

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • November 15, 2014

CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	True Thanksgiving Joy REV. RODNEY MIERSMA	74
<i>Editorial</i>	Who Will Train the Churches' Ministers? (1) PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS	77
<i>God's Wonderful Works</i>	Foundational Principles—Scripture (1) REV. JAMES LANING	80
<i>Special Article</i>	Augustine's View of the Indissolubility of the Marriage Bond (2) PROF. RONALD CAMMENG	82
<i>O Come Let Us Worship</i>	With Willing Heart: The Offering (9a) REV. CORY GRIESS	86
<i>Feature Article</i>	The Importance of Knowing Church History (1) REV. CLAYTON SPRONK	89
<i>Annual Report</i>	Ninety Years of "Free" MR. CAL KALSBECK	91
<i>Contribution</i>	BRF Conference Report MRS. KRISTIN CROSSETT	93
<i>Report</i>	Classis East Report MR. JON HUISKEN	94
<i>Activities</i>	News From Our Churches MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM	95

True Thanksgiving Joy

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall no herd be in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Habakkuk 3:17, 18

At this time of the year the citizens of Canada and the United States observe what is called Thanksgiving Day. On the second Monday of October and the fourth Thursday of November the prime minister of Canada and the president of the United States declare a national holiday for their respective countries, so that everyone can give thanks unto the Lord for benefits and mercies received.

Has it ever struck you as strange that our Thanksgiving Day should be a national holiday? I ask this question because the basis for this proclamation is, we understand, that all men have received blessings and mercies from the Lord and are able to render thanks unto Him from whom is every good and perfect gift. But where in Scripture do we read of such a proclamation? Where are we informed in Holy Writ that all men are the objects of

God's grace and therefore called to give thanks? O, let us not misunderstand. We do not deny the calling and obligation of every man to acknowledge Him who alone is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. However, what man *must* do and what he *can* do are two different things.

The teaching that all men have received blessings and mercies from the Lord and are therefore able to give thanks unto Jehovah is surely foreign to Holy Writ. How different it is in Psalm 118:2-4, "Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that mercy endureth forever. Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endureth forever." This means two things. It implies in the first place, that only the people of the living God are able to give thanks unto the Lord. And it implies in the second place, that they are able to give thanks unto the Lord always. The only thing that can prevent us and does prevent us from giving thanks unto the Lord is the spiritual condition of our own heart and life and never anything outside of us.

In light of the present wars and the fears concerning the ebola virus you may ask, How can I give thanks? Or you may have had more personal tragedies happen to you such as a serious illness, either to yourself or to a loved one, or death, or a business failure. I am sure that you can add to the list. At such times and under

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

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

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

Reprint and Online Posting Policy

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

Editorial Policy

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

Editorial Office

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

Business Office

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

Church News Editor

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

United Kingdom Office

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

Rep. of Ireland Office

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

Subscription Price

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

Advertising Policy

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

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

such circumstances we are inclined to refrain from giving thanks to God.

Dear child of God, bear this in mind. In the first place, the Word of God does not attempt to minimize your difficult position. Neither does it demand of you that you ignore it. Scripture does not ask that we assume the attitude of the stoic. Secondly, true thanksgiving must not be confused with worldly and carnal frivolity. The fact, therefore, that you are in difficulty does not exclude you from the privilege of giving thanks unto God. Thirdly, do you really believe that sorrows and earthly misfortunes and the giving of thanks exclude each other? In answer to this question please read the text above once again.

What an amazing Word of God! We cannot enter at this time into a detailed discussion of the calamity that the Lord visited upon His people through the instrumentality of the Chaldeans. Neither is this necessary. We must not overlook the tremendous contrast that is presented to us in this particular passage of Holy Writ. Amazing is this Word of the Lord because the destruction and joy whereof the prophet speaks occur simultaneously. The prophet does not declare that he is sorrowing but also rejoicing. Neither does he say that he is sorrowing but will rejoice in the future when his present calamity shall be past. But the amazing character of the text consists exactly in the fact that, although disasters overtake and overwhelm him, nevertheless he will rejoice in the Lord even in the midst of these calamities and disasters. That is wonderful, because it means that the Christian always has the victory, regardless of the difficulties that trouble him.

Another feature of this text is the fact that the prophet declares that he will *rejoice*. He does not say, for example, that he will merely bear his present trouble and affliction, or that he will not murmur or rebel. No, the church of God actually declares in this particular Word of God that she will *rejoice*. In order that there be no misunderstanding whatsoever, the prophet exclaims here, according to the original Hebrew, "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will leap for joy in the God of my salvation." To be sure, according to verse 16 the prophet trembled when he heard of the impending disaster; rottenness entered into his bones, and he trembled in himself. However, already in this same verse he declares that he would find rest in the day of trouble. Then in the words

of our text, he stands upon the mountaintop of faith and declares that even in the midst of calamity and disaster, he will rejoice in the Lord and leap for joy in the God of his salvation. Are you able to say this? Also today, when the staunchest and bravest hearts of men are being shaken and disturbed because of the frightening uncertainty that confronts them? If you and I cannot join with the prophet Habakkuk, what shall we say? If we fail to appropriate unto ourselves this comfort, wherewith then shall we be comforted?

The text speaks of the God of my salvation. We are acquainted with the idea of salvation. It refers to our deliverance from the greatest evil and to our becoming partakers of the highest good. This is not the highest good in the sense that it is the highest to which we could attain, but in the sense that it is the highest good that the Lord could bestow upon us. Briefly expressed, this salvation refers to our deliverance out of all the power of sin and death into the blessed fellowship of God's eternal and heavenly covenant and kingdom.

That God is the God of my salvation surely implies that all salvation is of the Lord. He is a God of salvation; salvation characterizes Him alone and can be ascribed only to Him. He is the God of our salvation because He conceived of it, willed it, laid it away for us from before the foundation of the world. Secondly, God is the God of our salvation because He realized it in Jesus Christ our Lord. It was He who took on our flesh and blood, bore the burden of our guilt, descended into the unfathomably deep and terrible abyss of hell, paid all our debt, and merited for us life and glory everlastingly. And, finally, God is the God of our salvation because it is He who alone saves us, calls us out of darkness into the light, and causes all things to work for our eternal and heavenly salvation.

Furthermore, He is the God of *my* salvation. The text is *personal*. Knowledge concerning the truth, fundamental and important as it is, cannot of itself enable us to give thanks unto the Lord. I must appropriate that living God unto myself. I must be able to say: God has elected *me*, bore *my* guilt, died for *me*, arose from the dead as *my* Savior. This I must know. And this I can know if His Spirit be in me, leading me upon the way everlasting and causing me to seek the things that are above.

Moreover, and this must not escape our attention, the prophet declares that he will rejoice in the *Lord*. The

Lord in this text is Jehovah. Jehovah is the I AM, the unchangeable One. He is unchangeable, everlastingly the same in Himself, and therefore the unchangeable, covenant God of His people. Having loved us, He loves us with an everlasting love; having begun His work of salvation in our hearts, He will complete that work even unto the end. Being Jehovah, and therefore the unchangeable and faithful God, He fulfills His promise once given to His people and repeated throughout the old dispensation, and sends His Son into the world. He does not rest until all the sins of His people have been paid and everlasting salvation has been merited. This constitutes an essential part of the text and explains why trouble and thanksgiving do not exclude each other.

It is because of this salvation that I will rejoice in the Lord, and leap for joy in God. This means in the first place that my joy will be in God; God Himself will be the content of my joy. Let us understand this. We will not rejoice in things. Earthly prosperity and plenty will not constitute my joy and happiness. I will rejoice *in the Lord*. I will leap for joy because He loves me eternally, because He has blotted out all my sins and trespasses and merited life eternal for me, because He has shed His love abroad in my heart and filled me with the unspeakable joy of His fellowship and communion.

But there is more. What must I say with respect to my present anxiety and distress and trouble? What must be my attitude toward this grief and sorrow that are my lot? Must I ignore them? That is impossible. The Lord does not send me trouble and affliction in order that I should ignore them. Certainly I must respond to His heavy hand upon me and take cognizance of my present grief and woe. What shall I say? I will rejoice in the Lord and leap for joy in the God of my salvation. He is always and constantly the God of my salvation, also in connection with my present distresses and sorrows. He is the LORD, Jehovah, is He not? He is Jehovah, the Unchangeable, who loves me and never changes in His love toward me. Hence, I will leap for joy in Him.

This does not mean that I will rejoice because of my present calamities and sorrows, or that the Christian must assume an attitude of indifference over against them. I will rejoice in God. But I will rejoice in Him also in connection with whatever He pleases to send me in the midst of this world. Indeed, I grieve and feel the pain

of my present afflictions. But underneath my sorrow, and sustaining me in my present woe, is the unspeakable joy that also this trouble has been given me of the Lord in His unfathomable love, and that all things must work together to realize the glory that the Lord has laid away for me from before the foundation of the world.


This expression of thanksgiving, so deeply and profoundly spiritual, is not easy. Do not be too hasty in declaring that you are able to take this song of thanksgiving upon your lips. It is easy to speak of victory when no enemy confronts you, to confess unwavering loyalty to the cause of God and of His Christ as long as such loyalty does not involve you in the sufferings of this present time. But are you also able to utter this thanksgiving in the midst of affliction? Are you, even at this very moment, in trouble and sorrow? And does this particular Word of God appear completely beyond your reach so that you cannot possibly attain unto it? Do you ask: How can I rejoice in the Lord and leap for joy in the God of my salvation?

Our text informs us that we must rejoice *in* the God of our salvation. You cannot rejoice and leap for joy in your own strength. But you can do so *in the Lord*. This is true, first of all, objectively. To leap for joy in the God of our salvation implies that we are in God, are rooted in God, have been ingrafted into Jesus Christ our Lord by the God of our salvation. God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light and united us with Himself. Whereas we formerly were of the earth earthy and loved sin and the things that are below, now we have been transplanted into God and live out of Him as the God of our salvation. This is objectively true.

But this must also be true subjectively. Also consciously we must stand and rejoice in the God of our salvation. We must cleave to Him and rejoice in the fact that He has called us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. And do not fail to apply this blessed consciousness of salvation also to the circumstances in which you may presently find yourselves. There is no evil in the city of God that the Lord has not done. There is no distress or sorrow that did not come upon you from the living God. Moreover, He whom you confess to be the God of your salvation is the Lord, Jehovah, who loves you with an everlasting love, constantly and unchangeably. Never does He fail to be

kind and cause all things to work together for your good.

Take this Word upon your lips prayerfully, whatever may be your lot in life: “Thou, God, art the God of my salvation, also now, inasmuch as Thou art Jehovah; give me the peace that transcends all understanding, and en-

able me to view all the things of this present time in the light of the glory that shall be bestowed upon me.” Then you will be able to rejoice also today and glory in the God of your salvation. Yes, truly, we can be thankful always in everything. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

Who Will Train the Churches’ Ministers? or The PRC Seminary: *Door de kerk, voor de kerk*

Who will train your and your children’s future ministers? Who will govern the institution where your pastors are trained? This question is more difficult and more important than you might realize—also for the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), which might surprise you.

Will you and your church train them, as you and your church band together with other churches of like precious faith, instituting a denominational, ecclesiastical seminary? Or will an organization, not from the church, and not governed by the church—a para-church organization—train them?

The PRC Seminary—your seminary, the churches’ seminary—is ecclesiastical. Mid-America Reformed Seminary is not. Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI) and Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI) are ecclesiastical. Westminster semi-

naries—both in Philadelphia and Escondido—are not. The Canadian Reformed Seminary (Hamilton, ON) is ecclesiastical. Heidelberg Seminary (Sioux Falls, SD) and City Seminary (Sacramento, CA), where Reformed Church in the U.S. pastors are trained, are not.

Our conviction is that the *church* must train the churches’ preachers. And not the church as organism, but the church *as institute*. The PRC Seminary is a seminary *of* the church and *for* the church. As our Dutch forefathers would say, *Door de kerk, voor de kerk*. We will not give our students to a non-ecclesiastical institution, a para-church organization, even if there are mostly ordained ministers who teach there, and even if its board listens to the will of the congregations or denominations that support it. We have, and we will continue to have, an *ecclesiastical* seminary.

This was not always the prevailing judgment in the true church of Jesus Christ, even in the years of its greatest strength. And it is my purpose to explain why it was not al-

ways so; how even some of the most respected heavyweights in Dutch Reformed history in the Netherlands came down on the wrong side of this issue; and why it is vital that we maintain, not only the *existence* of, but the keen *consciousness* of the *reason* for, an ecclesiastical seminary.

It was not always so...

In the early history of Reformed Christianity in the Netherlands (and other countries) preachers were trained in institutions that were partly under the control of the churches, but also under the supervision and control of the civil government. Civil government commonly had significant influence in the churches, determining whether synods could be held and where ministers would be stationed, providing salaries for the ministers, as well as establishing and funding universities where ministers would be trained. At some of these publicly-funded universities, one branch of study was “religious studies,” at which branch ministers

An expanded version of this convocation address is being prepared for publication in our seminary’s Theological Journal.

were trained. Because the government officials were often Reformed Christians, the Reformed churches did not consider this an encroachment. For example, Prince William of Orange rewarded the city of Leiden for their faithfulness with a university, intended primarily to train ministers. The great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck prepared for the ministry in Leiden.

In the seventeenth century, even though Holland's major ecclesiastical assemblies declared that professors of theology were to be *subject* to the church, these professors were nevertheless appointed by the government. And even though the great Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) determined that, from then on "the theological professors must appear at synod and there give an account of their teaching and submit themselves to the judgment of synod," the Synod thought little of it that the "seminaries" themselves were not strictly ecclesiastical.

In the 200-year period between the great Synod and the Afscheiding (Secession) of 1834, matters did not improve. Ministerial training remained governed and supported by the civil government.

The Afscheiding and Doleantie

At the Afscheiding of 1834, matters changed.

When Hendrick DeCock and the others whom God raised up left the corrupt State church in 1834, they soon established an *ecclesiastical* seminary for the training of ministers. These fathers were determined that the civil govern-

ment would no longer be involved in the training of ministers; they believed the work was the work of the *church*.

For the first twenty years when the churches were small and incapable of doing very much formally, the instruction was given by individual pastors. But in 1854 a seminary was officially established in Kampen with synod appointing four ministers as professors of theology. Reformed believers in the Netherlands finally had a seminary "of the church and for the church." *Door de kerk; voor de kerk*. The Afscheiding's tradition is an ecclesiastical seminary—a school that proceeds from the church as institute and is governed by the church as institute.

It was not so in the later Doleantie tradition of Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper was not a part of the Afscheiding tradition. Growing up in the State church, he was trained in and knew only the tradition of these universities under government control—most of which, in his day, were corrupt. Kuyper dreamed of a different university, a Reformed university independent of state control; that is, a "free university," as it is still known today. Kuyper's dream was brought to fruition in the 1880 establishment of the "Free University of Amsterdam." Here, theological development could be carried out 1) free from State control (even though with his political clout Kuyper was able to gain state *funding*); 2) in organic unity with all the other sciences, among which Kuyper declared theology "queen"; and 3) free from *ecclesiastical* con-

trol; that is, it was not a university of the Hervormde Kerk, the State Church of the Netherlands.

Believing young men who aspired to the ministry again had the option of a university faithful to the Reformed tradition—Kuyper's Free University.

And, keep in mind, the establishment of "The Free" took place *before* the next reform movement of 1886. Six years after the university was founded, Kuyper was instrumental in leading many out of the State Church in a movement called the Doleantie—"The Grieving Ones." Grieved over the corruption of the State Church, these believers formed a new denomination of churches rather than joining the churches of the Afscheiding.

Very soon, these two reform movements spoke of merging. But this proposed union faced a difficult obstacle. Would the newly-formed denomination train its ministers in Kampen—the ecclesiastically controlled seminary of the Afscheiding, or in Amsterdam—the Free University of the Doleantie? This question became an issue of sore contention.

The Afscheiding branch was convinced that the word of God *required* ministers be trained *door de kerk en voor de kerk*. Thus, in 1891 (one year before the merger was consummated) the Afscheiding churches declared it to be a *principle* for them (that is, non-negotiable) that the church is called to maintain her own institution for training ministers. Yet the 1892 merger forced them to compromise. Each side accepted the principle

that the Churches ought to *have* an institution for the training of their ministers, but they also upheld the principle of free study.

It was a great disappointment for the Afscheiding fathers that their most capable and promising minister, Herman Bavinck, left his position at their *ecclesiastical* seminary at Kampen and in 1902 joined the faculty at Kuyper's Free University. For many in his tradition Bavinck betrayed them regarding their commitment to a seminary *door de kerk, voor de kerk*. It became worse when one of his colleagues debated this with him, and Bavinck responded, "The office of doctor of theology (Bavinck was referring to seminary professors)...cannot be shown to be an ecclesiastical office." Bavinck concluded that, because there cannot be ecclesiastical office apart from the consistory, his own professorship at "The Free" was not connected to the church in any official way.

Bavinck's opinion notwithstanding, the Afscheiding fathers did not give up. In 1909, at a celebration of Kampen's work, a Rev. J. Kok took direct aim at his Doleantie colleagues, and spoke on the subject, "The Training for the Ministry of the Word: For the Church, By the Church." In the Dutch, *door de kerk, voor de kerk*.

The struggle in America

When our forefathers settled in this country and established the Christian Reformed Church, their *practice* was the Afscheiding practice—an ecclesiastical seminary.

Keep in mind the dates. The

CRC began in 1857, only three years after the Afscheiding fathers established their seminary in Kampen. It was not a question for most of these Reformed Hollanders that the *church* must train the churches' preachers. Thus, after their first few years of training ministers in various pastors' studies (just as the Secession fathers did, only twenty years before) they established a seminary *door de kerk, voor de kerk*. They *practiced* the Afscheiding's commitment.

But the question of *principle* was not so decisively answered in the CRC. And not all were so certain that their seminary would remain *door de kerk, voor de kerk*. Kuyperian influences were appearing.

Therefore, when the Rev. Foppe Ten Hoor—Herman Bavinck's colleague, who crossed swords with him in the Netherlands over this issue—was appointed in 1900 to teach in the CRC Seminary, he was determined to carry on the fight to maintain *ecclesiastical* training of ministers as a *principle*. The church *as church* must train her own pastors.

As Ten Hoor observed the members of the Theological School committee—at that time called the Curatorium—he saw leanings towards the "Kuyperian Alternative," as the view was labeled. He was convinced that, if something were not done quickly, a majority of them would soon favor it. That this "Kuyperian Alternative" would be so quickly transplanted in this country dismayed Ten Hoor. And it did not help matters that the Curatorium soon appointed as one of his col-

leagues a non-ordained professor. This was only further evidence to him that his denomination was departing from the principle: *Door de kerk, voor de kerk*.

The end of the story for Ten Hoor was that he and some of his colleagues asked Synod 1908 to declare the seminary to be an ecclesiastical institution as a matter of principle. Synod's study committee could not come to an agreement on the matter, and the next Synod (1910) concluded: "We will not make a declaration on this, lest the troubles that plagued the Netherlands also bother us; but Professor Ten Hoor ought to rest content in the *reality* that our seminary is an ecclesiastical institution."

For our mother church, this statement of 1910 was the end of the matter; and thus they maintained the reality of an ecclesiastical institution—Calvin Seminary—but without official declaration that this was required of them.

The application today

And this explains two very interesting matters—one perhaps only interesting, the other of some importance for the PRC.

Of interest to us is a serious struggle in the merger process between the Canadian (and American) Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches—the very question of where their ministers will be trained. The Canadian Reformed stand strongly in the tradition of the Afscheiding; the United Reformed has primarily used Mid-American Reformed Seminary—a "Kuyperian Alternative" school, as we might call

it. And though, after much discussion and debate, the official decision (in 2007) was to allow *both* schools for the future united denomination, still today there are strong voices of dissatisfaction with that decision.

What is more than “of interest” to the PRC, and what may surprise most in the PRC, is that the “Kuyperian Alternative” also influenced us. Not in actual *practice*, for we clearly practice the Afscheiding tradition. But in *some* of our official documents relating to the life and government of our seminary this “Kuyperian Alternative” is still clearly evident.

First, there is not one word in the *Church Order* itself that requires ministers to be trained in an ecclesiastical seminary.

Second, what the *Church Order* does say is weak, if not questionable. Article 18—the only article that speaks directly about training pastors—only says what is the *task* of the professors of theology, and nothing about where these professors labor or about the relationship

between seminary and churches. And Article 3 has the curious statement, explainable only by this Dutch history of ministerial training outside the church institute, that “not even professors of theology” may enter the ministry of the gospel without a lawful call. That is, the *Church Order* assumes the, to us, strange reality of seminary professors who are not ordained ministers.

Third, our “Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology” most clearly reflects this “Kuyperian Alternative” when it blatantly states that “it cannot be disapproved of that future ministers of the Word should receive their training at” another university, as long as that university “is founded on the basis of Holy Scripture, accepts the confession of a certain denomination, and this denomination has part control in the appointing of professors of theology.” Amazing!

But a couple considerations should relieve any discomfort a PRC member may have at this point.

First, very happily, our *practice*

is inconsistent with these few statements that hint of the “Kuyperian Alternative.” We have a seminary under direct control and supervision of the churches through their synod. Professors are appointed by, supervised by, and always answerable to synod. We have an *ecclesiastical* seminary—*through* the church and *for* the church. We reject the “Kuyperian Alternative.”

We also reject that “Kuyperian Alternative” *officially*. More than the 1910 Synod gave Prof. Ten Hoor, we have confidence for our seminary because the constitutions, both of our school itself and of the board that governs it, now make clear that this institution is an ecclesiastical institution.

Thus, there is no breach in our walls that may, some day, allow a non-ecclesiastical school for our churches’ future ministers. ☞

(Next time: the biblical basis and the practical benefits of an ecclesiastical seminary.)

GOD’S WONDERFUL WORKS

REV. JAMES LANING

Foundational Principles (1)

Scripture: What the Spirit says

There is nothing more important than having fellowship with God, and to have fellowship with God we need to know, and know with certainty, what it is that He says to us.

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

Anyone who truly loves God earnestly desires to know what God says to him. If he is taught that there are many errors and contradictions in the Bible, and that therefore there is no way for us to know for sure what God says to us, he will be miserably sad. Yet what a joy will come over him, if he is led to understand that he can know, and know for sure, all that God says to him.

With that in mind, let us consider the fundamentally important truth of the infallible inspiration of Holy Scripture.

Scripture declaring itself to be God's word

Scripture itself tells us that it is the word of God. We can see that on every page. For example, while reading the Scriptures we repeatedly come across phrases such as: "Thus saith the LORD...." "And God said...." From the beginning to the end of the book, God tells us that what we have in Scripture really is His word.

There are also some key passages that explicitly address the subject of the inspiration of Scripture. One of these is II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

The English phrase "given by inspiration of God" is actually a translation of a single word that means "God-breathed." Literally, therefore, the passage reads: "All Scripture is God-breathed."

That, in short, is what inspiration means. That Scripture is inspired by God means that God really did breathe out the very words that we have recorded for us in Scripture.

Now since Scripture is God-breathed, it must be infallible. The word *infallible* means *without error* and *incapable of erring*. If it is the word of God, it must, of course, be without error, seeing as God never errs.

But what about the fact that God used fallible humans to write down what He said. Could not errors have crept in because of this?

That brings us to consider a second key passage on the inspiration of Scripture.

Writers guided by the Spirit

Although it is true that those who wrote God's word were of themselves men liable to err, while they were engaged in this act of writing they were infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21).

That the writers were "moved by the Holy Ghost" means literally that they were carried along by the Spirit while they engaged in this work, so that what they wrote down was precisely the words that the Spirit guided them to write.

But, someone may say, Scripture is sometimes called the words of this or that prophet. Take, for example, what we read at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah. "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah..." (Jer. 1:1).

This passage is not saying that the book of Jeremiah is some sort of a combination of what Jeremiah says and what God says. The whole book is said to be "the words of Jeremiah," and yet it rightly belongs in the Bible. That is because the book contains the words that Jeremiah wrote while he was being moved infallibly by the Spirit of God. It was the Spirit who was the one speaking in and through the prophet Jeremiah.

There is nothing wrong with referring to a psalm of David as "what David said," or to an epistle of Paul as "what Paul said." Such phrases are found in a number of places in the Scriptures themselves. What they wrote can rightly be referred to as their words. But it was the Spirit who was speaking in and through them, so that what they put down was precisely, word for word, what the Spirit wanted them to write.

That is what is meant by the wonder of the inspiration of Scripture.

The Spirit speaking to us

There are some who like to speak of private messages that the Holy Spirit supposedly has said to them. The Spirit does indeed talk to us, but how do we know what the Spirit says?

The answer is that Scripture is the record of what the Spirit says. Scripture itself says this. Repeatedly in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, we come across this exhortation: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:6).

The book of Revelation tells us what the Spirit says, and then exhorts us to listen to what He says. In passages such as this, listening to Scripture is said to be listening to the Spirit.

To quote Scripture is to quote what the Spirit says. We often find in one Scripture passage a quote taken from another Scripture passage. Note in the verse from Hebrews quoted below that what Scripture says in Psalm 95 is referred to as what the Holy Ghost says: "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice" (Heb. 3:7).

Psalm 95 was written by a man. Yet the quote is said to be what the Holy Spirit said.


The Spirit does indeed speak to us, but we must not be fooled into thinking that our own private feelings are the words of the Spirit. Scripture is the record, the one, infallibly inspired record, of what the Spirit says.

Delighting to hear what the Spirit says

Listening to the Scriptures is therefore listening to the Spirit, and rejecting the Scriptures is rejecting the Spirit.

Many, however, do not want to think of themselves as rejecting God when they reject what Scripture says.

So they try to escape this condemnation by denying that what is said in Scripture really is the word of God. Those who do this, however, are not escaping their guilt, but rather increasing it.

A very different attitude toward Scripture is found in those who truly love God and desire to do what He says. To them the truth that Scripture is God-breathed, and thus infallible, gives them great joy. They find great delight in knowing and being assured that they have in Scripture a perfect record of what their God lovingly says to them. 

SPECIAL ARTICLE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENG

Augustine's View of the Indissolubility of the Marriage Bond (2)

Only Death Dissolves the Marriage Bond

Although in his teaching he stressed the permanence of marriage, Augustine recognized that the Scriptures permit divorce. The Scriptures permit divorce on one ground: adultery. "We must understand," says Augustine, "that a wife is not allowed to put away her husband except for the same reason for which a husband is allowed to put away his wife, that is, fornication."¹ The Lord "obliges a husband to keep his wife if there is no case of fornication."² Adultery is a ground for divorce because the nature of this sin is that it violates the unique and ex-

clusive intimacy of marriage. "One is allowed to divorce a wife in case of fornication for the precise reason that she first did not wish to be a wife who has not preserved conjugal fidelity to her husband."³

Although Augustine recognized the permissibility of divorce on the ground of adultery, even then the marriage bond remained intact. Divorce in Augustine's view did not sever the bond of marriage, but constituted legal separation, separation from bed and board. "This union divine Scripture so commands that it is not permitted a woman who has been dismissed by her husband to marry again, as long as her husband lives, nor is it permitted a man who has been dismissed by his wife to marry again, unless she who left has died."⁴ In his work entitled "Adulterous Marriages" Augustine insists on the permanence of the marriage bond.

The husband also is bound as long as his wife lives, whether she be adulterous or chaste, and he, too, commits adultery if he marries another. This bond is never dis-

¹ Augustine, "Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons," 65. I will be quoting from these works of Augustine as they are included in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Thomas P. Halton, Ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, repr. 1981-2011), volumes 11, 27, 38, 70, and 78.

² "Sermon on the Mount," 64.

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This article is a continuation of his article on Augustine held over from the October 15, 2014 Special Issue on Augustine.

³ "Tractates on the Gospel of John 1-10," 195.

⁴ "Good of Marriage," 12.

solved at any time, even if a spouse is separated by divorce from a chaste partner. Much less is the bond dissolved if she commits adultery before the separation. From this we may know that she is freed only by the death of her husband, whose death is reckoned, not from his lapse into adultery, but from his departure from the body. As a result, if the wife leaves her adulterous husband and does not wish to be reconciled to him, let her remain unmarried. (118).

In “Sermon #260” in his collection of “Sermons On the Liturgical Seasons,” Augustine counsels: “You who do not have wives may marry women whose husbands are not living. Women whose husbands are not living are permitted to marry only men whose wives are not living” (378).

Augustine scholar Eugene Portalie summarizes the bishop’s position: “The indissolubility of marriage found a staunch defender in Augustine.... Neither adultery nor actual separation nor sterility nor even apostasy can dissolve this bond. Only the death of one of the spouses will sunder it.”⁵

Forbidding the Remarriage of the “Innocent Party”

Consistent with his view of the permanence of marriage and his teaching that only death dissolves the marriage bond, Augustine disapproved even the remarriage of those who have come to be referred to as the “innocent party,” that is, the spouse not responsible for the breakup of the marriage. It is precisely the issue of the remarriage of the innocent party that is Augustine’s main concern in his treatise entitled “Adulterous Marriages.” In his introduction to this work, the translator Charles Huegelmeyer summarizes Augustine’s position.

The two books, *Adulterous Marriages*, are basically exegetical in character. Augustine’s conclusions are based on a carefully considered and finely drawn comparison of the passages in holy Scripture which relate to the question at hand. They are written in argumentative style and are a model of dialectic development of a main premise, which is, in this case, the statement of Mark and Luke that a Christian who divorces his spouse and remarries contracts an adulterous union, even if the divorce has as its ground adultery on the part of one of the spouses. (55).

⁵ Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, H. Regnery, 1960, 268.

Already several years prior to the publication of “Adulterous Marriages,” Augustine had taken the stand that the remarriage of the innocent party is forbidden by Scripture. This had been his contention in his “Commentary on the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” composed in A.D. 393-394. Treating Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:31 and 32 Augustine wrote that “if a husband puts away his wife (and this is permitted on account of fornication), he is to remain without a wife or be reconciled with the wife that he put away” (37). A bit later in this same work he wrote: “Furthermore, because a man commits adultery by marrying a woman who has been divorced from her husband—even though she has not put away her husband, but has herself been put away—she makes him commit adultery, for the Lord forbids this marriage no less strongly [than marriage to a woman who has put away her husband]. Hence, the conclusion is that—whether she has put away her husband or has herself been put away—she is obliged to remain unmarried or to be reconciled with her husband” (38).

From this position forbidding the right of remarriage to the innocent party, Augustine never wavered. In a sermon preached in A.D. 420 entitled “To Married Couples,” he addressed these words to the members of his congregation:

You are not allowed to take wives whose previous husbands are still alive; nor are you, ladies, allowed to take husbands whose previous wives are alive. Such unions are adulterous, not by the law of the courts, but by the law of heaven. Not even a woman who has left her husband by formal divorce are you allowed to marry, while her husband is still alive. On account of fornication alone is it permissible for you to put away an adulterous wife; but while she is still alive, you are not permitted to marry another. Nor are you, ladies, permitted to take as husbands those men whose wives have left them by formal divorce; it is not allowed; these are adulterous unions, not marriages. (43).

The Exception Clause of Matthew 19:9

As in our day, so in Augustine’s day, appeal was made to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 as justification for the remarriage of the innocent party: “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery:

and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” Augustine rejected the view that the exception clause provides not only the ground for divorce, but extends also to the right of remarriage. Besides the fact that grammatically the exception clause modifies “Whosoever shall put away his wife,” and not “and shall marry another,” he insisted that the Lord’s statement in Matthew 19:9 must be interpreted in light of the parallels in Mark 10:11, 12 and Luke 16:18. In these parallel passages the Lord forbids remarriage *absolutely*—all remarriage. It is in light of these passages that Matthew 19:9 with its exception clause must be interpreted. In light of the parallel passages, Matthew 19:9 is not giving a ground for remarriage, but the ground for divorce. Augustine contended that this is the only possible understanding of Matthew 19:9 when Scripture is compared with Scripture.

“Therefore,” says Augustine, “we have this same precept of the Lord: ‘Let not a husband put away his wife,’ because ‘Everyone who puts away his wife, save on account of immorality, causes her to commit adultery.’ But if he puts her away for this reason, even so: let him remain unmarried. For, ‘Everyone who puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery’ [Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18].”⁶ A bit later in the same work he insists that “it is not lawful for a wife to marry after a husband has been put away, nor is it lawful for the husband to remarry after his wife has been put away, because the Lord has left no place for exception, in saying [in Mark 10:11 and Luke 16:18]: ‘If the wife puts away her husband and marries another, she commits adultery,’ and ‘Everyone who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery.’”⁷

Besides interpreting Matthew 19:9 in light of the parallel passages in the other gospel narratives, Jesus’ teaching must also be interpreted in light of the rest of Scripture, according to Augustine. Especially must Jesus’ teaching be interpreted in comparison to the apostle Paul’s teaching on the permanence of marriage in Romans 7:1-3 and I Corinthians 7:39. In these passages the apostle teaches that marriage is for life and that only death dissolves the marriage bond. “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her hus-

band so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Rom. 7:3). “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” By these words the apostle forbids all remarriage of those who are divorced so long as the spouse from whom they are divorced is living. “Do not you realize,” says Augustine,

how contrary this is to the Apostle’s words: “A woman is bound as long as her husband is alive”? Or are you perhaps, going to say: As a matter of fact, he is alive, but he is no longer her husband, because he ceased being her husband at the time when she dissolved the marriage bond by her adultery? How, then, these words, “While her husband is alive, she will be called an adulteress, if she be with another man,” since he is not now her husband after the marriage bond has already been dissolved through the adultery of the woman? For, during what husband’s life, if not her own husband’s, will she be called an adulteress, if she be found with another man? But, if he has now ceased to be her husband, she will not be called an adulteress, even if her husband is alive, and she be with another man. However, not having a husband, she will obtain one through her second marriage. Do you not perceive how contrary to the Apostle is the opinion of the one who thinks this way?⁸

Two Further Considerations

There were two further compelling considerations that in the mind of Augustine confirmed his conviction that all remarriage after divorce, even the remarriage of the innocent party, is forbidden.

First, if the innocent party is permitted to remarry, what this means is that either the act of adultery or the subsequent divorce severed the marriage bond. The permission to remarry rests on the assumption that the previous marriage no longer exists. If this is so, if the previous marriage is no longer intact, there is nothing to prevent even the guilty party from remarrying. The marriage, after all, has been dissolved. The marriage bond does not any longer exist. If either the act of adultery or divorce dissolve the marriage bond, then in the end the responsibility for the divorce is immaterial. Since the bond is severed, those who are divorced ought to

⁶ “Adulterous Marriages,” 93.

⁷ “Adulterous Marriages,” 97.

⁸ “Adulterous Marriages,” 104.

be permitted to remarry. This Augustine viewed as the necessary consequence of the permission of remarriage to the innocent party. In the view of Augustine the right of remarriage could not consistently be limited only to the innocent party.

Accordingly, if she is bound as long as her husband lives, she is in no wise said to be freed from this bond except after the death of her husband. Furthermore, if the death of either severs the bond between husband and wife, and if fornication also is equivalent to death, as you say, a woman will undoubtedly be loosed also from this bond when she has committed fornication. Nor will one be able to say that she is bound to her husband, when her husband has been freed from her. Hence, as soon as she afterwards ceases to be bound to her husband by reason of her fornication, no one who marries her will be guilty of adultery.⁹

For since the bond of her previous marriage has been dissolved...no matter whom she now marries, as long as he has no wife, her second marriage will not be regarded as a union of two adulterers, but one, rather between husband and wife.¹⁰

This is exactly what has happened in the churches that in previous decades opened the door to the remarriage of the innocent party. Invariably that opening of the door of remarriage after divorce, that small crack, has led to flinging the door wide open to all remarriage after divorce. Maybe, in some cases, an apology or confession of sin has been required, but notwithstanding the remarriage is approved—a remarriage that involves in reality continued living in sin.

A second reason on account of which Augustine took a strong stand against all remarriage after divorce was his insistence on the biblical injunction that those who were divorced must be reconciled to each other and must work at reconciliation. This is Paul's exhortation in I Corinthians 7:11, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." The permission to remarry effectively precludes the possibility of reconciliation. How can they be reconciled to each other when one or both of them has remarried? But reconciliation is exactly what ought to take place: "If a

husband puts away his wife (and this is permitted on account of fornication)," says Augustine, "he is to remain without a wife or be reconciled with the wife that he put away."¹¹ "Hence the conclusion" of the Lord's teaching, according to Augustine, "is that—whether she has put away her husband or has herself been put away—she is obliged to remain unmarried or to be reconciled with her husband."¹² In another place he writes concerning the apostle's injunction in I Corinthians 7:11 that "[h]ere it is likewise understood that if the wife has left the husband for the one reason which alone permits separation from the spouse, she ought to abide strictly in the unmarried state. But if she does not remain continent, [she ought] to be reconciled to her husband...."¹³

Augustine was not insensitive to the burden which his (Scripture's) teaching about marriage and remarriage placed upon the members of the church who had been divorced. He knew by his own experience the power of the sexual aspect of man's nature, as well as the need for companionship. But with characteristic pastoral wisdom, Augustine pointed the members of the church living in this distressing circumstance both to their fellow Christians and to the grace of God which is always sufficient.

The burden of self-restraint [on those divorced and forbidden to remarry] must not terrify them. It will be lighter if it is Christ's and it will be Christ's if that faith is present which obtains from the Lawgiver the grace to do what He has ordained. Let them not be crushed by the fact that their self-restraint seems to be forced and not to come from the will, because even those who have freely chosen it have made it a matter of necessity, since they cannot deviate from its practice without condemnation, and those who have been forced into its practice make it a matter of free choice, providing they do not rely upon themselves but upon Him from whom is every good.¹⁴

Conclusion

There is an urgent necessity for the church of our day to reexamine and reassess Augustine's teaching on marriage. The problem of divorce and remarriage is

⁹ "Adulterous Marriages," 103.

¹⁰ "Adulterous Marriages," 104.


¹¹ "Sermon on the Mount," 64.

¹² "Sermon on the Mount," 70.

¹³ "Eighty-Three Different Questions," 219.

¹⁴ "Adulterous Marriages," 129.

widespread and worsening. It comes to it that the rate of divorce and remarriage among those who profess to be Christians is not significantly below the rate among non-Christians. Every pastor deals with strained marriages, divorce and remarriage, and the painful consequences of the breakup of the family, especially the scarring of the children. For the well-being of married couples, in the interests of the significance of marriage as a picture of the

relationship between Christ and His church, as well as a reflection of the unbreakableness of God's covenant, and motivated by faithfulness to the teaching of the Word of God, the church today is in urgent need of honoring the will of God regarding marriage. That will of God, as Augustine taught already in the fourth century, is that the bond of marriage is a lifelong, indissoluble bond. 

O COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

With Willing Heart:

The Offering 9a

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments.

Exodus 35:21

Introduction

Having worked through the principles of worship found in God's Word, we are now engaged in a study of the elements of worship. In this article and the next we take up the element of the offertory, an element that has us replying to God with the worship of giving our resources to the Lord.

The approach of these two articles must be to address the subject with both law and gospel. The *command* to give must not be neglected, and the gospel of grace which primes the hearts of God's people to let go of all other security and trust the good way of God's law must be made plain. This is necessary because the giving of alms, as all aspects of worship, is a heart issue. Our depraved hearts tend to make us idolize and trust in money. And it is not until our hearts are captured by the sovereign grace of God that we worship God as He commands and our hands let go of our money.

Rev. Griess is pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2014, p. 488.

The basic issue in this element of worship is not how much money we make or do not make. It is not how much we can give or cannot give at whatever stage of life we are in. The basic issue is the heart that knows the grace that God has given to His people, and therefore desires to honor the Lord with money. Grace alone will motivate us to follow God's command and give with willing hearts in worship.

The Element

Offerings have been part of the worship of God since Old Testament times. We see that in the context of the passage of Scripture at the head of this article. God has taken the Israelites out of the bondage of Egypt, and they are now gathered at Mt Sinai. At the base of Mt. Sinai the Israelites receive two things: the law of God and the plans for the tabernacle. This is why God has taken them out of Egypt. He has brought them to Himself that He might rule them and that He might dwell among them in the tabernacle. And in our text the Israelites are going to build that tabernacle at the base of the mount before they carry on with their journey. But in order to build that beautiful building they need material. Hence, God directly commands Moses to take up a collection for the advance of the kingdom of God in the building of the tabernacle: "And Moses spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye

from among you an offering unto the LORD" (Ex. 35:4, 5).

Throughout Old Testament history offerings were required of God and given for the support of the priests and the operation of the tabernacle and temple. Under King Josiah a chest was set in the temple in which people could put money for the purpose of the upkeep of the temple. Apparently, that remained a practice into the New Testament, for we find the same thing in the temple even in Jesus' day, (Mark 12:41).¹

God requires that offerings are to be part of our worship services in the New Testament as well. The New Testament itself shows us that when it says that offerings were the regular practice of the New Testament Christian worship services: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (I Cor. 16:1-2). On the first day of the week, Sunday, when worship services were held in the New Testament church, the apostle Paul commands that the church in Corinth take collections for the saints, and then tells them he has commanded the same thing for the churches in Galatia. Collections were a part of the public corporate worship of the church. The Heidelberg Catechism is correct then, when in Lord's Day 38 it lists along with the other elements demanded by the regulative principle the element of the offering. There is some freedom regarding how many offerings; there is some freedom in regards to specific causes; and there is freedom regarding when to take them in the service. But giving is part of biblical worship.

The Element Carried Out

There are basically two categories of offerings in worship. The first is for the support of the function and extension of the church of Jesus Christ in various ways and forms. The second is for the relief of the poor. There are examples of both in Scripture.

I have already given one example of collecting for financial support for the kingdom—Josiah's chest in the temple, where money was given in support of the temple life. In the passage of Scripture highlighted at the top of this article, the giving is for the building and maintenance

of the tabernacle, the house of Jehovah God. In Exodus 36:3 the Bible says the people bring their offerings "for the work of the service of the sanctuary," that is, for the tabernacle and the running of the tabernacle. God had revealed to His people that His tent in the middle of their tribes would be His dwelling among them. The people were given the calling to support financially the building of the place where God would dwell.

The New Testament application of the support of the tabernacle is not specifically and directly to the building of our church buildings. God would dwell in the tabernacle among the people, and God dwells not in a specific building today, but He dwells in the hearts of His people. The application here is that giving must be for the work of the church that builds up God's people in every form. Chiefly, it would apply to the maintaining of the pastor's salary so that he can devote himself to the Word of God, for the way in which God will dwell among His people is by Word and Spirit. Included is the collecting of gifts for the financial support of seminary instruction that makes the preaching possible. The evangelism and mission efforts of the church must be a good portion of the purpose of these collections, since God's church is gathered and preserved also through mission work. And more, since God's people generally need a place in which to receive God's Word and carry out public corporate worship, the support and maintenance of a building may be included here. God has tied the support of all spiritual interests to external means. Therefore collections are taken for the support of the kingdom of Christ.

Second, collections are taken for the relief of the poor. This need was the impetus for the office of deacon in the New Testament church. The Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily help for the poor, therefore the office of deacon was instituted to distribute the money collected for the poor (Acts 6:1-6). The relief of the poor along with the support of the kingdom has always been the calling of the church. In I Corinthians 16, where Paul commands collections be taken in the Sunday worship, those collections are both for the support of the church in Jerusalem and the assistance of the poor saints there.

Giving to the Lord

We must give. We must give in worship. And we must give in worship as an *act of worship*. This is important

¹ Matthew Henry in his commentary on Mark 12:41 says these treasuries were also for the relief of the poor.

to remember. When we gather for worship, part of our worship is this consecration of our resources to God's specific use. It is to be an act of specific and overt devotion to Him, of love and praise expressed. Giving in the worship service is different from giving in any other instance (although all giving should be generally unto the Lord). This is part of the public corporate worship of the church. We are meeting face to face with Jehovah God, and the offerings we bring, we bring directly to Him.


That is seen in the symbolism of the offertory in most Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The deacons collect the money, and after that they do not immediately bring the money to the bank, or to the contractor who fixed the door of the church building, or even to the council room to lay the money on the table. They lay the collected money on the table in front of the congregation. This represents the offering of this money to the service of Jehovah on behalf of the whole congregation. It is given to Him, and only later is it distributed to the specific causes. It is offered to the Lord as an act of worship.

The offering is part of the dialogue of worship. It is not in response to a specific element of worship, however; it is really a response to God's grace that He bestows upon us in every way in worship and in our lives. It is a response to His gift of meeting with us in worship and to all the gifts of His grace. It is a very significant thing that happens when the collection plate passes in front of us in the service. It is worship of God in thanks for His mercies. If we don't give anything to Him, but simply let the collection plate go by, we are not participating in one of the elements of worship. We are snubbing God before His face, since this worship is the covenantal meeting between Him and His people.

Since our giving is worship, our giving should be thoughtful and prepared giving. We ought to think at home before we come to church about what we are going to give. And if we give more to certain causes that we believe are more pressing, we ought to decide this prayerfully beforehand. We ought to prepare our children to give by giving them something to put into the collection plate, teaching them to be a part of this aspect of worship just as we teach them to sing with us and pray with us.

We ought to be truly giving from the heart when the

collection plate comes around and we drop our offering in. It is easy to look at the offering as "half-time" of the worship service—time to take a breather or go to the bathroom or get a drink. But this is a low view of what is happening at this point in worship. We are to be meditating on what we are doing, and give from the heart. One way to do that is to pray privately before or as we place our offering in the plate. "Lord receive this from a willing heart that is thankful for all Thou hast done." "Lord use this for the good of Thy kingdom that I love and serve for the great mercy shown to me a sinner." It should be a time of meditation on the gifts God gives us, that our giving be performed with willing hearts.

This meditation on giving could be aided perhaps by the minister reading an appropriate passage during the offertory, or even by the congregational singing of a song having to do with giving. There is really an inconsistency in our worship when we have the piano playing during the offertory but no singing.² I have already written on the distinction between elements and circumstances in worship. There we spoke about how the musical accompaniment is not an element but a circumstance, and how it is given to carry out the element, not to be an element itself. Musical accompaniment is not really necessary for the carrying out of the element of the offertory, and therefore is dangerously close to becoming its own element of worship. The suggestion may be made that it would be better that a passage of scripture on giving be read, or a song sung, or that we sit in silence and meditate on our giving to the Lord and pray.³ Our giving must not devolve into mere custom and habit, but must be an act of worship to the God who has given all things necessary for body and soul to us. 

² The prelude is not subject to the same criticism because it is not part of the worship service.

³ Abraham Kuyper "wishes" that it was the practice of the Dutch Reformed to read a scripture passage during the offering. (See Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 213.) Prof. Herman Hanko says that singing during the offering was the norm in the early years of PRC history. His sentiments are that a song would be too distracting unless it was a song about giving. A song about giving would indeed aid one in carrying out the element of the offering, and would itself be a commanded element of worship. Prof. Hanko does not comment on the concept of reading a passage of scripture during the offertory (*Standard Bearer* vol. 61, Issue 4, "Our Order of Worship").

The Importance of Knowing Church History (1)

Introduction

One purpose of this article is to convince you that you must *know* the history of the church. You must know, and should be interested in, the history of the church that is recorded in the Bible. You must know and should be interested the history of the church after the closing of the canon of Scripture—from the first century A.D. to the present. Maybe you are wondering if it is really necessary to make the case that knowing church history is important. Is it not a given that knowing church history is important? I hope that I am writing to brothers and sisters who understand the importance of the church's history. But the fact is, that we live in a day when there is not much interest in the history of the church. So it is worthwhile to consider why church history must be known and is also worth knowing.

The second obvious purpose of the article is to encourage you to read and study church history. I would guess that you probably need this encouragement to read and study church history more than you need to be convinced that knowing church history is important. You know the past is important. As Reformed believers, you love the heritage of the Reformation. And you want to walk in the *old paths* and maintain the *traditions* that have been handed down to us by our fathers. So you know the history of the church is important and do not have a great need to be convinced of that. But how much time must be spent actually digging into the past? When was the last time you read a book, much less an article, about the history of the church? This may be a bold statement, but I will make it anyway: *in general, the members of the church today do not read as much as they should; and in particular they do not read as much church history as they should.* So I will attempt to stir up in you an enthusiasm for reading and studying church history.

Rev. Spronk is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois. This is the edited text of the speech Rev. Spronk gave at the annual meeting of the RFPA on September 25, 2014.

We ask a simple question: why is it important to know church history? To that question a multitude of answers could be given, but I will answer that question under these two headings: 1) We are *required* to know church history; 2) It is *for our benefit* to know church history.

We are required by God Himself to know the history of the church. This is not to say that God requires that we know every detail of church history. If you do not know all about the life of St. Augustine, you do not need to fear you are guilty of disobeying God's demand that you know church history.

But, we do learn in the Bible that each generation must pass on to the next generation the knowledge of God's law (Deut. 6), the knowledge of God's mighty works (Ps. 145), and the knowledge of God's truth (II Tim. 3). By requiring this transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next God requires the knowledge of church history.

We find an example of this in Joshua 5. The people of Israel had crossed the Jordan River. They crossed Jordan because God performed a mighty miracle. The Jordan had overflowed its banks. It was humanly impossible for all of the people of Israel to cross the river with all of their possessions. But God performed a wonder by opening up a path through the river. After that miracle God ordered Joshua to set up twelve stones as a memorial. The purpose of these stones was that they would serve as a means of instruction for the future generations of Israelites. We read of this in Joshua 4:21-23,

And he spake to the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over.

By ordering Joshua to build the memorial and the fathers to teach their children about this event in the future, God required the knowledge of church history.

Sadly, we find in Judges 2:10 that this generation that God commanded to teach their children did not do so: “And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works that he had done for Israel.” The following generation did not know church history! And the passage clearly teaches that God deplored this lack of knowledge. God is not pleased when one generation does not learn from the previous one the works He has done to save His people in the past.

The New Testament also requires the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. In I Timothy the apostle Paul spoke to Timothy as his spiritual son (1:2). Paul committed the gospel unto Timothy and trained him to be a pastor (6:20). The truth was handed from one generation to the next. Consequently, in II Timothy Paul tells Timothy he must commit that same gospel to the next generation of ministers: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). The gospel is to be handed down from one generation of ministers to the next, so that in each generation there will be ministers to preach the Word to the people of God.

The idea is that each generation must commit the gospel to the next until the coming again of Jesus Christ. The truth does not change. Each generation of the true church of Jesus Christ confesses the very same truth confessed by all of the generations before. If the church today will confess the truth, then her confession must be based on a knowledge of the truth that was confessed by the saints who lived before.

Thus the Bible requires not only that we study and know the confession and life of the saints in the days of Abraham and David in the Old Testament, of the saints in the days of the apostles, but also of the saints in the days of Athanasius and Augustine, of Luther and Calvin, of Hendrik De Cock and Simon Van Velzen, of Hoeksema and Ophoff, and so on.

The truth of the church’s oneness explains why God requires that each generation know the doctrine and life

of previous generations of the church. Through Jesus Christ God gathers one church from the beginning of the world to the end of the world. The members of the church in every age are redeemed by the same Savior, gathered by the same Spirit, and united in the same truth. Because the truth we confess today came to us from the church in the past, we must know something of the history of the church in the past. And because the truth we confess today is not to be any different from what the church confessed in the past, we must constantly look back and compare what we confess today to what was confessed before.

Because God requires the knowledge of church history, the church’s confessions, which derive their teachings from the Bible, also demand the knowledge of church history. One of the church’s conscious reasons for adopting confessions is that they preserve the truth of God’s word for future generations. The church in the past drew up confessions in order to say to future generations, “you need to know your history, you need to know the truth confessed before you.” In the confessions, the church of the past says to the church today, “this is the truth we fought for, the truth we died for, the truth we confessed, the truth we lived, and we expect you to do the same.”

It should be obvious that the requirement to know the church’s past is not limited to a certain segment of the church—perhaps the ministers and professors of theology—but falls on every member of the church, including the children. Several of our liturgical forms require that the children of the church be brought up with the knowledge of what the church’s historical confession is. For example, the second question parents are asked by our “Form for the Administration of Baptism” is, “Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?”¹ This is basically the same wording as the first question asked of a person making public profession of faith. The question is not simply, “Do you know and believe the Old Testament and New Testament?” But the question is, “Do you believe the doctrines of the Old Testament and New Testament *as taught here in this*


¹ *The Confessions and Church Order of the PRC*. Grandville, MI, 2005, p. 260.

Christian Church? Every member of the church is required to know the historic faith of the church. Parents need to know the historic faith, and they vow at baptism to teach it to their children. Confessing members, every one of them, must know the historic faith of the church in order to be able honestly to say, “I know and agree that the articles of faith taught in this Christian Church are the true and complete doctrine of salvation.”

Although we will treat this in depth in the next article, we can already see that knowing church history is of great benefit to the church today. Since the church is one throughout history, the church today must not turn away from the confession and life of the church of the

past. But turn away the church will do, if she does not know her past and consciously root herself in the past. Instead of sticking to the “old paths,” she will be blown about by every new wind of doctrine. And if the historic confession and walk of the true church are replaced by new doctrines and practices in a particular church, she is no longer worthy of the name church. She deserves the name of false church.

The church that knows and maintains the historic confession and walk of the saints in earlier ages may be sure she is united in the truth with one church of Jesus Christ.

... to be continued. 

ANNUAL REPORT

MR. CAL KALSBECK

Ninety Years of “Free”

1924 was a good year. On January 21 of that year fifty-three-year-old Vladimir Lenin died. Sadly the police state, command economy, and state propaganda machine he had imposed upon the Russian people did not die with him. In that same year eight months later and half a world away, the RFPA was born. In contrast to the slavery and propaganda machine Lenin imposed, the RFPA was dedicated to freedom: the freedom to write in the *Standard Bearer*.

With the distribution of the September 15, 2014 issue, ninety years of publishing the *Standard Bearer* has been completed. This is, no doubt, a significant anniversary for the Reformed Free Publishing Association. More significant, however, is the fact that for ninety years the word “Free” in our name has remained operative. What does this mean? Rev. Herman Hoeksema explained it this way in his October 1, 1949 *Standard Bearer* editorial:

The term “Free” in this name denotes that the association in publishing its literature does not stand under any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It also means that the editors alone are responsible for the contents of their writing, and that they are not under the jurisdiction either of the Church or of the Board of the R.F.P.A.

Mr. Kalsbeck is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan and retired secretary of the RFPA.

Interestingly, it was the censorship of Hoeksema’s writing by *The Banner* (the official publication of the Christian Reformed Church) that led to the birth of the RFPA and its publication, the *Standard Bearer*. It also precipitated the inclusion of the word “Free” in the name of our association to insure freedom of the writers in the *Standard Bearer*. God grant that this “Free” continues to be operative as the RFPA goes forward in the publishing of the *Standard Bearer* and distinctively Reformed books.

Our ninetieth year of publishing distinctively Reformed books has been productive. The RFPA Board, committees and staff have been busy. We have published three new books: *1834: Hendrik DeCock’s Return to the True Church* by Marvin Kamps, *The Coming of Zion’s Redeemer* (a commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) by Rev. Ronald Hanko, and *Behold the Beauty* (art curriculum volume 3) by Connie Meyer. Also made available this year is a revised, third edition of *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* by Prof. David Engelsma. In addition, reprints of Engelsma’s *Better to Marry*, and *Marriage the Mystery of Christ and the Church* are completed and have found their way back on our stockroom shelves. Encouraging are responses to our books, like this one concerning our reprint of *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*:

The reprint is truly refreshed. This book has done more to stimulate and further my study of the Scriptures than any other work concerning the doctrine of Grace. Not being

Reformed, there was a decided gap in areas of my biblical training. Prof. Engelsma's book brought me face to face with the wonderful truth that God alone sought me and bought me from before the foundations of the world. *Nothing* is more amazing to consider.

All told 6,959 volumes of RFPA books have left the RFPA warehouse to take up new residence in the homes of our readers this fiscal year.

Our ninetieth year has not only resulted in more books being published; many more ebooks are available as well. Significant progress has been made this year toward our goal of making all RFPA books available as ebooks. At this time twenty-five of our books are available in electronic format. While ebook sales are not what one might call "brisk," there is a steady demand for them. Last year we sold 330 ebooks. By the way, if you do not regularly visit the RFPA website, you may not know that *The Church Order Commentary* by VanDellen and Monsma is available as an ebook.

A peek at the RFPA's plans for the ninety-first year of publishing Reformed literature reveals that an ambitious plan is in the works. God willing, we will publish three or four new titles. Also, we are well on our way toward the goal of publishing some children's books and making some of our titles available as audio books. Less significant, but of interest to many, are plans to print some new study guides and to reprint second editions of the study guides on Malachi, Ruth, and I and II Thessalonians.

It is our hope that our ambitious plan of book publishing not be a deterrent to our Book Club members. Sadly, our number of Book Club members has declined of late: from a high of 1,236 to 1,172 at present. The value of the Book Club to the RFPA cannot be over-stated; consequently, in the near future a Book Club questionnaire will be distributed in an attempt to ascertain the mind of the Book Club members in order to better serve member needs and desires.

Our ninetieth year of publishing Reformed literature once again has included the publishing of the *Standard Bearer*. In last year's annual report we expressed some concerns because of a decline in the number of subscriptions. While this continues to be a concern, we are thankful to report an increase of 56 subscribers (2,211) over the same period last year. This reflects, no doubt, promotion of the *Standard Bearer* by you, our faithful members.

As we stand at the threshold of our tenth decade of

publishing distinctively Reformed literature, we are encouraged by reader responses to the *Standard Bearer*, such as this one from a reader in New Hampshire: "Today, a week after receipt, I remain ever joyful, since reading (more than once) April's *Standard Bearer*. Truly, a splendid issue, educational and, need I say, most spiritually rewarding. It has encouraged and, hence, increased my daily psalm singing." Responses such as this remind us of the debt of gratitude we owe to all those who have made it possible: writers, office personnel, book club agents, copy editors, proof readers, volunteers, and Mr. Donald Doezeema. We take this occasion to make special mention of Don to publicly recognize his faithful, nearly flawless, thirty-five years of service as Managing Editor of the *Standard Bearer*. Most know Don as the man with many hats. Don is in the process of removing those hats, one of which is the Managing Editor's hat. Thankfully, Mr. Charles Terpstra is donning them almost as fast as Don is taking them off. So we welcome Mr. Terpstra as the new Managing Editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

So we begin our ninety-first year of "Free." Along with the "Free," however, is the "Reformed." That part of our name commits writers of RFPA publications to promote unashamedly the Reformed faith in keeping with our purpose to "witness to the truth" and "reveal false and deceptive views...." Thirty years ago Prof. (currently emeritus) Robert Decker spoke to the RFPA under the title, "The *Standard Bearer* and Polemics." He closed his speech this way:

Yes, the *Standard Bearer* ought to engage in Polemics. This was the reason historically for the existence of the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Our Protestant Reformed fathers needed the freedom to expose the error of Common Grace. All through the years the *Standard Bearer* has faithfully and vigorously defended the faith against heresy. This must continue. This must not be done merely in a negative fashion. Errors must be exposed and refuted and we must not hesitate to do that. But we must do it in the way of the positive development of the truth. We must do it so that our readers grow in the grace and knowledge of God in Christ. We must do it so that the church's understanding of the truth increases. We must fight the good fight of faith also by means of the pages of the *Standard Bearer*. We must not allow negative criticism to deter us.

That takes courage and grace! God grant that to our writers as they take up the pen in our ninety-first year of "Free." ☞

BRF Conference Report

After agreeing to write this article on the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference in Scotland, I spent about thirty seconds thinking, “This will be so easy! So much happened and I had such a great time!” I then spend the next two weeks thinking, “This is going to be so hard! So much happened and I had such a great time!” Figuring out how to share this amazing trip with people who have not experienced it, without writing a mammoth article that would bore people to tears, has proven difficult! But this article will have to suffice.

For those of you unfamiliar with the BRF, I would recommend you check out their Facebook page (search for British Reformed Fellowship) or their website (www.britishreformed.org). Those means do a far better job of introducing themselves than I can. What is important to know at this point is that they organize a biennial conference that is attended by Reformed believers from all over the world. For those of you reaching for a dictionary or worried I cannot spell, *biennial* means every other year as opposed to *biannual*, which is two times each year.

The Conference began on Saturday, 26 July. Driving up to the Gartmore House we could not help but be amazed by the picturesque views of Scottish countryside surrounding us. The American tourists among us were especially keen to get photos of the many cows in the farmers’ fields all around. The rest of us were more focused on other landmarks. Throughout the week those interested explored a lot of the surrounding area with day trips to Edinburgh (pronounced Eh-din-bur-ro for the struggling tourists out there), St. Andrews, Loch Katrine (pronounced Lock KAY-trin), Stirling, and Loch Lomond. We also were able to explore Reformation history through special lectures on the fascinating John Knox (did you know he worked as a bodyguard, was a skilled broad-swordsman, and was forced to become a galley slave after he was captured by the French?) and the work of the lesser-known James Fraser of Alness, walking tours discussing the martyrs of St. Andrews, and a visit to the Magdalen Chapel in Edinburgh. Getting to see the places mentioned so often in church history and learning about some of the godly men used to bring truth back to the churches was an eye-opening experience.

All this history was used as a backdrop to the Conference

focus—the doctrine of sanctification. I know that for many of us it was a stark reminder that “...there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9b). The dangers that we face today in our own Christian walk are the same sins and trials faced by our fathers before us. We do well to learn from the mistakes of churches and believers past as well as from the successes and strengths of our brothers and sisters of years gone by. The focus on sanctification reminded us of the importance of God’s work in us in making us holy, helped us better understand the differences and connections between sanctification and justification, clarified the role of the law in the Christian life, and highlighted the imperfections of our sanctification in this life as well as the dangers from the antinomianism threat even within our own true, Reformed churches. The practical speech on living a victorious Christian life concluded the speeches and summarized the blessings we have through this sanctification in our lives.

Rev. Angus Stewart, Rev. Martyn McGeown, Prof. Herman Hanko, and Prof. David Engelsma did an excellent job of bringing forth the practical and meaningful truths of sanctification to us all. So much learning and discussion was packed into a week, but no one was complaining. Young and old embraced the opportunity to speak and learn. A highlight for all was the simple yet profound question asked by five-year old Patrick from Spokane, WA. The way that Prof. Hanko clearly answered the question “Why did God make it so man could sin?” without condescension or trivialization, exemplified the way in which the complex and beautiful truth of sanctification was treated throughout the week. If you haven’t seen it already, you can check out a video of this question as well as the other speeches and questions and answers at the Covenant PRC NI YouTube channel.

This profound moment also helps to show how blessed we were to be worshipping there with believers of all ages and who come from such different backgrounds. We had repre-




Mrs. Crossett is a member of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. The conference took place in Scotland, July 26-August 2.

sentatives from eight different countries, three continents, and many different churches. The ages ranged from infants to those who believed they were attending their last BRF Conference due to advancing age. We shared the oneness of brotherhood in Jesus Christ, allowing us to share a bond that is hard to express and defying the short seven days we spent with one another. Friendships were made, and we grew together, young and old. With over 100 people present, we were privileged to meet and learn from many believers who have had different lives and experiences from our own. What a blessing we have in the catholic church, formed through all time and in all places! Together we talked, laughed, played, sang, explored, praised, learned, encouraged, and even cried. These experiences cannot be fully expressed on a page or two. If you want to know what I mean, you really should come and experience that for yourself in two years' time!

The strength of the bonds formed was most fully experienced as the week came to a close. Goodbyes are rarely easy, but the saints in the British Isles had an especially difficult goodbye to make to Professor and Wilma Hanko. There was hardly a dry eye in sight when hearing "We probably will not see most of our friends again in this life," as they said goodbye after more than twenty visits over the past years. The goodbyes were a reminder that the spiritually fulfilling week was truly coming to a close and that we were going back to the reality of our day-to-day lives. For many of the saints—especially for those outside of the USA—that reality is a serious lack of the true preaching and blessed fellowship experienced

at the conference. I know that when I lived in West Michigan, both of these were things I took for granted. Here in Northern Ireland in our small church we are still blessed with true preaching and with more fellowship than many of our friends have in other places. I know that I for one was challenged in this week to keep those fellow saints in my prayers, to continue to learn from their examples, and to really focus on how God is working to sanctify me where He has placed me.

If you are wondering if you should come to the next BRF Conference in 2016, I can tell you this: you will come home tired from a busy week, yes, but strengthened in your faith by what you have learned, not only from the excellent speakers, but also from your fellow saints from all over the world. Perhaps God will use your presence to be a blessing to others as well. I know the saints in Ballymena, Northern Ireland certainly love any visitors we get, reminding us that we are not alone in this wicked world. It can only be more of a blessing for those deprived of true Christian fellowship where they live. I cannot say enough how much I would recommend the BRF Conference for believers of any age. This was my first of, Lord willing, many Conferences. I hope to see you July 16-23, 2016 at Castlewellan so we can learn together under our speakers, Prof. David Engelsma and Rev. Andy Lanning! 

Watch the BRF website (www.britishreformed.org) and the BRF Conference website (www.brfconference.weebly.com) for updates on the next Conference to be held in Castlewellan, Northern Ireland in 2016.

CLASSIS EAST REPORT

MR. JON HUISKEN

September 10, 2014
with a continued Session on October 15, 2014
Grandville Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, 2014 with a continued session on October 15, 2014. All the churches were represented by two delegates. Rev. R. VanOverloop was the chairman for these sessions.

What occasioned the continued session on October 15th was the decision of the September 10th session to place four protests against the decision of Classis at its May 2014 relative Article 67 of the Church Order. At the May 2014 meeting, an appeal of a consistory's decision to change the date of its Prayer Day service was treated. At the May meeting, Classis upheld this appeal and decided that any change to the meeting date of the Prayer Day service should be sought by overture to the broader assemblies.

Four protests—three from consistories in Classis East and one from an individual in Classis West—were lodged at the September 2014 meeting of Classis against this decision. Classis then placed these protests in the hands of a committee of pre-advice whose report was received at the continued session on October 2014.

Classis received the majority and minority reports of this committee of pre-advice at the October continued session. Classis adopted the advice of the majority report, namely, that Classis uphold the protests received and therefore rescind its decision of May 2014 that a decision to change the date of the annual Prayer Day service should be sought by way of overture to the broader assemblies. The grounds (summarized):

The letter, spirit, and historical interpretation of Article 67 of the Church Order do not require the churches to cel-

celebrate Prayer Day together on a specific date. Further, the consistory's decision to change the date for its Prayer Day service does not constitute a substantial change to Article 67 of the Church Order

The consistory's decision to change the date for its Prayer Day service does not violate Article 86 of Church Order as the May decision asserts since, as stated in Ground 1 above, the decision of the consistory did not substantially change Article 67 of the Church Order.

At its September session, Classis granted classical appointments to Faith PRC and First PRC. At its October session, Classis granted a request from a consistory to increase censure to the second step for one of its members.

The expenses of both sessions amounted to \$366.24. Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 14, 2015 at the First PRC of Holland.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Classis Activities

Classis East reconvened on October 15 at Grandville, MI PRC, where a committee of pre-advice presented their findings concerning four protests originally brought to Classis on September 10. Classis adopted the advice of the majority report to uphold these protests. The official Stated Clerk's report is found elsewhere in this issue. We are thankful for the diligent labors of Classis East.

Minister Activities

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Peace PRC, Lansing, IL had been considering the call extended to him by the congregation of Faith PRC, Jenison, MI. The King of the church has directed Rev. Spronk to accept this call, convincing him that it is his calling to take up his labors as Faith's seventh minister. Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of Calvary PRC, Hull, IA had been considering the call to be the next missionary to the Republic of the Philippines. In Rev. Griess' letter of decline to the calling church in Doon, IA he indicated his assurance that God's bidding was for him to stay at Calvary PRC. We are thankful that our heavenly Father has made His will clear to Rev. Griess, and pray that God will continue to

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

bless him in his labors in Calvary. We pray also for another missionary in God's providence. On September 28 the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church located in the country of Singapore officially called minister-on-loan Rev. Andrew Lanning to be their pastor. On October 19 came his acceptance of their call. With shared excitement we rejoice with the church in Singapore that God has brought them a pastor of their own! On October 16 Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA announced that he declined the call from First PRC, Grand Rapids, MI.

RFPA

The annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association was held on September 25 in Grandville PRC. Rev. Clayton Spronk delivered a speech entitled "The Importance of Reading Church History." Various reports were rendered concerning the business of the last year and board members were elected. New members were also welcomed.

Congregation Activities

The three Canadian Protestant Reformed Churches (located in Edmonton, AB, Lacombe, AB and Wingham, ON) observed the Canadian Thanksgiving Day by holding a special service on Monday morning, October 13. In 1957 the Parliament of Canada pro-

claimed: *A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed—to be observed on the 2nd Monday in October.*

Often church bulletins feature a "warm welcome" to visitors. Speaking with our missionaries in the Philippines in times past, we have noted that some warm welcomes are warmer than others. Though our missionaries stay warmer year around, we doubt even they could match the really, really warm welcome emanating from Hope PRC in Redlands, CA this summer. According to sources there the air temperatures exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit most days from late August through late September. Residents in Lacombe and Edmonton can only wonder about that. We could use flowery language like balmy or tropical..., but let's just call it hot! Never fear, Redlands has moderated back into the "warm" category and hopes to stay there throughout the winter.

On the third Tuesday evening of each month members of the congregation at Lynden, WA meet at the Christian Health Care Center there to sing with the residents. Singing usually lasts at least a half hour, and the residents are happy to have this opportunity to listen and to sing unto the Lord, making His praise glorious!

One can become hungry by reading PRCA church bulletins. Many delicious treats were recently prepared as fundraisers by various church and school groups. Some of these included: eggrolls in Bethel PRC, a chicken dinner in Redlands, CA, Hudsonville YPS apple crisp, the Eastside Christian School Dutch banquet, Hope School's pig-in-the-blankets, apple pies in Lacombe, apple dumplings in Randolph, sub sandwiches in Edgerton and Randolph, Crete YPS taco supper, and caramel apples in Providence PRC. We are quite sure that this list is not complete. Hopefully many of you availed yourselves of these goodies!

Evangelism Activities

The evangelism committee of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA has started a "Pamphlet of the Month" program. The committee selects a pamphlet for the members of the congregation to read and to pass along to another who

might be interested in or benefit from such reading. The goal is to acquaint the congregation better with our pamphlets for their spiritual benefit and as a help in their witness to others. The pamphlet for September was "The Family, Foundations are Shaking" by Prof. B. Gritters.

Sister Church Activities


On Sunday, September 21, The Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore celebrated her 27th year of existence. Sincere congratulations to her! And may God continue to bless her abundantly with faithfulness to the truth of the gospel and eagerness for His cause in that area of the world!

Mission Activities

The synodically appointed Foreign Mission Committee of the PRCA meets the third Tuesday of each month in the Hull, IA, PRC. This committee is made up of ten members who represent the five Siouxland area churches. Many of their labors

center on the work in the Philippines and in Myanmar. The FMC met most recently on October 21.

7M (Metro Manila Monthly Monday Morning Ministers' Meeting) is going strong. However, for some time now they have met on Tuesdays to better accommodate everyone's schedule. The Tagalog word for Tuesday is "Martes" so fortunately "7M" can still be used. Including Rev. Kleyn and Smit, there are normally seven men present at each meeting, with the location of these meetings rotating alphabetically in this order: Marikina (Provident Christian Church), Mayamot (Berean PRC), Muzon (PRC of Bulacan), and Valenzuela (Maranatha PRC). Rev. Smit is leading the men through New Testament exegesis. Then after merienda (light lunch) Rev. Kleyn leads the study of Reformed Creeds.

"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 Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Steve and Lori Hageman, Chandra Hageman, and to Dave and Becky Russell and family in the death of Lori's mother,

MRS. WILMA CADY.

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

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their sympathy to fellow members Phil and Laura Kuiper and their children in the death of Phil's father,

REV. DALE KUIPER.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Pres.
Robert Mantel, clerk