need God.”

Second, in the constant experience of God’s mercy and grace, God wants us to show mercy to others and to forgive readily. Just as we constantly, daily need forgiveness, so we should forgive others the wrongs that they do against us, which though they may be grievous, can never measure up to the debt of our sins that God has forgiven.

Third, remaining sin increases in us a longing for heaven and perfection. Few things in life make us long for heaven more than our constant struggle with sin. Paul’s groan in Romans 7:24, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” is an expression of his longing for the final day of deliverance from sin’s presence and power. This struggle and longing do not make us complacent toward sin, but encourage us to hate sin, to strive, to run, to wrestle, to press on, to fight, to mortify the old man, and to quicken the new.

The normal Christian is one who struggles with sin all his life long.

Do you live the “normal” Christian life? Is your conversion true/genuine?

Are you fruitful?


Do you live in daily repentance?

Are you progressing in holiness?

Are you involved in a lifelong battle with sin?

If you answer “Yes” to those questions, that is normal—for Christians.

Questions for Discussion

1. What constitutes a good work? Would you describe philanthropy as a good work? Why or why not?
2. Why is it necessary for us to be converted?
3. What are the two aspects of conversion?
4. Is conversion a one-time matter or a continuous process?
5. How does one know whether his conversion is genuine?
6. Why is growth in sanctification important for the Christian? Can/ought we stand still in our spiritual growth?
7. How do we grow in sanctification?
8. Is it abnormal for a believer to be struggling with sin?
9. What are God's purposes in our struggles with sin? How are these different than the experiences of one who does not struggle with sin, but instead gives himself over to sin's pleasures?
10. What does the normal Christian life look like? How is this an encouragement to you as a believer? 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. RICHARD SMIT

Faithful Financial Support for Foreign Missions

Because the well-established system for the collection and distribution of financial support for our denominational foreign mission labors may easily go unnoticed, it is worthwhile to examine the biblical principles and benefits of this Reformed practice. This denominational practice has well served the stability and continuity of our foreign mission labors, and the continuation of this orderly practice needs to be encouraged.

A brief survey of how financial support is raised by some foreign missionaries shows that a variety of methods with a common theme have been used. One basic method for financial support is a letter campaign to churches, acquaintances, friends, and others for donations to the mission work. For success with this method, some have even hired the services of a professional consultant in order to improve fundraising outcomes each year.

A modern adaptation of this method can be seen on mission field blogs or in electronic newsletters distributed by email. Besides giving updates about the events

and development of the mission work, blogs display a donation "button." Those who read such blogs can "poke" the donation button, if they wish, and make one-time or repeated contributions.

Finally, another common method has been used in close connection with missionary furloughs. Some foreign missionaries, during their scheduled furloughs, have provided presentations of their labors to supporting churches, groups, families, and friends in their passport countries. However, during these public presentations, pleas for support were made and then forms and envelopes were handed out by which those in attendance could provide their financial support.

The troubling thing that all these methods have in common is that the missionary bears the responsibility to raise his own financial support. That problem may be the just consequence of some missionaries having been self-appointed to their work. That problem may be the consequence of an independent church sending out a missionary to a foreign field without sufficient finances, and by default improperly shifting the responsibility of the shortfall to the missionary. Whatever the underlying reason may be, the mis-

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sionary nevertheless bears a weighty and distracting financial responsibility.

In contrast, the system of financial support by our churches for our foreign mission work takes a biblically healthy approach. Certainly, the missionaries should continue to provide information to the churches about the developments, significant events, hardships, struggles, blessings of the work through the means of Internet blogs, newsletters, and in-person presentations. By these means, they ought to continue their expressions of hearty thanks to the churches for the love and support provided. Yet, the work, the responsibility, the burden, and the oversight of the collection and disbursement of financial support belongs on the shoulders of the churches in common through the direction and decisions of the synod, denominational mission committees, and calling churches.

As it works still today, this responsibility has been and continues to be fulfilled through a weekly denominational effort that does not make headline news in the world, and maybe goes easily unnoticed by us, too. When giving our offerings to the Lord in the cause of the General Fund each Lord's Day, a portion of our weekly General Fund offering is set aside for the support of our denominational labors in common, including foreign missions. Every week through our General Fund offerings and our prayers, we are supporting actively, regularly, and systematically the work of the Lord in foreign missions. Certainly, this is nothing earth-shaking by men's standards; but for the cause of the gospel of Christ in these last days it is a significant endeavor for a small denomination.

According to the decisions of Synod 2016, the synodical assessment for 2017 that PRCA families and individuals promise and oblige themselves to provide for our synodical work is \$815. Of that amount, \$161 has been designated for our foreign mission labors. The weekly amount for our foreign mission labors is about \$3 per family. Through the regular, weekly giving to our local General Funds, \$3 is set aside for the support of our two, and soon, the Lord willing, three foreign missionaries and their families in the Philippines. Additionally, if members desire to give more than the synodical assessment amount, other opportunities for that giving are provided through the periodic "FMC" special offerings in our local congregations.

According to that approved plan, then, the treasurers of our local congregations expect to forward the correct funds each month to the synodical treasurer, from which an appropriate portion is placed into the "foreign missions" general fund. From those accumulated funds, our foreign missionaries are given their monthly salaries and their approved reimbursements for various mission work expenses.

In other words, from the hearts and hands of the families and individuals of our churches in Sunday worship to Jehovah, through a very orderly system of collection, distribution, accountability, and oversight, our missionaries are supported in their mission labors.

As long as we remain free from great persecution or other unusual events that may interrupt our denominational life and work, this present Reformed, church-orderly practice needs to continue. This needs to continue because the Lord calls the churches faithfully to support their ordained and sent ministers of the Word in their work, including the missionaries. The Lord speaks of that duty to the support of the ministers of the Word, including missionaries, in several places in Scripture, such as I Timothy 5:18: "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward." While the minister of the Word provides the spiritual food for the people of God in the preaching of the Word weekly, the people of God must provide for him the earthly food to continue in that noble calling.

This principle of I Corinthians 9:7-18, II Corinthians 11:7-12, Galatians 6:6, and I Timothy 5:18 is summarized in the first part of Article 11 of our Church Order as follows: "On the other hand, the consistory, as representing the congregation, shall also be bound to provide for the proper support of its ministers...."

This Reformed understanding regarding the financial responsibility that our churches have also toward our missionaries in our denominational work is embodied in the call letter that our missionaries receive, where it states: "Convinced that the labourer is worthy of his hire and to encourage you in the discharge of your duties, and to free you from all worldly care and avocation while you are ministering God's Holy Word...in the [specific foreign field], we...do promise and oblige ourselves to see that you are paid, on behalf of our churches the sum of..."

Thereby the missionary is relieved of the burden and work of the procurement and care of the funds that support his mission labors. Instead, that work is carried willingly by the hands and hearts of the calling and supporting churches, so that the missionary may devote all of his time and effort in his mission labors to preaching and teaching the Word.

This orderly system of financial support for our foreign missionaries needs to continue. Its continuation is maintained locally, where families and individuals of our congregations contribute regularly and willingly according to the synodically approved assessments for their local General Funds. Thereby not only are the needs of the work of the local congregation met, but also the needs of our extensive denominational work in common are met, including foreign missions. Families and individuals are encouraged to maintain the duty of the giving of the firstfruits of their income to the Lord (Prov. 3:9) for the work of our local congregations and for the work of our denomination. These regular assessments, and any amounts beyond them as the Lord has prospered us, let us offer with thankfulness to the Lord because He loves a cheerful giver (II Cor. 9:7).

As we continue in this duty, we will also enjoy some benefits. First, there will be proper oversight and stewardship of the finances needed for the work. Occasion for distrust and suspicion and occasion for temptations are avoided. Through the oversight of many elders, proper stewardship, accountability, and care of the Lord's money for missions are promoted. This watchful care and transparency promotes stability and continuity in the mission work from year to year.

Secondly, as the earlier quote from the missionary call letter indicates, the missionaries and their families receive

the financial support as a clear token of the love of the churches for the Lord of the harvest and of their loving care for His harvest laborers. By that token, they will understand that the churches stand behind their full-time labors in the Lord's harvest. Such faithful support has been and continues to be an occasion for much thanksgiving to the Lord, and a source of great encouragement for our missionaries to press on in the demanding work.

Finally, the members of the churches may be encouraged in this work. It is true that

we can feel rather disconnected from a mission field 8,000 miles, or even 1,000 miles distant. It is true that the giving of \$3 a week to our foreign mission work does not seem like much. It is true that the manner in which it is collected is hardly noticeable because of its regularity, discreetness, and simplicity. It is true that according to worldly standards of giving, such simple and discreet giving does not bring great praise and notoriety, which is as it should be (Matt. 6:1-4). Nevertheless, in this discreet, steady, and orderly activity of financial support for our foreign missionaries our members—young and old alike in the local pew—remain directly connected and directly involved

with the weekly preaching and instruction in the Word of the Lord on our foreign fields. With our financial support and our accompanying prayers, we do stand with our missionaries in their demanding labors.

It would be a tragedy if our foreign missionaries were forced to raise their own financial support in whole or in part because we shirked our duty. May the Lord protect us from such error and preserve us in this duty so that, being freed from worldly cares and jobs, our foreign missionaries may devote their time and energy fully to their work for the gathering of believers and their seed out of the darkness of idolatry and unbelief. ☞

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Lord, Grant Boldness: The RFPA's Witness in the Sexual Revolution (1)

We are presently living in the midst of a sexual revolution of monumental scope and unheard-of influence. Our society shamelessly bows before the goddess Sex and has committed herself wholeheartedly to the promotion of her worship.¹

Wherever the Reformed Christian turns, the evidence of this revolution stares him in the face. He sees it when he turns on the TV. He sees it when he opens the web browser. He sees it on billboards as he drives down the highway. He sees it in the magazine rack as he stands in line at the grocery store. He sees it when he goes shopping at the mall. He sees evidence of it amongst his co-workers in the office and on the jobsite. He sees evidence of it amongst his fellow students on the university campus. He may even see evidence of it in his own family.

It is almost impossible to over-estimate the significance of this issue for Reformed believers today. The sexual revolution is one of the most important practical issues facing the church of Christ. The pressure being placed on her is massive. The subject is serious and sobering.

How do we respond? What can we do and say as an Association?

We are guided in part by what we read in Acts 4. The apostles had been imprisoned and threatened by the leaders of the Jews for preaching the gospel. They were released with the warning not to continue preaching. When the church heard this, they gathered together and prayed, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (v. 29).

¹ David J. Engelsma, "The Sexual Revolution," in *The Reformed Worldview: The Word of God for Our Generation* (British Reformed Fellowship, 2012), 79-102.

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This is the text of the speech that Rev. Engelsma delivered at the RFPA Annual Meeting on September 29, 2016.

This is what the church today needs as well. We need boldness that can only come from God Himself to continue to proclaim the truth of His Word, even when threatened by others in the world and in the broader church world. Our prayer as an Association must be: "Lord, grant boldness! That thy servants may speak—and write—Thy Word in the face of this sexual revolution!"

Where We Are

In order to give a knowledgeable witness, it is important that we know something about the sexual revolution that we are witnessing in society.

The world is unashamed of its sexual promiscuity, fornicating before marriage and outside of marriage. There is the multi-billion-dollar pornography business, which catches many in the embrace of strange women (and men).² There is the glorification of sex in music and movies and TV shows.³ There is the use of sex in advertising; as the adage goes, sex sells. There is the culture of frivolous and easy divorce, and the almost inevitable remarriage that follows. There is the idolizing of Hollywood and sports celebrities who jump from one bed to another.

But in recent years we have seen the sexual revolution expanding on two fronts. In the first place, we are witnessing a development in the promotion of homosexuality and lesbianism. It is striking how rapidly this development came. Four or five years ago very few were talking about the issue of homosexuality, and now suddenly it is a major issue and topic of frequent conversation. It is promoted on movies and TV shows and advertisements. This celebrity

² As I was preparing for this speech, a brother sent me a link to a disturbing article that suggested a connection between pornography use and sexual abuse. The premise was that teenage boys who view pornography think this perverse sexuality is normal and demand these things of young women, often leading to sexual abuse and even rape.

³ I was informed by another brother that research indicates that there is even one TV show that is so explicit that it causes traffic on pornography sites to decrease while it is airing.

and that sports figure announce that they are gay. And all the others stand behind them in support. And now, just a year ago, we had the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, where the United States Supreme Court redefined marriage so that it includes homosexual unions.

The second development is the promotion of transgenderism, of which there are many examples in the media: the former Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner undergoing a sex change to be reborn as Kaitlyn Jenner, now honored with all kinds of awards for bravery; a famous celebrity couple (now apparently in the throes of a bitter divorce) encouraging their young daughter to identify as “John”; major retailer Target announcing that transgendered people may choose whatever bathroom they desire; a case coming from a Virginia school board to the Supreme Court having to do with transgendered students and bathrooms.⁴

Instead of a person’s gender being governed by one’s anatomy at birth, the sexual revolutionaries say that gender is a social construct. A person’s gender is determined by how he/she feels and what he/she wants to be. One may choose to identify as whatever he/she wants.

It is amazing how quickly this has become the major issue today. Just over a year ago we were talking about homosexual marriage, and immediately after that was decided the issue became transgenderism. This is no accident; this is part of the plan of the sexual revolution. Not only are they undermining the institution of marriage, but they are also undermining gender and the body.

Where We’ve Been

What is important to understand is that these developments, although frightening, are not at all surprising.

The road has been paved for these developments for years. Such things as evolutionism, feminism, and postmodernism all have played a role. In addition, there has been a conscious, concerted effort to promote these

things. This has not been done haphazardly, but follows a specific playbook.

This playbook was put in place several years ago. In 1987, Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen wrote an essay called “The Overhauling of Straight America.”⁵ They expanded this into a book entitled *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90’s*. The work of these two men was extremely influential and spelled out the playbook that would be followed in the following decades.

The authors recommended that the way to start would be to desensitize the public to homosexuality. Do not try to make them accept it, just have them respond to the issue with a shrug of the shoulders and view it as a matter of personal preference. In order to get there, they laid out six stages. First, talk about gays and gayness as loudly and as often as possible. Second, present gays as victims in need of sympathy and help rather than aggressive challengers. Third, give protectors a just cause so that, rather than supporting homosexuals, they think they are supporting freedom of speech and the like. Fourth, portray homosexuals as outstanding pillars of society. Fifth, make opponents look bad by vilifying them and portraying them all as “bigoted Southern ministers drooling with hysterical hatred to a degree that looks both comical and deranged.” Sixth, solicit funds to launch a massive advertising campaign. The authors then go on to lay out in great detail how this campaign could be carried out through TV, movies, and advertising.

The plan these two men mapped out in the 1980s is eerily similar to what has actually taken place.

In addition to these concerted efforts on the part of the world, the broadly Christian church has also played a part in these developments.⁶

One way in which that was done was through the acceptance of divorce.⁷ To a previous generation, the idea of divorce was inconceivable. Even if you were in a bad, unhappy marriage, divorce was hardly an option. This

⁴ Cf. Ken Ham, “Transgender Restroom Case Headed to the Supreme Court,” <https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2016/07/27/transgender-restroom-case-headed-supreme-court/> (accessed September 29, 2016); and R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Supreme Court to rule in transgender bathroom case that could fundamentally reshape society,” <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/10/31/briefing-10-31-16/> (accessed November 16, 2016).

⁵ http://library.gayhomeland.org/0018/EN/EN_Overhauling_Straight.htm (accessed November 17, 2016).

⁶ Cf. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2015), 17-32.

⁷ Lewis Smedes, “Like the Wideness of the Sea,” *Perspectives* 14, no. 5 (May 1999): 8-12.

changed at the beginning of the twentieth century when people began admitting fault in order to get a divorce. And then in the 1960s came the legalization of no-fault divorce. Instead of having people stand trial, give painful testimony, and admit guilt, it was thought to be more humane to allow no-fault divorce. This means that now divorce is something that is easy to obtain. All you have to do is claim some irreconcilable differences and your marriage vanishes. This was an important step in the sexual revolution because it made every marriage provisional. It was a mere contract that could be broken at any time.

A second way in which the road was paved for these developments was through the development and acceptance of abortion and birth control, particularly the birth control pill.⁸ Birth control is certainly not something new to this century, but it has developed in our modern, technological age. In decades past, there was a certain outward check on sexual immorality because of the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. But then in the early 1900s, and especially in the 1960s, there was the development of the birth control pill. Then came was the *Roe v. Wade* case in 1973, which made abortion legal. Without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy, or at least the means to kill the consequences, these things have unleashed a tidal wave of sexual promiscuity. And what this also did was to redefine sex as something without any connection to children, which has a major impact on homosexuality.

A third way in which the road was paved for these developments was through the acceptance of fornication and “cohabitation.”⁹ In previous generations it was considered sin to engage in sexual activity prior to marriage and to live together although not married. But now the thought of saving oneself sexually for marriage is thought to be repressive and irrational. You cannot expect young adults to contain their God-given sexual natures and desires, they say. Now the expectation is that if you are going to date a person and get to know them, you must have sex with them. In colleges and high schools one finds the culture of hooking up. Teenage girls are encouraged to go on the birth control pill so that they

are free to engage in sexual activity with their boyfriends without fear of getting pregnant. Now the expectation is that men and women live together even though they are not married. The big step they take in their relationship is not to get married but to move in together. Marriage is pushed off until they are much older and more financially secure. For many, cohabitation has replaced marriage altogether. The effect of this is that it undermines the institution of marriage and replaces it with people merely living together.

All of these things have contributed to preparing the way for the ready acceptance in our society of homosexuality and transgenderism.

Where We’re Going

Briefly, what does the future hold?

Obviously, we are unable to predict exactly what will happen in the future, but we can be sure that there will be further development in sexual sin. The sexual revolutionaries will continue to press their agenda. Some have suggested that the present developments open the door to polygamy, bestiality, pedophilia, and incest.¹⁰ Marriage can now be defined however people want, whether that be man with man, woman with woman, man with beast, or parent with child. The only criterion that they yet seek to maintain is consent; the union has to be willing on the part of both parties. Otherwise, everything is approved.¹¹ It is hard to imagine what will stop our society from doing away with marriage altogether as an outdated, useless institution.

This will mean increased persecution for the church. More and more freedom of speech and religious liberty are being limited and denied for the sake of this new world order. The church is ordered to be quiet and get in line, or else risk trouble. And when the church refuses to do so, she can expect not only mockery and being ostracized, but being persecuted with arrest and punishment at the hands of the authorities. Dark storm clouds are building on the horizon.

How must we respond?

... to be continued. 

⁸ For help in understanding the issue of birth control, cf. Cory and Lael Griess, “Children: Calling and Blessing,” *Standard Bearer* 92 no. 14 (April 15, 2016): 333-6.

⁹ Cf. Clay Spronk, “A Modern-Day Jezebel,” *Standard Bearer* 88 no. 12 (March 15, 2012): 273-6.

¹⁰ On the matter of incest, cf. Kiley Crossland, “Mother, Adult Son Fight for Right to Incestuous Relationship,” <http://theaquilareport.com/mother-adult-son-fight-for-right-to-incestuous-relationship/> (accessed November 17, 2016).

¹¹ Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 96-7.

“The Truth Never Begg”: The Necessary Voice of the Reformed Free Publishing Association

In 1953 Herman Hoeksema penned an editorial titled “Why We Should Read the *Standard Bearer*.” He stated:

Mark you well, the *Standard Bearer* is not begging for subscriptions. The truth never begs. And the *Standard Bearer* represents the truth. If many of us are not interested in the Protestant Reformed truth anymore, something which I am still loath to believe, the truth of God nevertheless stands and marches on, even without them. Besides, I do not want mere subscribers, but readers that will make careful study of our paper and read it from cover to cover.

Hoeksema’s editorial is still relevant today for members of the RFPA. We do not beg for association members; we do not beg for book club members; and we do not beg for *Standard Bearer* subscribers. Indeed, the truth never begs. The truth stands and marches on. The calling comes through the echoes of our history: read!

H. Hoeksema identified reasons for subscribing to the *Standard Bearer*. It promotes the truth and is the means by which the truths found in the Protestant Reformed denomination have become known and respected. The *Standard Bearer* is specific; it does not just speak about the Reformed faith; it dots the i’s and crosses the t’s. The reasons are characteristics. They are characteristics of the works of the RFPA.

Faithful Reformed people tirelessly contribute to the RFPA’s various publications. The *Standard Bearer* editorial staff labors to write a first-rate magazine

complete with rubrics, series, meditations, discussions of current events, and special issues. Authors carefully pen books. Book coordinators, copyeditors, proofreaders, typesetters, and cover designers all diligently work to ensure that the RFPA produces books that are professional, reflective of the truth, and allow the reader to focus on those truths as they read. Operations and administrative details are carefully attended to so that the association runs smoothly and the focus can remain on the content of the publications. Additionally, this past year has seen significant growth in the RFPA blog. Various writers now post Reformed material for digital consumption.

The truth was promoted in the *Standard Bearer*! Twenty-one issues deliver more than 175 articles to about 2,250 subscribers every year. Of note, the RFPA board and editorial committee labored closely together in the past year with efforts ultimately leading to a meeting, intended to be annual, where special focus was placed on the *Standard Bearer*. Discussion topics ranged from its appearance, layout, content, promotion, placement, pricing, and the possibility of a redesign. Most importantly, the *Standard Bearer* promotes the truth in its many articles.

Regarding the 2015 special Reformation issue a reader from New Zealand wrote, “I have been reading and hoarding the *Standard Bearer* since the mid 1970s and must admit this one I cannot part with.” The special April 15, 2016, issue encouraged us in our marriages. Prof. B. Gritters in his editorials taught the readers what it means to be Reformed. We have kept up with news in our churches, reports of classis, synod, mission trips, and the world around us. We have followed closely the world’s open adoption of homosexuality and witnessed its desire to corrupt the institution of marriage. We have been com-

Mr. Hoekstra is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, and secretary of the RFPA.

forted and exhorted in meditations. A reader from Iowa shared, "I quite often read the meditation two or three times." To the many who work to create the *Standard Bearer* we say, thanks!

The truth was promoted in books! A little more than 1,100 book club members received four new publications this past year.

Gottschalk, Servant of God tells the story of a pre-Reformer who was committed to the truth of double predestination. A reader from New York wrote, "Thank you for the book.... I couldn't put it down. Easy to read. Informative. A scholarly work."

The Rock Whence We Are Hewn, a must read for all of us, especially the young people, tells the story of the foundation of the Protestant Reformed denomination with special focus on the truths of sovereign particular grace over against the heresy of common grace.

Christianizing the World exposes the logical end of the error of common grace and the destruction it has brought and will bring upon churches that insist on embracing this heresy. This book is currently being advertised on WFUR, a Grand Rapids MI radio station. Notably, the truth in this book is potent enough that *The Clarion*, which is the Canadian Reformed magazine, and *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*, the official publication of the Heritage Reformed congregations, refused to advertise it.

With excitement the RFPA recently received the much anticipated volume, *The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary*, which was originally written in Dutch by B. Wielenga, a prominent minister of the Word in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the early to mid-1900s. "The great worth of this book," according to its editor, Prof. David J. Engelsma, "is that it is the translation into English of a thorough, penetrating, sound commentary on the historic, inestimably rich Reformed baptism form." Wielenga wrote the commentary in 1906 for all members of Reformed churches, as he stated in his preface: "The ardent desire of my heart is that by the publication of this writing many people reading this work learn to regard baptism more purely, appreciate it more warmly, and more zealously plead the covenantal promises."

The RFPA also participated in publishing *A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend*,

1916–2016, the anniversary book of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In addition to publishing these five books, the RFPA published three new study guides on the books of Acts, James, and Romans as well as a second edition of Herman Hoeksema's *God's Goodness Always Particular*. The board also updated the ebook policy to allow book club members to receive free of charge the ebook format of all new books, adding another value to book club membership. To the many who labor in writing and creating books we say, thanks!

The truth was promoted on the blog! This past year rfpa.org drew 107,000 visits from fifty-five countries, and undoubtedly many of these visitors read more than seventy-five blog posts. Recent posts addressed Islam in a way that can help us better understand this world religion and how we respond to the doctrinal errors within it. Other posts addressed the errors of venerating Mary, provided help for those making decisions, and exposed the heresy of Federal Vision as it continues to fester in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We encourage you not only to read the blogs but to comment. Start a conversation, ask a question, encourage the writers, share. To those who write for the blog we say, thanks!

We must remember that the witness of the RFPA is not merely through current publications, but also through past publications, as a reader in India recently reminded us: "I was struggling with the common grace issue. My struggles ceased when I read Herman Hoeksema (*Reformed Dogmatics* and *Ready to Give an Answer*). I no longer adhere to common grace." This past year 1,132 copies of recent and older titles were shipped to the Philippines to support the mission work and spiritual growth in that field. Editorial Duolos, a ministry of Spanish Evangelical Distributors that has been distributing Christian books in Spanish since 1989, noticed a void for theologically sound works and is now translating *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace* for the Spanish-speaking world. We are thankful to God that past publications continue serve the cause of the gospel.

In the coming year the RFPA will continue to sound forth the truth. We do not even wonder if there will be more *Standard Bearer* articles or blog

posts; we are confident that God will graciously provide these materials and sustain our authors and staff. We will open our magazines and digital devices to discover what was planned when it arrives. Without a doubt Reformed truths will be put forward and heresies will be exposed.

A number of books are also planned for the coming year, the first of which will be *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer*. We also plan to release a book outside of the book club this year. This is a test case for bringing additional books to market without overloading the book club. This is not a timid test; we are excited to announce this new book author, Rev. M. McGeown, and the publication *Called to Watch for Christ's Return*, an exposition of Christ's Olivet Discourse.

All of this work has occurred in a year that has seen some staff changes. Rachel Maatman has been called to serve as a mother in Zion and has retired from the RFPA. We give thanks for her work. We welcomed a new staff member, Miriam Koerner, to the office, replacing Rachel. More significant changes will occur in the coming year. We expect to hire someone to focus on building a children's book division based on the successful publication of *Gottschalk* and the overwhelming interest provided by our readers and writers. Most notably, Tim Pipe and Evelyn Langerak plan to retire in about a year. Transition plans are in the works, and we covet your prayers as the board works through these changes in personnel. Tim and Evelyn have faithfully served for many years in the RFPA, and whether they admit it or not, they know more about the RFPA than any board member. Replacing them will not be easy, but they have both agreed to train their replacements during this transition. Changes will come, but thankfully, the truth of God's Word is unchanging. We trust that He will be faithful in this transition.


Just as in 1953, so also today, the RFPA publishes the distinctive truths of the Reformed faith. The scholarly work of our authors is not unnoticed outside the Protestant Reformed Churches either. Eugene Heide-man recently published his work, *Henry Scholte, His Legacy in the Netherlands and in America*, in which he made numerous references to Marv Kamps' work, 1834. Our writers are faithful and willing to take stands

for the truth despite its unpopularity in the world and the nominal church. Our writers are unabashed. We give thanks to God for them and we encourage them to continue to be faithful in this regard. Admittedly, the task is not easy; at times it is wearisome and difficult. By God's grace though, distinctively Reformed truths flow forth from the *Standard Bearer*, the books, and the blog. God is pleased to use a very small publishing organization for this work. For this we are both humbled and thankful.

H. Hoeksema concluded his 1953 editorial with a sobering thought:

Controversy we must have. The Scriptures are full of controversy. The Confessions devote a large part of their contents to controversy. As long as we are living in a sinful world and in an imperfect church, as long as the truth is attacked by those that oppose it, we certainly need controversy. And no lover of the truth, and certainly no Protestant Reformed man or woman should refuse to read the *Standard Bearer* because of its partly controversial nature. You must become acquainted with all the arguments, pro and against the truth of God.... This is my last reason why it is certainly necessary for all the Protestant Reformed people to read and support the *Standard Bearer* with all their power.

Imagine the Protestant Reformed Churches and even the world without the RFPA. Ninety-two years of the *Standard Bearer*, missing. Sixty-five thousand books in the RFPA warehouse and untold quantities throughout the world and in homes, gone. The truths of sovereign particular grace, of the covenant, of sex, marriage, divorce, remarriage, and homosexuality would be virtually unheard of in the church world today. God has given this little organization an amazing calling.

Association members, the truth never begs. But let us remember that we stand in this calling together. Together! We labor together! Encourage one another! Regarding the truths published by the RFPA, let it be said of us that we read, write, and converse about them. Not just for the sake of knowledge, but because we love the truth. May God grant us the grace faithfully to continue in this labor together. For His faithfulness shown to us, we give thanks! 

The 2016 BRF Conference in Northern Ireland

July 16-July 23, 2016 marked the fourteenth British Reformed Fellowship Conference. The venue was the Castlewellaan Castle, in Castlewellaan, Northern Ireland. The theme was “Behold I Come Quickly: The Reformed, Biblical Truth of the End.”

One hundred twenty-four attendees from ten different countries registered and attended all seven days, while several more visitors attended various speeches. Attendees came from the following countries (number of attendees in parentheses): Australia (4), Canada (4), England (6), Hungary (3), Northern Ireland (43), Philippines (1), Republic of Ireland (4), Singapore (12), USA (41), Wales (6).

After taking a red-eye flight from Grand Rapids to Dublin, my wife Pat and I took a bus to Castlewellaan. The bus trip introduced us to the beauty of Northern Ireland. We had heard about the beauty of the rugged coastline but were not prepared for the pastoral beauty of the interior of the country; mile after mile of rolling hills covered with thousands of sheep and cattle dispersed among countless small pastures bordered by hedges and stone fences; roads so narrow and twisting that the bus frequently had to come to a complete stop with its side-view mirror embedded in a hedge, just to let an oncoming vehicle pass. The bus drivers in Northern Ireland should all have a medal for skill and bravery.

For my wife and me, one of the highlights of the conference was being able to meet and talk with people of like faith from many other countries. We were able to get a glimpse into the joys and hardships that other believers face as they seek to be members of a church faithful to the Word of God. Another highlight, of course, was the speeches, the first of which was delivered Saturday night by Rev. Martyn McGeown, titled “Disorderliness and the Second Coming of Christ,” based on II Thessalonians 3.

Sunday began with morning devotions at 8:30 A.M.

Mr. Lanning is a member of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church and, along with his wife Pat, attended the BRF Conference held last summer.

followed by the morning worship service at 10:00 A.M. This service was led by Professor David Engelsma, who preached on “The Hope of Creation for Christ’s Coming” based on Romans 8:19-22. In the afternoon we all gathered again for a lecture by Mr. Pete Adams entitled “The Renaissance and the Reformation.” After a 5:30 P.M. dinner, we gathered for a third time that day for the evening worship service led by Rev. Andy Lanning, who preached from Genesis 5: 25-27 under the theme “Methuselah.” The Lord’s Day ended with fellowship and evening devotions at 9:30 P.M.

The rest of the week followed a general format of morning devotions at 8 A.M., breakfast at 8:15, various activities throughout the day, dinner at 6 P.M., speech at 7:30 P.M., tea and tuck (tea, ice cream and fellowship) at 9 P.M., and finally devotions at 10 P.M. The various activities included bus trips, free time, and speeches. The first bus trip was to Hillsborough Castle, a mansion built in the 1770’s and currently used as a royal palace, where the royal family resides when visiting Northern Ireland. The second bus trip included two destinations. The first was to the Boyne Valley, the site of the 1690 battle between the Catholic King James II and the Protestant King William III of England. The second destination was the Trim Castle built in 1172.

Over the course of the conference, attendees gathered for the following nine speeches delivered by five different speakers:

Rev. Martyn McGeown—

“Disorderliness and the Second Coming of Christ
(II Thess. 3)”

Rev. Angus Stewart—

“Dispensationalism, J.N. Darby and the Powerscourt”

Prof. David Engelsma—

“The Second and Quick Coming of Jesus Christ
(as Indicated by the Signs)”

“The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11”

“The Coming World Conquest of the
Beast From the Sea”

Rev. Andy Lanning—

“The Reformed Belief concerning
the Rapture and Antichrist”

"Jesus' Coming as a Thief in View of
Abounding Lawlessness and Great Apostasy"
"Called to Live in the Expectation of a Final Judgment and in
the Hope of Life Eternal"
Mr. Pete Adams—
"The Renaissance and the Reformation"
(highlighting their eschatological implications)

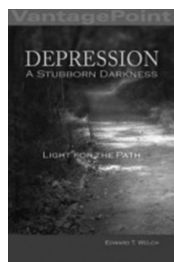


The week of the conference flew by, and soon it was time to say goodbye to new friends. My wife and I stayed in Northern Ireland for four more days after the conference and were privileged to stay at the manse with Rev. and Mary Stewart and several others. Their gracious

hospitality will be one of our fond memories of our trip. During these days we were able to enjoy the Lord's Day in the beautiful new church building in Ballymena, for which we give thanks. We were also able to rent a car and experience for ourselves white-knuckle driving on the country roads while taking in the beauty of the northern coast. All too soon it was time to say good-bye to new friends and also to family as we headed back to the U.S., while our son and family headed back to Singapore. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the opportunity to have been part of this gathering of believers from around the world. ☞

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor



Depression: A Stubborn Darkness, Edward T. Welch, Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2004. Paperback, 279 pp. [Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown.]

In the October 1, 2014 edition of the *SB*, I reviewed a book on depression, entitled *Broken Minds* by Steve and Robyn Bloem. Welch's book takes a different approach, or, at least, has a different emphasis. While Welch does not discount that depression is a disease, his counsel in this book is mainly spiritual. Depression is a complex subject, and there is seldom a meeting of minds on the issue. I would advise readers interested in the subject to read both Bloem and Welch and compare their approaches.

Welch's initial advice both for the depressed and his/her family is *caution*: "Depression is a form of suffering that can't be reduced to one universal cause. This means that family and friends can't rush in armed with THE answer. Instead, they must be willing to postpone swearing allegiance to a particular theory, and take time to know the depressed person and work together with him or her" (14). "Here is a suggestion: don't commit yourself too quickly to one explanation. Granted, it's something that begs for an answer, and there are more than enough interpretations from which to choose. But there are many causes of depression" (27).

The bottom-line for Welch—and herein lies comfort for

the depressed and their loved ones—is that depression is *suffering*. That might not sound like comfort, but Welch encourages biblical thinking: "If you are familiar with Scripture, you should sense a ray of light. Without Scripture's insights, suffering is random and senseless. When it comes, run fast! But Scripture is about suffering. It has given comfort to millions" (37). If depression is suffering, and if suffering is purposeful and even redemptive, depression is purposeful, and God can, and will, bring good out of it. That surely is good news!

Slowly and patiently, Welch works through his "depression is (purposeful) suffering" thesis. Be cautious: "For now, though, just orient yourself to seeing depression through the lens of suffering, and remember that suffering can come from a number of different causes. Don't jump to conclusions too quickly" (41). If God allows, and even sends suffering, the questions come thick and fast: "How could God allow such a painful, life-draining event in your life? How could such a God care? How could he be good? There are two ways to ask these questions. One is with a clenched fist; the other is with an open heart" (44).

Depression is not *only* a medical problem, argues Welch. It is not even *mainly* a medical problem. It is a form of suffering, and it is a human response to suffering. It involves the sufferer in real, painful, spiritual battles. Welch explains the cycle: "You are spiritually vulnerable. Your emotions are so powerful that they skew your interpretation. Satan attacks. You swear allegiance to your most pessimistic interpretation no matter what others say" (65).

Throughout the book, Welch relates depression to various virtues and vices, such as faith, hope, love, perseverance,

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

fear, anger, idolatry, self-pity, bitterness, guilt and shame. It is possible to be depressed and have faith: "Don't forget that depression casts its shadow on everything, even faith. As a result, faith won't feel jubilant. But that doesn't mean you don't or can't believe" (72).


In an important section, entitled "Listening to depression," Welch examines different reasons for depression: other people, culture, and our own hearts. About culture, Welch writes, "Not only do we have to fight against our own sin, we also have to fight against aspects of the culture that applaud our sinful tendencies rather than rebuke them" (115). Examples from culture are the pressure of decisions, individualism, self-indulgence, and the idolizing of happiness.

Welch does not discount medical intervention altogether, but he recognizes its limitations: "They will not give you hope, but they might make you feel less miserable.... Antidepressant medication can make some people feel better.... Don't put your hope in medication. Be thankful if it helps, but if it becomes just another place to put your hope instead of Jesus, you are just perpetuating the cycle of hopelessness" (210, 212).

There is also good advice for family and friends of the depressed. Sufferers tend to isolate themselves, making relationships difficult. Welch's advice: "Consider this: nothing can keep us from loving other people—not the sins of others, not our infirmities, not our humanity. Certainly, such a task might seem impossible—and it is, if you ignore the cross of Jesus.... Resist depression on this point.... Plan to love" (220). Minister to the depressed person: "You don't have to apologize for reading Scripture to the depressed person, praying with her, or looking for the Spirit's

work in everyday events.... The depressed person is loyal to his or her pessimistic interpretations; you must be loyal to a Christ-centred interpretation" (225). Ministering to the depressed requires wisdom and courage: "When depressed people interject their skewed and self-defeating interpretations of life, you can't sit idly by. You need to challenge and interrupt their inaccurate interpretation because it is wrong and leads to deeper despair. This, of course, is normal behaviour in loving relationships. With depression, however, friends sometimes don't pursue these normal interactions. Perhaps they are afraid that the depressed person will feel rejected.... As a result, depressed people are often handled very gingerly.... If you find that you are increasingly reluctant to say important things, reconsider your path" (227).

This book is not only useful for dealing with the depressed, but it also a valuable book for Christians who want to examine their own hearts and attitudes to life. It is a heart-searching book, which is a very good thing. You (even if you do not suffer from depression) will feel humbled by reading this book, and it will direct you again and again to the cross of Christ.

Which approach—the Bloems' or Welch's—is preferable? Both make valuable contributions, and both are worthwhile to read, whether for pastors, friends and families of depressed people, or for "ordinary" Christians who want a spiritual heart check-up. Depression is a complex, and emotive, subject. Read Welch's book with and to a depressed loved one. As Welch would say, our primary duty toward the depressed, as with any neighbour, is *love*. Books like this one, when read and acted upon, help us to show that love to hurting saints. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

A New Year

With this issue we turn the calendar page to 2017. We give thanks to God for His almighty care and His daily blessings through the past year! Truly God is good to Israel (Ps. 73:1)—and to us. May He guide and care for our churches

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

in the coming year as only the Almighty can do! Praise be to Him!

Congregational Activities

Supporters of Hope PR Christian School in Redlands, CA participated in a doubles ping-pong tournament, with proceeds to the school and goodies like homemade caramel corn, ice cream, and hot cider served for refreshments.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada recently invited the young people of neighboring Immanuel PRC of Lacombe to join them for an evening game night with snacks and refreshments in the basement of the Edmonton church.

Sister-Church Activities

One of many quotes from the bulletin of Covenant PRC of Ballymena, Northern Ireland includes this:

I send to you two Czech translations. I spent a great time with these articles. When I read and re-read your thoughts, I grow in Reformed (biblical!) understanding of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you! By the way, I became a book club member of the rfpa.org! I'm looking forward to the book *The Reformed Baptism Form* by B. Wielenga.

—from the Czech Republic

From the latest newsletter by Rev. Martyn McGeown in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, we learn this:

In my last newsletter, I mentioned that I have had some opportunities to witness by writing letters in the local newspaper, the *Limerick Post*. Between April and July, the *Post* published eight of my responses to Roman Catholics and atheists. Since then, the newspaper has published three more of my letters (October 22, November 12, and November 26) in response to atheists who attacked the veracity, consistency, and clarity of the Word of God. An atheist has also started a private e-mail correspondence with me in response to what he read in the *Post*. The letters have been reprinted on the back of the bulletin and on the LRF blog.... Christmas is also coming. Because last Sunday (November 20) Limerick had its annual ceremony of the official "turning on of the Christmas lights" in the city centre, the city was gridlocked with extra traffic. Traffic was so bad that Bill Davies, our oldest member (aged 81) was unable, after driving around the block six times, to find

suitable, nearby, on-street parking; so he had to drive home again and missed the evening service. Such is the inconvenience at times of renting a hall in Limerick: parking is hard to find, and it will only get worse as the Christmas shopping frenzy continues. In addition, this year December 25 is on a Sunday, which means that the hall will be unavailable for rent. After I tried unsuccessfully to book a room elsewhere on that day, we have decided to worship in a member's home on that occasion.

The Session of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore announced that it had nominated Emmanuel Singh to be called as her missionary to Kolkata. A congregational meeting was held on Sunday, December 11, at which meeting the congregation voted to call Emmanuel as their missionary. This procedure followed the requirements of the Church Order, Articles 4, 5, and 9. All voting members (male, communicant members) were to attend the meeting. All others were invited to observe.

The CERC also reported:

Due to the currency crisis in India, the Church Camp in Kolkata, which had been scheduled for 25-27 November, has been cancelled for now. Our delegation will not be traveling to Kolkata until the situation has settled down, which will probably be in 2017. This decision was made after discussion with Emmanuel and Sudip (the Camp Chairman), who reported that it is very difficult for some people to get food, and very difficult to travel via bus. Society is in turmoil right now. The Church Camp and our delegation's presence would not do anything to help the turmoil, and may even put

added pressure on the people. Let us pray for the saints in Kolkata, including that God would provide their daily bread, and use this as an opportunity for them to teach their neighbors that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.

Minister Activities

Rev. Brian Huizinga declined the call he was considering from Southwest PRC, MI. Southwest announced the new trio of Revs. G. Eriks, C. Griess, and R. Kleyn, with Rev. G. Eriks receiving the call on December 7.

On November 27 Rev. Cory Griess answered the call from Byron Center PRC to be the next domestic missionary. God led Rev. Griess to decline this call and remain as pastor in Calvary PRC.

The congregation at Doon, IA extended a call to Rev. Rodney Kleyn (Spokane, WA) to be the third missionary to the Republic of the Philippines. Rev. Kleyn answered this call on December 18.

First PRC of Holland, MI called Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor at Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD to be their next pastor. Rev. Brummel declined this call on December 11.

Mission Activities

A delegation of the Contact Committee of the PRCA visited the Philippines from December 15-27. The delegation consisted of Prof. R. Dykstra and Rev. G. Eriks. The main purpose of their visit was to continue discussions with our PRCP churches regarding a sister-church relationship between the PRCP and the PRCA. Meetings with all the PRCP officebearers were scheduled

for both Saturday, December 17 and Saturday, December 24, to be held in Maranatha PRC at 9:00 A.M. The delegates also preached on their two Sundays there according to the following schedule: December 18—

Rev. Eriks in the Berean PRC and Prof. Dykstra in Provident Christian Church. December 25—Rev. Eriks in the PRC in Bulacan, and Prof. Dykstra in Maranatha PRC. May

God use this visit for the benefit of the churches there and for His glory!

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School of Wingham 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.

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hope PRC of Redlands on Wednesday, March 1, 2017, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by January 30 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hope's consistory.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

January 2017

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Date	Topic	Text
January 1	"Alpha and Omega"	Revelation 1:8
January 8	"Honoring the Wife"	1 Peter 3:7
January 15	"The Marital Bond"	Song of Solomon 1:16, 17a
January 22	"Give Me Your Heart"	Proverbs 23:24-26
January 29	"Honoring the Hoary Head"	Leviticus 19:32

Called to Watch for Christ's Return

by Martyn McGeown

A few days before Jesus gave his life on the cross, his disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). Christ responded with the Olivet Discourse, a detailed teaching on the doctrine of the last things.

We need to understand the signs of Christ's coming for our comfort as we look for "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Christ had two concerns. First, his disciples must know the signs of his coming, which are footsteps of his approach. But Christ is not satisfied with mere "sign-gazing," which can lead to speculation and idle, foolish living. He did not give signs to satisfy our curiosities, but so that we will be ready for him when he returns. Therefore, Christ's second concern was the readiness of his disciples, which is expressed in his urgent and repeated warnings to watch for his coming in light of the signs.

Watch, pray, and serve the Lord with an eye to the signs of his return!



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