

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • March 1, 2016

CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Jesus Reproached by Soldiers REV. RON VAN OVERLOOP	242
<i>Editorial</i>	What It Means to Be Reformed (13)—“Always Reforming” PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS	244
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	Wisely Laying Our End to Heart REV. THOMAS MIERSMA	247
<i>A Word Fitly Spoken</i>	Thought REV. BILL LANGERAK	250
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	Bless, and Curse Not MRS. MARGARET LANING	251
<i>All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee</i>	Beauty and Purpose in Separation DR. BRENDAN LOOYENGA	253
<i>Report from the Contact Committee</i>	The Question of Psalter Revision: An Update PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS	257
<i>Pertaining to the Churches...in Common</i>	News from Seminary PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA	259
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	<i>Memoirs of the Way Home</i> REV. MARTYN MC GEOWN	261
<i>Activities</i>	News From Our Churches MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM	262

Jesus Reproached by Soldiers

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.”

Matthew 27: 27-31

Jesus suffered! Jesus' suffering was because of sin—my sin. The penalty of divine wrath is earned by my sinfulness and by each and every sin I commit. God made Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be my Substitute, my Mediator. This made it necessary for Him to bear completely all the penalty that my sins deserve.

This is the confession of everyone who was given to

Jesus by the Father and to whom is given the gift of faith to believe in Him. This confession of sin and of faith is ours especially as we commemorate Jesus' death.

Jesus endured God's wrath both directly and indirectly. He suffered it directly all His life, but especially during the three hours of darkness in the early afternoon of His crucifixion. It was then, as in no other time in His earthly life, that He tasted and endured God's anger against all the sins and the sinfulness of all the elect.

He tasted God's wrath indirectly when reproached by humans. He suffered in this way when He was contradicted by sinners, when a murderer was preferred before Him, when He was stripped naked, when His face was slapped, when He was crucified outside the camp. He suffered God's wrath indirectly when He was scourged and mocked by the Roman soldiers.

The Scourging

Jesus was scourged. Usually, only those sentenced to death were scourged. But Jesus was scourged before He was officially condemned. This was an attempt by Pilate to arouse sympathy from the people so they would be

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

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

Reprint and Online Posting Policy

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

Editorial Policy

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

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

Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

Advertising Policy

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

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

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

willing to let Jesus go. This is what the Roman governor was indicating when he said, “Behold the man!” (John 19:5).

The custom was that the one to be whipped would be stripped of his shirt, and then his hands were tied around a pole so that his back would be stretched. Then he would be beaten with a whip, which usually had lead in its tips. This would lay open the flesh of the back of the victim.

The scourging was done by the Roman soldiers who were on duty in the common hall of the governor’s palace. These soldiers had escorted Jesus into the hearing before Pilate, and then to and from Herod. Now instead of just doing escort duty, they could be involved in a sport. It was a break from the routine, and an opportunity for evil entertainment. What had to add to their enjoyment was the fact that Jesus was a Jew—one from a nation they hated for making their lives miserable.

Jesus suffered physically. For Him whose conscience was perfectly sensitive to God, this suffering was for the sins of His people.

The Derision

Jesus certainly suffered from the physical abuse, but worse was the cruel and derisive mocking. The soldiers found it humorous that the charge brought against Jesus by the Sanhedrin was that He declared Himself to be a king. They incorporated this into their fun by giving Jesus the appearance of a king: a purple robe, a reed for a scepter, and a crown made up of thorns. They pressed the crown on Him, driving the thorns as deeply as they could into His head. They mockingly saluted Him: “Hail, King of the Jews!” They bowed down before Him, as if to give homage to a king. They utterly despised Jesus by heartlessly slapping His face, spitting on Him, and hitting His crowned head with the reed/scepter. Jesus suffered.

The soldiers represented the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of this world despises the kingship of the Christ. They show that they consider His rule to be utterly foolish and entirely worthless. They found it impossible to conceive of Him as a king. Their mockery, biting insults, and cruel treatment truly reflect the thought of all natural men.

Jesus suffered. This reproach hit deeply into the soul

of Jesus, for He really was and is King. In fact, He is King of all kings and Lord of all lords. But His kingdom is spiritual and not earthly. It is a kingdom obtained by righteousness—not by mighty power. And He rules over all in His kingdom in righteousness. His kingdom is not of this world. This was precisely Jesus’ testimony to Pilate: “Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37).

But such a King and kingdom meant absolutely nothing to the soldiers. They were only able to recognize earthly, physical might. As such, the soldiers represent all earthly concepts of a king: physical dominance that earns the right to be served and obeyed for the king’s selfish pleasure. But Jesus stands in the middle of these soldiers with no human power and with no sword. King Jesus bears reproach. He gives His back to them. He suffered.

The Enduring

King Jesus established His right to rule and His kingdom as the Servant of Jehovah! Let us recognize the fact that no one could have heaped reproach on Him without His will! He definitely had the ability to turn it aside and to execute vengeance on His enemies. And this He could have done with the flash of His eyes, or with a single word of His mouth. This He demonstrated the previous night in the garden of Gethsemane, when the band that came to arrest Him fell down before Him.

See too that Jesus’ suffering is voluntary. It is completely an act of His will, arising out of love and obedience to His Father. This is His righteousness. He bears reproach of the soldiers as the Servant of Jehovah—doing so for the sake of God and for the sake of God’s righteousness. Jesus established His kingdom according to real justice—God’s justice and righteousness. It was for the sake of all the citizens of Jesus’ kingdom that God’s justice had to be satisfied and perfect righteousness earned. He established a kingdom by doing the will of God. He is a king who served, instead of being served. And thus He established a kingdom where the citizens are judged by the perfect Judge to be righteous and holy. To become King, Jesus had to take away Satan’s spiritual right to rule, and He did so according to divine justice. This required Him to obey His Father perfectly by bearing completely

the penalty earned by the sins of His citizens and by earning perfect righteousness for them.

Christ's bearing the reproach of the evil soldiers is a mighty royal deed! The flesh says that He is a weakling to be mocked, beaten, and rejected. But from the viewpoint of the eternal, He is the mighty Servant of Jehovah, doing the will of His heavenly Father and establishing righteousness for His citizens in God's way. He is allowing Himself to be bruised in the heel by the serpent that He might crush the head of Satan forever!

This suffering attitude and action of the Savior condemned the world in the judgment of God. When God raised Him from the dead, God justified Him who was reproached by the world, thus condemning these soldiers and all the world of the ungodly.

Finally, see that Christ bore the reproach of the world by putting all of His confidence in the Father. He knew that God would never put Him to shame. And He

trusted the Father to clothe Him with majesty forever. He knew that soon He would be given all authority in heaven and on earth. He knew that He would be revealed as King of kings before whom every knee will bow in actual worship and adoration, all to the glory of the Father.

Jesus endured the suffering, despising the shame, in order that we might be delivered from eternal torments. He suffered innumerable reproaches that we might never be confounded. He was bound that we might be freed. He was innocently condemned to death that we might be acquitted before the judgment seat of God. He willingly bore the world's reproach, offering Himself as the sacrifice for all of our sins and sinfulness, thus redeeming us. He was derided that we might have honor and glory forever!

He suffered. And we are blessed forever! 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

What It Means to Be Reformed (13)

Reformed, yet “Always Reforming”?

If being “confessional” means holding the traditions, maintaining the old paths, and not removing the ancient landmarks, how can a Reformed church be “always reforming”? If being Reformed is embracing the confessions—both ancient and Reformational—what use is the motto “always reforming”? Can the church truly be *always* reforming? The confessions are the tried and tested expressions of our faith. Without

changing the confessions, how can a Reformed church *reform*?

Or does the charge stick, that the confessions are simply the “Paper Pope” of Protestantism—infalible and unchangeable? Is it, in fact, true that we Reformed folks blindly follow all our confessions—the Three Forms of Unity, as well as

the Baptism Form, Lord's Supper Form, Marriage Form, and Church Order—unwilling and probably unable to change anything about them, as the Roman Catholic faithful view their Pontiff?

The answer is a proper understanding of that Reformed slogan, *semper reformanda* (“always reforming”), almost as old as the Reformation itself.

A proper understanding of that important maxim is: A Reformed church wants to adopt the mentality that she *constantly examines herself by the Word of God, to en-*

—WIMTBR—
COVENANTAL
CALVINISTIC
CHURCH
CONFESSIONAL
CHRISTIAN LIFE

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2016, p. 221.

sure that she is indeed faithful to that Word of God—the ultimate standard—and reforms herself when she has become deformed.

Semper reformanda

The Latin phrase *semper reformanda* sounds like the United States Marine Corps' *semper fi*, an abbreviation of *semper fidelis*, meaning “always faithful.” Reformed churches could abbreviate their slogan as *semper re*.

The origin of the saying is uncertain. Historians have searched for the origin and give different views both of its origin and original intent. Most of them agree that the first use was in the 1670s by Jodocus van Lodenstein, a Reformed preacher in the Netherlands, although even he did not speak of it as an aphorism, or use the precise words we are familiar with. Various forms of the phrase were used by other Reformed men, until the full expression, most agree, came to be *ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*.¹ That is, *the church, having been reformed, must continue to be reformed according to God's Word*. What the full expression brings out is that: 1) the reference is to the *church*; 2) the reference is not to any church but to the *Reformed* church that stands in the tradition of the sixteenth century Reformation; 3) the constant reformation of this church must be only according to the infallible *standard of Scripture*.

¹ The last part of the Latin expression, *secundum verbum Dei*, (according to the Word of God) was not added, it is thought, until the early twentieth century when the motto was popularized.

The adage itself has no real authority among us.

The phrase is not from the confessions. It has no ecclesiastical definition. It has not, as far as I am aware, been adopted by any Reformed assembly and thus given a formal definition or standing.

Improper understandings of semper reformanda

Some suggest that the initial intent of the expression had nothing to do with the church's doctrine, worship, or government, since these were addressed sufficiently at the Reformation, but had to do with personal conduct and piety. This view ties the phrase to the “Second Reformation,” (in the Dutch, the *Nadere Reformatie*) whose emphasis was on reformation of life, on personal godliness. The Reformation went far, it was thought, but not far enough. Now, what is deformed in heart and life must be corrected. Reformed, indeed, but always reforming. Attractive as that view may be, in certain respects, proper understanding and use of the phrase is not mainly personal, but ecclesiastical—*ecclesia reformata*....

Recognizing the need always to be reforming one's heart and life, though not the proper understanding of the phrase, is not dangerous. The phrase, however, is hi-jacked and misused today by those who promote serial upgrades of the church's theology, perpetual revision of her liturgy, annual amendments to her government—changing the church as often as millennials change their smart-phones or redecorate their homes. For example,

the so-called emergent church has stolen the phrase, wanting nothing of Reformation *truth* and desiring a form of *church* that Christianity has never before seen. Also, the Federal Vision heretics promote their errors with appeal to *semper reformanda*, now supposing that the motto should smooth the way to reconsider covenant theology and take a fresh look at Paul's doctrine of justification.

But even sincere Reformed believers can hear the phrase without understanding its intent. Then they live with a certain unease if their church does not change or adopt something new every so often.

A basic understanding of the Reformation itself will guard us from such improper applications of *semper re*. If we only remember the Reformers' determinations, we will be safe in our own use of the expression. The Reformers never wanted anything more than to 1) reject what was in error, 2) sharpen what was unclear, and 3) retain everything else. And it's this “retain everything that is not out of focus or in error” that we must remember.

“The church, being reformed and always being reformed,” then, fits well with being *confessional*. The church is glad for the creeds, unchanged; satisfied with the church's government as we have it (mostly) from Dordt; and rejoices in her liturgy that remains very much the same from generation to generation.

What, then, is semper reformanda?

Starting with two basic Reformed principles, we can receive good

counsel from the expression *semper re*.

First, a Reformed believer begins confessing the absolute and sole authority of the Word of God. All else is subordinate to Scripture and subject to its scrutiny. Whatever does not measure up to this standard is crooked and must be discarded or made straight.

Second, the Reformed believer understands that the church always tends toward corruption—a kind of ecclesiastical entropy—because of the sinfulness of every member and the wiles of the devil. History shows this and we must learn from history. Rarely does a church or body of churches not degenerate. The Old Testament reveals the same pattern, that new generations usually deviate, often slowly, and probably with the attitude that all is well in Zion.

And because of those twin truths, the motto *semper re* is not merely permissible for us to adopt, perhaps someday even formally; it is vitally important. A Reformed church must adopt a mentality: we are Reformed but we must never rest on our laurels, lest we arrive at church some Sunday morning to see 95 theses nailed to *our* sanctuary door.

Starting with those two Reformed principles—the sole authority of God’s Word and the depravity of man’s nature—the good counsel of *semper re* can be repeated and spelled out, now very carefully: We are always testing ourselves with the Word of God to see whether, in doctrine or conduct, personally or ecclesiastically, we measure up;

and if not, we correct ourselves (Reforming!) according to that Word. In these ways:

1. *By discarding or changing what is still defective.* Even since the Reformation, although the likelihood of this is smaller, some error may have been retained that Reformed Christianity has yet to put away. Is an example of this the doctrine of the relation between church and state as the Belgic Confession expresses it in Article 36? The footnote adopted in 1910, which remains but a footnote, and is the subject of continued debate, shows the difficulty of changing creeds. Is another example the doctrine of divorce and remarriage as adopted by the Reformers (not in the Three Forms of Unity, but codified in the Westminster Standards), perhaps in improper over-reaction to the Roman Catholics?

2. *By adding what has been missing.* Since the Spirit of truth always leads the church into all truth, and since no church may assume that she knows everything as she ought to know, the church today may be able to see further, understand more deeply, and develop beyond what her fathers did. In the past, when heretics threatened the church, the Lord used that heresy to spur her on to develop truth that she had not explained thoroughly enough in the past. Today, the charismatic errors regarding the Holy Spirit and the millennial errors in eschatology are examples where the church may have opportunity to add confessional declarations of scriptural truth.

3. *By restoring what (over*

time) has been lost, or rejecting what (over time) has been improperly added. This point addresses the tendency of sinners to depart from right, to lose what is good, and add what is evil. Jesus showed the way when, early in His ministry, He challenged the assumptions of the church leaders and called them “to the sources” (*ad fontes!*) to see the true intent of the law of God. What “has been said among you of old times” is not what “I say unto you.” At a different time, in response to their perverted doctrine of marriage and divorce, Jesus said, “From the beginning it was not so.” To use a different kind of example, a good tradition today becomes “law” and then is imposed upon others, for example, on a mission field and in a different culture. Or, different yet, over-reaction to an error becomes ensconced as orthodoxy, and only after a generation the church realizes her response went too far. It takes the church time, but especially the grace of humility, to examine herself in these regards. And her safety is her standard: Everything is examined by the Word of God. Everything.

4. *By revising what must be changed because of changing circumstances.* Church Order revisions come to mind here. What the PRC did in 2001 with the Church Order not only may be done, but at times must be done. To give only one example, the old version of the Church Order forbade “funeral sermons,” speaking to Roman Catholic times when funerals were allowed into a worship service. We changed the Church Order there.

The Church Order itself mandates change if the profit of the churches is in view: "...may and ought to be altered, augmented, or diminished."

5. *By reforming personal conduct.* What van Lodenstein and his colleagues (Hoornbeeck, Koelman, and their predecessor Voetius) emphasized regarding personal piety is worth noting here as well, and is not out of place in a discussion of *always reforming*. Our confessions themselves tell us to be always improving, spiritually. The expression "more and more," repeated so often in the creeds, is simply a reflection of the Scripture's injunction to "abound yet more and more," to "approve things that are excellent," and to go "from glory to glory" in our being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two real dangers


But there are dangers. The Reformers were fond of reminding the church of dangers that threaten

from *two* sides. And here there is risk of looking for danger in only one direction. It makes you think of the Brit's friendly cautions to the American visitors who, because of our traffic customs, cross the street looking first to the left. On London's curbs are the warnings, "Look Right!" It depends on where we are in history, and in what circumstances we find ourselves, but we Reformed must be willing to look both ways for dangers.

On the one hand, as we have already seen, those who misuse the motto *semper reformanda* to promote constant change must be put in their place. On the other hand, those whose tendency is to suppose that the status quo is always pleasing to God must be reminded that the church is always to be examining herself by the Word of God. G.K. Chesterton, himself no friend of the Reformed faith, but whose understanding of church and society was perceptive, once pointedly re-

marked: "The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected." But we are neither progressives nor conservatives. We are Reformed.

John Calvin was not shy to give his impression of where was the greatest danger in his own time. Whatever your judgment of today, and where you are, God's wisdom counsels us to be sure to look both ways.

There is value in having a slogan like *semper reformanda*. Let it remind us to be Berean-like Christians, who always go home asking whether these things be true and right, searching the Scriptures (Acts 17). So when moderns "mutter" and today's "wizards peep" (see Is. 8), may we Reformed Christians call one to another, in the spirit of Isaiah, "should not a people seek unto their God? To the law and to the testimony!" (Is. 8:20). 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Wisely Laying Our End to Heart

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-6

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

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2015, p. 299.

“A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth” (Eccl. 7:1). This verse begins a new section in Ecclesiastes. Solomon has considered the van-

ity of life under the sun, man's works, and the terrible bondage to covetousness that subjects man's life to vanity. While he continues to describe what is seen under the sun, he would also lead us to some conclusions concerning these things in the following chapter.

He introduces a point of comparison that may at first glance strike us as strange, since he declares that the day of one's death is better than one's birthday. In doing so, he is not, however, making a sweeping statement but rather is calling us to a certain spiritual reflection, to contemplate a sober reality. He does this by comparing first a good name and precious ointment and then, in what follows, explaining more fully his point.

A good name is a man's reputation. It may be viewed both as it stands among men under the sun and as it stands before God. It is not something given at birth but is the fruit of one's course of life, one's speech and dealings among men. We are called as believers to "walk honestly toward them that are without" (I Thess. 4:12). One, for example, who is to hold office in the church, is to be of "good report of them which are without" (I Tim. 3:7). A good name is the fruit of a godly walk in integrity in this world, though we may suffer reproach for Christ's sake.

Such integrity is the fruit of grace, for it is the fruit of a walk of faith, founded in Christ and His righteousness and manifested in the fear of God in an upright walk in the world. It is truly precious. The world may have an appearance of it, for a season, but the bondage of covetousness works its destruction.

This good name is compared to "precious ointment." The word ointment today conveys the idea of a medicinal salve or lotion of some sort, which is not the idea here. The term refers to a fragrant spice, oil, or perfume, a heady, but temporary fragrance that belonged to celebration in the Middle Eastern context. It fills the senses with its power and energy, but is fleeting in character. Such spice is costly and precious. It is thus the beloved comes to his bride, "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant" (Song of Solomon 3:6).

The good name is "better" because it is something firm, of lasting worth, the fruit of a walk in integrity, while the perfume of an ointment is a passing thing, a fleeting joy. It is this comparison that is on the fore-

ground here. The day of one's death is a fundamental reality, a sobering one. It stands at the end of life's journey. It is the "end of all men" (Eccl. 7:2). The day of one's birth, while a joyous occasion, is nevertheless a fleeting thing. By it we begin life's pathway in the vanity of this world under the sun. It is a moment in time, a beginning, and we pass beyond it.

It is thus that Solomon further explains: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Eccl. 7:2). The feasting and rejoicing of men in this life is, again, a passing thing. He is not speaking here of excess and its evil, as in I Peter 4:3. There is a lawful rejoicing in which the beloved takes his bride to the banqueting house in love (Song of Solomon 2:4). But his point here is that all such feasting, even in lawful celebration, is a transitory vanity. The fool does, in the lust of the flesh, seek it as a goal or end in itself, since his god is his belly. But even in its lawful use in celebration and rejoicing, feasting is like the day of one's birth, a passing event. It is like the passing fragrance of an expensive perfume that does not abide.

The reality of death that comes upon all men, is that one enters an abiding, permanent, and eternal state. It is the end of our earthly sojourning and the destination of all men under the sun. Death is the sober reality of life in a fallen world. Entering the house of mourning, the living will learn wisdom. It gives one pause to reflect soberly on the meaning and end of one's life and the pathway we are on. "The living will lay it to heart" (Eccl. 7:2). It works a spiritual good not found in the house of feasting.

Solomon adds therefore, "Sorrow of heart is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:3). The issue is the heart, out of which are the issues of life and the spiritual state of that heart. Laughter is, again, a passing thing with little abiding value. Laughter does not instruct the heart, while sorrow, in the presence of grief, works a sober understanding. Sorrow that vexes the spirit works grief, but it also points to the character of this present life as subject to vanity, calls to mind its end, and questions the foundation on which that life is built. It leads a child of God to his Lord, to seek his Savior, and to seek the things that are above. Feasting and laughter are the

world's way of drowning out the reality of death and life's end and the questions it occasions. Such reflection in the house of mourning, though in sadness of countenance and grief, makes the heart better. Solomon is speaking, therefore, of that which works wisdom.

Thus he says, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Eccl. 7:4). The world with its laughter, its banqueting, and its entertainment seeks to evade the reality of life. The heart, the spiritual center of a man's life, is also that which shapes his thoughts, desires, and affections. The heart dwells in the house in which it is shaped. The fool's heart is *in* the house of mirth. He does not simply go there; his life is shaped by its passing foolishness, which does not consider the end of his way. The fool seeks to dwell in the house of mirth and feasting.

The heart of the wise frequents the house of mourning, not because it is morbid, but to learn wisdom, which the end of life teaches. For the same reason, "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools" (Eccl. 7:5). Instruction and rebuke teach wisdom. By the Word of God we learn the fear of God and true wisdom. The house of mourning is, in a way, a visible expression of that Word. It is a form of rebuke that speaks against that which is sin and folly in this life and drives folly away. Rebuke teaches wisdom. Better to hear that word from one who has understanding and learn spiritual wisdom and discernment than to listen to the song of fools.


The song of fools is the expression of the fool's heart, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). His song reveals the foolishness of his mind and heart before God and in the world. His song is the expression of his spiritual emptiness and foolishness; likewise his laughter. This is a sobering reflection

on what passes for music and entertainment in our day, especially through all the forms such media is readily delivered in our digitally-connected, electronic world.

Solomon uses a concrete figure to further ground what he has just said about the song of fools. "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" (Eccl. 7:6). He is not speaking of true joy or rejoicing, but of the laughter of a fool. It is like the noise made by burning thorns in a fire. They crackle. They are loud in the noise they make. They flame up and burn quickly so that they are gone almost instantly. But they produce no heat that will warm the pot. As a means to heat a pot and to make it boil, thorns are useless. They accomplish nothing.

The point is, so is the laughter of the fool, of the world without God, and its song. "This also is vanity." To then fill one's life with such empty vanity is also folly. It will not teach wisdom in the fear of God. The cackling of the fool's laughter is as empty as the crackling of thorns under a pot is of heat. It is useless and vain, serving nothing of any profit. The point of the text should raise the question, too: where do we turn our ear to hear? What is it we seek out that we may listen to it and make it our own? Do we seek "the rebuke of the wise," or the "song of fools?"

Solomon's implied warning to be sober and seek wisdom is particularly for those who are young, who are beginning their walk along life's path. This life has an end to it, which comes

to all men. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1). 

*The point of the text
should raise the question,
too: where do we turn
our ear to hear?
What is it we seek out
that we may listen to it
and make it our own?
Do we seek "the rebuke
of the wise," or
the "song of fools?"*

Thought

I think, therefore I am. Thus reasons man. But the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are vain (I Cor. 3:20). God is not in all his thoughts (Ps. 10:4). Man's thoughts are an abomination unto the Lord (Prov. 15:26). The thoughts of his heart are evil continually (Gen. 6:5). His thoughts are of iniquity, and evil against the righteous every day (Is. 59:6; Ps. 56:5). Man thinks his name will continue for ever (Ps. 49:11). He thinks he can escape the judgment of God (Rom. 2:3). But he knows not the thoughts of the Lord (Mic. 4:12). And all his thoughts shall perish at death (Ps. 146:4). As he thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7).


Since God knows and judges our thoughts, Scripture also exposes evil thoughts in the church that actually oppose the kingdom of God (II Chr. 13:8). Jesus, being God, knew the hidden thoughts of those who opposed Him. He condemned the wickedness of the Jews who thought they were children of God because they were children of Abraham (Matt. 3:9), who thought that studying the Scriptures alone could save them; and who thought that Moses would approve of them (John 5:39, 45). They thought Jesus guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death (Mark. 14:64). And later, thought they did God's work even as they killed God's own children (John 16:2).

Members of the church have thought many foolish things. The rich fool thought much about a long life of ease but never about dying that night (Luke 12:1). Simon thought the Holy Spirit could be bought (Act 8:20). Peter thought Jesus needed his protection (Matt. 25:53). Some thought it unlawful to pay taxes, that Jesus came only to bring peace, or that His kingdom would immediately appear (Matt. 22:17; 10:34; Luke 19:11). Others thought their spirit wasn't prone to envy, or thought they could receive from God what they asked in unbelief (Jam. 4:5; 1:6).

Scripture, therefore, warns us against many thoughts to which we are prone. Being proud, we are exhorted

not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3); to think we are something when we are nothing (Gal. 6:3); to think that we know everything (I Cor. 8:2); or to think more than what is written (I Cor. 4:6). Being weak, we are not to think we are free from the danger of falling (I Cor. 10:12). Being Christ's, we are not to think that we are alone in suffering trials (I Pet. 4:12). And being well cared for by Christ, we are to take no thought about tomorrow, and to take no thought for our life, about what to eat, what to drink, or about our body, what to put on (Matt. 6:25; 34).

Scripture also acknowledges, commends, and urges us to good thoughts. The Lord who understands the imaginations of our thoughts, declares that the thoughts of the righteous are right (I Chr. 28:9; Prov. 12:5). He promises that when we commit our works unto Him, our thoughts will be established (Prov. 16:3). By God's grace, we think upon His name (Mal. 3:6) and, in His temple, think upon His lovingkindness (Ps. 48:9). And rather than think on what is false and corrupt, unjust and unholy, ugly and evil—which things too easily occupy our thoughts—the Lord exhorts us to think on whatsoever is true and honest, is just and pure, is lovely and good, and whatsoever is of virtue and praise (I Cor. 13:5; Phil. 4:8).

Especially amazing and comforting are God's thoughts. His thoughts are very deep (Ps. 92:5). What He thinks shall come to pass (Is. 14:24). We can think to do evil, but God means it for good to His own (Gen. 50:20). His thoughts are not our thoughts (Is. 55:8). And Christ, who being in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, is able to do exceedingly more than we think (Eph. 3:20). He understands our thoughts and declares unto man his thought (Ps. 139:2; Amos 4:13). His thoughts toward us cannot be numbered (Ps. 40:5). Our Lord thinks upon us for good (Neh. 5:9). He thinks upon the poor and needy (Ps. 40:17). He thinks peace toward us, not evil (Jer. 29:11). And in deep love, merciful grace, and exceeding power, He brings into captivity our every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5). What a thought! 

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

Bless, and Curse Not

In the privacy of his own bedroom, the king of Syria, in II Kings 6, devised an attack on God's people. Where could be a more secretive spot to plot? Finally, when his invasion was ready to carry out, how shocked he was to discover that his plans had been divinely delivered to the king of Israel. This happened not once or twice but time and again to the angry, frustrated Syrian king.

Even today, in the privacy of our own homes some of our words are intercepted too. It grieves us to confess that we do not always love each other as we ought, which we show by attacking with our words. I have known, and surely you too, some lovely Christians who rarely have a bad word to say about their fellow saints. This is a gift from God and a gift for which we should pray. Sadly, we are sinful and forget to pray.

Thus, we learn the hard way when our words escape through our windows, doors, Internet connection, and telephone lines. Out it goes into the great outdoors. Perhaps there is only a bird or two nearby. Should we be concerned? Did not Grandma warn that all it takes is one? With a flap of a wing, the words are snatched and dispatched to parts unknown through the vast, measureless air.

Oh, if only we could catch that bird and bring it back! We cringe as our children blithely wave to the birdie out the window. Secret words bring open shame. With a mere piccolo trill, a chickadee-dee-dee, and a cheery chirp our lives are nearly ruined.

Scripture tells us to take heed: "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" (Eccl. 10:20). Under God's providence, our words will travel at times by unknown, unsuspecting means. It is as if a bird

perches upon our window sill, promptly flying elsewhere to declare it.

Birds or no birds, we need to stop! We and our children are not a good witness when we speak disrespectfully about people, bear false witness, or falsify anyone's words. Further, the verse tells us not to curse the king. We may not know any kings, but we must honor those who hold an office of authority, specifically our rulers. Most especially, we can apply this truth to the honor due our church officebearers as well as to all believers who are anointed in Christ. How we speak to and about our brothers and sisters in Christ is the focus of this article.

How especially horrifying it is when we turn our thoughts and words against one another! The book of James says that we might tame wild birds and other animals, but not the tongue. This untamable tongue can be a problem in the church. "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:9, 10). Is God pleased with our praises of Him while we curse His people? We know He is not. Rather, God's word tells us to "bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12:14). Now, that is what our tongue should be busy doing—blessing and not cursing! This is glorifying to God and builds up His people.

Some might object, "But there is nothing good to say about some people at church." You can reckon they will not be blessing them. In the past, some have gone so far as to use the imprecations in Scripture to justify private vindictiveness. John Calvin refers to this grievous abuse of God's Word among the Roman Catholics of his day. Roman clergy were hired to use Psalm 109, for example, as a chant for cursing personal enemies. Calvin notes that he knew a woman who hired these wicked men to curse even her own son (cf. Calvin's commentary on Psalm 109:6).

Cursing in all its forms sows discord among the brethren.

Mrs. Lanning is a wife and mother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa.

ren. It goes beyond vulgar words, with taking of God's name in vain being by far the worst. What about cursing our brethren? Certainly, we would never call on God to send them to destruction. However, with unchecked anger, resentment, or jealousy there are times when God's people come close to that. So much so, we might find ourselves entertaining thoughts of revenge, hoping to get back by dishonoring their name. This insecure, mean-spiritedness includes any hurtful, overly critical, belittling, even slanderous thing we can blurt out. It leads to attributing only evil motives to their character. We eagerly listen to any negative, unproven gossip about them. By implication, we declare them outside of our communion. We do not pray for God's blessings upon them—not sincerely, at least. If we do pray, it will tend to be a series of exhortations we think they need to hear. We sit in the judgment seat of our smug condemnation, desiring that the person receives what we think they deserve.

God's Word says "bless, and curse not," and there are great consequences if we do not obey. How disturbing for a child to realize that the Christian adult or parent he or she looks up to is two-faced. In the child's eyes, the one like Jesus has taken off a mask to reveal a liar. With a few disrespectful, critical words from the adult, the child's concept of love and respect is undermined.

For those on the receiving end of someone's anger, the good news is that the curses do not work. The curses fly away, as the birds illustrate: "As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2). Far away, passing overhead is the vain curse. Balaam could not curse God's people and, thankfully, we cannot either. This does not mean that angry words will not hurt feelings. Sadly, they very much do. Even so, a person who is blessed by God is forever blessed. Those who delight to do the will of our heavenly Father have the assurance and joy of God's favor upon them.

For us who dispense the unkind words, however, the news is rather grievous. Just as migrating birds return to where they left, so do our curses. As sure as eggs is eggs, all of our anger comes right back upon us. We reap what we sow, and those who curse God's people will be cursed. God will not allow us sinfully to condemn our brethren. We believers cannot be everlastingly cut off, but we will

certainly receive chastisement from the Lord. The experience of God's displeasure and the repercussions from the offended person(s) may seem severe at times.

Maybe our words will not reach the ears of those with whom we are angry. Even a starling can sing some notes too high for humans to hear. But our heavenly Father hears and chastens us. Unrepentant anger will fester, robbing us of our joy and peace in Christ. Additionally, we may spiral downward into deep melancholy, clinging to our miserable grudges. Further, while we are not walking by faith, we become easy prey for other sins as well. Yes, our once happy life seems nearly ruined.

We cannot emphasize enough to our children the importance of our speech. Our speech makes known where we are from. I knew a Danish immigrant who owned a pet parrot. She invited me over to see her beautiful yellow-naped amazon. Opening the latch of his cage, she took him out and set him on a perch on her table. She told the bird it was bath time and picked up a spray water bottle. She began misting his green and yellow plumage, lifting one wing at a time. Ruffling his feathers and bobbing his head, he said in a high-pitched register, "Ooh, Tat is sho nice!" That was a Scandinavian avian if there ever was!

Where do we come from? We are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Our children listen to what we say and are also good at repeating what they hear. They look to us to lead the way in using our tongues for blessing. The word "bless" in Romans 12:14 is the Greek word *eulogy* meaning "good word." We are to speak good words to one another and about one another. We are to use soft, gentle answers (Prov. 15:1). Our tongue should be ruled by the law of kindness (Prov. 31:26). Regulated by love, our words are to be based on biblical principles, ministering grace to the hearer for their encouragement and edification. Here are some suggestions we and our children can discuss together:

1. *Look for the good:* Some songbirds sing more than 2,000 times a day. How many times do we speak blessings to others? We all have strengths and weaknesses—what is your specialty? How about using encouraging words? Instead of finding fault with others, find what is good. Try looking at their spiritual gifts. Romans 12:6-8 speak of prophecy, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving from the heart with simplicity, ruling, and showing

mercy with cheerfulness. These are gifts from the Lord that we should encourage our children to employ and look for in others. These gifts are a great blessing for the saints. God did not save us to live unto ourselves but unto God—“...to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29).

2. *Forgive and forget:* Whether we were hurt first is irrelevant. We are to bless even those who persecute us. If there are sins in the church, we know the proper way of church discipline. We start by going to the person and talking about it—not to others. But more often than not, we simply forgive and forget. Try to be understanding from their perspective. Perhaps, they had a bad day or spoke impulsively under pressure. We have all done that. Saying “I am sorry” goes a long way, but we do not always need to demand an apology. “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:15). “Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:24).

3. *Put a clamp on it:* Roosters cannot crow if they cannot fully extend their necks. Likewise, we make no provision for the flesh. This includes no more excuses such as, “I just had to vent.” Before we open our mouth,

we need to stop and ask ourselves if this is a blessing or going down the road of cursing? In fighting our old man of sin, our thoughts need to be redirected with thanksgiving for our great salvation and the return of our Lord. “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

4. *Pray:* Pray to the Lord for peace among the brethren. Our need is very great, so our prayers must be persistent, even importunate, for God’s grace. The battle is fierce. Remember the devil is “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). He is behind our cursing one another. His chief desire is to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. I am ashamed for the times I have used my tongue sinfully, as you are too, I trust. God hears our prayers and is full of compassion and forgiveness.

We glance out the window. The ruby-throated hummingbird is all abuzz, the perky bluejay flies from sunflower seed to suet. Who can keep track of them—flitting, fluttering hither and thither? If we guard our tongue, we have nothing to hide. What will the little bird have to say about me or about you? May the Lord bless us as we, with love and sincerity, strive to speak blessings.



ALL THY WORKS SHALL PRAISE THEE

DR. BRENDAN LOOYENGA

Beauty and Purpose in Separation

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Psalm 19:1-2, 9

Dr. Looyenga teaches in the Science Department at Calvin College and is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan.

Among the many passages of Scripture that speak to the topic of revelation, Psalm 19 is perhaps the most explicit in its demonstration of how we are to know God. Situated side-by-side in this text are obvious references to the twofold revelation we receive in the creation and in God’s inspired Word. As faithful summaries of Scripture, the confessions of the Reformed faith are similarly rich in reference to how the believer may know God. The Belgic Confession (Art. 2) very nearly begins with this question, to which it provides the simple answer: by creation, and by “His holy and divine Word.” Though perhaps less direct in its treatment, the

Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 47, Q&A 122) also points to the importance of God's works as a means of knowing His attributes by relating the concept of knowing God to the first petition of the Lord's prayer. In short, we can learn to know—and thus better love—our heavenly Father not only from His Word, but also from His works in creation.

In thinking about the scriptural and confessional evidence that the creation reveals important knowledge about the Creator, the question should be asked: “*How* does the natural world reveal God?” The traditional answer to this question is that the creation reveals specific attributes of our Creator, including His power, sovereign authority, majesty, and infinite creativity (Gen. 1-2; Rom. 1:20). Though the Intelligent Design movement is neither inherently Christian nor interested in revealing the sovereign Jehovah of Scripture, we can appreciate its central tenant, that the natural world displays order and design, rather than randomness. This principle, which can be derived by simple observation of the physical laws that govern the creation, is a clear demonstration of God's love for law and order. This same attribute underlies the moral law and providential institution of government in the church and society (Is. 33:22; I Cor. 14:33; Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-14). All of these aspects of the creation and its various institutions reveal truths concerning God's Being.

But I think we can say more on this issue of *how* the creation serves as revelation. It is to this point that I would especially draw the reader's attention, since it is perhaps a less-appreciated concept than the traditional understanding briefly explained above. Note that the patterns we see in the natural world can be observed by humans *regardless of their religious beliefs*. A *true faith* in God is not required to derive Einstein's laws of relativity, nor does one have to believe in God to see and understand the patterns of order that are visible at every level—from cells to galaxies—in the creation.¹ While the reprobate mind may reject the implications of these patterns, the inspired apostle Paul leaves no doubt that every

human being can see them (Rom. 1:18-23). Since both believers and unbelievers alike can discern the truths that God sets forth in the creation, this is sometimes called “general revelation.”

In another sense, however, the term “general revelation” fails to capture the importance that true faith plays in the revelatory power of creation. To fully grasp the beauty, elegance and, most importantly, *purpose* of the creation, the observer must be viewing the creation through eyes of faith. Scientific *facts* may be accessible to the agnostic; but *truth* is never attainable independent of faith.² In this context, we find another way in which the creation reveals truths about God and His Word. When seen through the informed eyes of faith, patterns in the physical creation often appear as metaphors for the spiritual truths of Scripture. In this sense, the revelation of creation is clearly not “general.” A belief in and desire to search out the parallels of the natural world with God's inspired Word are both necessary.

This desire to know God better through His creation comes in many forms, and is not strictly limited to the disciplines of science. The arts, humanities, math, and sciences are all legitimate ways to view God's creative work, in as much as they involve both the aesthetic and functional qualities of the natural world (I Cor. 12:6). Though qualitatively different, each of these disciplines allows the redeemed believer to seek out the vastness of God's wisdom in his or her field of study, and to contemplate how the marvels of the creation reflect the truths revealed in Scripture. This is the true blessing of learning and education—growing in our appreciation for the Creator!

An important implication of this point is that individual Christians ought to cultivate and use their intellectual gifts for the purpose of searching out God's ways in His creation. Cultivation of our gifts often—though not always—involves some form of higher education, from which we gain a fuller understanding of the discipline to which God has called us. This process of learning

¹ By “*true faith*,” I refer to the formal definitions given in the Heidelberg Catechism (including Lord's Day 7, Q&A 21) and in the Belgic Confession (Art. 24), which encompass the entirety of the Christian faith and not a generic belief in the “divine” presence of an unspecified god.

² The concept of *truth* is central to the gospel of John. The inspired apostle uses this word to demonstrate that God in Christ is the source of truth (John 14:6), and that truth is made accessible only to believers through the words of Christ (John 8:31-32) and the work of the Spirit (John 16:13). Other passages in Scripture also demonstrate that truth is specifically given through the Word of God in the context of the church institute (I Tim. 3:15).

has value for the entire body of Christ, which is clearly expressed by Paul Griffiths in his essay “From Curiosity to Studiousness: Catechizing the Appetite for Learning”:

That is why the church is interested in learning. It is not that every Christian, every member of Christ’s body should seek [higher] learning; neither is it that seeking [higher] learning is the church’s principal task (that is worship of the one who makes learning possible); but it is the case that in becoming learned, the Lord’s gesture of love in bringing what is knowable and thinkable into existence is returned in an intimate way.³

Simply put, we can corporately grow in our love and honor of God by knowing His work, and “thinking His thoughts after Him,” as the great German-Calvinist astronomer Johannes Kepler was fond of saying.⁴ We must do this with a mind of humility, however, realizing that God’s thoughts are far above ours (Is. 55:8, 9), and that the patterns of creation we see through our sinful eyes only faintly illustrate to us the greatness of our God.

With this caveat in mind, we need to exercise considerable care in drawing from the creation truths that are actually *revelatory* of the person of God. Whether the parallels between physical and spiritual truths that we may notice are the actual *intent* of God in His creative act is hard to discern without clear reference in Scripture. That all creation sings God’s praises in a general sense is clear from the Psalms and other texts. But whether the various intricacies of creation were intended to reveal other spiritual truths—without the clear indication of Scripture—remains speculative at best. As such, it may be better to represent the parallels between scientific observations and spiritual truths as *metaphors* rather than direct *revelation* from God.

To better illustrate the concept of drawing spiritual metaphors from the physical creation, I turn to my own discipline of science—biochemistry. Like the other disciplines of chemistry, the field of biochemistry is primarily interested in structure, function, and activity of the smallest components of the creation—atoms and molecules. But as its own discipline, biochemistry focuses specifically

on the subset of molecules that function within living organisms, typically at the level of the cell. We might say that biochemistry is the investigation of biology from the perspective of individual molecules that make up a cell, tissue, or living organism.

Although there is remarkable variety in the different kinds of study done under the overarching term *biochemistry*, there are also a number of prominent themes that recur throughout the discipline. For instance, much of biochemistry is understood in the context of *enzymes*, which are the molecules that carry out chemical reactions in a cell. From a molecular perspective, enzymes are proteins, which makes them just one part of the complex mixture of molecules that make up a cell. In order to investigate their activity and purpose in a cell, they need to be *separated from* the other types of molecules found there—sugars, fats, and DNA—as well as from each other.

Many of the experimental methods associated with the practice of biochemistry research are aimed at *separation* of the complex mixture of molecules found in living organisms based upon their unique chemical and physical properties. The importance of these separation methods is especially obvious when we consider the importance of *purity* to researchers who work with proteins. High levels of purity are an absolute requirement for investigation of the structure and function of proteins, which are among the most unique molecules in all of creation. Like snowflakes and ice crystals, individual types of proteins have their own orderly shape, which is absolutely critical to their function.⁵ Very small changes in the shape of proteins can lead to dysfunction in their ability to carry out their role in the cell. For instance, a miniscule chemical alteration to the oxygen-carrying protein hemoglobin causes it to change shape and lose its capacity to carry oxygen effectively, leading to a disease called sickle-cell anemia.

It is quite likely that many readers are already seeing a theological metaphor in this scientific discussion. Recall

³ David Smith & James Smith, ed., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith & Learning* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 107.

⁴ <http://www.icr.org/article/science-man-god-johann-kepler>.

⁵ For those interested in reading further or seeing images of protein structures, a multitude of resources on the remarkable beauty and diversity of proteins can be accessed online. Two reasonably non-technical resources to start with can be found at the sites linked below: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protein_structure; https://www.nigms.nih.gov/education/pages/factsheet_structuralbiology.

that *the individual function and beauty of a given protein is revealed by its separation from the complex mixture that makes up a living cell or organism*. In the absence of separation and purity, there is nothing to distinguish what is unique about a given protein. The same thing can be said for believers, who are also members of the entire human race. From a purely physical point of view, there is nothing that separates believers from the rest of the human race. They are male and female; rich and poor; old and young; gathered from every possible racial and ethnic group of humanity. And yet from a spiritual point of view, elect believers are different, unique from the rest of humanity.

What makes believers different is that they are literally “set apart,” which is one way to explain the meaning of the word *holy*. Holiness is the primary feature that separates the people of God from the rest of humanity. God establishes the reason for His peoples’ separation several times in the book of Exodus, which is quoted by the apostle Peter: “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” That is, the children of God must look different from the world because they are supposed to look like their Father, who is the Holy One (Is. 6:3). Or as Kevin DeYoung puts it, “the best-looking Christian is the one growing by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ.”⁶

The separation that is the holiness of a believer has two distinct effects on his or her life. First of all, it is painful because the rest of the world is not interested in separation from the pleasures of sin. As DeYoung notes, “the world stands for everything that opposes the will of God...[it] provides no cheerleaders on the pathway to godliness.”⁷ In all reality, it should come as no surprise that the world opposes those who stand apart with God in holiness; Christ told us to expect it (John 15:18-20)! But at the same time, separation *from* the world also means separation *unto* a new life with and in Christ. There is purpose in that separation because it brings us into closer communion with our Lord. That is the second, far more blessed effect of separation!

The ultimate value of separation for the believer is very much like the value of separation in biochemistry. Why *separate*? Why *purify* from the rest? Because it

is the way to see the beauty and function of biological molecules, or in spiritual terms, the beauty and function of believers. Separation from the world reveals who believers are (or more properly, *whose* they are) and for what *purpose* they exist. That this is true is clear from the entire witness of Scripture in both testaments, but especially so in the following two texts.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and *purify* unto himself a *peculiar people*,⁸ zealous of good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a *peculiar people*;⁹ that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (I Pet. 2:9, 10).

Both of these passages combine the idea of being “peculiar” with the concept of holiness. Believers are beautiful—*peculiarly* so—because they are chosen and purified by the blood of Christ, and in Christ they become holy in their walk. This holiness has purpose that is the true function of all believers, which is to “show

⁸ James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance with Greek and Hebrew Lexicon*, online ed. (Crusade Bible Publishers, 1980). The word translated “peculiar” in Titus 2:14 (*periousios*) meaning “being beyond usual” expresses the idea of something of being unusually precious. It is a similar idea to the Hebrew word (*cegullah*) that is commonly translated “peculiar treasure” in the Old Testament (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4). Notably, this same Hebrew word is also translated “peculiar people” elsewhere in the Old Testament (Deut. 14:2; 26:18), indicating the concept of a specific group of people being of great value to God.


⁹ The words translated “peculiar people” I Peter 2:9 (*eis peripoiesis*) are distinct from those used in Timothy, instead referring to the concept of a group of people “worth possessing.” In the text, Peter provides a Greek translation of Isaiah 43:20-21, which emphasizes that the value of believers is that they are chosen to be possessed by God.

⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 145.

⁷ DeYoung, 37-38.

forth the praises of God” through being “zealous of good works.”

In the Reformed tradition, we use the term *antithesis* to describe separation of believers from the world. Emphasis on this doctrine is an altogether appropriate practice, so long as we never forget that the separation implied in this term isn’t just about church membership, ethnic heritage or distinct family names. First and foremost, this doctrine is about holiness. Chosen, elect,

foreordained—all are inspired words to describe believers in contrast to the rest of humanity. But so also are the prepositions “to,” “unto,” “that,” and “for,” which very often follow these adjectives in Scripture (I Pet. 1:2; Col. 3:12; John 15:16; Eph. 1:4). Separation has purpose. And like all of creation, that purpose is revelation and glorification of the one true God for and unto whom we have been separated. 

REPORT FROM THE CONTACT COMMITTEE

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

The Question of Psalter Revision: An Update

Last year’s Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches instructed the Contact Committee to come to Synod 2016 with a detailed and grounded recommendation about revision of the Psalter. Synod did not express herself on whether the Psalter should be revised, but asked the Contact Committee to submit a proposal which could be considered at Synod 2016.

The subject of Psalter revision arose about five years ago when the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) approached the PRC asking whether our churches would be interested in joining them, along with other denominations who use the Psalter, in updating the Psalter. At that time synod instructed the Contact Committee to communicate with the FRC about our shared history of using the Psalter produced in 1912 by the United Presbyterian Church. In the few years that passed, the Contact Committee met with representatives from the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) and the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), and found that the intent of these churches was an update that would improve the Psalter, but leave it as much as possible the Psalter we have always known. These two denominations have officially decided to revise the Psalter for their use in worship.

Our Synod 2015 mandated the Contact Committee to do two things: First, to bring a detailed and grounded proposal to Synod 2016 so that synod could make a good decision whether or not to participate in this work; that

is, whether or not the PRC is in favor of and thus desires to be on board with the project. Second, Synod 2015 instructed the Contact Committee to appoint three men to serve on an interim committee with these other churches so that synod can be well-informed about the intentions, principles involved, and the process of updating the Psalter.

The Contact Committee appointed three men—two ministers and one layman. The layman, Mr. Joshua Hoekstra, has devoted his adult life to promoting Psalm-singing, has conducted a PR Psalm choir for many years, and has studied the Psalter and its history at some length. Rev. D. Kuiper and Prof. B. Gritters have over 50 years combined in leading worship with the Psalter, and both have shown special interest in the Psalter in various ways. To all of them, our Psalter is a precious possession.

The other denominations have appointed men with similar commitments and interests. Some are both theologians and musicians; others have more expertise in music; but all of them have spent their life using and loving the Psalter. Because of their love for the Psalter, these denominations are committed to preserving it as much as possible in its present form. If any who read this are hoping for a very different Psalter as a result of this undertaking (whether or not the PRC participate to the end of the project), they will be disappointed.

The broader committee hopes to have initial work

done on a sample portion of the Psalter for their respective synods to approve or disapprove. The FRC—who initiated the project—recommended the work begin with Book III of the Psalms, that is, Psalms 73-89, or Psalter numbers 201 to 243 (plus the numbers in the chorale section corresponding to these Psalms). In November, the committee of nine met in person (they come from different US states and Canadian provinces) to make plans for their work. The committee apportioned its work by dividing into three groups, with each denomination represented in each group. Communicating through a specially-arranged Internet program, each group of three will make initial recommendations on one-third of this small section, pass their recommendations on to the next group, and then finally to the third group. In this way, each group's recommendations will be judged again by the two other groups. When the committee of nine meets in person again in April, the hope is to finalize recommendations that can be included in a synodical agenda.

PRC History of Psalter Revision

The history of Psalter revision in the PRC dates back to Synod 1940 and the appointment of a special committee to consider Psalter revision.¹ Synod judged that “much can be done to enhance the beauty of our Psalter.” Two sub-committees were to deal with both the versifications and the musical arrangements, but the members were to have theological, poetic, and musical abilities so that any proposals would be well-founded. Throughout the 1940s Synod repeated its desire for the work to be completed, at times urging the committees to work with more energy. During this time the “Chorale Section” was added, as were Rev. Heys’ two arrangements of the Lord’s Prayer. Also during this time, Classis East was involved in its own study and recommendations—much of which work is lost.

The mandate of this early synod was to determine whether or not the versifications followed Scripture and, if not, to suggest improvements; to add stanzas for parts of Psalms that were excluded in the Psalter; to suggest

elimination of some tunes and determine whether others truly “fit” the words; and to offer any other suggestions of a general nature for improvement of our Psalter. This particular report was signed by M. Schipper, D. Jonker, G.M. Ophoff, and H. Hoeksema.

But all that momentum of the 1940s was lost in the exhausting theological battle that ended in the schism of 1953. Thus, Synod 1955 took a decision to discontinue the project, although to retain in the archives the work already done for possible further use.

Then, almost twenty years later, in 1973, First PRC (Grand Rapids) brought a grounded overture to synod, through Classis East, to “appoint a new committee which will continue the work for revision of our present Psalter.” First’s grounds were simple:

The need of revision is self-evident and has been pointed out in articles and in the earlier decision of Synod when it first decided upon a committee for revision. Some work has already been done and is on file. We have people available who are capable of doing this sort of work.

Classis East approved the overture, and added its own recommendations to synod that a separate committee be appointed “to revise the liturgical material in the Psalter.”

Synod 1973 rejected the overtures of First GR and Classis East. There were two grounds: First, the overtures were too vague. Synod wanted description of what, in particular, would be changed. What “First” said was “self-evident” was no longer so evident to them. After thirty years, the memory of the 1940’s justification had faded. Second, the project was “financially prohibitive.” Synod called attention to the new seminary building (seminary moved to its present location in 1974) and the increased missionary activity, which were “priorities of the first magnitude.” At that time, also, a third professor was being called to the seminary.

That rejected proposal was the end of the PRC’s history of considering revision of the music sections of the Psalter. But the history makes clear that the churches desired revision, officially mandated it, and began extensive labors to carry it out. When it was discontinued, it was not for principle but practical reasons: schism in the denomination that spent her energies, unspecific proposals, and finance.

¹ For more of this history, see the special issue of the *SB*, April 1, 2014. But note well that the history we recount in the present article is not the history of whether to add hymns to the Psalter—a completely different story, one told well in that 2014 special issue.



The stance of the committee from the three denominations can be summarized: “Make improvements, but change only what needs to be changed.”

The guidelines adopted by the committee can be here summarized as follows:

1) *Regarding the text:* *There is a commitment to sing accurate renditions of the Psalms. Is all of the Psalm represented in the Psalter? Is the text faithful to Scripture? Is it theologically sound? Is it the language of Scripture? Is there unnecessary poetic license taken? It is good poetry? The New Testament idiom will be retained.* All this fits with the PRC’s 1949 requirement: “That the versification is as close to the language of the Psalm as possible, and that the Psalm is fully covered.” The committee is determined to retain pronouns addressing God in the form of “Thee” and “Thou.”


2) *Regarding the music:* *The Psalter must be retained as a book for congregational singing, not changed for trained choirs. The tunes must not be too difficult, have too wide a range, or have difficult rhythms. They must not have inappropriate associations. They must be suited to the words of the Psalm.* Examples of this last would be Psalter 212’s “Auld Lang Syne,” and the music of Psalter 136 (“Dust to dust...”). These guidelines fit the PRC’s 1949 requirements: “that the tune fits the words...prayerful when the psalm is a prayer, joyful when the psalm is a song of praise;” and, “that the tune is singable, especially for a congregation.”

3) *Regarding the format:* *The book must be a usable Psalter and familiar to the members, designed to promote knowledge of the Scripture that we sing. Thus,*

the Psalters will be numbered 1A and 1B for Psalm 1, etc. But consideration will be given to retaining the old numbering as well. The chorale section will be merged into the main body of the Psalter. Other details regarding format include questionable musical notations, references to “stanzas 8-10” that have no correspondence to the Bible, and the indexes in the back of the Psalter.



The PRC Synod 1945 instructed her committee to “purge the Psalter of doctrinal errors.” The present committee is not on a mission to hunt for heresy, but there is great variety in the Psalter as to faithfulness to the Psalm. Most Psalter numbers are very close to the wording of the Psalm. Others, although doctrinally sound, are loose paraphrases of the Psalm. In some Psalters, the hard language of God’s judgments is muted. And a few stanzas here and there cannot be traced back to the Psalm at all. We, who have sung the Psalter all our lives, are hardly aware that there are parts of Psalms absent from the Psalter, and that some Psalter stanzas do not come from the Psalms. If they are interested in testing this, it would be worth anyone’s time to start with Psalter #205, for example, and compare it to Psalm 74; or #206, compared with Psalm 75. In the few cases where the Psalter is more “hymn” than Psalm, the committee will need to make good recommendations, faithful to Scripture, and the churches will need to judge whether they succeeded.

In the next months the Contact Committee will be hearing a report from its committee of three, and formulating (or not) a recommendation to Synod 2016 regarding revision. 

News from Seminary

So soon the second semester of the 2015-16 year is well underway, and news from “the hill” (i.e., seminary) is in order.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary began the school year with twelve seminarians and one man taking a pre-

seminary course (Greek Grammar). Midway through the first semester one of the third-year students, Mr. Nathan Price, discontinued his studies in the seminary. This is always difficult for professors and students alike, because in a small seminary, the bonds of fellowship grow strong



New seminary drive

indeed. Nonetheless, we wish Nathan well as he seeks to determine God's will and calling for this life.

At mid-year the pre-seminary population doubled with the addition of Mr. Josiah Tan. Josiah and his new bride, Hui Qi (married January 9), arrived in the dead of the Michigan winter from the fair land of Singapore—where a cool nighttime temperature is 75 F. Josiah has one semester of schooling (Greek reading in the seminary and several courses in college) to complete all the pre-seminary requirements. He plans to enter seminary proper in the Fall of this year, D.V.

Thus in the seminary are currently three students in their first year, two coming from the western churches. Matt Kortus hails from Loveland, CO. Matt and his wife Sarah are members of Faith PRC. Jacob Maatman

grew up in Lynwood, IL. Since "South Holland PRC" has now become "Crete PRC," Jacob is the first seminary student from Crete PRC. He and Rachel, his wife, are members in Southwest PRC. Darren Vink comes to us from the First PRC of Grand Rapids—hardly the first student from that congregation. Darren is married to Stephanie, and the Lord has given them four children. All three students have acclimated to seminary very well.

The much-anticipated internship looms large for the eight third-year students. They are scheduled for the following churches (pastor's name in parentheses) for the internship from July 1 to December 31 of this year.

Aaron Lim: CERC, Singapore (A. Lanning)

Brian Feenstra: Loveland, CO (S. Key)

Dave Noorman: Hope, Redlands, CA (B. Huizinga)

Joe Holstege: Calvary, Hull, IA (C. Griess)

Jon Langerak: Edgerton, MN (D. Kuiper)

Justin Smidstra: Faith, Jenison, MI (C. Spronk).

Matt De Boer: Georgetown, Hudsonville, MI (C. Haak)

Stephan Regnerus: Southeast, Grand Rapids, MI (W. Langerak).

Prof. Gritters taught the interim course this year (Jan. 4-13). Recall that this yearly class is an intensive study of one subject—historical, practical, or doctrinal. This year the class treated Christian ethics. A number of visitors attended, including two Christian school teachers who will apply it for credit to a master's degree in another institution.

The eleven students and Prof. Cammenga made a six-day visit to California in January following the interim. They attended a conference on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit sponsored by the Westminster Seminary in Escondido. We have attended similar conferences in Escondido in previous years when the topic and speeches are judged to be profitable, as they were this year. A major benefit of the trip (beside the warm sunshine) is the fellowship with the congregation



Student Body 2016

Back row: Matt Kortus, Stephan Regnerus, Jacob Maatman, Jonathan Langerak, Brian Feenstra, Darren Vink.

Front row: Aaron Lim, Matt DeBoer, Joseph Holstege, David Noorman, Justin Smidstra.



Westminster Seminary Conference

*Prof. Cammenga, 2016 PR seminary students,
with Rev. Brian Huizinga and Rev. Rodney Kleyn.*

in Redlands, whose friendly hospitality is unsurpassed. The two Sunday worship services in Hope PRC were led by seminary students.

We conclude this brief report with a request for prayers. We covet your prayers for God's blessing on the labors of the professors and on the young men who aspire to the ministry. But there is more. Your requests

are urgently needed for prospective students. This, perhaps, will need some explanation.

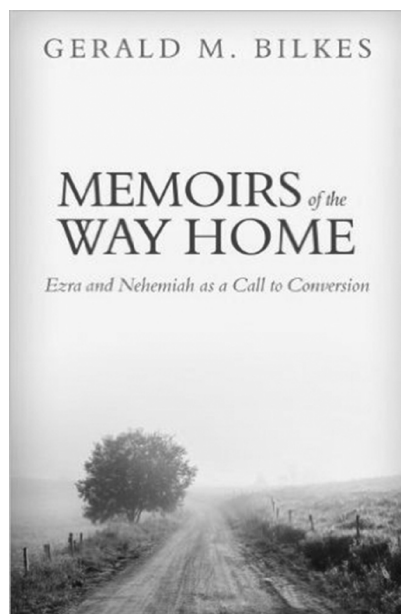
Because the churches currently have no vacant congregations, and have ten students in seminary desiring to be pastors in the PRC, it might seem that there is no pressing need to pray for more students. However, the reality is, we ought to be beseeching the Lord for more pastors. Consider that in the next nine years approximately fifteen men will leave the ranks of active ministers, including the three current professors. Relatively few young men (in high school or college) have informed the faculty of serious consideration for the ministry.

If, in God's blessing, all the current seminary students and all the young men known to us who are considering the ministry are in fact ordained, they will not cover the vacancies left by the aging ministry. And this does not figure in daughter congregations or God-given mission work. Do continue to pray the Lord of the harvest for laborers in this part of His vineyard.

Prof. Russell Dykstra, Rector. ☞

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor



Memoirs of the Way Home: Ezra and Nehemiah as a Call to Conversion, Gerald M. Bilkes. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014. Paperback, 187 pp. [Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown.]

This is a brief, accessible, and helpful commentary on two neglected books of the Old Testament. Ezra and Nehemiah are post-exilic writings, that is, they were written *after* and describe life *after* the Babylonian captivity.

For many Christians that history is strange and unfamiliar. We treat it at the end of the Old Testament History catechism season, when students are looking forward to the summer break. It does not even seem to be as exciting as the life of David or the history of Daniel.

Therefore, such a commentary on these two important Old Testament books is welcome. This little book would be an excellent resource for a Bible study on the post-exilic writings—throw in Esther (which is not treated in this book) and you have the complete set!

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

Bilkes' commentary is not scholarly, so he does not burden the reader with technical details. That is no criticism. Sometimes, scholarly commentaries offer more stones than bread. They might explain the text—in great, and tedious detail—but they do not edify the reader. Bilkes gives enough historical background to make the material accessible, and then he devotes himself to exposition, illustration, and application. It appears that these chapters were originally sermons. At least, they are divided homiletically.


Bilkes explains his approach in the introduction:

For the most part, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are not the records of great heroic feats. They read more like the confessions of a humbled prodigal, and bear an uncanny resemblance to the experiences of the younger son in Christ's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), traveling as he does from the far country to the father's house. In many ways, the narratives in Ezra and Nehemiah read like an extended account of the prodigal's way back home. This journey has different phases, occurring over nearly a century. Yet, through it all, it is foundationally a journey from misery to joy, from sadness to gladness, from captivity to service (2).

The themes developed in these chapters are God's sovereignty, God's faithfulness, opposition and persecution, repentance, worship, prayer and reformation. About "reformation" Bilkes writes:

What is reformation, other than bringing the church of God back in line with the Word of God in doctrine, life and worship? Today we often hear, "The church must be always reforming," a statement with which we heartily agree. Some people, however, mean by this that the church should always be adapting to changing times. What reform really involves, though, is constantly returning to the Word of God. Any development that doesn't bring the church into closer subjection to the Word of God is not reformation, but deformation (54).

I enjoyed this book. It gave me a greater appreciation for the sacrificial zeal of the returning captives, and a greater appreciation for God's mercy to His chastised, repentant people. If this book makes the post-exilic history of the Old Testament come alive, it has fulfilled its purpose.

And it will. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Minister Activities

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor at First PRC of Holland, MI, spent time in the Philippines assisting Rev. D. Kleyn with the work there in January. From there he also traveled to Singapore for a short week, filling the pulpit on January 31 while Rev. Andrew Lanning was gone to Kolkata, India.

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor at Cal-

vary PRC in Hull, IA, and Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor at Edgerton, MN PRC, gave a presentation about their recent trip to India in Calvary PRC on January 31. All who were interested from the Siouxland area churches were invited to attend. A large crowd enjoyed the presentation—and Rev. Kuiper's Indian attire.

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor at Cornerstone PRC of IN, declined the call to be the second missionary to the Philippines on January 31. In the letter read in the calling church at Doon, IA, Rev. Mahtani

expressed an extreme struggle with regard to this call. In the subsequent congregational prayer, those in Doon acknowledged God as Supreme, who makes no mistakes. Some disappointment is natural, but we must take heed that the disappointment not become sin against God, who knows best. Our prayers continue to be with Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn as they labor diligently in the metro Manila area.

Doon then announced a new trio from which to call a second missionary. The trio consists of Rev. Cory Griess (Calvary PRC, Hull,

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

IA), Rev. Daniel Holstege (First PRC, Holland, MI), and Rev. Brian Huizinga (Hope PRC, Redlands, CA). The men of the Doon, IA congregation called from this trio on February 29.

Mission Activities

The annual delegation to the Philippine mission field, consisting of members of the calling church Council and Foreign Mission Committee, made that trip from February 11-24, 2016. Lee Hoekstra, member of Doon's Council, and his wife Joann accompanied Rev. Joshua Engelsma to encourage our missionary, Rev. Daniel Kleyn and his wife Sharon, along with the saints in the various churches. The delegation also evaluated the field of labors, with plans to report back to the Doon Council, FMC, and to Synod 2016.

The Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines met on February 25 in the Maranatha PRC of Valenzuela, chaired by Rev. Vernon Ibe of the Berean Protestant Reformed Church.

When Rev. John Flores, pastor in the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan, Philippines, flew to the island of Leyte with elder Reden Zuniega from January 29-February 1 to visit the saints in the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Albueria, he had the opportunity to preach there. Interestingly, through live-streaming he also led the second service in his own congregation on the main Philippine island. The first service in the PRCB that day was led by an elder.

The Pittsburgh Protestant Re-

formed Mission recently received visitors from Georgetown PRC as well as from Providence PRC and Grandville PRC. We are glad that these visitors from Michigan could explore the Pittsburgh area and mingle with the saints there. This type of activity is definitely uplifting to the group in Pittsburgh—they would welcome your visit!

Denomination Activities

The next meeting of Classis West is scheduled for March 2 in Crete, IL PRC. Classis East will meet next on May 11 at Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI, D.V.

Young People's Activities

The 2016 PRC Young People's Convention will be held August 8-12 at Lake Williamson Christian Conference Center in Carlinville, IL. The theme of this convention, hosted by Grace and Wingham PRCs, is "Contentment in an Age of Entitlement," based on Philippians 4:11. Scheduled speakers are the Revs. Ryan Barnhill, Rodney Kleyn, and Ronald Van Overloop, with many exciting activities being planned. We hope to see a large crowd of our young people in attendance! Also, chaperones are needed.

The Young People's Society of the PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited those from their own congregation as well as those from neighboring First PRC of Edmonton to a Black Tie Dinner in the Central Alberta Christian High School on February 12. It sounds like an evening of fun and fellowship was enjoyed by all in attendance!

The young people and adults

from First Edmonton PRC often play volleyball at Westminster Junior High School, something that occurred twice in February.

School Activities


The Athletic Boosters of Covenant Christian High School of Grand Rapids, MI held a "Special Needs Night" in February between basketball games. The plan was to "Gold Out" the gym, with special t-shirts sold for the occasion. Proceeds of the shirt sales were donated to the cause of Protestant Reformed Special Education. Special games and activities were planned throughout the evening.

The PTA of the Genesis PR School in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited everyone over 16 years of age to a night of bowling at the Ambassador Lanes there.

Congregational Activities

2016 is a presidential election year in the United States of America. Members of the three Iowa PRCs had the opportunity to begin this process by attending Iowa's first-in-the-nation presidential caucus events on February 1. May our all-wise God guide and control these proceedings to the honor of His name.

At a recent congregational meeting the members at Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI approved the purchase of two new furnaces for the church.

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

Standard Bearer

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

PERIODICAL
POSTAGE
PAID
AT JENISON,
MICHIGAN

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call to Aspirants to the Ministry

■ All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2016-2017 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2016 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418.
Jon Huiskens, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour March 2016

Date	Topic	Text
March 6	"Wars and Rumors of War"	Matthew 24:6, 7
March 13	"Natural Catastrophes and the End"	Luke 21:11
March 20	"Abounding Lawlessness"	Matthew 24:12, 13
March 27	"The End of All Fear: He Is Risen"	Matthew 28:5, 6

1916-2016

CELEBRATING THE

100th Anniversary

OF HOPE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH

Walker, MI

1 Peter 2:4-5

"To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

www.hopeprchurch.org

"A Spiritual House Acceptable to God"

The congregation of
Hope Protestant Reformed Church
cordially invites you to attend a
commemorative program and celebrate with us
a century of God's preserving grace.

JUNE 10, 2016, 7:30 P.M.

First Jenison Christian Reformed Church
8360 Cottonwood Dr.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of First PRC of Holland express sympathy to the family, in the death of our beloved long time member,

HAROLD SCHIPPER.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Daniel Holstege, President
Darle Wassink, Asst. Clerk

Lecture

Topic

*The Necessity of Membership
in a True Church of Jesus Christ*

Speaker

Prof. David Engelsma

Date/Time

Friday April 22, 2016 at 7:30 P.M.

Place

First Jenison CRC
8360 Cottonwood Dr.
Jenison MI

Sponsor

Reformed Witness Committee
of Hope PRC

Will be lived-streamed on SermonAudio