

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Kept in Perfect Peace REV. DENNIS LEE	194
<i>Editorial</i>	Facing 2016 (and What Will Follow) in the Light of the Year Past REV. KENNETH KOOLE	196
<i>Letters</i>	Same Sex Marriage Vote in Northern Ireland MERV HURSE	199
<i>All Around Us</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two Kingdoms Conference• Legalizing the Sin of Assisted Suicide• Defending Creationism REV. DANIEL HOLSTEGE	200 201 202
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	Robbing Christ of His Honor (17) MR. DON DOEZEMA	203
<i>Believing and Confessing</i>	The Mass and Open Communion REV. RODNEY KLEYN	205
<i>God's Wonderful Works</i>	Signs and Wonders of the Lie REV. JAMES LANING	208
<i>Go Ye Into All the World</i>	The Second Coming of Christ and Missions (2) REV. RICHARD SMIT	210
<i>Church and State</i>	The Supreme Court Finds a Right to Homosexual Marriage (2) MR. BRIAN VAN ENGEN	212
<i>Activities</i>	News From Our Churches MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM	214

Kept in Perfect Peace

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

Isaiah 26:3

Isaiah 26 is a song of great comfort and praise, composed while the inspired prophet reflected on the great day of salvation. What a day that will be! Freedom from sin and all its effects! Full and final deliverance, along with the consummation of God’s covenant in heaven with glorified soul and body!

It was a most important, needful song because of the troubles that the Old Testament church and believer in Isaiah’s time would yet have to face. For Zion shall be redeemed with judgment (cf. Is. 1:27). And that judgment will come with all kinds of far-reaching implications for the church, which she must bear for her good and salvation! Therefore, in preparation for those troubles that will come, God’s people must be constantly reminded of Jehovah God’s salvation and its precious benefits, including the promise of Isaiah 26:3.

That promise of God’s precious peace has been inscripturated for God’s people throughout all ages in this song of chapter 26. “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, we have a strong city, salvation will

God appoint for walls and bulwarks” (v. 1). Then comes the call to “open the gates”—not for everyone, but for “the righteous nation” to enter (v. 2)!

What a blessing this call is! For if the gates were shut, we would be outside of the city and have no protection against our enemies! But in and through the promised Christ, the Righteous One, we have access into the city by His righteousness accomplished on the cross. We have a strong city that the enemy cannot enter, providing a place of safety, rest, and peace for our weary souls. For in that city, we have a strong Keeper who cares for each one of its inhabitants. Therefore, let our focus be on Him and His reassuring word to us as He promises to keep us in perfect peace!



What is this peace? One way to understand peace is by considering its exact opposite: war. When there is war, towns and cities are bombed, villages are shelled, and the sounds of explosions and guns firing can be heard all around. When war takes place, many have lost or are losing their lives through conflict. When war occurs, lives are under constant threat and danger from day to day.

But then, how sweet is deliverance from war! Ah, liberation! Sweet liberation! The fruit of which is peace! No more conflict! No more constant fighting, killing, bombing! No more people dying from all these things!

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

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Editorial Office

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

Business Office

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

Church News Editor

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

United Kingdom Office

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

Rep. of Ireland Office

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

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No more running away and hiding! Peace! Precious peace!

Only let us understand that God here speaks not of an earthly peace but a spiritual peace. The opposite of which is a spiritual war, the conflict of sin: rebellion against God. In this war, the misery is that of our sin and depravity. The guilt of sin. The punishment of sin. And the practical out-workings and implications of sin, including distress, disease, and death. For the wages of sin is death!

But now, when God comes to deliver and liberate us from the bondage of sin and death, there is peace! Peace that is a state of safety and tranquility, and that even transcends this to the enjoyment of sweet fellowship with God in Jesus Christ! This is a peace that comes from the perfect righteousness of God, outside of us in Jesus Christ, and imputed to us through faith (cf. Rom. 5:1). This is a peace from the misery and unrest of sin. From the punishment of sin. From the guilt of sin. This is a precious peace that is experienced in the midst of our troubles. For this is a peace that stares into the face of all wars and troubles of earthly life and causes us to be unmoved—indeed, to rest perfectly in God. That's the peace that comes from embracing the precious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

That is the peace that God's Word sets forth to us here—a *perfect* peace! Literally, the text reads, "Peace, Peace." A double peace! That is, a true peace! For it conveys the fullness and wholesomeness of peace. There are two aspects to such peace.

First, this is a peace of *infinite degree*, and therefore of *infinite efficacy*. In this connection, it is helpful to be reminded of the inspired Paul's description of this peace that comes through prayer: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). It is of infinite degree because this is the peace of the God of peace, who is Himself infinite in His glory, infinite in His holiness, infinite in His love and mercy toward us in Jesus! This is why this peace "passeth all understanding."

There is mystery but not contradiction as to the details of God's wonderful operation of bestowing this peace—an operation that goes beyond our puny minds. But God does give us to understand that this peace "keeps" or guards our hearts and minds through Christ

Jesus. Think of our hearts and minds as a fortress, and our worries and anxieties as enemies laying siege upon that fortress—battering us, assaulting us, and putting us under oppression and grief. Peace is the guard or sentinel that God places over our hearts and minds that fends off all our worries and anxieties!

Is it any wonder then, that in the second place, this is a peace that is *all comprehensive*? This peace that God promises covers all things! It was what caused the same apostle Paul to confess what he did in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is a peace that abides with us, victorious *over* sin and death! It stares at sin, knowing that we are sinners, and is not afraid because the holy faith that is in us directs us away from ourselves and causes us to look to Jesus and find all our righteousness in Him! It confronts death, and is not afraid because it knows that Jesus has obtained the victory for us over death and the grave by His cross: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:55-57). And this peace also faces all the troubles and trials of our earthly pilgrimage and is not and will never be afraid, for it causes us to be at rest with God! Truly its scope is all comprehensive!

Do you know this perfect peace? It is so important that you do. And you do and will know it, if you are a child of God! You will because of Him. Our faith, and therefore, our knowledge of faith, is weak, and at times so weak that it is a faint, flickering light. But God is faithful and cannot deny Himself (cf. II Tim. 2:13). So He will preserve that light of faith He has put in us. He will cause it to continue to glow, and thus to burn and to shine brightly once again. Even when the activity of our faith is weak, because the bond of faith by which we are engrafted into Jesus ever abides, there will come a time when faith becomes strong again.



One way in which our faithful God, who is mindful of our frailty (cf. Psalter #281:1, Ps. 103), strengthens us

and gives us the peace we need is through His precious promises, even this promise, a promise of peace that is enjoyed by us in the way of faith.

Isaiah took to heart this promise of being kept in peace by trusting in God, and so must we: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee*”(emphasis added). The psalmist gives similar expression to trusting in God in Psalm 112:7: “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.” We are kept in perfect peace in the way of trusting in the Lord—with our heart and our mind—fixed on Him!


How we need to be reminded of that when our minds and hearts are at odds with God concerning what is truly good for us or for our loved ones in Christ! That is when our thoughts can lead us into trouble and restlessness! The cure for trouble and restlessness is for our minds to be fixed on God. It is to call to mind His precious Word. It is to trust in Him by His blessed grace! The cure is not found in trusting in ourselves, by having our minds fixed on ourselves and our thoughts and opinions, but by having our minds fixed on God! We enjoy peace in our hearts only when our minds are fixed on Him, stayed on Him!

The Hebrew original means “to lean on Him for support.” Think of old, dying Jacob mentioned in Hebrews 11, who demonstrated his faith in his dying moments in such a powerful way—when he worshiped God—not by lying down on his deathbed, but by leaning upon the top

of his staff! The spiritual reality spoken of in verse 3b is that faith leans *entirely* on God for support. It does so with mind and heart fixed, stayed, indeed riveted on Him!

How humbling it is for us to do so! But even more, how wonderful it is for us to do so by the power of His grace! For the object of our support is God, and His everlasting strength holds us up when we feel cast down—and never fails! Weak is our faith. But how strong is the God who holds us up and supports us with His everlasting strength! Therefore, in the way of faith, we unfailingly experience being kept in the perfect peace of God, which flows out of a mind that is fixed and stayed on Him!



In like manner, that is also how we enjoy the blessed assurance that the God who makes this precious promise of keeping us in perfect peace will do so: “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.*” He does so not for everyone, but for the righteous nation whom He sent His beloved Son to redeem. All those chosen in Christ, and them alone. Everyone of His dear children. And if He is willing to go to the extreme of that gift and sacrifice of His Son for us, will He not keep His promises to us, the objects of His Son’s redemption? He will! He will for He is our faithful covenant God! “Trust ye in the LORD forever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Is. 26:4). 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Facing 2016 (and What Will Follow) in the Light of the Year Past

Though we may be a month into 2016, we deem it is not too late to do some reflecting on what is coming, in light of events of 2015.

For believers reading the signs of Christ’s promised return, 2015 was not an insignificant year.

Back in the early 1990s the late Dr. James Boice made an insightful

observation, likening Christianity and professing Christians to an endangered species.

Back then already there was a long and growing list of endangered species: the great blue whale, various kinds of fish and fowl, such as the snail darter (trigger a memory?), the California condor, and various mammals (like the white rhino)

with their plant habitats as well.

It is a list that continues to grow. We do not dispute the reality.

To that list could well be added the historic Christian faith.

Not just Christianity as such and those who claim the right to the name Christian. That ‘genus’ flourishes. But biblically-defined Christianity; Christianity of the

historical, orthodox vintage with its roots in the apostolic truth itself.

An endangered species.

Boice's concern was chiefly with the great inroads apostasy made in the twentieth century as Protestant denomination after denomination corrupted and diluted its 'bloodlines' by corrupting one biblical doctrine after the other.

With this we certainly agree.

But in the twenty-first century the threat to the survival of true biblical Christianity goes beyond a great 'falling away' and its dying off in its generations. What is becoming plain is that biblical Christianity itself is becoming the focus of a godless society that would like nothing better than to hasten its extinction from the face of the earth by force and fiat.

This became clear in 2015.

Events of lawless violence occurred that made all too plain how far the agenda of the spirit of Antichrist has advanced in the last decade or so. And 2015 was a year in which our Supreme Court made a landmark decision regarding the lawfulness of homosexual unions, declaring that civil magistrates could not refuse to grant marriage licenses where recognition of these unions was sought.

A watershed decision, and anti-Christian to its core.

Make no mistake.



Dominating the headlines of 2015 were the atrocities of ISIS and the lawless violence of Muslim terrorists and extremists.

It began already in January of last year. As you recall, a French satiri-

cal newspaper had the temerity to mock the Muslim religion and to caricature its prophet, Mohammed. As a result, twelve journalists paid for their folly with their lives, gunned down as Muslim gunmen stormed the Paris offices in broad daylight. And the year concluded with attacks by Islamic terrorists in Paris at a rock concert and at a soccer stadium, resulting in hundreds of casualties, the dead and wounded. Closer to home, you can throw in the murderous attack in San Bernardino, CA by a couple of Muslim radicals as the year ended.

And during the months between, news reports and videos of barbaric execution after execution. Embedded in our memories are photos of men in orange prison suits kneeling with bags over their heads as their executioners stand behind them with swords raised, waiting to behead them immediately following a religious propaganda statement. And then the headless bodies sprawled on the desert sand. "Great is Allah, god of the pure Islamic religion!"

The ISIS adherents, of course, consider themselves to be the true embodiment of the *pure* Islamic religion. Too many other Muslims have made their peace with the Western infidels. That's the problem.

But let none imagine that ISIS is the only Islamic group claiming to be the true continuing strain of the pure Islamic religion. These groups abound.

What has become crystal clear is that all these self-identified, so-called pure strains of the Islamic re-

ligion have this in common, namely, they are anti-Christian to the core. They have no tolerance of a Christian faith that declares that Christ Jesus is the one only, God-ordained Lord and Savior, and that biblical apostolic Christianity is the one only true faith and religion. And then on top of that, a Christianity that has the audacity to refer to their Allah as a pagan god, to the Muslim religion as an idolatrous, heathen religion, and to their Mohammad as a false prophet. Given opportunity they would gladly return to the 'evangelism' method of their early forbearers, namely, conquer the West and give the conquered two choices, convert to the Islamic religion or be executed!

To this add the reports that have filtered through the news media (not headline news by any means) that in the last year in African countries and the Near East those professing the Christian religion in any shape or form have been slaughtered by Muslim radicals in the tens of thousands.

Make no mistake, the Muslim religion as promoted by its zealots is not only anti-Christian to its core, but militantly and aggressively so.

But here is the truly worrisome reality: the liberals who dominate our universities and public schools, as well as our present administration, will not talk about *Muslim* extremists or of *Islamic* radicals, but only about *religious* radicals and *religious* extremists and fundamentalists.

Why?

Because they want room to place *Christianity* with its fundamental-

ists and its purists in the same category. And for our godless society, such are the real home-grown radicals and the greater threat! They will go to great lengths to prove from ancient and medieval history that such is the case.

You may ask, "Over the past years, has it been Christians who have committed acts of terrorism without regard for life, slaughtering others in the thousands, presenting an ongoing threat that requires national security measures running in the billions of dollars?"

Of course not. But to the liberals that makes no difference. Surely, they say, these Christians of the fundamentalist persuasion are the breeding ground for future threats to the State. Think of what they fill their children's heads with toward present-day liberal educators and what they call our present liberal 'regime.' Not honor and esteem, that is for sure.

And, it is those Christians governed by their inflexible creedal convictions who call peace-loving Muslims idolaters and say that Mohammad is a false prophet. These are those who by their uncivil and inflammatory words offend and rile up the Muslim communities and keep the fires burning.

How can our society have peace and unity as long it allows such a species as these creed-bound Calvinists the right to propagate their religion? These are the real disturbers of the peace and the true religious agitators.

Do not think that the violent events perpetrated by Muslim extremists in this past year will not

be used to bring charges against the practitioners of biblical Christianity in the days ahead. The spirit of Antichrist with its ever strengthening hold upon the liberal mentality of our day will make it so.

The days of our free, unmonitored worship, our freedom of speech, and our right to instruct our children in our convictions are limited. Don't think they are not.

And that looming reality has been strengthened by the Supreme Court decision made this past June.

What the Supreme Court decision of June past has done (namely, give the right to homosexuals to seek and obtain marriage licenses from every State and to have all the rights of married couples), is to give to that segment of society tremendous leverage, not only to intimidate those who condemn their lifestyle as sin, but to silence them in the end.

Those who dare charge the homosexual population with sin, condemning their lifestyle as perversion, are already being tagged as guilty of hate speech. And such a Christianity that 'brain-washes' its children with the same bigoted, discriminatory mentality should be allowed to continue to exist and teach their children such?! Or continue to have the right to discriminate against such folk when it comes to church membership?! Does any have the right to practice such an intolerant and bigoted Christianity?!

The days of such accusations come. And the decision of this past June gives the 'gay rights movement' all the lawful ammunition it needs.

A loaded shotgun has been placed in their hands. And do not think they will not use it to hunt down a certain species of Christians.

This was brought home to us in a forceful way by an incident one of our deacons observed at year's end.

He was entering a large store that requires membership ID to purchase its products. As he stood in line, a young employee checking the IDs greeted a couple of persons just ahead of him (both clearly of the female gender) with a smile and the words "Hello, ladies." Whereupon they turned on him and with loud voices so all could hear shouted, "How dare you speak to us that way!" The one whose hair was rather short and who was wearing jeans declared, "As should be clear to you, I am the husband, and this is my wife! Where is your manager? We are going to file a complaint. We do not feel welcomed here at all."

After apologizing and giving the couple the information they required, the young man in shock turned to our deacon and said "What did I say wrong?"

Well, whatever mistake the young man made, this much was clear, he was not addressing two *ladies!* How two such females should be addressed we leave to the reader's judgment

The point? If a young man trying to be *civil* can be accosted this way, his very job now in jeopardy for a remark made in all innocence, how long do you think it will be before the angry and aggressive segment of these people turn their scope on us, that species of Christianity that insists on calling a male

a male and a female a female, and insists on practicing a certain gender discrimination regardless of all the present hue and cry?

And do not forget, those who want to make a case against us for what we dare say about homosexuality, to say nothing of our practice of a gender discrimination, will not lack for ammunition. Not with all our sermons being in the public domain, as well as books and articles that we encourage others to read.

We will be easy game for those set upon hunting us down.

And strikingly, a number of popular, well known evangelists, who prior to the Supreme Court decision were very vocal in their opposition to homosexual relations being sanctioned in some legal way, suddenly changed their tunes when confronted by news reporters (agitators?) who wanted their response to the newly sanctioned law.

No longer simply, "The Bible condemns such practices!" It was suddenly, "We have to review our church policies. We want to be a community where no one, no matter what their sexual disposition, feels threatened or unwelcomed or judged!"

In other words, we will adjust our views to 'co-inhabit' peacefully with national policy. We are not the inflexible fundamentalist Christianity you are looking for. Those particular billy goats, much tastier than we, can be found just down the road. Just leave us alone.

And off they go to safe pasture. We are next on the list.

And then there is the visit of Pope Francis to our fair shores.

Not so momentous in itself. But what is significant was the popular and published response of Protestant evangelicals and spokesmen in great number. They with one accord spoke in glowing terms of this 'man of God' and his mission. It was plain that a Romish *reformation* was in the air. A transformation is going on before our eyes, a less dogmatic, more accommodating, receptive Rome.

And how all of beleaguered Christendom needs Rome with her political power and influence, right?

This two years before 2017 and the 500th anniversary of the Great Reformation.

Truth to tell, indications are that winds of change are blowing through the halls of the Vatican.

But if any one imagines these will be changes to line up with Scripture, once again, you have been deceived.

The year 2015 revealed just how far down the road the anti-Christian spirit of false ecumenicity has come. A wounded head in the process of being healed by a demonic power (Rev. 13).

And when fully recovered, the great Eye of the Beast will be fixed on whom? On what troublesome religious species and disturber of social and ecclesiastical peace?

Those creed-bound people.

It is time to remove their habitat, prevent them from 'breeding' anymore, and to silence their witness once and for all.

Like sheep to the slaughter.

What hope do we have?

This: remember, all these things have been fore-ordained, and it is the Rider on the great white horse who is directing all things (Rev. 6). Having conquered by His death and resurrection, He will do so once again when He returns. Then all of our seeming defeats will prove to have served His ultimate victory over all evil.

Maranatha! Lord Jesus, use 2016 also to hasten that Great Day. ☞

LETTERS

Same Sex Marriage

In your "All Around Us" column in the *Standard Bearer*, 15th September issue, you had a report on the Irish vote for "Same Sex Marriage."

As horrible and repulsive [as] we find this decision, the report missed one very vital aspect: Ireland does not have compulsory voting. It had been reported here in Australia that the vote was passed by 60% of the votes, but what was conveniently left out of the report was that

only 37% of those eligible voters actually cast a vote. That means a whopping 63% either didn't see it as relevant or couldn't care less. Bearing these figures in mind, the vote got through on only 20% of the actual population voting yes.

I think the fact that 63% did not vote on such an important issue is an equally worrying trend.

Merv Hurse
Kallangur, Queensland, Australia.

■ Two Kingdoms Conference

On the cover of the November 18 issue of *Christian Renewal* was a photo of Dr. David VanDrunen and Dr. Cornelis Venema and the words “Two Kingdoms, Two Views.” VanDrunen is professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary in California and a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Venema is President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Indiana. The debate took place last October at Preakness Valley URC in New Jersey prior to the meeting of Classis Eastern U.S. of the URC. VanDrunen defended his view, known as “Two Kingdoms (2K) Theology.” Venema gave his evaluation of that view from the Neo-Calvinist/Kuyperian viewpoint.¹

VanDrunen, who began the conference, claims that God has two kingdoms. The one is a “natural or common kingdom” that encompasses the whole world in which believers and unbelievers live together socially, economically, and politically. The other is a “supernatural or redemptive kingdom” that is the institutional church of Christ. He positions 2K theology between two perceived extremes: Christians who retreat from the world and Christians who emphasize social and political activism. He claims that natural law is the way God rules over the common kingdom, but the gospel is how He rules in the church. The Christian is simultaneously a citizen of both kingdoms and has a calling in both. As a citizen of the world, the Christian must obey God’s natural law. As a citizen of the church, he must obey the precepts of Christ.

Venema then gave his evaluation of the 2K view. He stated at one point that “on all of the points disputed, this view tends to track more closely with historical Lutheran theology than Reformed: whether law/gospel hermeneutic, two kingdoms—one on the ‘left hand’ and the other on the right...those are all Lutheran worries,

not Reformed ones.” For Venema, there is one kingdom of God, and the Christian is to live as a citizen of that kingdom not only in the church but also in the world. But while that sounds good, Venema also used language associated with Neo-Calvinism, namely, the idea of “redeeming” or “transforming” culture. For example, he took issue that in 2K theology “My work, my vocation has no meaningful way of advancing the reach of the Kingdom and doesn’t count for much.”

Which view is correct? In some ways neither, and both, in my judgment. The 2K view is correct to reject Neo-Calvinism’s call to advance the kingdom of God by social and political activism, the siren song sung to thousands of young people at Christian colleges today. But reading a two-kingdoms model into Scripture is not the way to do it.

While it is certainly true that God reigns over the universe by His sovereign power, that is not one of His two kingdoms. A kingdom involves more than reigning. Scripture regards the kingdom of God as a unique entity. Jesus preached, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 4:17); taught us to pray, “*Thy kingdom come*” (Matt. 6:10); told Nicodemus that “except a man be born again, he cannot see *the kingdom of God*” or enter into it (John 3:3, 5); gave the keys of *the kingdom* to the apostles on whose doctrine He would build His church (Matt. 16:18-19); and prophesied that “this gospel of *the kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14, emphasis added throughout). The way, rather, to oppose Neo-Calvinism’s mistaken call to social and political activism as the way to advance the kingdom is to emphasize what Jesus tells us: the *preaching of the gospel* is the way (to be fair, 2K theologians do emphasize this).

Are there not two kingdoms then? There are indeed two kingdoms. Venema criticized the 2K view for muting aspects of Scripture’s teaching on the antithesis between the kingdoms of light and darkness: “In many respects, the 2K paradigm offers a benign, even sanguine, view of the possibilities of peaceful co-existence and co-operation between believers and unbelievers in society

¹ Gerry Wisz, “How Many Kingdoms? 2K and Neo-Calvinist apologists lay out their hermeneutic, take questions and cordially debate,” *Christian Renewal*, November 18, 2015, 6-14.

Rev. Holstege is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

and culture.” However, many Neo-Calvinists believe this too! After all, they have their doctrine of common grace that enables them to hold hands with unbelievers and work together for the common good (whether Venema would put it exactly like this, I do not know).

As Protestant Reformed believers, we stand for the truth of sovereign particular grace rooted in eternal double predestination. This particular grace produces the one kingdom of God that arises in the world over against the devil’s kingdom, which is rooted in the principle of sin alone. As Christians, we are called to live as citizens of God’s kingdom in the world in antithesis to the kingdom of darkness, for the glory of our King.

■ Legalizing the Sin of Assisted Suicide

It was called the “End of Life Option Act” or ABX2-15. It was passed in the California legislature in September and signed into law in October by Governor Jerry Brown, a practicing Roman Catholic, the contrary stance of his church notwithstanding. By this law California joins Oregon and Washington in making it legal for a dying person to end his own life with the assistance of a doctor. It is also legal in Vermont and Montana, in the latter state by court ruling, rather than by legislation. For California to legalize assisted suicide is highly significant because the rest of the country often follows its lead.

California has legalized self-murder. The United States is moving in the direction of Europe in more ways than one. In Belgium and the Netherlands euthanasia is legal. One who is depressed and wants to die may be prescribed a lethal drug to end his life. In California, beginning sometime in 2016, one diagnosed with a terminal illness and given a short time to live may be prescribed lethal drugs to end his life. Advocates of the new law call this “death with dignity,” “end-of-life option,” or “right to die.” Just as, at the other end of the spectrum, they champion a woman’s “right to choose” whether or not to kill her unborn baby, so now they affirm a person’s “right to choose” whether or not to kill himself. Do we have a *right* to kill ourselves? Gov. Brown said,

In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death. I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to

consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn’t deny that right to others.²

As you may recall, 29-year old Brittany Maynard, who was dying from brain cancer, moved north to Oregon and killed herself on November 1, 2014. She was praised for her courage. She became a force that led to the new California law. But in the eyes of God she committed murder. God says in the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” The Heidelberg Catechism explains that this also means “I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger” (LD 40, Q&A 105). We do not at all want to minimize the pain involved in a terminal illness. But God alone has the right to give and take away life. We do not have the right to choose when or how we die. Besides, every child of God has the comfort that nothing can separate him or her from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

Clearly, Christ is coming quickly. For before He returns, “many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12). Iniquity is abounding today. First abortion became legal. Now assisted suicide is too. Nor will it end with that. Soon the “end-of-life *option*” will become the “end-of-life *requirement*” for those deemed not worthy to live, and doctors will have the authority to order their death. Charles Lane of the *Washington Post* wrote,

What’s noteworthy about euthanasia in Europe, though, has been its tendency to expand, once the taboo against physician-aided death was breached in favor of more malleable concepts such as “patient autonomy.” “What is presented at first as a right is going to become a kind of obligation,” Belgian law professor Étienne Montero has warned.³

One does not need to wonder who will eventually be deemed unworthy to live.

Christ is coming. When the world fills up the cup of iniquity, He will surely come and execute judgment. For His beleaguered church in the world, He will give a crown of life that will never end.

² Jerry Brown, “Jerry Brown turned to his own doctor and Desmond Tutu in assisted-suicide decision,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2015.

³ Charles Lane, “Europe’s Sinister Expansion of Euthanasia,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 2015.

■ Defending Creationism

Probably this belongs to the “Bring the Books” rubric, but it is also an encouraging item from “all around us.” A book was recently published entitled *Uncensored: Daring to Embrace the Entire Bible*. I did not read the book. But I read an excerpt in the form of an article in *Christian Renewal*. The author is Brian Cosby, the senior pastor of Wayside Presbyterian Church in Tennessee. The book is a defense of the doctrine of creation in six, literal twenty-four hour days. We are so used to hearing evolutionary ideas presented as facts of science, even in conservative churches, that I was thrilled to hear a voice bravely defending creationism. He writes,

Self-professing Christians of all stripes seem to be running from the creation account of Genesis like those loonies running from the bulls in Pamplona.... But why would they be running? The answer is simple: because they’re embarrassed by the Bible, at least at a functional level.... God’s creation account is barely whispered from the pulpit and eliminated from the radio. But here’s the reality: evangelicals are running to “science” first and then attempting to make the creation account fit within that “science.” Why do Christians do this?... It’s because we believe that the all-knowing Darwin has spoken and that the unbiased natural history museums and *National Geographic* have proved his theory once for all.⁴

He affirms that Genesis 1 is historical narrative, not poetry. He believes the days of Genesis 1 are literal twenty-four-hour days. He maintains that death first entered the world at the Fall, so there could not be millions of years of animals or humans living and dying before the Fall. To top it off, he confidently writes,

To my understanding, the theory of evolution seems completely absurd. Think about it. For billions of years, rain falls on the rocks, making a sort of primordial goop.

⁴ Brian Cosby, “Covering up Creation,” *Christian Renewal*, October 28, 2015, 29.

Then one day, the soup comes alive...it morphs and grows in complexity until—voilà!—living, breathing, reproducing human beings. And we think the creation narrative in Genesis is hard to believe? I would argue that it takes less faith to believe in creation than in evolution.⁵

Sometimes we feel a bit like Elijah when he sadly said to the Lord, “I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant...and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away” (I Kings 19:10). Then let us be encouraged that there are still other Reformed and Presbyterian believers who oppose the powerful tide of evolutionism.

While we are on the topic of creation, you will be interested to know another tidbit. On July 14, 2015 the New Horizons spacecraft passed over Pluto, becoming the first to explore that dwarf planet at the edge of our solar system. Scientists were not sure what they would find. They expected to be surprised. As it turns out, they were shocked. In *Answers in Genesis* we found a

brief article stating this:

What the photos revealed was a shock to scientists who believe in a 4.5-billion-year-old solar system. The preliminary photos of Pluto’s surface indicate far fewer craters than expected.... Planetary scientists committed to belief in a 4.5-billion-year-old solar system are at a complete loss to explain the lack of craters on Pluto. In such a long time, millions more objects should have collided with Pluto’s surface. But it gets worse. Pluto also has a nitrogen atmosphere that is leaking away. After billions of years, all of its nitrogen should be long gone. These considerations demonstrate that Pluto is a very young object. But why should believers be shocked? We should expect more confirmations of a young universe as NASA’s space exploration continues.⁶ ∞

⁵ Cosby, “Covering up Creation,” 30.

⁶ “Pluto’s Young Surface,” *Answers in Genesis*, October-December, 11. This was a shortened version of a July 20, 2015 article by Dr. Danny Faulkner entitled “Pluto’s Surface is Young!” on answersingenesis.org.

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Upon This Rock (25)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (17)

David, we said, was foreseeing in Psalm 40 and Psalm 51 the Gospel age, when not even the lowest place would be left for any of the rites that were strictly required under the Law. Not only, therefore, was he embracing the Antitype, but he was also *dismissing the types*. All of them. And *that*, as we pointed out, was no little thing. Whether we view it from the perspective of what went before, or of what came after, we see David standing as it were on a mountaintop in Psalm 51.

When we think of such ‘mountaintops,’ our minds turn quickly and easily to passages like Isaiah 53. Surely Isaiah 53 is among the highest, if not itself *the* highest, of the peaks in the dispensation of shadows. But we ought not overlook Psalm 51.

Isaiah, living still among the ‘shadows,’ among which were daily sacrifices for sin, foresaw the day when a single sacrifice would accomplish what the blood of bulls and goats could not. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are *healed*” (53:5). David, though not foreseeing the Antitype with the clarity of an Isaiah, was able nevertheless to prophesy of the day when there is no place left for the rites of the Law. “Thou desirest not sacrifice,” says David. And: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart” (51:16-17). Thus, writes Calvin, “David represents contrition of heart as comprehending in itself the whole sum of acceptable sacrifice.”

Notice that: “*contrition...in itself... the whole sum of acceptable sacrifice.*” Notice, too, that David is here giving expression to *his own approach to God* after his grievous fall into sin. Not, in other words, is he speaking only of some future state of affairs when the whole apparatus of ceremonies will be forever discarded. His point of reference was what for him was the *here* and the *now*.

Mr. Doezema is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2016, p. 179.

This man after God’s own heart wanted, more than anything else, to be “washed” from his iniquity (v. 2), “cleansed” from his sin (v. 2), and “delivered” from bloodguiltiness (v. 14). With a view to *that*, what *value* could there be in a sin offering, in itself, at the tabernacle? What efficacy was there in the blood of a goat, in itself, to attain for David a restoration of the joy of salvation?

David provides the answer in verse 16. It is *nothing*. *Zero*. What is the “whole sum” of acceptable ‘sacrifice’? A contrite, humbled *heart*. And the *hands*? They are, and must be, *empty*. Which is exactly what the blood of bulls and goats was intended to teach the saints of old. Had there been efficacy in those sacrifices, asks the writer to the Hebrews, “would they not have ceased to be offered?” (10:2). The very necessity of repetition demonstrated the impotence of that blood to accomplish the remission of sins. Thus did the sacrifices, along with all the other rites and ceremonies of the old dispensation, lead God’s people to abandon all trust in their own works and prostrate themselves before God in supplication for His mercy—which they understood to be the essence of His promise of a Savior. Those sacrifices served therefore a very useful purpose in the life and worship of the saints of old. It is for that reason that, as we mentioned last time, “we must come to the kingdom of Christ for it to be completely true that God does not wish sacrifice” (Calvin). And it is this eventuality, the termination of all the types when they reach their fulfillment in the Antitype, that David was anticipating by prophecy in Psalm 51.

Remarkable, we say, in light of what went before and what would come after. Note God’s command to Abraham: “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an *everlasting* covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant” (Gen. 17:13-14). And God’s command to Israel through Moses: “It shall be a *perpetual* statute for your generations throughout all

your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood" (Lev. 3:17, emphasis added).

Today, of course, we understand, and express in Article 25 of our Belgic Confession, that it is the "truth and substance" of the shadows that are *everlasting* and that remain with us in *perpetuity*. Not the shadows themselves. But what came after David, at the time of the actual transition from the old to the new covenant, shows that what we confess today and what David was foreseeing and rejoicing in, in Psalm 51, was not quickly and easily grasped in the apostolic age.

In our last article we began considering some of the evidence of that difficulty. Understandably, it was the place of the rite of circumcision in the church of the new dispensation that was first called into question, especially as it related to obedience to Christ's commission to preach the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the earth." Paul and Barnabas, on their return from their first missionary journey into Gentile lands, reported to the church in Antioch how God had "opened the door of *faith* to the *Gentiles*" (Acts 14:27, emphasis added). Faith, that is, to the *uncircumcised*. In keeping with what Peter had been taught on the housetop of Simon the tanner in Joppa, Paul had made no attempt to make Jews out of the Gentile converts, by proselytization. And this brought opposition. "Certain men came down from Judea" and insisted that circumcision "after the manner of Moses" was a prerequisite for *salvation* (15:1).


What followed was "no small dissension and disputation" (15:2). Truth is, the very *fruit* of the work of the missionaries should have settled the matter. Paul, after all, can *preach*, but only God can work *faith*. "Therefore," says Calvin, "Paul and Barnabas show by the *results* that their calling was approved and ratified by God, for the faith of the Gentiles [uncircumcised] was as if a seal had been imprinted by the hand of God, in order to confirm it" (emphasis added).

But not even *that* seal was enough to persuade the dissenters—the Judaizers—from Jerusalem, who must have argued simply that the Law is the *law*. And that was unsettling to the church in Antioch. 'Troubling,' according to 15:24, and a 'subverting of souls.' So much so, that it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas "and certain other of them" (v. 2) to Jerusalem, in order that the question might be addressed by "the apostles and elders."

That was the occasion for what is often called the Council of Jerusalem. What was it that was 'on the table' at this assembly? Really, all of the Levitical requirements. And how they figured into the calling of the Gentiles. And what were the implications of that for the church of the new dispensation. How important Luke considered the question to be is evident from the fact that he devoted nearly all of chapter 15 to its resolution.

What was at stake? The Judaizers, we must understand, in their insistence on the *necessity* of circumcision, were making of this sign a meritorious work—which it had never been. Witness Psalm 51:16-17. "Nothing in my hand I bring" could have been sung by David. "Thou desirest not sacrifice." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews in fact *quotes* David. Have you ever noticed how much of the rest of Hebrews 10 accords with what must have been the sentiments of this Old Testament prophet? "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"—these are of course the words of *Christ* in David, in Psalm 40; and David could not know *how* the Christ would fulfill that "will" of God. But David was sure that He *would* come, and that He would do what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, namely, "*take away sins*" (10:11, emphasis added). And that by the "one offering" that *He* would bring, He would "perfect forever them that are sanctified" (10:14). And that "where remission of [sins] is, there is no more offering for sin." And then this: "Having an high priest [the Antitype] over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." *Washing?* Yes. Not, as it were, with H₂O. But with *pure* water. Which accords with the nature of Christ's kingdom. Calvin's comments on those verses (20 and 21) in Hebrews 10 are so good. "There must," he says, "be mutual concord between Priest [with a capital P] and people." We are therefore "to bring [to God] nothing which does not correspond [to it]." "Outward washing of the flesh must therefore be *done away with* and the whole apparatus of the ceremonies must *cease*."

To all of that, David would have given a hearty Amen. Witness Psalm 51.

But the Judaizers thought otherwise. And a good number of others among the Christians in Jerusalem were unsure. More... next time. 

The Mass and Open Communion

Lord's Day 30

Question 80. What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the popish mass?

Answer. The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself has once accomplished on the cross; and, that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ, who according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven at the right hand of God His Father, and will there be worshiped by us—but the mass teaches, that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.

Question 81. For whom is the Lord's Supper instituted?

Answer. For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by His passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Question 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

Answer. No; for by this the covenant of God would be profaned, and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation; therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and His apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.

Some Reformed churches and Christians are embarrassed by this Lord's Day and want it removed from the Catechism. In their view, it is too harsh in its evaluation of the Roman Catholic Mass, and too narrow concerning whom it permits to come to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. As we examine these subjects, the primary question is not, Who or how many are offended?, but, Are these biblical positions? If they are biblical, then we must unashamedly affirm them.

Evaluating the Mass

As we have already seen in the previous Lord's Day, Rome teaches that the elements of bread and wine in the

Mass are miraculously transformed into the real body and blood of Jesus—transubstantiation. In Q&A 80 we have the Reformed evaluation of this teaching. To evaluate the Mass properly, we must understand that Rome's teaching of transubstantiation also means that in the Mass there is a continual, repeated sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and that because Jesus is physically present in the elements the people must worship Him in them.

The Reformed evaluation of this in the Heidelberg Catechism is fair and logical, not harsh and unreasonable. If Christ's body and blood are repeatedly sacrificed in the Mass, as Rome teaches, then the original sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was not enough to satisfy the justice of God against sin. If it were enough, then there would be no reason for any more sacrifice. The repeated sacrifice tells us that His death was not sufficient. And so, the Mass

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington.

“is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ,” and teaches “that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests.”

This is clearly unbiblical and against the gospel (good news) of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:18 states very plainly, “where remission of these is [“sins and iniquities” in the previous verse], there is no more offering for sin.” The good news that Jesus proclaimed from the cross concerning our justification was, “It is finished” (John 19:30). In raising Jesus from the dead, God proclaimed to His people that they are no longer “in their sins” (I Cor. 15:17). The Mass denies this good news of the gospel.

It is also logical and fair to evaluate the Mass as idolatry. “Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested Himself in His word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust” (L.D. 34, Q&A 95). Not only does Rome teach that the earthly elements of bread and wine should be worshiped, but also that men should place their trust in something other than God as He has manifested Himself in His Word. People are taught not to trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, but in a piece of bread that supposedly confers grace to the recipient. All idolatry takes the trust of man away from God, which is what happens in the Mass.

Because the Mass denies the good news of the sufficiency of the death of Christ, and because the Mass is endorsed idolatry, the Roman Catholic Church is a false church and Roman Catholicism is a false religion. It is against Christ, and it worships the creature rather than the Creator. We must pray that God will deliver His own from the false religion of Rome, and that He will protect the church from falling into the errors of Rome. For this reason, Q&A 80 of Catechism ought to be retained.

In contrast to the Mass, the Lord’s Supper testifies that we do have full pardon of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, and that Christ is now in heaven and there we worship Him. This is what I Corinthians 11:26 means when it says, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” The fact that He must “come” means He is now absent from us; therefore, we worship Him at God’s right hand.

At the same time, we “shew forth his death,” or proclaim it as perfect and sufficient for our salvation. This is the good news of the Lord’s Supper.

Self-examination

Questions 81 and 82 of this Lord’s Day tell us not only who may come to the Supper, but also who decides who may come. By self-examination, individuals must determine whether they may partake; but also the elders of the church must decide which individuals may partake.

In Q&A 81 we learn that every person who partakes of the Lord’s Supper must first examine himself/herself. This is biblical: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (I Cor. 11:28). This call to self-examination is necessary, in part, because there are always hypocrites present in the church, people who make a profession of faith but who are, in fact, lying. These must be warned against partaking, lest they “eat and drink judgment to themselves” (I Cor. 11:29). However, the primary purpose of self-examination is to help believers who partake. Self-examination is important for believers because it helps them to deal with sins in their lives, and it is a means to their personal, spiritual growth.

As we examine ourselves, we should remember that we always do this in the light of God’s Word (Ps. 139:23-24). The Catechism helps us in our self-examination by outlining the three parts of self-examination (these are the same three that are expanded on in the preparatory section of “The Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper”). First, I must consider my sin and sinfulness. Am I truly saddened by my sin? Am I displeased with myself and my sinful nature? Do I realize that my love for God and others is far from perfect? Do I confess all this, my sins and sinfulness, with a broken spirit? Second, I must consider my faith and trust in my Savior. Do I have the idea that I am worthy because I have made myself to differ from the ungodly by what I believe or do? Or am I truly trusting in the grace of God and in the finished work of Jesus Christ in His suffering and death? Third, I must examine my life to see whether I am growing in faith and holiness. Is it the desire of my heart to be a stronger Christian in my faith and in my walk? Such self-examination is beneficial because it deepens my

sorrow over sin, increases my gratitude for salvation, and helps me to be more intentional in my godliness.

Restricted Communion

In most churches today, even some that are Reformed and quite conservative, when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the minister will offer an invitation to all believers who are present to participate and, in some cases, will warn those who are unbelievers or living in sin that they may not participate. It is then left entirely to each individual to determine whether they are believers or not, and whether they may or may not come to the Supper. Because of this, it is quite a shock to many Christians when they visit a church in which participation in the sacrament is restricted by the elders and, as visitors, they are not permitted to take the bread and wine of the Supper.


Besides self-examination on the part of the Christian, the church has a responsibility to watch over the sacrament. One of the New Testament words for the office of the elder is "bishop" which means "one who oversees." Elders are appointed by Christ to "oversee" the spiritual well-being of the members of the local congregation, and as they do this to determine whether different individuals live worthy of the name of Christ. It is their responsibility as elders to exercise the "keys of the kingdom"—one aspect of which is the closing of the kingdom by discipline to those who by their talk and life show that they have no part in God's kingdom. The only way that the elders can properly guard the table of the Lord's Supper is by their having a personal knowledge of each participant and by their giving permission to the individual to partake. This permission is given through their approving of membership in the local congregation or their granting the right to partake of communion to a visitor who requests it.

In the practice of "open communion," which leaves participation in the sacrament entirely up to the individual, the elders are not being faithful to their calling. They are, in fact, opening up the church to the possibility of "a little leaven" that can spread through the entire church in the form of false teaching or permitted ungodly living (I Cor. 5:6). This inevitably leads the church down the road of departure and apostasy, which is the expression of God's wrath against the whole congregation. Also, when the sacrament is opened up to those who are unworthy, the covenant is profaned. The covenant is the life of fellow-

ship and unity that God has with His people and that they have with each other—a fellowship that is impossible with those who live in wickedness and unbelief.

While it is true that we cannot know the heart of man, so that it is impossible to keep all hypocrites away from the sacrament, still, by restricting participation in this sacrament the elders protect the local church against departure, preserve holiness and unity in the local congregation, and even show mercy to those who might otherwise come and "eat and drink judgment to themselves." Both the calling to self-examination and the elders' requirement of a credible confession are vital to the spiritual well-being of the church.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the doctrine of transubstantiation teach?
2. How is the Mass a denial of the suffering of Christ?
3. How is the Mass idolatry?
4. In contrast to the Mass, what does the Lord's Supper teach?
5. What are the elements of self-examination?
6. How is self-examination helpful in your life as a Christian?
7. Does "restricted communion" minimize the importance of self-examination?
8. What is "open communion?" What are some of the dangers of this practice?
9. What standard should the elders use to determine who may/may not come to the Lord's Supper in a local church?
10. Will the practice of "restricted communion" keep all hypocrites from coming to the sacrament? If not, then why do we practice it?
11. Is it proper for Christians who come from churches that disagree on major points of doctrine to come together in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Why/why not?
12. It is popular for Christians today to forgo membership in a local church because they believe it is enough that they are united to Christ by faith. What effect does this mentality have on the office of elder and the administration of the sacraments in the local church? 

Signs and Wonders of the Lie

Having considered in the last article the miracles performed by some of God's prophets, we proceed to consider the lying wonders performed by some false prophets. But before doing so, we consider a few more points about miracles.

The word "miracle" is commonly used today in a different way than the Bible uses it. When an extremely rare recovery from a serious illness takes place, people often say "it was a miracle." But the Bible does not use the word *miracle* to refer to such events.

The Bible uses the term *miracle* to refer to an event that humans would say is clearly impossible. For example, consider a man born lame who is instantly healed and begins to leap about, not even needing to learn to walk. Humans would say that such an event is not extremely rare, but impossible. A biblical miracle is an "impossible" event like that.

Miracles are also called signs and wonders. God uses these two terms to tell us something about the purpose of a miracle.

A sign is something visible that points to and illustrates something invisible. A miracle of healing, for example, is a visible sign used to illustrate the invisible spiritual work that Christ performs within His people.

The term "wonder" indicates the effect a miracle has on those who see it. It captures a person's attention, so that he wonders in amazement. God used miracles to capture people's attention, so that they would come to listen to the messenger of God who had performed the miracle. Similarly, false prophets have performed wonders to attract people to come and listen to the lies they are proclaiming.

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

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2015, p. 135.

Miracles in the Last Days

Christ told us that in the last days there would be many false prophets, who would perform signs and wonders. "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22). Christ here warns His disciples not to be deceived by these miracles.

Elsewhere these miracles are called "signs and lying wonders," mentioned in connection with the coming Antichrist:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders (II Thess. 2:8-9).

These lying wonders will be used to deceive people into following the Antichrist, who is referred to in this verse as "that Wicked [one]." They will be "signs and wonders of the lie,"¹ and will be used to draw people to listen to the apostate church that works for the antichristian world power (Rev. 13:12-14).

We should note how the devil, in a sense, tries to mimic what Christ does. Christ and His church preach the kingdom of heaven. The devil and those who serve him also preach a kingdom. But the kingdom they preach is the antichristian kingdom of men. When Christ, the Messenger of God, came, there were miracles that served to confirm that what He was teaching was truly the word of God. The devil also uses wonders in an effort to persuade people that his messengers are the ones who are speaking the word of God.

The devil tries to fool people by external similarities

¹ The phrase that is translated "signs and lying wonders" could be translated literally as "signs and wonders of the lie."

between what he does and what Christ does. Our Lord has pointed this out to us, and has exhorted us to take heed.

Lying Signs to Prove Us

In the past as well as today, God has warned His people about the deceptive wonders of the lie. He has also told them what His plan is with these signs. Though the deceptive miracle workers are evil, God is using them to prove or test His people, to manifest whether or not they truly love Him.

In the days of the Old Testament, when God warned His people about false prophets who would perform miracles, He also told them this: “Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 13:3).

God says the same thing in the New Testament. Lying wonders are used to draw people away, and thus to manifest those who do not really love the truth:

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (II Thess. 2:9-11).

The people who will believe the lie are the ones who “received not the love of the truth.” They did not really love the truth that God spoke to them, but rather hated it. So God sends to them strong delusion and lying wonders, that they might be drawn away with all the others who believe a lie.

Lying Signs of Judgment, not Healing

Most false prophets of the past and of today do not perform wonders. A close inspection would manifest that many who claim to perform wonders really do not. There are, however, some who have done them. But the wonders they have done have never been wonders of healing. They have always been wonders that illustrate the punishments of God upon the ungodly.

Consider, for example, the signs that the Egyptian

magicians performed: “And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt” (Ex. 8:6-7). After Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters and the frogs came up, the Egyptian magicians brought up even more frogs. They could perform signs of destruction, signs that illustrated what God in His wrath was bringing upon the ungodly. These they could do. They could not, however, get rid of the frogs. They could only increase the plague.

In the New Testament we read of the false church having power to perform miracles in the last days. The miracles they will perform are again said to be signs that illustrate the power not of God’s grace, but of His wrath:

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast (Rev. 13:13-14a).

They make “fire come down from heaven,” once again, a sign that points to the judgments of God’s almighty wrath.

Whatever the specific miracles may be that the false church will perform in the last days, one thing for sure is that they will not be miracles of healing. Miraculous healing signifies the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. When false prophets perform miracles, they will be signs that illustrate the works of destruction that demons perform under God’s sovereign control.

Many are tempted to believe that miracles like those done by Christ and His apostles will be performed again in the last days. It is very important that we not be fooled by the arguments of those who teach this. As we considered in the last article, those miracles ceased when the Bible was finished. The only miracles being performed in the days right before Christ comes will be the lying wonders that God has warned us about repeatedly.

May we take heed to this warning. Let us show forth that the truth we confess with our mouths we truly do love in our hearts. In this way, we will stand fast in these last days, receiving from God the strength that we need to persevere in the days ahead. ☞

The Second Coming of Christ and Missions (2)

In the previous article, we began a consideration of the relationship between missions and the final appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. We explored the thought that faithful missions serves the final appearing of Christ by its authoritative proclamation of the second coming of Christ. In this article, we explore another aspect of how missions serves the second coming of Christ. Missions serves the coming of Christ as a power that is actually guided by the Lord to prepare the church and the world for His final appearing.



The preaching of the gospel in a mission setting is a spiritual power, necessarily affecting souls and lives of those to whom it is preached. That the preaching of the Word is a spiritual power in connection with men and salvation is taught from Scripture as explained in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31, Q&A 84. There the preaching is defined, not as an informational or inspirational talk that can be received or ignored without consequence, but as a key power that opens and shuts the kingdom of heaven. The preaching of the gospel in missions is one of the mighty keys of the kingdom that both opens the kingdom to believers and shuts the kingdom to all unbelievers. Such a power has spiritual heart-and-soul consequences for both time and eternity. This is a sobering thought and reality about the work of missions.

What is taught in the Heidelberg Catechism is confirmed, first of all, in I Corinthians 1:18. There we learn that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." The preaching is a means by which God powerfully saves His people from their sin, in spite of how the ungodly scoff at such a wonder as this. What a beautiful wonder to behold when God by His grace opens the hearts of His people so that they do repent

and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto their salvation, walking in His truth with all diligence and sincerity! Such is the affect of the preaching upon those whom God has ordained unto eternal life (Acts 13:48).

However, as far as the power of the preaching of the cross of Christ upon those whom God does not intend to save is concerned, the Scriptures confirm that it is a power to destroy and condemn them. The Lord told Moses that when he would faithfully proclaim the truth of Jehovah and the command to Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go, the effect of his ministry would be that Pharaoh would harden his heart. In fact, it is clear that God intended in His sovereign providence to harden the heart of Pharaoh in this way so that he would be justly destroyed in the Red Sea (Ex. 7:3, 13, 14, 22).

God also told Isaiah that the effect of his ministry would be negative.

...Go, tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed (Is. 6:9-10).

In Jeremiah 1:10, the Lord told Jeremiah that the effect of his ministry would be both positive and negative. "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:10).

Jesus Himself experienced this negative fruit in His ministry. He experienced being rejected, and many hardened their hearts toward Him. After Jesus had preached the truth concerning Himself as the Bread of life, we read that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). After Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), and by this declared plainly that He is God, many took up stones to kill Him. That attempt at His premature murder was a

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

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2015, p. 469.

clear indication that His Word had the irresistible effect of hardening people's hearts against Him and His Word.

Likewise, a faithful missionary certainly may expect the sobering reality that his faithful preaching of the Word will have the irresistible effect in the ungodly, whom God does not intend to save, that they will harden their hearts in their unbelief and will sin against Christ.

This effectual power of preaching in missions, which cuts through mankind and separates between the elect (wheat) and the reprobate (chaff), is included in the symbolism of Revelation 6:1-2 when the first seal is opened by Christ. It is part of the meaning of the white horse and rider that Christ sends forth and guides in victory throughout the New Testament era until His goal is reached at the end of history.



What makes the preaching of the gospel an irresistible power unto salvation or unto condemnation? The efficacy of the preaching is not found in the missionary himself. Although the missionary needs qualifications for his work and works faithfully with his God-given gifts, even those things are not what makes his preaching effectual in the hearers. Although the missionary may be eloquent, his sermons captivating for young and old in his audiences, yet the sermons themselves are powerless with respect to its spiritual consequences.

Instead, we understand that the preaching is that power which produces results *by the Holy Spirit*. The apostle Paul confesses that very thing in I Corinthians 2:4, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." That verse indicates that the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ makes the preaching of the Word effectual. This is true in God's chosen people, whose hearts the Spirit opens and into which He sows the good seed of the Word unto their salvation. This is also true with respect to God's enemies, whom He does not know savingly, and to whom the Spirit sends the Word, as directed by Christ, for their judgment and condemnation according to their rejection of that Word.



This has been the understanding of the key power of the preaching, whether in the local congregation or in missions, by our Reformed forefathers. For example,

John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* expounds this truth about the preaching in Book III, Chapter 24, Section 13. Regarding the negative effect of the preaching in particular, John Calvin writes sharply:

...Observe that he directs his voice to them but in order that they may become even more deaf; he kindles a light but that they may be made even more blind; he sets forth doctrine but that they may grow even more stupid; he employs a remedy but so that they may not be healed. And John, applying this prophecy, states that the Jews could not believe Christ's teaching (John 12:39), for this curse of God hung over them.

Who intends and will make preaching have a positive effect for the gathering of His spiritual seed out of the world, or a negative effect on the seed of the serpent in the world to its condemnation?

Jesus answered that question in John 16:8, where He speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter by whom the church is gathered unto Christ. But for the world, not so. "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." As He did in the days of Noah through his preaching of righteousness and the coming judgment of the water flood of God's wrath, so again the Spirit by His church will reprove the world, convicting them of sin unto their condemnation until the coming of the Lord in the fire-flood of His wrath.

This two-fold effect of the preaching directly serves the final appearing of Christ. It serves the final appearing of Christ in the sense that the preaching prepares the world for judgment, as the wicked fill up their cup of iniquity until God pours out His wrath on them at the end and goal of history. It prepares the false church for its terrible judgment by its rejection of the truth and by its attempt to overthrow God's truth and true worship. It provokes the Antichrist to persecute the saints. With regard to the reprobate, the preaching brings them to condemnation before God. The preaching is that power that offends and irritates the world as well as the carnal seed within the church institute unto escalating opposition to the faithful saints of Jesus Christ. As the church faithfully continues to preach the Word, battles faithfully through every doctrinal controversy in history, becomes purer and clearer in her exposition of the Holy Gospel by the guiding work of the Holy Spirit, the lie and darkness, under


the evil guidance of the spirit of the lie, will also certainly become more intense in its hatred against the truth and more openly violent against faithful missions carried out by true churches of Jesus Christ. In this way, the preaching of missions prepares the church and the world for the final appearing of Christ.



Understanding that faithful missions is an effectual power of Christ for the fulfilment of His will in history, we will also be careful about how we measure and document “success” in foreign missions. We may be prone to focus solely on the positive fruit of missions and, in so doing, judge the success of missions solely on the basis of how well the good fruit is being gathered. Although we certainly cherish with joy the good fruit of the gathering of God’s elect sheep out of the bondage of unbelief, idolatry, and superstitions, we ought not forget the sobering reality that successful missions also involves the hardening of hearts in the unbelieving reprobate.

That understanding is necessary. If we would evaluate

the labors of the apostle Paul based solely on how much positive fruit he accomplished in comparison to the multitudes of people that he addressed, we would measure his ministry as a dismal failure. Realizing that faithful preaching by divine necessity also involves the inexcusable rejection of the true gospel by the unbelieving, we will refrain from the conclusion that missions is a failure when the majority of the fruit is hardened unbelief. While we earnestly pray and aim for the gathering of those whom God has ordained to eternal life by a faithful preaching and teaching on the mission field, yet we must reckon with the reality that God does hide His truth “from the wise and prudent” and reveals it only to “babes” (Matt. 11:25-27). To that fruit and power of missions we learn to submit, as Jesus Himself did. And, perhaps, as the day of Christ approaches, faithful missions will be more and more marked by *that* success.

Knowing the divinely governed effects of her preaching as it serves the coming of her Lord, let the church serve diligently in her missions with the earnest prayer, “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” 

CHURCH AND STATE

MR. BRIAN VAN ENGEN

The Supreme Court Finds a Right to Homosexual Marriage (2)

In the last article, we examined the United States Supreme Court’s ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which found that homosexuals are guaranteed a right to marry by the Fourteenth Amendment to the *Constitution*. We examined the way in which the Court reached this conclusion. In this and a future installment, we will look at the implications of that ruling for believers, as well as some measures that religious organizations such as churches and schools can implement to protect themselves.

As mentioned previously, the Court in *Obergefell* did

Mr. VanEngen, a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney.

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2015, p. 140.

not create a right to homosexual marriage, but instead found that this right already existed in the Fourteenth Amendment to the *Constitution* and that laws contrary to this right were illegal. While that distinction may seem to be merely a matter of semantics, it does have practical implications. People from both sides of the religious and political spectrum have stated that the rulers have spoken, and we must obey by submitting to this ruling or by resigning positions that would cause us to violate our consciences. For instance, shortly after the Supreme Court’s ruling, media attention was focused on Kim Davis, a district court clerk in Kentucky, who refused to issue marriage licenses and was ultimately sent to prison for several days for her refusal. Even many

Christians suggested that she must resign her position in light of the Court's ruling.

The idea that the Court's ruling is a mandate that we must obey is contrary to our system of government, under which the Court cannot legally create rights or freedoms or legislate, but only protects those rights that already exist under the *Constitution* or other laws. This is the reason the Supreme Court "found" the right to homosexual marriage under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Under our system of laws, now that the right to homosexual marriage has been found to exist, that right is simply one right that must be weighed against competing rights. In the case of homosexual marriage, even the liberal majority on the Supreme Court recognized that people may still oppose homosexual marriage for religious reasons, stating:

Finally, it must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned. The First Amendment ensures that religious organizations and persons are given proper protection as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths, and to their own deep aspirations to continue the family structure they have long revered.¹

Freedom of religion is a First Amendment right, and when First Amendment rights are implicated, courts usually analyze whether reasonable accommodations can be made for sincerely held religious beliefs. In the case of the Kentucky court clerk, we will assume for the sake of argument that her actions were based on sincerely held religious beliefs. Some news accounts indicated that she was not willing to issue marriage licenses because they were issued under her name as clerk and she did not want to appear to condone homosexual marriage. These news accounts indicated that she was willing to issue them in the name of the state. The question is whether it would have been a reasonable accommodation to change the marriage licenses to accommodate her religious beliefs. The newly recognized right to homosexual marriage will conflict with the First Amendment rights of traditional Christians to the free exercise of their religion, and neither of those rights will be absolute.

Some might still question whether it is appropriate for

¹ *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ___, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (2015).

a Christian individual or organization to attempt to assert our legal rights in opposition to laws that are contrary to their faith, such as those providing equality for homosexuals. However, as Article 28 of the Church Order demonstrates, consistories are required to take measures that allow them to claim the protection of the authorities. That Article reads:

The consistory shall take care that the churches, for the possession of their property and the peace and order of their meetings, can claim the protection of the authorities; it should be well understood, however, that for the sake of peace and material possession they may never suffer the royal government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon.

Article 28 has often been interpreted in modern times as requiring that a local congregation's status as a legal corporation be maintained so that it can defend itself in court or assert its rights if necessary. However, the history of this Article shows that the Reformed fathers intended that consistories use whatever means available to preserve the ability of the church to maintain the ministry of the Word over against the forces of the world that would seek to silence the truth of the Word.²

This Article requires that we obey the civil government, but that we use the means available to see that the rights of the church are also protected. As has been stated before in relation to Article 28:

The duty of the consistory, now, is to "claim" these rights. The consistory is to secure official government recognition (legal standing) for the congregation with the state. The consistory is to do what is necessary to see to it that the lawful rights of the congregation are honored.³

The issues surrounding the recognition of legal rights for homosexuals are far-reaching. If the churches and schools do not take measures as necessary to claim their legal rights, the failure to assert those rights may result in interference in the instruction of our children or even in matters of preaching and church discipline. As has been written before in regard to Article 28:

² A more complete discussion of Article 28 and its history can be found by reading Gerald Vanden Berg's "The Church and the State," *Standard Bearer* 33, No. 5 (1956): 115-116.

³ Ronald Cammenga, "Claiming State Protection," *Standard Bearer* 68, No. 3 (1991): 67-68.


State domination over the church may never be tolerated. The state does not have, and may not be permitted to exercise, ecclesiastical authority. The church may never tolerate state interference in the spiritual and internal affairs of the church. The state has no right of supervision of the official work of the officebearers. The state is not to regulate the faith and life of the church. The state is not to involve itself in the exercise of Christian discipline. The state is not to become entangled in the official labors of the consistory, the classis, or the synod.⁴

Article 28 requires that consistories take measures as necessary to allow the churches to avail themselves of the legal protections that our heavenly Father has providentially provided.

With regard to modern issues such as homosexual marriage, the threat to the churches' autonomy comes not only from the government, but also from individuals who may seek to use government institutions to restrict the teachings of the church. Homosexuals are on their way to becoming a protected class that is guarded from discrimination by government laws and government institutions. However, homosexual individuals also have gained legal standing by which they can attack churches, schools, and individual believers for opposition to their lifestyle. We must position our churches and schools, not to rebel against any laws or those in authority, but to avail

ourselves of the protections that we have under the law, which the same authorities are also bound to protect.

We have discussed the need for churches to be prepared to assert their rights against the attacks of groups such as homosexuals, but the need for action to protect our schools is even greater. Our churches enjoy some measure of protection by virtue of the fact that they are clearly religious institutions subject to the protection of the First Amendment. Traditionally, state and federal courts have deferred as much as possible to the decision of ecclesiastical assemblies in matters of property rights, employment of ministers, and church discipline. While all churches are religious institutions, not all schools are. For example, the public schools are required by law to avoid being religious institutions. We, on the other hand, see our schools as extensions of the home in which we try to ensure that our children are instructed in all subjects in accordance with the same doctrines taught in the church. As such, the instruction of our schools should also be entitled to a degree of religious freedom. However, even greater care is needed for school boards to assert those legal rights in the face of opposition from the world around us.

In the next installment of this series, Lord willing, we will look at specific measures that can be taken to aid our churches and schools in asserting the right to religious freedoms granted under the *Constitution*. 

⁴ Cammenga, "Claiming State Protection," 68.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Mission Activities

On December 27, 2015 the calling church for the mission field to the Republic of the Philippines published their latest trio consisting of Rev. Cory Griess (Calvary PRC, Hull, IA), along with Rev. Brian Huizinga (Hope PRC, Redlands, CA), and Rev. Jonathan Mahtani,

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

pastor in Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, IN. The congregation in the PRC of Doon, Iowa extended a call to Rev. Mahtani on January 3. We pray that God may clearly reveal His will to Rev. Mahtani regarding this call as He says to one "Come" and he comes, and to another "Go" and he goes. May the saints in the Philippines, the Kleyns, the congregation at Doon, and our entire denomination be content with the direction of the King of the Church

"for of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Congregational Activities

The congregation at First PRC, Edmonton, AB, Canada shared coffee and oliebollen after their New Year's Day service.

The congregation at Loveland, CO is planning a camp-out at Carter Lake in June of this year.

Members at Kalamazoo, MI PRC have the opportunity to camp at Markin Glen County Park in late July.

The Council of First PRC, Holland, MI approved the purchase of an Automated External Defibrillator (A.E.D.) machine, as well as some new tables and chairs for use in the council room and for special events, and the replacement of audio wiring in the auditorium.

The annual concert of the Protestant Reformed Student Orchestra (PRSO) was held Thursday evening, January 28, at the Grandville, MI Middle School auditorium. The group, made up of 30 students from the Grand Rapids area schools and churches who study stringed instruments, performed various styles of orchestral music including classical, folk, seasonal, and sacred. A beautiful evening of music, we are sure!

Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI held a chili cook-off for January 27. A perfect time of year for such an activity.

Minister Activities

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of First PRC in Holland, MI, along with his wife Leah, traveled to the Republic of the Philippines in January to provide assistance to the work there. The Holstesges were scheduled to arrive in Manila on January 8. Rev. Holstege preached in the Berean PRC on January 10, in Maranatha PRC on January 17, and in Provident Christian Church of Marikina on January 24. Plans also included speaking at the 7M meeting and on the monthly trip to Southern Negros Occidental, D.V.

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, pastor

at Grace PRC, Standale, MI spent a few weeks at the turn of the year preaching in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia in Brisbane. Rev. VanOverloop also gave four presentations at the church's Youth Camp. Rev. David Torlach is the pastor at the church in Brisbane. EPC congregations also exist in Launceston, Londonderry/Sydney and Winnaleah.

On Friday, January 8, 2016, Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI traveled with Mr. Pete VanDer Schaaf (Faith PRC) to Northern Ireland as a delegation of the Contact Committee of our churches. The primary purpose of the visit was to conduct church visitation with the Council of our sister congregation, the Covenant PRC of Ballymena and to visit the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. The men planned to be gone two Sundays and return on Tuesday, January 19.

School Activities

Members of the Adams Christian School Association met on January 11 to decide whether to purchase a two-acre parcel adjacent to the school property.

The Ladies Aid of the Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA made and sold almost 2,800 blanket (almond patties) recently as a school fundraiser. Girls, moms, and grandmas came together to enjoy fellowship and work together—all for a good cause. And delicious too!

Sister Church Activities

The congregation at Covenant PRC, Ballymena, Northern Ireland was invited to the manse to join Rev. and Mrs. Stewart for games

and fellowship on New Year's Eve. They also planned a congregational dinner for January 15. On the 28th of January Rev. Angus Stewart planned to present a lecture entitled "Our Identity in Christ" in Port Talbot, South Wales.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society in Loveland, CO PRC sponsored a soup supper on a Friday in December that was followed by mother/daughter and father/son basketball games. Hopefully those dads and moms did not eat too much soup before they hit the court! That might have slowed them down a bit.

In Hope PRC of Redlands, CA the YPS plans to serve a French toast breakfast in early February to benefit financially those young people wishing to attend the annual Young People's Convention.

Seminary Activities

First semester seminary classes were concluded and exams taken in mid-December. After a two-week break the 2016 Interim class began on January 4. This class is entitled "Reformed Covenantal Ethics" and was taught by Prof. Barry Gritters. The class emphasized the Reformed principles of Christian conduct as well as the application of those principles to Christian behavior. We are thankful to God for His mercies and grace in granting a good first semester and for the physical and spiritual refreshment given to students and professors during the break.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Pete and Eunice Boer and their family in the death of their sister and aunt,

MRS. CLARA BOSS.

We pray that they may receive comfort and assurance from the Word of God in Psalm 121: 1 and 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Warren and Dianne Busscher and their children in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. ARTHUR BUSSCHER.

It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With gratitude to God, we rejoice with our parents,

MICHAEL and SHARI BOSVELD,

as they celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary, Lord willing, on February 1. We thank our heavenly Father for His covenant faithfulness to them and pray for His continued blessings in the years to come. Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

* Jared, Annica (and fiancé Zach), Katelyn,
Justin, Joshua, Emma
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ It is with deep gratitude to God for His covenant faithfulness that we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our parents,

CHARLES and BETTY VAN MEETEREN,

on February 3, 2016.

Their love, devotion, and self sacrifice demonstrated Christ's love and an example for us to follow. By God's grace they have led us in the Scriptures faithfully and taught us to love the Lord and His church. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless and keep us and our parents as He has so faithfully done all the days of our lives. "According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:10, 13-14).

* Charles and Beth VanMeeteren

* Randy and Nancy Hendriks

* Donald and Shelly DeVries

* Gary and Mary Gaastra

* Steven and Beth Potjer

20 grandchildren (one in glory) and 18 great-grandchildren

Redlands, California

Classis West

■ Classis West will meet in regular session on Wednesday, March 2, 2016, at the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, IL. Material to be included in the agenda must be in my hands no later than Monday, February 1, 2016. Delegates who will need housing or transportation may contact Mr. Ed Stouwie, 219-513-9218.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (phone: 616 795-8606). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 8, 2016, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour February 2016

Date	Topic	Text
February 7	"The Second Coming of Christ"	Revelation 22:12, 13
February 14	"The Millennial Kingdom"	Revelation 20:1-6
February 21	"Signs of Jesus' Coming"	Matthew 24:8
February 28	"This Gospel in All the World"	Matthew 24:14