

The Standard Bearer

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Giving Thanks

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Ephesians 5:3-4

We live in a time of great prosperity. The standard of living in the U.S. far exceeds any other nation, past or present.

With this great prosperity has come an alarming increase in wickedness in our land. The principle here is that the more the Lord gives a wicked nation, the more they have with which to sin, so that they abound more and more in sin. The Word of God before us speaks of some of the wickedness that prevails in our land—fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, jesting.

And there is very little giving of thanks to the Lord.

With the national Thanksgiving Day drawing near for the churches in the U.S. it is well that we focus on this Word of God.

Let none of these vices be named among us.

But rather giving of thanks!



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

What a contrast! Vices of every kind over against giving of thanks!

The Word of God here mentions various vices that were prevalent in the Gentile community of Ephesus. Sadly, they also prevail in our society.

Fornication, all uncleanness, and covetousness are grouped together.

“Fornication” is a broad term that describes sexual sins in general. It includes such things as adultery, homosexuality, pornography, rape, and sexual abuse.

“Uncleanness” is added to this to make this as broad as possible. The term “unclean” as used in Scripture is not limited to sexual uncleanness and deviation. But here it seems to be used to emphasize anything that is sexually unclean or perverse.

Added to this is “covetousness.” Covetousness is avarice, a greedy desire for and pursuit of material things and pleasure. Covetousness is added here because it is especially covetousness that gives rise to fornication and all uncleanness. A pleasure-mad society necessarily becomes a society given to sexual sins. Sexual sin becomes one of the distinguishing marks of a covetous society. This is what characterized society in Paul’s day. And it certainly also describes our society.

Closely related to this are filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting. All three describe the sinful speech of this world. “Filthiness” refers to shameful obscenities that

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Editorial Office

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

Business Office

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

Church News Editor

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

United Kingdom Office

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

Rep. of Ireland Office

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

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come from the mouth of the ungodly, like putrid sewage flowing from a moral sewer. “Foolish talking” is conversation that degrades marriage, sex, authority, and whatever wholesome thing God has ordained for our lives. Finally, mention is made of “jesting,” which refers to coarse jokes.

This kind of talk is invariably found among those who are covetous and unclean. The same evil heart that produces unclean thoughts, desires, and actions also produces filthy talk.

They were very prevalent in Paul’s day, as they are also today in our society.

The contrast to this, however, is *giving of thanks*.

We have much for which we can and ought to give thanks. As we soon celebrate Thanksgiving Day, our attention is drawn to the material abundance God has given us. God has prospered the works of our hands. He has given us much, both as a nation and as the church.

But more importantly, God has showered us with the spiritual blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God has provided forgiveness of all our sin and reconciliation to Him. In Christ God has given us a new life in which we are able to enjoy a most intimate relationship of friendship and fellowship with Him. In Christ we have the hope of better things to come in heavenly glory. In Christ we have all that we could possibly wish for and more besides. And it is all a gift of grace to undeserving sinners.

For all of these gifts, spiritual and material, we are to give thanks. We are to thank God first of all in prayer. This is the chief part of thankfulness that God requires. And we are to thank God in spiritual songs that praise Him for His greatness and express gratitude for His gracious gifts. And do not forget to thank God by performing works of gratitude. These are works in which we use all of God’s gifts, spiritual and material, to serve Him as an expression of our deep gratitude to Him.

This is something that a covetous person cannot do. One who is covetous is not a grateful person. He does not acknowledge God as the Giver of what he possesses. He does not express thanks to God for His good gifts. Nor does he use them to serve the Lord. Instead of speaking words of gratitude to God, his mouth is filled with obscenities and foolish talk. Instead of using God’s good gifts to serve God, he uses these gifts for his own sinful pleasure.

And so covetousness is contrasted here with giving of thanks.



“...As becometh saints!”

The vices mentioned in this Word of God are not becoming of us. They do not suit us; they are not fitting for us. Nor are they convenient. They are out of place with us.

This is because of who we are. We are *saints*.

A saint is one who has been made holy. And the basic idea of holiness is separation. One who is holy is separated by the grace of God in Jesus Christ from the sin and vices of this world, and separated unto the service of God. He has been cleansed from the pollution of sin by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. He has been delivered from the power of sin, set free to serve God in love.

How out of place and unfitting it is for us as saints to be involved with the vices of the world!

It is fitting, rather, that we give thanks.

How richly God has blessed us as His dear children. He has showered us with great material abundance. More importantly, He has rescued us from a world headed for destruction and has secured for us a place of honor and glory in heaven.

Certainly, this deserves our thanks.

How fitting it is that we express words of thanks to God in prayer and song!

How fitting it is that we show our thanks by using all of God’s gifts in the service of His name!

And we are able to do so exactly because we are saints, holy ones, separated by the love of God from the depravity of this world.



“Let it not be once named among” us!

The vices mentioned in this Word of God must not be named among us.

This does not mean that we may never talk about them. We need to talk about them by the very fact that the Word of God brings them to our attention. We must talk about them in order to warn against them. Parents must warn their children against such things in our homes. We must warn each other in the church as we look out for each other’s spiritual welfare. We must also warn the ungodly about these vices for which the wrath of God comes.

The meaning is rather that these vices should not become the topic of discussion because they exist among us. How easily filthy talk, fornication, and covetousness creep

into the lives of the saints. How easily they defile our homes! How quickly they compromise the integrity of the church! When that happens, these vices become the topic of discussion. Some revel in these sins and boast about them. Reports of this sinful behavior become the subject of juicy gossip. Those that abhor these sins find it necessary to admonish and rebuke those given over to them. Saints from other churches sadly shake their heads and talk about what they see and hear.

This is not becoming of us as saints. So let it not be once named among us.

What must be named among us is giving of thanks. As saints, we must be characterized by the giving of thanks in both word and deed.

This, then, will be what is named among us.

How wonderful and fitting it would be should the topic of discussion among us as saints be the godly, thankful talk of our young people, the grateful service we see in each other, the chasteness of our people, and the heavenly mindedness of our fellow saints!

Pray for this and strive for this in Jesus Christ.

How becoming! 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Teacher Training

Note to the Readers: Some time ago I had plans to write a series of editorials on the need for Protestant Reformed teacher training. With that in mind I wrote this editorial, intending to follow it up with a number of articles on this subject. In the unfolding of the editorial schedule, that was not possible...until now. We reprint this editorial from June 1, 2014 with modifications, to start this series up once again.

—Prof. Russell Dykstra

One of the most significant covenant blessings given to the Protestant Reformed Churches is God's gift of Christian schools. God establishes His covenant not merely with believers, but also with their chosen seed. Believing parents are committed—by their own baptism vows—to instructing their children in such a way that their children will know, love, and obey Jehovah their God. God commands parents to instruct their children constantly—

from the rising up out of sleep to the time they tuck their children into bed at night. In this way, their children will know God, know His creation, and be equipped to serve Him in the country and culture in which they live.

Wise parents understand the daunting nature of instructing their children in all the various disciplines that are necessary for Christians to live and work before God in this age. They are also deeply conscious of the uncompromising demand of God, and of the vows they have taken. Hence, they seek to fulfill part of their responsibility through the instruction of a good Christian school. Beginning some eighty years ago,¹ and to the present day, God has granted conscientious Protestant Reformed parents this crucial as-

sistance from their own schools. We cannot be thankful enough for this precious gift.

In their prayers of thanksgiving, parents, elders, ministers, and the whole congregation include the gift of good teachers. The Christian school is the teachers, and the teachers are the Christian school. *They* stand in the parents' place. *They* rear the children in those school hours. *They* impart necessary knowledge of God, His creation, and how to serve God as His covenant people in the world.

Because of the vital task teachers perform, and because teachers are partially fulfilling the demand God places squarely upon parents, the standards for teachers in Protestant Reformed schools are, and ought to be, high. The Christian school teacher must possess the God-given ability to teach—effectively and interestingly to convey the beautiful knowledge of God and His works in Jesus Christ. To teach in a Protestant Reformed school he or she must

¹ The members of the PR congregation in Redlands, CA organized the first Protestant Reformed school in 1934. The next school organized by the parents in the PRC was in the late 1940s, and more came into existence in the fifties and sixties.

be Protestant Reformed, that is, not merely a member, but one who grasps, loves, and is wholeheartedly committed to the truths God has given to the PRC. The teacher must also be compassionate and have a love for the children placed under his or her care. Teachers must be able to admonish and discipline biblically and effectively. They must be equipped and prepared to rear these children in the fear of the Lord. Teachers *are* the Christian school.

That raises the question of preparation for teaching. What is required of an individual, from a formal point of view, to be allowed to teach in a Protestant Reformed school? The answer: Membership in a Protestant Reformed church, and a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with an education certificate.

Is that it? Yes, that is all. They may receive their diploma from a college that is Christian Reformed, Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, or Methodist, or a state institution.

Why are we parents satisfied with that kind and that limited amount of training? These teachers stand in our place—rearing our covenant children. And the only thing we require of them is that they be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and have a college degree with state certification?

School boards interview prospective teachers and look for the best qualified to take their place on the staff. They can search for indications of spiritual strength and commitment to the work of covenant instruction. But, is this twenty-two year old girl an effective

teacher? Effective not according to the standards of Grand Valley State, or Kings College, or Hope College, but according to *our* standards? And is this twenty-two year young applicant an effective *Protestant Reformed* teacher?

Do not misunderstand. I am not attacking our teachers. I am not even criticizing them. Teachers reading this editorial need not feel threatened by anything written in it. I love the teachers in the Protestant Reformed schools. I have personally seen their ability, their zeal, their commitment, and their love both for the truth and for the children. I have witnessed these things sitting in a desk as a student for thirteen years, as a teacher working with other teachers, and as a parent of nine. Do these teachers all have the same teaching capabilities? Of course not—neither do ministers. But it is not with the teachers that I have an ax to grind. My criticism concerns their training. My question is this: Why are we as parents not doing more to help our teachers be the very best teachers—Protestant Reformed teachers—they can be? Why, after eighty years of maintaining Protestant Reformed schools, do we not have an institution to train young men and women for teaching in a Protestant Reformed school? It is puzzling, even disturbing, and it needs to be faced.

It may interest you to know that the Protestant Reformed Churches have faced this matter in the past, and that officially as churches. During the years 1948-50, strong consideration was given to requests that the churches work together to

establish an institution for training Protestant Reformed teachers. We will discuss that history in subsequent articles. If you are interested, you can consult the Acts of Synod for those years.

Early on, the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches revealed its eagerness to assist in the significant effort to train teachers. Both Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff were willing to make speeches and even craft a course for teachers. This interest in a quality, Reformed training for teachers was seen in Rev. Hoeksema in his earlier years in the ministry, dating back to his time in the Christian Reformed Church.

This comes out in an editorial entitled “The Normal School” that the young HH wrote in *The Young Calvinist* in April of 1920. We quote here the first third of that editorial in order to present his viewpoint on training teachers. It also explains the concept of a “normal school.”

We trust that most of our readers believe in the necessity of Christian schools. It is not necessary, I think, to discuss the necessity of Christian education and the question of the Christian school as such.

After all, the children are not the possession of the State. Neither is the State responsible for them before God. The children are under the stewardship and for the responsibility of the parents. They, therefore, must also educate them. They are before God responsible for their education.

Hence, it is our conviction,

that free schools² ought to be the rule, and that the State, naturally interested in the education of its citizens, ought to have power to supervise and to establish schools where the parents neglect to do so. Free schools the rule. State education the exception.

But the question of the Christian school as such I was not going to discuss. I will proceed from the assumption that most of our readers agree with us on this question. If this is a fact, however, if we believe in the Christian primary education, it stands to reason that we must also believe in Christian normal schools. And it is this cause which I wish to bring to the attention of our societies and of our young men individually.

What is a normal school? It is an institution for the purpose of training young men and young women for the teaching profession. It is with a view to the teaching profession what a seminary is for the ministry. Now, we all agree that we must not expect competent ministers in our church without a good seminary. But just as little right we have to expect competent teachers in our Christian schools without a good normal school. We must have teachers that are theoretically well-informed, that are practically well trained and that are principally on a sound basis. Our entire Christian school depends upon such teachers. The teacher is the heart of the school. If we want to have Christian schools, we must have Christian teachers in the first place. And to get Christian teachers we must simply train them.

² Free schools are Christian schools.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema instilled in his son and successor in the seminary the same zeal for Christian schools, and for training Protestant Reformed teachers. In the early 1950s H. C. Hoeksema penned a lengthy series on Christian schools, and there he focused also on the need to train teachers. He held the conviction that the Protestant Reformed people had to establish a training institution— either a college or a normal school. He writes:

But let us now understand that we may not and must not be satisfied as long as our teachers receive their training in Reformed or Christian Reformed or even outright worldly institutions. It may be granted that such institutions may train teachers. But it lies in the very nature of the case that such institutions cannot train *Protestant Reformed teachers*, that is, train them to be Protestant Reformed in their teaching. You don't get cookies at a hardware store. You don't get Protestant Reformed teachers from a non-Protestant Reformed college.³

What would such an institution have in its courses that would be distinct from another teacher training institution? HCH gives a fairly thorough list,⁴ including “educational subjects, such as the principles of education, the philosophy of education, and the psychology

³ “Looking to the Future (Chapter 2): The Teacher Problem (Suggestions Towards Solutions),” *Standard Bearer*, 28, 15, 351.

⁴ “Looking to the Future (Chapter 3): On Teacher Training,” *Standard Bearer*, 29, 2, 40-42.

of education (or, at least, general psychology).” In addition, courses that would acquaint the teachers with the “principles of history, of geography, of arithmetic, of music, of language, etc.” Especially high on his list was a thorough program of practice teaching, with constructive criticism an essential part.

He concludes:

For the present, however, we may have to be satisfied with a normal course in the limited sense of the word. Possibly we could begin with a few of the general college subjects, possibly not. It may be that for a time our prospective teachers would have to seek that part of their education elsewhere, as they do now, even though principally it would throw a monkey wrench in the machinery of their education.


But I am convinced that the time is not distant when we must and shall establish the beginning of our own teacher training school. It will probably be a humble beginning. Let it be. But let it be healthy, principally sound, and as complete as possible. And let us beware that we be not satisfied with half finished, amateurish efforts.

That was the sentiment expressed some sixty years ago. This is my conviction as well. The purpose of this editorial is not to discuss all the options and difficulties, of which there are many. That will come, D.V. The purpose now is simply to consider the disturbing lack of training for our teachers. And to start us thinking about solutions.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have long and generously supported the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Why? Because it is well understood that the work of the minister is the heart of the church—preaching and catechetical instruction. Both must be

distinctively Protestant Reformed. Continued existence as Protestant Reformed Churches demands that we train men to be ministers in the PRC.

The same must be said for the Protestant Reformed schools. The teachers *are* the Christian school. If we would have Protestant Reformed

schools, distinctive in their instruction, we must have Protestant Reformed teachers. How can we be confident that these young men and women, good and godly though they may be, will be properly trained to be Protestant Reformed teachers, if we do not train them? 

LETTERS

Salvation and Good Works

In his article titled “Good Works” in the October 1, 2016 issue of the *SB*, Rev. R. Kleyn wrote in the section “The Place of Good Works:”

Although the Bible teaches good works, there is always an order: first salvation, then good works. Salvation is not based upon works, but rather salvation is the sovereign work of God by His grace and Spirit and it produces good works. Good works are a part of the salvation that God works in us.

Then later in that same section, after writing of “salvation from God’s point of view,” he writes in the next paragraph: “On the other hand, looking at salvation from our perspective, we see the same order: first salvation, then good works follow.”

As I see it, Rev. Kleyn is saying in regard to salvation and good works, on the one hand, “there is always an order: first salvation, then good works,” and on the other hand, “Good works are a part of salvation that God works in us.” So my question is: which is it? Are our good works separate from our salvation or part of our salvation?

It looks to me that either I missed something that was in the article, or something was missing from the article. Please note: I am not questioning the orthodoxy of the article, but rather asking for some clarity.

Cal Kalsbeek
Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESPONSE:

Dear Mr. Kalsbeek,

Thank you for your question. I believe it helps us to

think through the relationship of our good works to the grace of salvation.

When I speak of an order, first salvation, then good works, I do not mean to separate good works from salvation. Rather, by that order I mean these three things:

1. That our salvation is not based on any good works that God sees in us. In grace God comes to a depraved and unworthy sinner and brings salvation.

2. That good works are impossible apart from the sovereign saving work of God’s grace. All our doing of good works is a result of the grace of regeneration.

3. That in our conscious experience of God’s saving work, we first know, by faith, that we are in Jesus Christ and justified, and then in the response of gratitude, we begin to live in good works.

So, it is proper to say that good works follow our salvation, or to restate that, our doing of good works follows God’s saving of us.

Perhaps it helps, here, to see that Scripture does speak of salvation in the past tense. Titus 3:5 is an example of this: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5).

Three things are notable from this verse:

1. “He saved us” is past tense, describing something that has taken place in the past.

2. This “past” salvation is identified as the work of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

3. This initial work of God is wholly of grace, “not of works...but according to his mercy.”

It is subsequent to this work of grace that we begin to live in good works.

This, however, does not mean that our good works are separate from salvation. Rather, good works are a part of

our salvation. They are part of our election (Eph. 2:10); they are merited for us on the cross by Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:14); they are one of God's purposes in saving us (Tit. 2:14); and they are included in our regeneration.

In regeneration we are made new creatures; we are given the life of Jesus Christ; we are given the spiritual abilities to love and believe; and we are given new desires and powers to obey God. In the seed of regeneration is included all the potential to grow into a fruit-bearing

Christian. This, in part, is what John means when he says "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (I John 3:9).

... it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 64).

—Rev. R. Kleyn 

ALL AROUND US

REV. MARTYN MC GEOWN

■ Transgender Discrimination and Churches in Iowa and Massachusetts

In a recent submission to the "All Around Us" rubric (vol. 92, No. 18 [July 2016]) I reported that across the Western world anti-discrimination laws are being amended to include protection for "transgendered" individuals, that is, for persons who "identify as" a gender different from the biological gender "assigned to them" at birth. Two U.S. states, Iowa and Massachusetts, have made the headlines recently because of a perceived threat to the religious liberty of churches.

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission (ICRC) recently revised its guidelines because they appeared to lack exemptions for churches. This revision was made in response to a lawsuit filed by the Alliance Defending Freedom on behalf of Cornerstone World Outreach Church in Sioux City, Iowa. The offending, some say, confusing, section of ICRC's brochure entitled, "Does the law apply to churches?" formerly read as follows, "Where qualifications are *not related to a bona fide religious purpose*, churches are still subject to the law's provision. (e.g., a child care facility operated at a church or *a church service open to the public*)."¹

¹ *The Des Moines Register*, July 8, 2016, "Civil Rights Commission Revises Church Exemption Language," <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2016/07/08/civil-rights-commission-revises-church-exemption-language/86879100/> (emphasis added).

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

The astute reader can see the problem—shall the secular state determine what is and what is not a church's "bona fide religious purpose," and are not all church services, by definition, "open to the public"? What else do our signs, "Everyone welcome," mean?

Kristin H. Johnson, director of ICRC, issued this clarifying statement on the Iowa state government's website:

"The Iowa Civil Rights Commission has never considered a complaint against a church or other place of worship on this issue," said director Kristin H. Johnson. "This statute was amended to add these protected classes (sexual orientation and gender identity) in 2007 and has been in effect since then. The Iowa Civil Rights Commission has not done anything to suggest it would be enforcing these laws against ministers in the pulpit, and there has been no new publication or statement from the ICRC raising the issue. The Commission regrets the confusion caused by the previous publication."²

The ICRC's brochure has been changed to read as follows:

Places of worship (e.g. churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.) are generally exempt from the Iowa law's prohibition of discrimination, unless the place of worship engages in non-religious activities which are open to the public. For example, the law may apply to an independent day

² Iowa Civil Rights Commission Releases Revised Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Public Accommodations Brochure, <https://icrc.iowa.gov/pressrelease/iowa-civil-rights-commission-releases-revised-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-public>.

care or polling place located on the premises of the place of worship.³

In the same brochure, the ICRC gives an example of illegal discrimination: “Refusal to allow an individual to use *all the facilities* or services of the public accommodation.” “Facilities” include restrooms, which means that a “transgendered” person may be legally entitled to use the restroom of his/her choice “if the place of worship is engaging in non-religious activities which are open to the public.”⁴

The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) has also published “Gender Identity Guidance” in which it states the following:

Even a church could be seen as a place of public accommodation if it holds a secular event, such as a spaghetti supper, that is open to the general public. All persons, regardless of gender identity, shall have the right to full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of any place of public accommodation.⁵

In case the reader is wondering what is meant by “facilities,” the brochure adds, “Any place of public accommodation that lawfully separates access to a place or portion thereof based on a person’s sex, shall grant admission to that place, and the full enjoyment of that place or portion thereof, consistent with the person’s gender identity.”⁶ Moreover, “the law provides that a place of public accommodation may not distribute, publish or display an advertisement, notice or sign intended to discriminate or actually discriminating against persons of any gender identity.”⁷

If anything, the MCAD’s provisions are more troubling than the ICRC’s. The young people of our churches often use church premises for fundraisers, which are generally open to the public—pancake breakfasts, burger fries, car washes, soup suppers, ice cream socials, and

the like. Could a “transgendered” individual enter one of our churches on such an occasion (a “secular event”), and request the use of the restroom of his/her choice, so that a biological man identifying as a “transgendered woman” could demand access to the women’s restroom, for example? And would such an individual be offended if he/she saw a book, pamphlet, poster or other printed notice or sign displayed in the narthex, which he/she perceived to be discriminatory? Imagine if a church displayed the words of Matthew 19:4, “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?” inside the building. Would such a display fall foul of the MCAD’s guidelines?

ICRC and MCAD may have no immediate plans to target churches, but all it takes are a couple of test cases and a liberal judiciary to push the LGBT agenda one step further. And if the U.S. Supreme Court, which with the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February 2016 is now evenly split, even deadlocked, between Liberals and Conservatives, moves further to the left, might we see “transgender rights” legislation enforced in all U.S. states?

■ Non-discrimination Law and Religious Exemptions

The chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), Martin R. Castro, appointed in 2011 by President Obama, raised eyebrows with his introductory remarks in the Commission’s recent (September 2016) Briefing Report, “Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles With Civil Liberties”:

The phrases “religious liberty” and “religious freedom” will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy, or any form of intolerance.⁸

One of the issues swirling around the First Amendment in the U.S. is the “balance” between “civil rights” (for protected classes in society) and “religious freedom,” the right to live, work, and behave according to one’s religious

³ Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Sexual Orientation And Gender Identity: A Public Accommodations Provider’s Guide to Iowa Law, https://icrc.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016/2016.sogi_pa1_.pdf.

⁴ ICRC, Provider’s Guide.

⁵ Gender Identity Guidance, Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, September 1, 2016, <http://www.mass.gov/mcad/docs/gender-identity-guidance.pdf>.

⁶ MCAD, Gender.

⁷ MCAD, Gender.

⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR), “Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles With Civil Liberties” (Briefing Report, September 2016), <http://media.washtimes.com/s3.amazonaws.com/media/misc/2016/09/09/Peaceful-Coexistence-09-07-16-6.pdf>.

beliefs and convictions. The issue has really come to a head because of the addition of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to the list of protected classes. The question has arisen: does the government have the right, because of its perceived obligation to prevent “discrimination,” to compel religious individuals and corporations (that is, businesses owned and run by religious individuals) to act against their religious beliefs and practices? Can the government compel a Christian adoption agency to arrange adoptions for “same-sex couples”? Can the government compel a Christian business to service a “same-sex wedding,” or provide health insurance that includes abortion or abortifacient drugs for its employees?

Castro’s opening salvo makes his position clear, as do the following remarks:

Religious exemptions to the protections of civil rights based upon classifications such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, when they are permissible, significantly infringe upon these civil rights.⁹

Regardless of the pace at which American religious institutions do or do not embrace the reality of civil rights and liberties of LGBT families and of women, religious exemptions to them are, and must remain, few and narrow.¹⁰

Do not miss the import of Castro’s words—religious exemptions to non-discrimination law should be “few and narrow” because they “significantly infringe upon” the civil rights of protected minorities. Also, do not miss Castro’s presupposition—sexual orientation and gender identity are equivalent to race and color, and, therefore, to defend the Bible’s teaching on sexual behavior, marriage, and gender against so-called LGBT ideology is equivalent to racism. When the courts are in the hands of left-wing ideologues, expect the exemptions for churches, Christian schools and universities, and businesses owned by Christians to become fewer and narrower.

■ Conservative Christians Have “Lost” the Culture Wars: Now It’s Payback!

Another left-wing ideologue, Mark Tushnet, Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, in a blog post

⁹ USCCR, “Peaceful Coexistence.”

¹⁰ USCCR, “Peaceful Coexistence.”

entitled, “Abandoning Defensive Crouch Liberal Constitutionalism,” reveals his animosity against conservative values. Some newspapers hysterically reported that Tushnet was calling for harsh treatment of Christians. “Harvard professor: Start Treating Christian Conservatives Like Nazis” proclaimed the *Washington Times*.¹¹ To be fair to Tushnet, whose words we must not falsify (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 112), he did not write that. Instead, he urges his fellow liberals aggressively to take advantage of the death of Justice Antonin Scalia to petition the Supreme Court to overrule a host of cases: “Liberals should be compiling lists of cases to be overruled at the first opportunity on the ground that they were wrong the day they were decided.”¹² The controversial part of Tushnet’s blog post is how to deal with the “losers” (whom he views as those who hold to conservative moral and social values):

For liberals, the question now is how to deal with the losers in the culture wars. That’s mostly a question of tactics. My own judgment is that taking a hard line (“You lost, live with it”) is better than trying to accommodate the losers, who—remember—defended, and are defending, positions that liberals regard as having no normative pull at all. Trying to be nice to the losers didn’t work well after the Civil War, nor after *Brown*. (And taking a hard line seemed to work reasonably well in Germany and Japan after 1945.) I should note that LGBT activists in particular seem to have settled on the hardline approach, while some liberal academics defend more accommodating approaches. When specific battles in the culture wars were being fought, it might have made sense to try to be accommodating after a local victory, because other related fights were going on, and a hard line might have stiffened the opposition in those fights. But the war’s over, and we won.¹³

“The war’s over, and we won!” If by “won,” Tushnet means a liberal judiciary, the redefinition of marriage at state and federal level, the legal right to murder one’s unborn children for any reason, and a host of other liberal “victories,” I suppose he has won. Will the cultural tide

¹¹ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/may/10/harvard-professor-start-treating-christians-nazis>.


¹² “Abandoning Defensive Crouch Liberal Constitutionalism,” <https://balkin.blogspot.ie/2016/05/abandoning-defensive-crouch-liberal.html>.

¹³ Tushnet, “Abandoning...Constitutionalism.”

change again in Christians' favor? Who can say? Christians put no trust in princes or judges. We do not panic, and neither do we stick our heads in the sand. We recognize that Christians have suffered injustice throughout history for Christ's sake, and we prepare to suffer, if God wills.

Nevertheless, the victory of the wicked is temporary. The Egyptians thought that they had won when they passed the "Cast All Jewish Baby Boys into the River Nile Act" in Exodus 1:22. The Persian princes thought that they had won when they passed the "No Prayer to Any God But Darius Act" in Daniel 6:9. Haman thought he had won when he passed the "Exterminate All the Jews in

Persia Act" in Esther 3:12. Even our children know the outcome of those cases.

Our society is becoming increasingly and openly hostile to Christianity, and the much-vaunted "common grace," with which the Western world is supposedly awash, is doing nothing to stem the tide. The words of our God remain, and we must cling to them by faith: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD" (Is. 54:17). 

GOD'S WONDERFUL WORKS

REV. JAMES LANING

Foundational Principles (7)

Believing the Unseen Act of Creation

So far we have considered principles regarding how God reveals Himself to us. This next section will consist of articles on the subject of creation. First, we consider how creation is understood only by faith. In other words, we will understand the truth about creation only when we believe what God says about something that we ourselves did not see.

What the world refers to as science involves studying the visible creation through observation and experiment. But what about the invisible things? What about creatures and activities that cannot be detected by observation and experiment? What about events in the past that really happened but that we today cannot prove any other way than from Scripture? The science of this world rejects these. They do not take them into account. They walk by sight, and in doing so they fall into many errors.

We believers walk by faith, not by sight. It is in this

way, and in this way only, that a person comes to an understanding of what the truth really is.

Believing the Unseen

The invisible God tells us about Himself and about spiritual things that we cannot see with the eye of the body. He tells us about events that no human being saw, and many events that no one today has ever seen.

Even our first parents, Adam and Eve, did not see God's act of creating all things in six days. Man was created last and did not see what God did when He called the various creatures into existence. Even when God built the woman out of the man, the man was in a deep sleep. He did not see that event either.

We also were not there when God created all things. We were not there when Christ was crucified, or when believers saw Him alive on the third day. When our Lord ascended into heaven before the eyes of His disciples, we were not there.

Yet we believe these events happened. We believe they happened precisely as God tells us they did. We have no

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

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doubt that what we read in Scripture is true, because it is a record not of the word of men but of the Word of God Himself. Whatever God tells us we believe, even when He tells us about creatures and events that we have never seen.

We believe, for example, that angels exist and that God directs them for our profit. Yet we have never seen them. Man cannot detect them with any of the five senses, and the scientists of this world would say that there is no proof that they exist. Yet we know that they do. We have proof that they do. God has told us about them, and that is certain, infallible proof that they exist.

The same could be said about the believer's spiritual soul and its being taken up to Christ at death. The soul is spiritual. It cannot be detected by our senses, and no one on earth can see the soul of a person depart at the moment of death. Yet we know this happens. When we say that we believe this happens, that means we know it with certainty. Faith is certain knowledge. We believers know with certainty that our souls will be with Christ at death. About this we have no doubt because God Himself has told us in His Word.

We believe what God tells us about angels, about our souls, and about His act of creating all things in six real days. We walk by faith, not by sight (II Cor. 5:7). We do not need to see visual "proof" that what God says is correct. We do not walk by faith *and* by sight. In fact, if we walked by sight, requiring visible evidence to prove that what God has said to us is true, we would not be walking by faith.

Understanding that God Created by His Word

That God created by His Word is not something that can be understood by the creation all by itself. It is only from the Scriptures that we know that this is how it happened.

An unbeliever who has never read the Scriptures or heard them preached can look out at the creation and see that there must be a Creator who has eternal power (Rom. 1:20). But it takes faith to understand that God created all things simply by speaking His Word: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb.

11:3). God spake, and it was done. He expressed His will, and what He willed took place. He "callesh those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). We believe this because our God has told us that it is true.

On the first day God spoke the words, "Let there be light," and light came to be. There are other days on which God created something in such a way that one creature was brought forth from another. For example, God said "Let the earth bring forth grass" (Gen. 1:11a) and "Let the earth bring forth the living creature" (Gen. 1:24a). But one thing that was consistent in every creative act was this—it was by God's Word that each creature was made.

A scientist studying the creation under a microscope cannot detect this. He can see certain characteristics of this or that creature, but he cannot detect that it was simply by His Word that God created it. It is by faith that we understand this.

Going to Scripture, not the Stars


Many reject what God says and instead look to the stars as if one can learn from them how everything began. The popular big-bang theory is said to be based upon information from the stars. The light from the stars is said to indicate that stars in all directions are moving away from us. This, they say, is proof that the universe is expanding in all directions, and that this expansion must have started billions of years ago at a single point.

We do not need to go into any more details of this theory to see that those who try to persuade us to embrace it are tempting us to walk by sight, rather than by faith.

If we could go back in time and walk with Adam and Eve just a few days after they were created, how would things appear to us? Looking at Adam and Eve, we would conclude that they must be far older than just a few days. Similarly, if we would look at the stars, thinking about how far they are away and how long it would take for the light from them to reach the earth, it would seem to us that they must have been created a great many years before Adam and Eve. Yet the truth would have been that those stars were only two days older than our first parents. We would be mistaken if we judged accord-

ing to outward appearances. Only by believing what God says would we give a correct age for Adam and Eve, the animals, the plants, and the sun, moon, and stars.

Our Lord teaches us to walk by faith, and not by sight. Believing what our Lord says on all subjects, we have great joy in our heart. What a blessing it is to understand

the truth, the truth about the past as well as about the future! Those who believe the unseen, they are blessed indeed. What our resurrected Lord said is true also regarding the subject of creation: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

The Limits of Attaining Wisdom for Sinful Man

All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness: and I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-26

“**A**ll this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me” (Eccl. 7:23). Solomon reviews what he has sought out, proved, and tested by the wisdom given him of God. He has set before us, in chapter 7, the sober reality of death and sorrow, the folly of sin and pride, the sovereign providence of God, and the strength that wisdom gives, including the knowledge of one’s own sin. But in seeking after wisdom and understanding he also reached a limit. He has proven much, but when he sought to be wise, he could not attain to its perfection. He was yet a man, a creature of the dust, and also a sinner.

We must put what Solomon says in the context of his own life and conduct as king over Israel, his rule from the throne, and the life of the palace. There was much wisdom displayed in the ordering of the kingdom, the build-

ing of the temple, and his other works. I Kings records these works extensively in its opening chapters. When the Queen of Sheba saw that order and plied him with hard questions, she was in awe of what she saw and heard of Solomon’s wisdom (I Kings 10:1-10). There was also his enterprise and business sense—his navy, commodity trading, and the wealth of Israel that was its fruit in gold, silver, and every luxury. He was indeed wise by the gift of God. But in these things, perfection of wisdom was not attained; there was an undercurrent of discontent even among his servants in the palace and also in the kingdom with men like Jeroboam. Prosperity itself cannot truly satisfy, because of man’s bondage to covetousness (chapters 5 and 6). It can work discontent because enough is never enough to man, who is by nature given to envy. That discontent would grow into rebellion. Solomon’s own stubborn sinfulness, under God’s chastening, would fuel it.

If in the ordering of the kingdom much wisdom was attained in Solomon’s own life (we may say his personal life), there were also many sins. He himself confesses the fact of it, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20). The statement is both an observation of life in general and a personal confession. What then? He sought to be wise, and found that he could not attain unto complete or perfect wisdom for all of the measure of wisdom given him. Wisdom is a divine attribute. It is God’s ability to form all things and work all things together for the realization of His counsel and purpose, unto the revelation of His own glory and grace in Christ. God’s wisdom is beyond the understand-

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta.

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ing of man. Solomon says, "It was far from me" (Eccl. 7:23).

He now adds, "That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" (Eccl. 7:24). The fountain of true wisdom is in God, and man cannot attain unto it. Solomon has said, "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" (Eccl. 7:13). God's ways are higher and deeper than our understanding. Agur in Proverbs 30 speaks the same language: "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy" (vv. 2, 3). The apostle Paul makes the same confession: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

Solomon likewise confronts the limits of his own understanding. He has said in the beginning of Ecclesiastes, "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Eccl. 1:17, 18). Here he repeats the same idea, "I applied mine heart to know and to search, and seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness" (Eccl. 7:25). He has said in himself, "I will be wise." He has given every effort to be wise and to search out wisdom. The object of that study was "What is wisdom and its way?" Because of sin, that study included also its spiritual opposite, folly and madness.

He sought to be wise, but it was a wisdom tainted by the flesh. There was an element of fleshly carnal wisdom that cleaved to his desire. His searching and seeking was not a mere abstract exercise, for Solomon had his own sins to wrestle with. He multiplied wives, not so much out of lust, though that is not excluded; but he took heathen princesses to form political alliances to secure the external peace of the kingdom. In an earthly sense, this was the way of the world's wisdom. But it was a false wisdom, which led to folly on his part.

When he speaks of knowing the wickedness of folly, even foolishness and madness, he is not advocating *doing* wickedness. His desire was to be wise, but he was still a sinner. He speaks, therefore, of seeking to understand

this reality of sin, as it is part of the reason of things and as it cleaves also to him in his own life. He is at this point somewhat like Paul in Romans 7, "I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21). He sought not only wisdom as from God, but to know his own sin and the reality of sin around him. Sin is foolishness and madness, because it is contrary to God's law and design for man's life and well-being. This too was beyond his understanding. His confession is similar to Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" The answer to the dilemma Jeremiah gives as well: "I, the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to his doings" (Jer. 17:10). The Lord alone knows the heart. But that means for man, as well as for Solomon, "That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" (Eccl. 7:24).


Solomon illustrates this limitation of his own wisdom by speaking of his own personal experience. "And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Eccl. 7:26). Because he speaks of "finding" what is "more bitter than death," and that personally, not just by observation, we may understand that he is speaking of his own experience. Death is the judgment of God upon sin. The bitterness of which he speaks is not, however, physical death, but the state of his heart when he looks at the matter before him. It worked a sorrow in his experience that was to him more bitter than death itself, a spiritual grief of heart comparable to the sorrow of death and loss. That grief was the effect of his relation to women. He is not speaking, however, of any kind of woman; he is not speaking of women in general, but of one who has a specific character: "whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands." She is an ungodly woman, an unbeliever. The description is that of his heathen wives, who caused his heart to err and led him to serve or make room for their idols.

His intention is not to discuss his sorrow over his sin; that belongs to David's history in Psalms 51 and 32. Rather, it is to give a warning to the young man who is drawn to the unbelieving daughters of this world. Nor is it to be limited to young men. While that is the illustration in Solomon's case, what he says is also a warning to

a young woman with regard to being attracted to unbelieving young men. It further applies to whatever draws us away from the Lord within the life of the church in a sinful world. His picture is of a woman whose heart, in the deceitfulness of sin, is like one who lays a snare and net to capture a bird. The snare is deceitful, cunningly laid, out of a heart that is a trap of sin to ensnare one who is heedless and lacking discernment. That trap certainly uses sex and sexuality, but Solomon has a broader view than simply the seventh commandment. It is a trap that preys upon the mind in order to deceive, preys upon the emotions to draw, and seeks to hold by hands that become bands, bands that are the chains of bondage. Nor is there any need to introduce the idea, as some commentaries do, that the author is speaking allegorically of the woman, as a personification of worldly philosophy. He speaks concretely. He is seeking to warn young people, by his own bitterness of heart, to flee from such relationships and not be ensnared by them. He intends that they should remember their Creator (Eccl. 12:1) and not fall into this, his sin.

What makes the warning a sober and serious one is not only his sin and its sad history but what he adds: “whoso pleaseth God shall escape her; but the sinner shall be taken by her” (Eccl. 7:26). There is a judgment of God that is manifested in this matter. He who walks in the fear of God, taking heed to His Word, walks in a way that is pleasing to God. Because our wisdom is limited and

our understanding of our own sin imperfect, it is clouded by the subtle deceitfulness of sin. We are called to flee youthful lusts (II Tim. 2:22). But it is God’s grace that keeps us from that and other ways of sin. God chastens the one who walks in the sin of pride and who departs in the way of his own sinful imagination. He, or she, is like a heedless bird who does not regard the danger and the warnings given.

The sinner shall be taken and ensnared, and with the ensnarement comes sorrow of heart, bitterness “more bitter than death,” for it often works the ruin of life and joy. Such was the case with Solomon’s sin. He laid the root of sin in the life of the palace; the consequences would rend the kingdom after his death in the days of Rehoboam. The blessings of God’s covenant in marriage and family life are at issue, and Solomon’s sin undermined both in the life of the church and kingdom. The idolatry of his unbelieving heathen wives and the temples built for them outside the city would work through in the life of the nation. The idolatry introduced into Israel would ultimately lead them into the captivity in Babylon. Solomon when he is old speaks to us: “Learn what I learned to my grief, bitter as death, and walk not in it.” Pride supplanted wisdom because of sin. Solomon for all his wisdom did not have perfect wisdom or understanding. In Jesus Christ alone, the Word and Wisdom of God made flesh, is perfect wisdom to be found. 

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

Psalter Revision: Why?

In my last article I explained that Synod 2016 of the PRC decided to continue participating in the interdenominational project of Psalter revision.

Why did it do so?

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

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Synod adopted the four grounds that the PRC Contact Committee gave in its recommendation. In four words, I could summarize the first ground as “history,” the second as “necessity,” the third as “acceptability,” and the fourth as “opportunity.”

History

“History: the PRC has repeatedly decided in favor of revising the Psalter, and even began the work of revi-

sion, but did not carry it out for practical, not principal, reasons.”¹ So begins Synod’s first ground.

A study of the *Acts of Synods* from 1940-1955 reveals that Psalter revision was often discussed during those years. Recognizing the need for more copies of the Psalter, Synod 1940 appointed a committee to investigate how many were needed. Apparently, the committee wondered whether Synod desired to revise the Psalter before reprinting it, for Synod 1942 instructed the committee “to consider the right to make any changes as to version and the meter of the Psalter with a view to the copyright” (Art. 49). Synod 1943 instructed the same committee to appoint “a broad committee consisting of those having musical, poetical and theological ability, to consider metrical and poetical revision of the Psalter” (Art 82). Because this second committee was never appointed, Synod 1944 itself appointed “a committee to purge the Psalter of doctrinal errors, and if possible to make recommendation for some revision” (Art. 53).

The report of this second committee to Synod 1945 is significant because it shows that our present concerns regarding the Psalter were already voiced in 1945. That committee informed Synod 1945 that it had formed two subcommittees. The first committee was tasked with the following:

- a. To search out and suggest correction of doctrinal errors.
- b. To determine whether or not the present versifications followed the text of Scripture and if not to suggest improvements.
- c. To determine whether or not the content of each Psalm has been included in the versifications and, if not, to suggest additional verses to correct such exclusions.
- d. To offer any suggestions of a general nature for the improvement of our Psalter.

The second committee was mandated:

- a. To suggest new tunes as well as elimination of some tunes in the present Psalter.
- b. To provide English Chorale arrangements of some Holland [Dutch] Psalms.
- c. To determine to what extent the present tunes fit the words and if necessary suggest any improvement.
- d. To offer any suggestions of a general nature for the improvement of our Psalter.

¹ *Acts of Synod 2016*, Art. 49, 61.

What came of all this effort at Psalter revision? Something, but not much.

Something: in 1947 the PRC revised its Psalter by *adding* the choral arrangements (Psalms 414-432) and the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer (Psalms 433-434). Thus mandate “b” of the second subcommittee of 1945 was fulfilled. The committee(s) continued to work on the other seven mandates.

Not much: the committee reported to Synods 1949 and 1952, which synods continued the committee and its mandate. But the Synod of 1955 decided “that the matter of Psalter revision be tabled indefinitely” and “that the present Committee for revision be discontinued” (Art. 112). The reason, apparently, was that our churches were recovering from the schism of 1953. We had fewer men to devote to the work of Psalter revision, and the men we did have needed to concentrate their efforts elsewhere. Synod 1955 considered the possibility that the work continue someday. To “table indefinitely” is not the same as rejecting the idea. Furthermore, Synod 1955 decided to preserve the labors of the committee “for future use in continuation of this worthy object, if and when the Lord provides the opportunity” (Art. 112).

Synod 1973 treated an overture “to appoint a new committee which will continue the work for revision of our present Psalter” (Supplement 31). Synod rejected this overture because the overture did not spell out specific areas of revision and limitations, and for financial reasons (Art. 158). (See *Standard Bearer*, April 1, 2014, p. 300 for more information).

Synod 1993 rejected a request from an individual to work with an interdenominational committee to publish, revise, and promote the Psalter. Synod did not see the need for an interdenominational committee to *print* the Psalter, and saw no advantage to “undenominationalize” the Psalter (Art. 33). The reader should note that the individual who made this request loved the Psalter and Psalm singing, but was a member neither of the PRC nor of any other denomination that used the Psalter.

Synod 2016 did not spell out all of this history to which I have alluded. Rather, it acknowledged that we did revise the Psalter once in our history, and that the earlier work of Psalter revision that we intended to do (correcting doctrinal errors, ensuring that the present versifications followed the text of Scripture and were

complete renditions of the Psalms, and determining whether the present tunes fit the words) was never completed.

This reference to history is significant. For one thing, it underscores that the work of Psalter revision is not a novel concept in our history. For another, it shows that the reason the matter is faced today is *not* that a segment in our churches continue to agitate for revision even though previous synods have rejected the idea. No previous synod has rejected the idea. Previous synods have only found the implementing of the idea to be not feasible at that time, or in the way suggested.

Necessity

Understanding the first ground in this light, the second ground follows. Synod acknowledged that “good reasons exist to reevaluate our Psalter with a view to making beneficial revisions.” These reasons were grouped into four categories.

First, the words. Some words are archaic. When possible (it will not always be), these could profitably be updated. More importantly, portions of some Psalms are not versified in our Psalter, so that we do not sing the complete Psalter. Examples are Psalm 78:45-50 and Psalm 137:9.

We can add one matter that Synod did not address in its grounds: some words simply do not express properly the idea of the Psalm. Take Psalm 76:12: “He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.” Now read the second half of the last stanza of Psalter 207: “Mighty kings obey and fear Him, princes bow before His throne.” Do you see that the Psalter rendition removes the idea of Christ’s judgment on unbelieving kings and turns it into the idea that the kings of the earth bow in submission to Christ? We do not sing the Psalms as they were written in the Hebrew. We do not even sing a literal translation of the Psalms (that would be stilted). We sing versifications of the Psalms, in the form of English poetry (rhyme and meter). However, we should all desire that the versifications be faithful expressions of the idea of the Psalm itself.

Second, the tunes. Some tunes could profitably be pitched lower. Others need to be fixed, probably because the original typesetter made a mistake when setting the type. For example, the last chord of Psalter 286 should

be two notes lower in the tenor and bass.² Yet other tunes are difficult to sing (Psalter 180) or do not fit the words to which they are set (Psalter 136). Addressing these issues will be beneficial for worship.

Third, 38 Psalms have only one Psalter rendition. (Interestingly, Psalm 117, the shortest Psalm, has three renditions!) In itself, one rendition per Psalm is not bad, especially if the Psalm is brief. Yet, not all of the 38 Psalms are brief. A second rendition could help us sing the Psalm with fuller understanding, or more often. As an example, look up Psalm 58 and compare it with Psalter 156. The 11 verses of Psalm 58, none of them overly short, are versified in 4 stanzas of common meter. The effect is that much of the Psalm does not appear in the Psalter versification. Now compare Psalm 59 (17 verses) with Psalter 157 (9 stanzas). Perhaps it is an improvement over Psalm 58/Psalter 156, but we can do better yet.

Finally, the formatting could be improved. Fermatas, as well as musical notations such as “rit.” and “slowly,” have limited value. And, to strengthen our knowledge of the Psalms, the Psalter selections could be renumbered so that, instead of singing Psalter 1 or Psalter 2, we sing Psalm 1A (currently Psalter 1) and Psalm 1B (currently Psalter 2).

This ground (necessity) is weighty. If no concrete matters needed fixing, or if the mandate of the Psalter revision committee was simply to investigate *whether* any stanzas or tunes needed addressing, the need for Psalter revision would not be stated, and the efforts of Psalter revision could be viewed as an attempt to fix what needs no fixing, and therefore, under the guise of Psalter revision, to change our worship. If this necessity for revision had not been stated, the argument could be made that the matter was “vague,” as Synod 1973 said. But this ground focuses on weaknesses that have been identified in our Psalter, and that could profitably be fixed. Our Psalter is used in divine worship; it should be accurate. It is used for congregational singing; *all* of its selections should be singable and usable.

² The interested reader could go to the website www.hymnary.org, search for the tune “Stanley” which was composed by John Stanley (other tunes have the same name but were composed by different men), and view scanned images of how the tune appears in other music books. By doing so one could conclude that our Psalter’s typesetting of the last chord is incorrect.

Acceptability

The third ground is that Synod 2016 declared three things that the committee presented to be acceptable: the guidelines that govern the work, the principles that the Psalter revision committee submitted to Synod 2016, and the preliminary work of the committee (suggested changes that are proposed for Psalms 73-89, Psalters 201-243). Synod said, “The preliminary work of the committee is evidence that the Psalter will be improved where improvements are necessary, and yet be essentially the Psalter the PRC has used for all its history.”

This ground is important because Synod 2015 approved the PRC beginning the work on an interim basis. Synod 2016 could have ceased our involvement in the work because it found the guidelines, principles, or preliminary work unacceptable.

That synod declared this preliminary work acceptable does not mean that Synod adopted the proposed changes. A future synod, not sooner than Synod 2018, will face this question. But at this point, Synod commits to the work with a good idea of what the proposed outcome will be like.

Opportunity

Synod’s final ground was “Opportunity: Other denominations joining together make the project reasonable, feasible, both as to manpower and expense.” Synod noted in this ground that these other denominations, the Free Reformed Churches and the Heritage Reformed Churches, “have the same love for the Psalter as does the PRC.”

The significance of this ground is not so much that it adds weight to the necessity of the project. The second ground did that. Rather, this ground explains why now is a good time in the history of the PRC to proceed. Could the PRC revise the Psalter without the help of the FRC and HRC? Probably it could. But that would have required the PRC to initiate the effort to revise the

Psalter. Fact is that the PRC did not initiate these recent efforts; rather, the FRC did, and appeared ready to tackle and finish the project with the HRC, even if the PRC did not join efforts. Because the ball is rolling, our working with them is reasonable.

Conclusion


Not every decision that synod makes has grounds. Of those that do have grounds, some are stated briefly in one or two lines. By contrast, the four grounds that serve as the basis for this decision take up almost two pages. That is to say, they are carefully spelled out.

These grounds were taken verbatim from the proposal of the Contact Committee. The committee of pre-advice that treated this matter at Synod 2016 was free to modify, add, or remove the proposed grounds in its recommendations, but it did not do so. Again, the Synod as a body was free to modify, add, or remove grounds, but it did not do so. The committee of pre-advice and the Synod saw the value of the grounds.

To the member of the PRC and the reader of the *Standard Bearer*, these grounds should give evidence that the decision to work on Psalter revision was made not in haste, not without adequate forethought, and not without recognizing the great value our Psalter has even in its current form, but after careful consideration of why we have a Psalter at all, and what we

want to do with it.

With our Psalter we desire to teach and admonish each other, and sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16). But then, we must be certain that we are singing the word of Christ that dwells in us.

With it we desire to “sing praises with understanding,” that is, with insight and comprehension (Ps. 47:7). That requires us to attend to matters of accuracy. 

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In Memoriam of the Reverend Peter Breen^{*}

Although the year 1919 began with the nation mourning the death of Teddy Roosevelt, optimism seemed to abound. The flu pandemic that snuffed out some 30 million lives, was beginning to fade. World War I, the four-year quagmire that swallowed up another 18 million souls, had just ended (and with it the furor in West Michigan over a young Reformed pastor's refusal to display the flag during services in his church in Holland). Then, in the hope of lasting peace, the League of Nations was formed, and in the hope of a new morality, the eighteenth amendment was adopted.

On September 2, in a small farmhouse just east of the rural town of Coopersville, Michigan, a couple of Dutch immigrants rejoiced in the gift of another covenant child. The father, John, was born in 1877 as Jan Govert Breen in Stellendam, Zuid Holland. His wife, Grace, was born a year later as Gerarda Timmer in Kommerzij, Groningen. Both emigrated with parents and siblings to West Michigan where they would meet, marry, and settle down to farm. Their new child, the eleventh of twelve the Lord would give them, they named Peter James Breen.

Peter spent most of his life into adulthood on the family farm. He received his primary education in various local one-room schools and attended Coopersville High. But a few weeks before graduation, his father died of a heart attack, leaving Grace and the three youngest boys to earn the daily bread. Then, with the outbreak of World War II, Peter, who was exempted from service due to a hernia and flat feet, ran the family farm himself.

^{*} The contents of this article are derived from a number of sources, including personal interviews with Rev. Breen and his wife Pauline during our many visits, the family, and especially his grandson, attorney Mr. Ben Veldkamp, to whom I am indebted.

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



Rev. Peter Breen, 1919-2015

John and Grace were devoutly committed to the Reformed faith, and according to their baptismal vows, taught their children to fear the Lord in all of life and worship. They attended Coopersville Reformed Church, a congregation of mainly Dutch immigrants formed in 1854. When Peter was nine the building burned, but was rebuilt the next year. He made confession of faith there at age 19, and became increasingly involved in the church life, taught Sunday School, and led the youth group. But as yet, he had no aspirations for the ministry. His mother regularly prayed at the table that one of her sons would be a minister. And their minister, Rev. Gerrit Rozeboom, told Peter he had the necessary gifts and should consider college, then seminary. But Peter was certain the course of his life was set, and he would remain a farmer.

That changed on September 15, 1945. The war had officially ended two weeks previous, on the day before his 26th birthday. Earlier in the week, Rev. Rozeboom asked Peter to visit Hope College with him and talk to the faculty. Peter decided not to go, but each time he tried to call the minister to tell him, the line was busy. So Peter returned to cutting hay with his team of Belgians. For some reason, the horses refused to budge, and rather than continue wrestling with the massive beasts, Peter decided to go with Rev. Rozeboom and settle the issue of the ministry. When he arrived, the minister was waiting, certain Peter would go, even though he had never committed to the trip. The next week, Peter enrolled in the pre-seminary program at Hope College, but also thinking he would flunk out the first semester.

In less than a year, Peter would be preaching regularly. Due to the war, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) had a shortage of ministers and seminary students. Thus Western Theological Seminary appealed to Hope College for capable pre-seminary students who could serve vacant churches during the summer. Peter was one of those chosen. So, after receiving a crash course in preaching and a pile of sermon outlines from the faculty, he was sent to Gibson Union Chapel near Saugatuck. He did well, and would serve three more summer preaching assignments before even entering the seminary the Fall of 1949.

While at Hope College, Peter met his wife Pauline Stegenga at a class they attended called "Our Protestant Heritage." Although Pauline did not know it yet, Peter had taken an interest in her because "she asked good questions." When he learned she clerked at a local dry goods store, he began frequenting the establishment "to buy soap." When the manager noticed Peter often lingered and, by then, had bought enough soap to last for years, he suggested that next time Pauline should be the one to help the young man with his purchase. The clean, aspiring preacher and lovely clerk were married August 12, 1948. During the seminary years they would have two sons, David and Stephen, who also would eventually become ministers in the RCA. Peter himself graduated and became a minister of the Word in that denomination in May 1952.

Rev. Breen's first charge was Corinth Reformed Church, located south of Grand Rapids, near Division

and 100th St. He served there from 1952 to 1957, and during this time, he and Pauline had their third child, a daughter Mary. From 1958 to 1967, he pastored First Reformed in Fremont, Michigan, where daughters Ruth and Beth were born. His next charge was Calvary Reformed in Grand Rapids from 1967 to 1978. His final pastorate in the RCA was Fourth Reformed of Grand Rapids from 1979 to 1983, when, because of problems with his voice, he retired from the active ministry in the RCA. It turned out, however, to be only a short break.

Rev. Breen's first exposure to the PRC had happened back in seminary when the students were assigned to observe some good preacher they had not heard before. Peter wanted to hear Rev. Herman Hoeksema, whom he knew was scheduled to preach nearby. But there was a problem: Pauline was expecting to give birth at any time. Peter foolishly, he would admit, went anyway. And then compounded his error when, as Pauline recalled with the understanding only a preacher's wife could have, he returned so excited to talk about his encounter with Hoeksema that he forgot to ask about her condition or inquire as to whether she might be in labor.

Throughout his ministry, Rev. Breen became increasingly familiar with the PRC. He read Hoeksema and other writings of PRC men. During his pastorate at Calvary Reformed, the neighbors were Protestant Reformed, and largely through their influence the Breens enrolled their two youngest daughters at Covenant Christian High. Then, in the early 80s, as Rev. Breen neared retirement, he joined a ministers' Bible study, which included Rev. Gerald VandenBerg, the former pastor of Oak Lawn PRC. He had left the denomination in 1970 and became minister of the Orthodox Reformed Church (ORC), a small unaffiliated congregation largely of people who had separated from the PRC around the same time. In February 1985, Rev. VandenBerg was killed while working on his car, when the jack supporting it collapsed. Although by then retired, Rev. Breen frequently provided pulpit supply for the ORC, and in September they called him to be interim minister for one year. He ended up serving them for six years until 1991, when he retired a second time and the ORC subsequently disbanded.

Without a church home, and unable to return to the RCA in good conscience, Rev. Breen and Pauline decided

to join the PRC. They, and a number of former members of the ORC, joined Southeast PRC. The minister, Rev. Dale Kuiper, encouraged Rev. Breen to apply for ministerial credentials in the PRC. And in January 1993, after undergoing a *colloquium doctum* examination by Classis East, he was admitted as *minister emeritus*. He immediately set about preaching and teaching catechism in various PR congregations. Due to his previous work on an RCA extension committee, he also became involved in the formation and early history of Grace PRC. Rev. Breen would remain active as a retired minister in the PRC until 2008, when doctors found an inoperable aneurysm near his heart. On August 3, a month short of his 89th birthday, he preached his final sermon in Byron Center PRC on II Samuel 9, the story of Mephibosheth.

Rev. Breen often expressed how thoroughly he enjoyed his years in the PRC. He felt at home there. He loved the churches—their unity, life, faith, worship, order, preaching, officers, and members, especially the young people—and was thankful the Lord allowed him to work in them as a retired minister of advanced age. Even after he could no longer preach, he often called on the sick, conversed at length with members, and wrote letters of encouragement to the distressed. And he found peace there from the trials he experienced earlier in his ministry. He had

suffered for his commitment to the confessional Reformed faith, once even being summarily dismissed from a church wanting to be more ‘progressive.’ He had suffered for his love, support, and use of Christian schools, which at times was met with scorn and opposition. Tuition was often considered a pastoral extravagance that he should forego, but ended up paying with help from the bank and Pauline’s income as a Christian school-teacher.

Rev. Breen was a kind, gentle, peaceful, humble, and faithful, Reformed child of God and pastor. On Sunday, October 25, 2015, his life complete at the age of 96, the Lord took him home, leaving behind Pauline, his wife of 67 years, 4 children (his son David had died in 2013 of cancer), 23 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. He collapsed early in the morning while preparing for a day of worship that, although he could no longer attend church, always began by dressing in his Sunday best in order to listen with Pauline to the services at Southeast and The Reformed Witness Hour. Frequently, he would call me after the service to leave a message of appreciation for the word. But that Sunday, the Lord called him to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Thankfully, the U.S. military had no use for him, and by the sovereign providence and saving grace of God, he was made an effective, tireless soldier of Jesus Christ. ☞

BRING THE BOOKS...

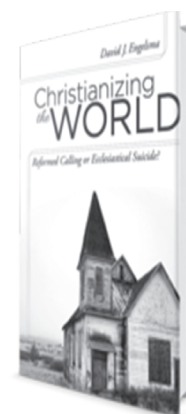
MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

Christianizing the World: Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide? David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Hardcover. 192 pages. \$19.95. [Reviewed by Craig Ferguson.]

What a fresh and insightful book this is! As always, Prof. David Engelsma is thorough; in this case, his thoroughness is much to the chagrin of the (many) advocates of Abraham Kuyper’s common grace theory. Today we are witnesses to a sprawling, nebulous support for the idea of Christianizing the world, one that has seeped

Mr. Ferguson is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, MI, and a pre-seminary student at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

into the broader church world, crossing denominational lines and infecting a vast number with the vague conviction that it is the church’s cultural mandate to so “build the kingdom of heaven.” This development is the spiritual child of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, and has come to represent a kind of mad experiment that the broader church world has undertaken—some have undertaken it deliberately, others have joined in as unwitting followers.



In his most recent examination and critique of the Kuyperian call to Christianize the world on the basis of common grace, Engelsma is characteristically dogged and surgical. He begins as he means to go, illustrating first of all that common grace is not just some vague doctrine, but an entire worldview. Accordingly, its effect reaches throughout the life of both Christian and church, structuring our understanding of the whole of God's creation and all of that creation's history. On these bases, Kuyper's theory props up a lofty vision for the future, underpinned in every way by the common grace of God in working the Christianization of every culture, government, and people of the earth.

Immediately, then, Engelsma calls the reader to recognize the gravity of Kuyper's teachings and of their present-day manifestations. Kuyper did not intend for his theory to be a small attachment to the Reformed worldview and confession; nor do his proponents today. Rather, he brought it forward as a redefinition of the fundamental truths that make up the foundation for the life of the Reformed Christian and work of the church.

The question, therefore, that Prof. Engelsma brings to our attention is aptly captured in the title of this work: "Is Christianizing the world a Reformed calling or is it ecclesiastical suicide?"

Beginning with a thorough and fair representation of Kuyper's theory and of the logical conclusions of that theory that have been made by his disciples, Engelsma gives a pointed examination of the roots of Kuyper's doctrine. Are they to be found in the Reformed Confessions? Are they to be found in the doctrines of grace? Are they consistent with all of the teachings of Scripture? What claims do Kuyper and his disciples make pertaining to the covenant? The antithesis? Particular grace? Engelsma's conclusion: "The advocates of common grace are foolish and blind, as well as theologically in error. The common grace project of Christianizing Western culture in the twenty-first century is sheer madness, as well as the breaching of the antithesis" (55). "The Kuyperian theory of common grace with the practice that accompanies it is ecclesiastical suicide! The proof is in the pudding" (107).

A uniquely enjoyable aspect of this volume is contained in the eighth chapter, where Prof. Engelsma an-


swers a number of questions that arose out of the speech when it was given. The author does not give any of them short shrift; he provides detailed and thoughtful answers, which also answer some of the more pointed questions that may arise in the reader's mind. And the questions are good ones as well, certainly adding to the already substantial 'meat' of this work.

Make no mistake, this book makes excellent reading for shepherd and sheep alike! Though the author deals with (sometimes heavy) theological and doctrinal concepts, he does so in an exceptionally accessible manner. After all, this work began as a speech written for the edification of believers, and it still maintains much of that voice. Recognize also, however, that this work is necessarily polemical; it is an examination of heresy, a denunciation of the same, and a declaration of a comforting, encouraging, scriptural truth.

For the Protestant Reformed reader, there is certainly a sense of events having come full circle with the publishing of this book. 1924 was a long time ago, but in the passing years we have seen common grace's rise to prominence in the broader church world. It is no longer merely dominant within the Reformed community, as it was then; today, it is dominant in all realms of those who call themselves Christian. In light of this, Kuyper's grandiose plans for the dominance of this teaching may seem to be realized.

But then, when we also consider the incredible, ever-increasing depravity of this wicked world, a world given over to sin, and the corresponding and increasing depravity of the broader, common-grace-dominated church world, the futility of Kuyper's "grand castle in the air" (64) is made abundantly clear.

The Lord preserves His church, as Engelsma notes, "the lovely rose amid the thorns," (69) calling her to holiness and antithetical purity, comforting her in her calling to declare the truth in the midst of a wicked and ungodly generation. "The way of special grace is the way of friendship with God and of enmity with his enemies" (123).

I am very pleased to give this work my hearty recommendation. 

Minister Activities

Synod 2016 of the PRC designated Byron Center, MI PRC as the calling church for another home missionary. The Council there had formulated a trio of Revs. C. Griess, B. Huizinga, and C. Spronk. On October 9 the congregation at Byron Center issued the call to Rev. Griess to be the next PRC home missionary.

Also on October 9 the congregation at First PRC of Holland, MI extended a call to Rev. Nathan Decker to be their next pastor. He is currently serving at Trinity PRC of Hudsonville, MI and had also been considering the call to be the third missionary to the Republic of the Philippines. On October 16 Rev. Decker announced God had led him to decline the call to be a missionary in the Philippines.

And on October 9 the congregation at Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI extended a call to Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor at Hope PRC of Redlands, CA.

May the God of all glory and the Great Shepherd of His sheep make known to each flock His sovereign will in all these instances. This is our prayer and our confidence!

Mission Activities

Sunday afternoon, October 16 the congregation of Provident Christian Church of Marikina

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

was invited to the home of Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn, located at Sunrise Drive, Beverly Hills Subdivision, Antipolo City. A late lunch was served and fellowship took place. This was an excellent opportunity for the group to visit with each other, the Kleyns, and Rev. Daniel Holstege who was in the Philippines preparing for his move there.

The appointed church visitors for the denomination of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines are Revs. Ibe, Flores, and Kleyn. These men recently conducted church visitation in the Berean PRC and in the PRC of Bulacan, with Rev. Leovino Trinidad accompanying the committee to observe the work. Church visitation had been conducted in the Maranatha PRC of Valenzuela City earlier in the year. This is a valuable work and one that serves to maintain unity in the churches.

The classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines was scheduled to meet on October 31 at the PRC of Bulacan, Muzon.

Young Adult Activities

The Lynden Protestant Reformed Young Adults Society extends a welcome to their upcoming retreat to be held in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. The retreat will be held at Warm Beach Camp and Convention Center, located 40 minutes south of Lynden, WA. The dates are July 3-7, 2017 with activi-

ties to be announced in the next few months. Registration will be open in January. More information can be found at their Facebook page or through e-mail of Kyle Hanko at kyhanko@gmail.com. They hope to see you there!

Young Calvinists planned a 15-20 mile bike outing on Saturday, October 15. They met at Spring Grove Park in Hudsonville and biked to Zeeland and back. When they got back to Spring Grove, they feasted on grilled burgers and had a time of singing and devotions. All young people and young adults were encouraged to come and join in for an enjoyable morning!

Minister Activities

Prof. Herman Hanko observed his 86th birthday on October 10. We thank God for Prof. Hanko's many years of faithful labors in our churches, both preaching and writing. With fondness, many in Doon, IA PRC remember Prof. Hanko on the pulpit there more than 50 years ago. In the little church on upper Main Street there was no air conditioning. On hot summer days all windows remained open and it is thought that the entire town of Doon heard those sermons as a young Rev. Hanko strongly emphasized the gospel truth. Time passes quickly. What a comfort that our heavenly Father controls each moment, guiding and directing all things for our good!

Congregational Activities

The three Canadian churches in the PRC held special worship services on Monday, October 10 in observance of their country's Thanksgiving Day. This holiday occurs on the second Monday of October each year.

Sister Church Activities


Rev. Angus Stewart of Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland gave a Reformation Day lecture on October 28 entitled "John Owen and the Death of Christ." And it was decided that he would give it again on November 11 at Portadown Town Hall, and also on December 8 at the Round Chapel in Margam, South Wales. In that manner an interesting topic could be heard by many ears! We are glad that Rev. Stewart could busy himself in this way.

And this from the October Covenant PRC newsletter: A brother in England wrote: "A big thank-you for the solid Reformed materials you kindly sent me. Doctrinal, Reformed, biblical truth is the bedrock of my faith in Christ alone. The CPRC is a great blessing to me. Wishing you God's peace and blessing."

An interesting excerpt from the bulletin of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland regarding the differences in the four gospel accounts:

With four gospel accounts, we do not expect carbon copies. Each one has a different emphasis and complements and completes (without contradicting) the others. Accounts of events can vary without being contradictory, as everyday examples illustrate. If I went to an event at which my friends John

and Margaret were present, and I said, "John was there," but did not mention Margaret, I would be giving an incomplete, but not a false account. (I was interested primarily in John, so I mentioned only him). If another person was at that event, and he said, "John and Margaret were there," his account complements and completes mine, but it does not contradict it. If John mentions only Mary Magdalene, it is not because she was alone, but because he wants to focus on her. John does not write, "Only Mary Magdalene..." He mentions only her. There is a difference. To mention the other women, who are mentioned in the other accounts, would distract from John's purpose.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ We, members of the Men's and Ladies' Bible Study Society of the First PRC of Holland, wish to express sincere sympathy to fellow member, Mrs. Jan Moore, in the death of her husband,

RICHARD MOORE.

We pray she may receive comfort and assurance from the Word of God in I Thessalonians 4:14: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Paul Starrett, Pres.
Kim Warner, Sec.