

The Standard Bearer

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God's Love Washes and Renews

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

The apostle Paul continues to instruct Titus concerning what he must do in the new Christian church in Crete. Generally, Titus must constantly call the new Christians to a godly lifestyle—one that harmonizes with what they now believe to be the truth (1:1; 2:1).

They believe in Christ Jesus, who is the great God and Savior. He redeemed them from all iniquity and purified them, so that they are zealous of good works (2:13, 14). Titus is admonished to speak and rebuke with all authority (2:15) concerning a life of godliness in

the communities in which they live. In gratitude for the gift of salvation that delivered them from vices (3:3), they are to put on specific virtues that would lead them to be good citizens and good neighbors (3:1, 2).

In the above text Paul gives the reason why godliness must flow from a correct understanding of and appreciation for the wonderful truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. When God saves, that salvation washes and makes us new.

What God did

God “saved us.” “God our Savior” (1:3; 2:10) came to man’s rescue. He did not rescue every human, but He did rescue those who, by His saving grace, believe in Him. He rescued them from the greatest evil, and He bestowed on them the greatest blessing!

God’s activity of saving was accomplished in the way of “the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” Regeneration saves! “Regeneration” is the “again birth” that God performs within the elect, of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5-8). In this work God implants the principle of a new spiritual life into a previously fallen and depraved child of Adam.

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It works a radical change in the whole man because it is the work of putting new, spiritual life in the heart, out of which are all the issues of life. This new life in Christ makes holiness to be the governing disposition of the soul. Those who before were loaded down with the seven vices of verse 3 are now in principle adorned with the seven virtues of verses 1 and 2.

This is the work of the “Holy Spirit.” The third person of the Trinity is the bestower of life. It is the Holy Spirit who takes the lead in the divine work of making men holy. This first work of the Holy Spirit within an elect child of God makes instantaneous change in the heart. It precedes and gives rise to the process of renewing (a lifelong activity).

The Holy Spirit not only regenerates but also performs the work of “renewing.” This work of the Spirit can be distinguished, but never separated, from regeneration. Renewing is a work of the Spirit that includes an awaking of the person to the realization that he is a child of God (cf. Rom. 12:2). While regeneration is an activity of God in a dead sinner, the Spirit’s renewing (sanctifying) of a person makes him active (zealous unto good works). Regeneration is never directly perceived, but becomes known only by its effects, whereas renewal requires the conscious and continued surrender of man’s thoughts and actions to the will of God. Sanctification is that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God’s Son, and enables him to perform good works.

Regeneration and renewing are a “washing.” Jesus explained to Nicodemus that regeneration is the same as being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). Of this spiritual washing, water baptism is a sign. The thing signified in water baptism is the cleansing work of the Spirit. Regeneration does the work of initial cleansing, and renewing is the on-going cleansing that continues until we enter heaven.

Why God did it

God’s saving us is according to His “kindness and love...toward man” (4). This expression must be a single concept, because the verb with it is singular. The words “love toward man” are expressed in one word in the Greek: *philanthropia*. Our text combines both the love

itself and the generous outpouring of love on man.

This is best understood by seeing the striking and double contrast. God’s kindness and love stand over against our former inhumanity to each other: “living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (3). Our past, great, evil darkness serves as the background for the light of the love and kindness of God our Savior to “appear” (this word in the Greek speaks of a dramatic dawn!). The Father’s kindness and pity that brings every one of His children into the present state of grace appears like an epiphany. This is the way it is expressed also in 2:11, “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.”

The apostle speaks to Titus about the sudden and brilliant appearance of the kindness and love of God toward man as something he personally experienced. It came to him on the road to Damascus and he never forgot the kindness and love that stopped him in his tracks and turned him around. He is describing what God did for him, and he does so out of a heart that is glowing with ardent love to Him who first manifested so great a love toward him. These words about the kindness of God our Savior and His love toward man express a most warm and tender thought. Paul is moved by the wonder of such love, from which nothing can separate him.

Next Paul stresses that we did not deserve and did not work this salvation ourselves. He does this in order to make us more ready to help anyone who does not deserve our help (cf. vv. 1, 2). God saved us “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy” (5). Paul emphasizes that salvation is completely a sovereign work of God. We must ever live in the consciousness that if any are saved, it cannot be because of their works. It is always and only according to God’s great mercy. This mercy is God’s deep-seated and urgent desire to bless the miserable and pitiful. The divine mercy that endures forever is the only reason why God washes and renews His adopted children!

Concerning this mercy Paul adds even more words to describe it more accurately: “which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (6). Notice the presence of all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father not only gives His Son, but also pours out His Spirit. At Pentecost the Spirit was given to the whole church (present and future). While the church of the past had a


small measure of the Spirit, after the Savior completed His saving work the supply of spiritual gifts is abundant and rich. No one who is saved has the right to say that he has no spiritual gifts. The gifts are given through the atoning sacrifice and prayer of Jesus Christ our Savior (cf. John 14:16; 16:17).

To what end did God do it

One result of God's washing and renewing us is that we are "justified by His grace." To be justified means that God, the perfect Judge, makes a judicial declaration not only that He sees us as being without sin, but also that He judges us to have done everything perfectly right. This judgment the righteous Judge can make because in His grace (undeserved and unmerited love) He grants and imputes to us the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ. God declares our sins to be on Christ, and He declares Jesus' righteousness to be given to us. He delivered us from His curse and forgives us full and free as a gift of His marvelous grace.

A second result is that "we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." We have the right and calling to look forward to being in possession of never-ending, ever-lasting fellowship with God Himself. Of this hope Paul had already spoken (1:2; 2:13).

Remember that eternal life is not only something that we will have but, if it is eternal, then we already have it, and have always had it. The hope is a certainty and not a possibility. We already bask in the sunshine of God's love and partake of His joy and glory. Now it takes faith to experience it, and one day we will no longer need faith.

We who were dead in sin are made alive and may look forward to experiencing perfectly the everlasting life and glory. We were idol worshipers and are now serving the true and living God, and we await the coming of the Son of God from heaven bringing us to our everlasting fellowship with Him in glory. We were ungodly and were ruled by worldly passions, but now we may and can renounce those passions and we may and can strive to live lives of self-mastery as we wait for the realization of the blessed hope. 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Hoeksema and 1924 Reappraised (2)

In our previous article (Sept. 1 issue) we indicated that we intended to offer a response to Dr. John Bolt's essay entitled "Herman Hoeksema Was Right (On the Three Points That Really Matter)." Bolt's essay is found in a collection of essays entitled *Biblical Interpretation and Doctrinal Formulation in the Reformed Tradition*, 14 essays submitted to honor Dr. James De Jong (who served for a time as president of

Calvin Theological Seminary) as he nears retirement.

As stated, the essay warrants consideration and a response if for no other reason than because of who wrote it, a seminary professor in the Christian Reformed Church. But more than that, it is evident that Dr. Bolt has given careful thought to what we know as "the common grace controversy of 1924."

Dr. Bolt's essay is well researched and well argued.

And if Bolt's arguments stand, they lead to but one conclusion, namely, in the 1924 common grace

controversy Hoeksema was right (in three areas that really matter). And as well, by necessary inference, he and others with him were wronged by the broader assemblies of the CRC.

Coming from a Calvin Seminary professor, that is no little concession, or, if you prefer, charge. Though, as we stated in our last article, at this point Bolt wants it known that his essay, with its conclusions, is "suggestive rather than definitive" (cf. footnote 9, p. 297).

Bolt has written a proposition, "Hoeksema was right," with three

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2014, p. 461.

supporting theses inviting response and debate.

The three theses are:

#1—that grace is particular.

#2—that the doctrine of common grace is an extra-confessional matter on which Reformed people can have different opinions.

#3—that Reformed church polity was violated in hierarchical actions.

We begin with Bolt's first thesis.

Bolt's point is not simply that Hoeksema insisted that grace is particular, but that when it comes to grace, God's grace, divine grace directed towards human beings, it is always and only particular. There is no other kind of grace.

This means, as far as Hoeksema was concerned, that to speak of a *common* grace is a contradiction in terms. Scripture knows of no such grace.

As Bolt points out, Hoeksema in large measure certainly learned this emphasis upon grace, one that is particular and saving, from none other than Abraham Kuyper himself. Grace that is bound inexorably to election was one of Kuyper's great emphases. His book *Dat de Genade Particulier Is* is well known to us. We know it by the title *Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation*, a translation published by the RFPA. In his book *Of Sin and Grace* Hoeksema quotes from Kuyper's book with approval.

We concur with Bolt's statement that Kuyper's influence on Hoeksema in this area "was deep and enduring."

But, as we know, there is this other doctrine of grace that came in

time to dominate Kuyper's perspective, the one that came to be known as common grace. With this, Hoeksema would have no part.

Why not?

Because, as far as Hoeksema was concerned, it stands in flat contradiction to particular grace.

A doctrine of common grace implies that grace is not only particular and found in Christ alone, but also general. As a result, there is a grace, a favor, of God towards all, a grace that has nothing to do with Christ—supposedly. We add the word supposedly because Hoeksema, along with Danhof and Ophoff, shrewd theologians that they were, predicted that such a distinction would never last. Such a distinction throws a tension into one's theology. And one can be sure that, in time, if that distinction is not expelled from one's theology and preaching, the "lean and ill-favored cattle" (common grace) will devour the "fat and well-fed cattle" (particular grace). They knew that, because this is a matter of *grace*, God's grace, it would not be long before those holding to common grace would tie this in also with Christ and, in time, even with His cross.

And now what would become of particular grace itself? Diluted beyond any meaningful use in the preaching, that's for sure.

Were they prophets or were they not?

Let history be the judge.

What becomes clear from Bolt's essay is that Kuyper himself foresaw this very possibility, and so, when referring to this 'common grace,' Kuyper purposely refrained from using the Dutch word *genade*,

which explicitly refers to "grace," and used the word *gratie* instead, as in *gemeene gratie*—*gratie* referring more to a certain kind of favor than to saving grace. Bolt informs us that Kuyper, in his first volume of *De Gemeene Gratie*, made a point of this distinction. Kuyper realized that once the notion of common grace was introduced, there would be "an immediate effort to change it into a universal saving grace," and so he informed his readers why he used the one word rather than the other. He insisted that *gemeene gratie* was an altogether different kind of grace than *algemeene genade* (cf. Bolt's essay, p. 301).

In other words, Kuyper, once having introduced his common grace theory into the Reformed church world, attempted with might and main to keep the tainted, polluted waters of common grace from seeping into the wells of the pure waters of particular, saving grace.

As they say, "A fond and blasted hope."

Hoeksema saw that. And so his broadside against common grace, not only against the infamous three points formulated by the 1924 Synod of Kalamazoo, but against Kuyper's version (with his attempted distinctions) as well.

This is an important point, to which we will return shortly.

What Bolt is at pains to argue (and he argues it well) is that the 1924 Synod, in its formulation of the theory of common grace, failed to protect adequately Kuyper's own insistence on the *particularity* of grace (p. 301).

Bolt puts it this way:

The 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, though it ostensibly wanted to defend Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of common grace, failed to guard its formulation from the perils of possible salvific universalism. Kuyper would not have been happy with that: by joining Kuyper's insistence on the particularity of grace, Herman Hoeksema was right and the Christian Reformed Church was wrong (p. 302).

In his criticism of the "first point" as formulated by the 1924 Synod, what Bolt zeros in on is what Hoeksema and his colleagues later referred to as *Het puntje van het eerste punt* ("The little, and most telling, point of the first point!")—the reference to *the general offer of the gospel*. In its first point synod declared that, in addition to God's expressing through creation this common grace (a favorable attitude toward mankind in general), God also expressed this grace to all through the general offer of the gospel!

And that certainly went beyond Kuyper. In fact, this is contrary to Kuyper, whose opposition to turning the gospel call into a general offer is well documented.

But more importantly, this perspective on the gospel offer is contrary to the confessions, to the Canons of Dordt in particular.

To his credit, Bolt adopts the conclusion reached by his colleague Dr. R. Blacketer back in 2000. Writing on the 1924 controversy with an eye to the well-meant offer of the gospel, Blacketer concluded that "the substantial error commit-

ted by the 1924 synod was its acceptance of the Arminian definition of the sincere call—a *doctrine that is clearly rejected by the Canons III/IV.8*" (emphasis mine—KK) (*Calvin Theological Journal* 35, no. 1, 2000).

So Bolt rightly criticizes the common grace doctrine adopted by the 1924 Synod as formulated in its first point. It is clearly in conflict with the truth of God's grace, which is always particular and directed towards God elect, those who are in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

The Synod of 1924 was wrong to declare otherwise.

However, that said, though we can agree in part with Bolt's criticism of the first point, we are convinced he does not go far enough in criticizing and opposing the first point of 'Kalamazoo.' He misreads Hoeksema if he thinks that all that Hoeksema opposed in the first point was its reference to common grace as an avenue to the well-meant gospel offer.

Hoeksema's opposition to this common grace concept was not just the CRC's non-Kuyperian development of it, he was opposed to Kuyper's view itself. To Hoeksema, it did not matter whether Kuyper used the word *gratie* (favor) or the word *genade* (grace). Practically, they came to the same thing and were, as far as Hoeksema was concerned, neither biblical nor confessional. Whether *gratie* or *genade*, if it is meant to depict a favorable, loving attitude of God towards the reprobate in their ungodliness, it is a teaching that would destroy the antithesis in this world and our life

in it, and it was to be rejected root and branch.

Hoeksema knew what Kuyper was trying to avoid and guard against by his intentional use of *gratie* rather than *genade*. Hoeksema simply was not persuaded the distinction had merit. He knew what Kuyper's purpose was in developing the whole common grace concept, namely, to justify this marriage (union) between 'Athens' (the culture of the worldlings) and 'Jerusalem' (the church with her kingdom agenda). Hoeksema and his colleagues would have no part of it, and so sounded the alarm, warning their denomination to have no part of it either.

And so Hoeksema's rejection of Kuyper's common grace itself, and not just the CRC's perversion of it.

It is at this point that we find we must part ways with Dr. Bolt's argument as he supports Hoeksema and criticizes the 1924 Synod. We agree with his major premise, that grace is always particular. After all, biblical grace is rooted in the cross. And we can find some agreement with his argument that the 1924 synod in its first point was at odds with Kuyper in their common grace theory. But we cannot agree with the whole of Bolt's argument.

Why not?

Because, evidently, Bolt sees as valid the distinction between *genade* and *gratie* that Kuyper tried so strenuously to maintain. The one is *grace*, the other is only a certain kind of *favor*. So the term "common grace" really should be a "common favor" of God to all. And if the CRC synod had un-

derstood that, everyone would have been better served, and Hoeksema and his colleagues would have been satisfied as well.

Of that we are not convinced.

But this evidently is Bolt's assessment.

In an attempt to correct the CRC's misrepresentation of Kuyper's *gemeene gratie* (common grace), Dr. Bolt offers a reworded first point, which he thinks might be acceptable to Hoeksema and his colleagues.

Having quoted the 1924 Synod's wording of the first point, which speaks of a "favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect," and also of "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to all His creatures," Bolt proposes a first point worded as follows:

Concerning the doctrine of grace, Synod declares that God's saving grace is always particular, to the elect. The promise of the gospel "that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life..., together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel" (Canons of Dordt, II, 5). In addition to this saving grace of God, shown only to those chosen to eternal life, there is also a favor of God shown to all creatures, whereby He providentially upholds all things, preserves life, and governs the world by His fatherly hand (Lord's Day 10). Whatever "light of nature" remains in man

only serves to make him inexcusable (Canons III/IV, 4).

There are things we like about this revision: the Canons' reference to the call of the gospel as being promiscuous, a summons to all and sundry, replacing what amounted to a free offer of the gospel; the reference to God's providence upholding all things; and then the Canon's declaration that the 'light of nature' remaining in man only serves to make man inexcusable.

Almost I am persuaded. But not quite. We are not convinced Hoeksema, for all his likely agreement on various points, would have been willing to make the above statement his own.

First of all, there is the statement that "God's saving grace is always particular." Just God's *saving* grace? Why not this: "God's *grace* is always particular"? Would Dr. Bolt agree with that? In essence, that was Hoeksema's issue with Kuyper. Not simply whether *saving* grace is always particular—in *that*, the two were in agreement—but whether there is another kind of grace, namely, a grace that preserves mankind but does not save, a grace shared in common by all!

Here Hoeksema parted ways with 'Father Abraham.' We are persuaded he would have questioned why the qualifier "saving" was applied to the particular grace referred to. What does that imply? There is also a second kind of grace, non-saving?

But the main issue we have with Bolt's proposed first point is the use of that word 'favor,' as found in

the phrase "there is also a *favor* of God shown to all creatures." "All creatures" certainly would include the reprobate segment of mankind along with the elect and the other creatures of this world.


That Bolt is willing to speak of a favor of God that embraces the reprobate segment of mankind in addition to the grace shown to the elect indicates to us that he is in basic agreement with Kuyper's attempt to distinguish between *genade* and *gratie*—a distinction Hoeksema was convinced was not valid, was not biblical, and would not remain distinct for long either in practice or in the preaching.

The word favor has too many 'Kuyperian' overtones.

God hates the wicked, as described in the Psalms, and yet looks with favor upon them too? How can that be?

That God is *good* to the wicked, the Esaus of this life, is biblical. Esau was given good parents, good instruction, good gifts of intellect and health, and a lot of good food. But bestowed in favor? Or in wrath? Read Psalm 73 if you wonder.

We appreciate Dr. Bolt's effort to justify Hoeksema in his rejection of Kalamazoo's first point. Bolt makes a valiant attempt to find a solution. But we judge his proposed (re)wording to be a middle ground. And for all its coming closer to the truth of things, it is not yet on the mark, we judge.

Next article, an assessment of Dr. Bolt's second thesis. 

The People of God Humbled and Healed:

The Element of Prayer (8b)

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

The Congregational Prayer

In our worship service the chief time we come through Christ to God in prayer is in what is called the congregational prayer. It is important to note the title of this prayer. It is *congregational* prayer. The minister is not giving his own private prayer. It is not that the minister is praying and the congregation just happens to be there listening. It is not even that the minister is praying for the congregation as he normally does, but the congregation just happens to be hearing him this time. Rather it is the *congregation* praying to God through the words the minister is saying.

This is important. As we have emphasized throughout this series, the church comes as one body before the Lord. When the Lord responds to Solomon's prayer in our text, He says, "if *my people, called by my name*, pray to me...I will forgive." God's reference to His people's prayers there is specifically a reference to the *congregational* prayers that the people made as one body when they came for worship during the three great feasts.¹ During these feasts all Israel gathered around the temple and together sought the Lord as one body. They were one people united in humble prayer of repentance before God.

¹ See Robert Lowth, in *Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 4. Psalm 105:1-5, translator's footnote 1.

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This is what happens in the congregational prayer of the worship service today; we come together as one body speaking to the Lord. If we all prayed our own individual prayers during the time of congregational prayer, there would be no sense of the body speaking with one voice.² In song we all sing the same thing and therefore can come as one and yet still sing individually. In congregational prayer, that is impossible unless we always use form prayers. So we come as one through the words of one.³

These truths about the congregational prayer affect the way the minister prays the congregational prayer. He has great responsibilities with this prayer. He must represent the people to God so that the prayer is their own prayer. He must know the needs of the congregation. He must know the difficulties, the struggles, the joys of the people. He must place himself in their shoes as much as possible so that ideally the congregation is able to say when the prayer is finished, "That is exactly what I needed to say to God here as an individual, and that is what we as a congregation needed to say to God in prayer."

The minister must work so that the congregational prayer is not made up of vain repetitions. They are sometimes the fruit of an unprepared heart and mind. The minister should work hard to prepare his heart and mind spiritually to pray in the service so that there will not be so many repetitions in his prayer.

The minister should not be preaching in his prayers. This can easily be done, and I think it is a temptation for all ministers at times to make the prayer more about teaching the congregation as they are listening, than

² A time of silent prayer very early in the service is different. This is individually preparing our hearts to be unified in spirit by each one setting himself in the proper spiritual frame of mind before God.

³ Form prayers said in unison are certainly legitimate and useful in some instances.

bringing us all together before the throne of grace. But the prayer is not a sermon, it is a prayer. And though the minister prays mindful that the congregation is listening, he does not give a lecture in his prayer. Such is no prayer at all. His goal is by grace to bring us into the throne room of God and, as it were, escort the congregation into heaven for a time.

The congregation has great responsibility as well with regard to congregational prayer. First of all, our responsibility is to pay attention and not let the mind wander in the prayer. Truly to *be led* in prayer is hard sometimes. The congregation is called to take the words that are being said and make them their own in the prayer—to enter into the prayer. The congregational prayer is not a time to sleep, or to daydream. It's not break time where we check out. This service is meeting with God face to face after all. Prayer must be offered from an attentive and pious heart as we make the prayer our own. Strange it must be to God that people are here to meet with Him and then in prayer this one is thinking about football, and that one about what she has to get done tomorrow. It is a struggle, and all of us know it. It will help if we focus on what we are doing, communing with God Himself.

Besides this, the congregation must help the minister to know her struggles and difficulties and joys and praises. Especially the elders should speak to the minister of things he should pray for on behalf of the congregation. But there is a place, too, for the whole congregation to express needs and joys that the minister should bring before God in congregational prayer.

The Content of the Congregational Prayer

What should the content of these prayers be? We've already said that part of it should be the people's supplications and praises to God. But all the elements of biblical prayer ought to be in the congregational prayers at one time or another: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplications, praise, intercessions. There may be one aspect emphasized above another sometimes. But they should generally all be in the prayer.

There ought to be scriptural content in the prayers. Remember that the power of the worship service is the Word of God. God speaks to us in His Word. So too we speak God's Word back to Him. That means of course, from a negative point of view, that there ought not be

anything that is not in agreement with the Word. But, positively, the whole prayer ought to bear the marks of being influenced by the Word. Allusions to the Scriptures should be used. The biblical prayers of Scripture can be quoted in the congregational prayer at times. Other references can be quoted to fit the occasion. The text that makes up the source of the sermon should be prayed over in this prayer. Not to the point where the minister preaches his sermon in the prayer. But requests and convictions having to do with the subject matter of the text should be prayed about. For example, if the subject is conversion—the mortification of the old man and quickening of the new—the congregation pleads with the Lord in this prayer that God grant the strength to kill the old man and enliven the new. We confess in prayer that we cannot kill the old man in our own strength and therefore depend upon God for help.

In addition, it is generally accepted that there is some content unique to the congregational prayer in the morning service, and some content unique to the congregational prayer of the evening service. In the dialogue of worship in the morning service, we are confronted with the Law of Jehovah God. Recall that in our articles on the reading of the Law in worship I said that in liturgies of the Reformation there was a separate time of confession and forgiveness. The congregation would make a prayer of confession, and then a Scripture text on forgiveness would be pronounced to the congregation. We said that this generally fell away and the reading of the Law took its place, so that we are convicted of sin by the Law, and then in the song that follows and in the first part of the congregational prayer we confess those sins. And finally in the singing and prayer and sermon we recognize God's forgiveness. Since that is the way the Law functions in many Reformed and Presbyterian services (where the Law is still read), the minister is called then to lead the church into more extensive confession of sin in the morning congregational prayer.

In II Chronicles 6:22-27 Solomon prays to God that God would forgive His people when they inevitably fall into sin and then pray for forgiveness as they are gathered in His house. II Chronicles 7:14 is God's answer to Solomon's prayer there. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear

from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” This is what is happening in the dialogue of the morning service specifically. The people of God come humbled by the Law that has exposed their sin. They enter into prayer as one body humbled before God and yet seeking His face. In that prayer they repent. In that prayer they turn from their wicked ways. And they do that with the confidence that God gives them here in this text: “When they do this, I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive them.”

Don’t be drifting off, then, in the prayer of the service. It is here that we lay our sins as a body before the throne of God’s grace and God assures us that we are forgiven. We lay our sins down and are forgiven *as a body*. That phrase at the end of II Chronicles 7:14, “I will heal their land,” has been misinterpreted so often. Some American ministers will say to an American audience that the land there for us Americans in the New Testament means the United States. And while of course we are called to pray for the country we live in, that is a misinterpretation of the verse. The land there is the nation of Israel, which is the Old Testament church. To apply this in the New Testament, then, one does not apply it to the United States, one applies it to the church. The church is God’s land in the New Testament. The church is where “my people called by my name” are found. I will heal my church as one body. I will forgive their iniquities, heal even some of the consequences of their sins, when they come to me as one in repentant prayer.

The morning prayer must be a prayer for the forgiveness of general sins. It must be a prayer for forgiveness for specific sins, especially ones that are exposed by the text of the sermon. Specific sins, weaknesses, and failures, even those that the congregation has *as a congregation*, must be brought before the Lord. With sin confessed and forgiven, the door is open for sweet communion in the rest of the prayer; in the rest of the morning service; and in the whole evening service to come. That confession sets the tone for the whole rest of the day. We celebrate the forgiveness of sins, then, in the rest of the day. We sing about it the whole rest of the day in the songs that we sing. We take all the Psalms that talk about God defeating our enemies and we sing about how He has defeated the spiritual enemies of the soul, how He holds on to us, draws us back to Himself, and forgives us.

Generally in Reformed and Presbyterian churches it is the case that in the congregational prayer of the evening service, the prayer takes on a broader dimension. The congregation looks beyond the borders of her own local body. She addresses the needs of the denomination, and the needs of all true Christendom. Having been assured that we are personally right with our God in the way of confession and repentance, we now ask God to grant that forgiveness and help to others in His body.

The evening congregational prayer broadens to obey the command of the apostle in I Timothy 2:1-2: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” The church follows the admonition of the apostle Paul in Hebrews 13:3 when he says, “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” She prays for the church that is enduring persecution for the sake of the Lord. She remembers those in lands where there is not freedom to worship as we currently have it. She prays for truth in the church universal. She prays for conviction, and boldness for the cause of Christ. She prays for missionaries and saints in other lands. She prays that God save His own through the spread of the gospel, and that the Lord be pleased to use her in that great commission.

In addition to the main congregational prayers, the short prayer after the sermon is also a congregational prayer. It is a prayer to the Lord that He apply what was proclaimed to our hearts. It is a part of the dialogue, responding to God who has proclaimed His Word. In that prayer, together we are saying to Him, “We receive Thy Word, O Lord, let not its truth simply rattle around in our heads, but drive it into our hearts, that we might leave this place in a different state spiritually than when we arrived, and carry on in Thy service in the week ahead.”

The Goal of All Prayer

The goal in our prayers in the assembly is the glory of Jehovah God. Calvin, when he taught on prayer, started this way, “What then is the first rule of right prayer? Leave behind all thought of our own glory, cast aside

all notion of our own worth, put away all self-assurance, humbly giving glory to God.”⁴

O God, be glorified then, as we humble ourselves before Thee and seek Thy forgiving grace. For where else can we go, Thou alone art Savior. O God, be glorified in our praise and adoration, as we exalt Thy name and declare Thy matchless worth. Be

⁴ From the 1526 edition of the *Institutes*. Quoted in Calvin, John, and Ford L. Battles ed. *The Piety of John Calvin*. 1978. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009. 120.

glorified in our thanksgivings, for Thou alone art the giver of all good and perfect gifts. Be glorified in our supplications, for Thou art the source of all help and sustenance.

And may Thy Son ever live to make intercession for us, that our prayers might bring Thee all glory. And may Thy Spirit help our infirmities and make intercession with groaning that cannot be uttered, that Thou mightest receive all praise. ∞

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Covenant Home: God’s Ideal Institution for the Nurture of Children (2)

The covenant home is God’s good and wise creation. The home was created when God made man and woman after His own image. The family was intended to be a reflection of His own covenant life as the triune God. God Himself united man and woman in the intimate holy bond of marriage. God created the man and the woman with their unique characters adapted for their respective roles in marriage. After He created Adam and Eve, God gave them the joint mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to bear children after their own likeness. God created man with authority and strength to be a father, the head of his family, to rule over and provide for and protect his family. The woman was created with a deep, God-given desire for children. She was God-gifted with tender, motherly love and sympathy for children, especially her own children. She was created to be the caretaker of her home and to devote herself to this. God created marriage to be a personal intimate union that should endure for a lifetime. This would be very important to create a stable environment for the protection and nurture of children. Through the act of marriage, children are born of the flesh and blood

of their parents and have an intimate bond with their parents. Children should from their birth be received by a man and his wife with greatest joy and thanks to God. They are God’s most precious gifts to a married couple. Marriage blossoms when godly couples receive children. The children born from marriage should be the object of the dearest love and affection of their parents. From birth the children should be commanded to honor and love their parents, through whom they received their life. To abandon children, one’s own God-given children, is among the greatest imaginable evils in the world.

By all these wonderful works, God created the institution of the family. God created the family to be the institution where children can be nurtured from the helpless and totally dependent stage of their infancy, to the time of life when they are equipped to live independently as mature and responsible adults in society and the church. This work of nurturing children takes quite a number of years of devoted effort and patient endurance. This requires of husband and wife in their marriage the willingness to make many personal sacrifices and great investment of their time and effort and personal interest in their children.

God’s ideal for marriage and the institution of the family was grievously corrupted by the fall of man into sin. Fallen, sinful men are by nature proud and self-seeking,

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and full of depraved lust. They engage in immoral sex with those not given to them in marriage, which is one of the chief causes for divorce. As a result, they often bring unwanted and uncared for children into the world. They will not have God to rule over them. Married couples live in strife and enmity with each other. This does great damage to marriage and God's institution of the family. Wicked men and women treacherously put away their God-given partners. This has very serious, often lifelong consequences for the children. They are deeply hurt by the divorce of their parents and are often left to fend for themselves. Even when a marriage is not destroyed by the evil of divorce, worldly marriages often degenerate into being the opposite of what God intended and become wretched spheres of confusion and strife. All of this breeds deep-seated bitterness and hopelessness and rebelliousness in children.

Even our Christian marriages are affected by the fact that we have not yet been fully delivered from our depraved sinful natures. When God brings us together as husband and wife, we soon experience that the unity, peace, and happiness of our marriages are marred by our sinful natures, our daily behavior in our homes. We realize that our children are conceived and born in sin. They are born with the same depraved nature as their parents. A great part of parenting involves strenuous effort towards driving wickedness and sin out of the hearts of our children by godly discipline and admonition.

We must understand that bearing covenant children is a mandate from the Lord. It is not something left simply to the decision of married couples. Our only hope is in the sovereign grace of God and the work of His Spirit in our hearts that restores us and enables us to be parents. According to God's wonderful covenant purposes, He establishes a home for us and our children. God is pleased to continue His covenant in the line of generations, and according to this purpose He saves our children and sends His Spirit also into their hearts. The covenant home is the amazing institution where our covenant children can be turned from their natural ungodliness and be taught the fear and love of God. God is pleased to raise up from our children members of His church and citizens of His kingdom. They are preserved from the temptations of this wicked world in the sheltered environment of the covenant home, pro-

tected and spiritually nourished by godly parents. They are taught what it means to live the Christian life. With the blessing of God, the covenant home is in the midst of this ungodly world! What potential for great good it has for the children of this home! While our children are growing up from being helpless little babes to becoming mature responsible adults, covenant sons and daughters of God, they will go through many stages of life. Each stage requires new wisdom and understanding by godly parents. At first we feel awkward and inadequate. God teaches us by His word and through our years of experience as parents. We learn much from our children concerning their needs and their personal development. God is our help.

The world has created its own institutions for the raising of its children. Parents give their children over to day-care centers, sometimes already a few weeks after they are born. They do this because they want to free themselves from the burdens and responsibilities of caring for children. Fathers and mothers, driven by their own selfish lust and pride and desire for prosperity in the world, both have their own agendas. They do not want to be limited by the great demands of daily child care. Often parents even give little consideration of the quality of the child-care institutions where they drop their children off. They imagine that even those who are simple and uneducated and who perhaps have their own lives in a state of confusion can still care for the children. If damage is done to the children, this can, according to their foolish imagination, be repaired with a little part-time parenting at the end of the day when both husband and wife are exhausted from a hard day's work.

Godly fathers and mothers ought surely to realize how serious it is simply to drop their children off at worldly day-care centers or entrust them to nannies. What a failure to accept covenantal responsibility for the raising of our children this really is.

The world even sometimes vehemently insists that only state-run governmentally-controlled schools can nurture the children of our society. This is not a task, it is said, that should be left to the parents. No doubt in many ungodly homes parents are woefully inadequate for raising their children because of the wickedness and ungodliness and worldliness of their own lifestyle. It is imagined, therefore, that the public school will solve the

problems that arise in the lives of the children. The world employs its well-trained professional teachers. Included on their staff are some professional child psychologists who are so much better equipped than parents to deal with psychological problems children have. They pretend to have the answers to the problems expected in the days of youth, during the natural rebellious stage of life when they desire to go their own way.

There are public schools that boast of teaching morality and good behavior to children. They teach community involvement and humanitarianism. No godly parent ought to imagine that this kind of instruction is the same as being instructed in the fear of God and love for His commandments. In the final analysis the public school teaches a philosophy of worldliness and ungodliness that is antithetic to true Christianity and the love for God's commandments.


Many of us as parents have the opportunity to send our covenant children to a Christian school operated by and overseen by a society of covenant parents. We are deeply thankful for our excellent Christian schools that God has given us and for the spiritually qualified and devoted teachers of these schools.

Even then, however, we must never imagine that these excellent Christian schools can by themselves nurture our children. Our children must be nurtured first of all by covenant parents in the God-ordained institution of the covenant family. There are many reasons for this, some of which we want to consider in future articles. When there is trouble in the home because of parental neglect or poor parenting, great damage is often done to the chil-

dren. This often cannot be repaired even by the best of Christian schools,

Good parenting must lead our children from their helpless infancy through all the stages of their lives until they are brought to years when they can discern truth and righteousness for themselves, and live independently as mature and responsible adults. Over the years of growing up, our children need the spiritual shelter, the moral instruction, and the guidance that only the home of the truly God-fearing can and does provide for them. They need to be admonished and corrected and disciplined. They need also to be encouraged in a Christian walk and the knowledge and commitment to the truth of God in their lives. The covenant family is the God-ordained institution to perform this work.

History has proven that the whole experiment of public education is a colossal failure. The many rebellious youth without aim and direction in their lives that our society produces is proof of this. Many of the youth that are the products of the worldly institutions that man has created are wholly unprepared to live stable, responsible, and productive lives, even for things needful for life in earthly society.

We love the words of Psalm 128 as versified in our Psalter for singing in our covenant homes and in our churches. "In thy wife thou shalt have gladness, she shall fill thy home with good, happy in her loving service and the joys of motherhood. Joyful children, sons and daughters, shall about thy table meet, olive plants in strength and beauty, full of hope and promise sweet. Lo, on him that fears Jehovah shall this blessedness attend..." (Psalter 360). 

STAFF NEWS

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Thanks, Mr. Wigger!

The *Standard Bearer*, as you can tell from the Volume and Number on the front cover of this issue, is ninety years old. "News From Our Churches," one of

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its more popular rubrics, is younger. It's fifty-six years old. It has therefore appeared in most of the last 1,176 issues. And Mr. Ben Wigger has written half of them.

The one that appears in this issue is his last. For his twenty-eight years of faithful service as news editor in the *SB*, the Editorial Committee, on behalf of the Editorial

Staff and, I'm sure, of some 2,500 readers of this magazine, says, "Thank you."

"Faithful service." I'm thinking of such things as dependability and punctuality. Twenty-eight years (have you done the math?) translates to nigh unto 600 issues. And I'm here to say that this managing editor did not have to wait for the news for a single one of them. Not only was Ben's news always there, it was always on time.

But I'm thinking of more than that. Our now-retired news editor had a feel for what the news column in the *Standard Bearer* was intended to be. Ben was but nine years old when Rev. Hoeksema introduced the column back in 1958, so he may never have read its purpose as stated by the then editor-in-chief. But there can be little doubt that he lived up to it.

Let the reader judge.

The "Announcement," in the October 1, 1958 *SB*, read like this:

The *Standard Bearer* staff, in its last meeting, decided to institute a new column, under the rubric "News From Our Churches." This decision is in response to the popular demand from many of our readers who have been desiring a closer unity between our churches, a unity wherein we can share one another's joys and sorrows, a unity which is based on one hope, one love, one Lord Jesus Christ. So in this issue you will find the introductory column devoted to church news as it affects each one of us. The ministers of each congregation, and the presidents of consistories of vacant churches, are requested to mail their bulletins and other important news directly to the editor of the column.

Please send your contributions to J.M. Faber, 1123 Cooper Ave. SE, Grand Rapids 7, Michigan.

Not only 'news,' you see, but *perspective*.

How "see you in church. J.M.F." envisioned his task is clear from the opening paragraph in the first news that came from his pen. It read like this:

May this column serve as a means to reach out to the far-off outposts of Redlands, Lynden, and Loveland, drawing them into a closer circle with the rest of our churches, binding us closer in the bonds of love; yea, let it be a means to embrace one another in the communion of saints.

An ambitious undertaking. I do not know if I would have dared set myself up for accomplishing a goal like that. But already in his first article, JMF demonstrated how it's done. "The number one news item today is Rev. Ophoff, of course.... G.M.O.'s pen is resting. The Lord told him to lay it down for awhile. Our beloved Rev. Ophoff has suffered a stroke which has become a stroke for us all...." Denominational news. News of vital interest to every one of the congregations in the PRC, and written in such a way that it served as "a means to embrace one another in the communion of saints."

More often than not, the news items were more limited in scope, but even those were made to have broader application. "We see in the bulletin of First Church [G.R.] that the catechisms are starting this week.... Societies [also] have already begun; what bountiful opportunities are given us, children and adults, to thoroughly furnish the man of God by the study of His Word. It is deplorable that not everybody avails himself of these opportunities...."

Was there, with JMF, also a 'lighter' side? Indeed there was. In a later column: "Adams St. ninth graders worked hard getting ready for and serving a spaghetti supper on the evening of December 12. Dishing out spaghetti, pouring second cups of coffee, and serving ice cream and desserts kept them busy—with a little assist from their parents. It is reported that some six hundred mouths were fed—that took quite a mountain of spaghetti!"

In that same news: "The other group comprised the choir from Adams St. School, all forty-seven of them, with Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hanko, Miss Dykstra, and, of course, Miss Kuiper singing with them. They sang at the homes of several shut-ins, slipping and sliding down slippery front steps. That couldn't happen in Redlands."

..."Another situation impossible to arise in Redlands: The Men's Society meeting of South Holland scheduled for Dec. 8 was frozen out!"

You get the idea—news written in such a way that it reaches out to the far-off outposts...drawing them into a closer circle with the rest of our churches, binding us together in the bonds of love.

J.M.F. showed the way. A pattern worthy of emulation. And Mr. Ben Wigger mastered it. His style is of

course his own. Delightful. But the overall tone of it reflects the pattern set by JMF and the purpose stated by HH: the promotion of “a unity wherein we can share one another’s joys and sorrows.”

Did you hear it too? Already in Ben’s first news (October 1, 1986) there was this:

There was one announcement that was not seen in any of our church bulletins this fall. Did you miss it? The announcement I am speaking of concerns our seminary convocation. As you all no doubt know, there are no young men enrolled in our seminary this fall. No students, no convocation. This fact has to make us all a little sad. We should remember this need daily in our prayers.

And this:

Even though the Hope Heralds, an all male chorus from our Hope Church in Grand Rapids, gave this latest concert on September 7, it should still be mentioned here because that program marked their twenty-fifth anniversary as a group. It isn’t always easy to stay together as a choir for 25 years, and we should add our congratulations to all the men who took part in that group over the past 25 years.

And:

By this time you all should have gotten your copy of the Acts of Synod 1986.... It deals with the life of our churches. I always like to spend some time looking in the Yearbook section of the Acts. It is amazing just how much information about our churches can be found there. If you haven’t gotten your own free copy of our Acts, don’t forget, you are entitled to one.

That that perspective continued through the years could be demonstrated easily. Consider just a couple from Volume 90. “In other news from Covenant of Grace in Spokane, WA, we read recently that their Building Search Committee had agreed on a purchase price with the seller of a church and parsonage not too far from where Covenant currently meets.” Then after giving more details, Ben concluded with this: “What an exciting step to take for any church, and we share in the joy with their congregation.” The very language of HH’s introduction of “News From Our Churches”!

And: “In recent news from the Philippines, we learned that an earthquake hit on Tuesday morning, October 15, measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale.... We are thankful to

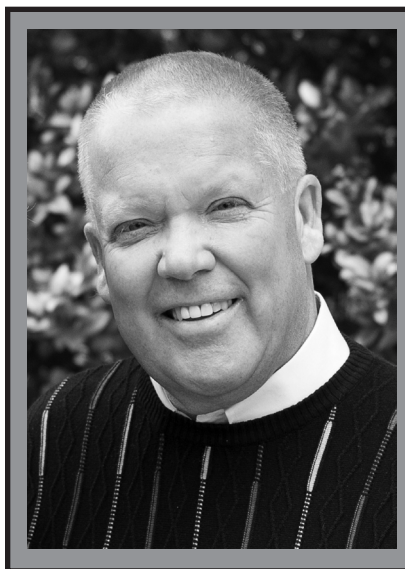
hear that while they [contacts of our missionaries living near the earthquake’s epicenter] felt the tremors, no damage or injuries were sustained. Through these events we hear the footsteps of Christ and are reminded in a concrete way of His coming.”

Like JMF, Ben injected into his writing also a tasteful lighter side. In writing, re-

cently, that “Cornerstone connected to Hudsonville’s live-streaming video of their service through the Internet,” he added this note: “So I guess you could say that Rev. Eriks, Hudsonville’s pastor, may be the first in our denomination to preach live to two separate congregations at the same time.”

Ben Wigger, as we noted at the beginning of this article, “had a feel for what the news column in the *Standard Bearer* was intended to be.” We commend him for that—as well we should. But we write this article more particularly because of the number of years of his service. There have been others, after JMF, who wrote equally well for this very column. But does anyone remember DD, KJV, CK, or DH? Likely not. And that’s not because their writing of news was somehow inferior, but because, for various reasons, they found it necessary to bow out after a relatively short period of time. Then came Ben Wigger, who stayed as long as all five of those who preceded him put together.

In your first news column, Ben, you expressed your hope that “the back page of this magazine” would continue “the excellence that it has enjoyed in the past.” And you added: “Over the years I have always enjoyed reading the Church News and I hope that enjoyment continues on into the future for both you and me.” After 28 years, Ben, your readers can answer with a resounding, “It did!”



Ben Wigger

The Way to Heaven, by John Philips (1585-1663), edited by C. Matthew McMahon & Therese McMahon. Puritan Publications, USA, 2013. 120 pages. Paperback \$14.99, eBook \$7.99. [Reviewed by Rev. Angus Stewart.]

Some in our day claim that it is Roman Catholic or “extreme” to teach that outside the church there is no salvation (Latin: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), even though this has been a teaching of the historic Christian church from the church fathers onwards, including the Reformers, their successors, and the Reformation creeds: *Luther’s Larger Catechism*, the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, *Belgic Confession* 28, *Second Helvetic Confession* 17, and *Westminster Confession* 25:2.

Puritan John Philips’ recently republished book of 120 pages is a sustained argument that eternal life is found only in Christ’s church, for it is, as its title proclaims, *The Way to Heaven* for those eternally elected by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, irresistibly drawn by the Spirit, and justified by faith alone.

Educated at Cambridge, John Philips [or Phillips] (1585-1663) ministered not only in England but also in Massachusetts in New England, then a British colony, before returning to (old) England. Philips began his ministry an Anglican or episcopalian, was a member of the largely Presbyterian Westminster Assembly, and became congregational in his ecclesiology.

The English Puritan presents his thesis: “It must be known and believed of all that desire salvation that the *Regia via*, the King of kings’ highway to heaven, is the Church, without which Church, there is no salvation” (23).

To “demonstrate this truth,” Philips turns first of all to the typology of “the ark of Noah, in which was most lively figured the Church of God...to show that salvation is and only is in the Church” (23). Interestingly, this ark imagery, used by Cyprian in the early church, is cited as the first proof by our Westminster divine and referred to continually by him (e.g., 23, 46-48, 93, 104, 118-119). It is also found in Heinrich Bullinger’s 1566 *Second Helvetic Confession* 17. Second, Philips explains the

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head-body union between Jesus Christ and His church (24).

Next, the author appeals to four other oft-recurring biblical pictures of the church (24-30): “This position, that salvation is to be had only in the Church, is not obscurely noted by those sacred families, so frequent in scripture, where the Church is resembled [1] to a house, [2] to a city, [3] to a mother, [4] to a vine” (24).

Next, Philips treats individually four steps in the *ordo salutis* or order of salvation: election, calling, justification, and sanctification (33-42), showing how each is “such a property of the Church that it cannot possibly be separated from it” (34). Thus, “if there is no salvation without election, calling, justification, and sanctification; and none of these to be found, but only in the Church of God, it follows necessarily that there is no salvation out of the Church” (42).

Philips enumerates four “means to effect and perfect man’s salvation”: “the written Word of God, called the Scriptures, the ministry of preaching the Word, the two sacraments of the New Testament, and prayer” (43). Quoting many pertinent texts of God’s Word, he proves that “these are the prerogatives of the Church” (43) and concludes, “Then we see that the means of salvation being only in the Church, salvation itself is only there, and not to be found elsewhere” (45).

The English Puritan makes a powerful exhortation to join a true church:

This calls all men with a most forcible invitation, even as ever they desire to be saved, to enter timely into this straight gate that leads to life (Matt. 7:14).... This we should do—forsake all, and follow Christ (Mark 10:28); leave all societies for the communion of the saints; for the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, but was fain to return into the ark again (Gen 8:9): so let a man compass the whole world, yet shall he never be able to find rest to his soul, until by entering into the Church, he take Christ’s yoke on him (Matt. 11:29) (48).

First, if someone were to claim that Philips is teaching that there is no salvation outside the *invisible* church, the company of the predestinate, he should know that *The Way to Heaven* excludes this, because the church

that we are bound to join is the church institute with the two marks of a true church: faithful preaching and sacramental administration (43-45, 55-58, 87-90), for “the roadway [to heaven] is to be joined with some visible orthodox congregation” (47).

Second, a reader who is more familiar with fundamentalism or revivalism or modern evangelicalism (which are largely Anabaptist) than with the Reformed creeds and theology might think that Philips’ ship is sailing near Rome. Far from it! Philips engages in a lively polemic with the “Romish church” and its “Antichristian religion”

(16), including its councils, publications, and theologians throughout *The Way to Heaven* (e.g., 49-105, 114-117).

Third, one with some grasp of Reformed soteriology with its *sola fide* but little knowledge of Reformed ecclesiology with its *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* might think that Philips is denying or compromising justification by faith alone. Not at all! The Puritan is rock solid on this article of a standing or a falling church (35-40, 108-111).

Philips’ *The Way to Heaven* is well worth buying and reading! ∞

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

School Activities

Friends and supporters of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI were invited to eat at Heritage’s full service restaurant at the annual Hudsonville Community Fair the week of August 18-23. Volunteers from Heritage cooked and served breakfast, lunch, supper, and desserts and snacks all six days of the fair. Speaking from past experience, I would say that this must have been an enjoyable but extremely busy and intense week for all involved. Countless hours are spent leading up to that week, and then even more during that week, helping this restaurant succeed. But in the end it also proves to be an excellent fundraiser for Heritage and well worth the effort.

When you read this in mid-September, all of our Christian schools should be well into their first month of another school year. We could not help but notice that two of our schools, the Northwest Iowa

PR Christian School and Trinity Christian High School, began their school year on August 18, with convocation services led by Rev. John Marcus, pastor of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada. Rev. Marcus was in Doon, IA filling a classical appointment for two Sundays, was available, and agreed to speak. Rev. Marcus spoke first at 9:00 A.M. at Northwest Iowa on the theme, “A Workman That Needeth Not To Be Ashamed,” based on II Timothy 2:15. Then again at 11:00 A.M., Rev. Marcus spoke at Trinity Christian High School. Although no theme is mentioned for Rev. Marcus at Trinity, we will assume it was the same as at Northwest Iowa.

Even though we may not typically think of our Seminary as a school, it would qualify as one, so we include some Seminary news here. Our Seminary invited those who were interested, and whose schedules allowed it, to attend selected classes for this coming school year. Two classes were open to auditors the first semester: The first locus of Dogmatics, Theology, taught by Prof. Ronald Cammenga, and Medi-

eval Church History taught by Prof. Russell Dykstra.

Congregation Activities

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we extend a big thank-you to all the Sunday School teachers in our churches. We extend a big thank-you to all the parents as well, for their support of our Sunday School programs. And we especially extend a big thank-you to all the students of Sunday School for the efforts and enthusiasm they displayed week after week. As we reflect back on a rewarding season of instruction, we are thankful for the active role each of these three groups played, and pray that it will serve in a small way in bringing our children up in the fear of the Lord.

The Activities Committee of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited their congregation to join them for three planned discussion groups this summer. On July 27 their study focused on Abraham. Sarah was added to the discussion on August 24, and a discussion centering on Lot was planned for Sunday, September 21.

The Marriage Mentoring Com-

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

mittee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI arranged three summer classes on marriage for their congregation. The first class was held on August 6, followed by classes on August 20 and September 3. Topics and speakers were: August 6: "The Foundation of Marriage, God's Good Creation," Rev. Van Overloop. August 20: "Keeping Love Alive in Marriage," Rev. Garrett Eriks. And September 3: "Resolving Conflict: Mirroring Grace to One Another," Rev. Carl Haak. Group discussion followed each meeting.

Young Adult Activities

Saturday, August 16, the Young Adults Society of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI joined young singles and married couples from the Cornerstone, Crete, Peace, and Bethel churches for a bike outing along the waterfront bike trail in Chicago, IL.

The Young Adults of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada planned an outing at Emerald Lake for Saturday, July 19. The day started with an early morning meeting at Immanuel for muffins,

coffee, and directions. After arriving at Emerald Lake, they could choose from among various activities. They could enjoy a leisurely walk around the lake, rent a canoe, go fishing, or if they were a bit more adventurous, they could do part or all of a 20 km loop around the Emerald Triangle.

Young People's Activities

The annual Young People's Convention was held this summer at the Idyllwild Pines Camp and Conference Center in southern California on August 4-9 and was sponsored by the young people and congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. From all accounts, a safe, exciting, and spiritually enriching week was enjoyed by all. This year's theme was "Living in the Last Days," based on I Thessalonians 5:1-8. Revs. Garrett Eriks, Nathan Decker, and Brian Huizinga were the featured speakers. We are thankful for all the efforts of the Hope congregation, the leaders, chaperones, and speakers. May Jehovah use this convention as an occasion for our young people to strengthen each other's hand in God (I Sam. 23:16).

Evangelism Activities

The congregation at First PRC in Holland, MI enjoyed an Evangelism Workshop on July 14-15. This year's theme, "Clash of Worldviews and Our Witness," proved to be very beneficial, since postmodernism is becoming a greater and greater threat to the church and her witness. What must be our witness to people who are indifferent to truth and to God? Discussion on this subject was led by our missionary to Pittsburgh, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma.

On Friday, August 8, the area churches were invited to Calvary PRC in Hull, IA for a lecture by missionary pastor Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma entitled, "Today's Evangelism." Rev. Bruinsma also gave a presentation on his work in Pittsburgh at Calvary PRC after the evening worship service on Sunday, August 10.

Minister Activities

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, declined the call extended to him to serve as missionary pastor to the Philippines. ☺

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of First PRC of Holland express their Christian sympathy to Harold Schipper and family in the death of their wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother,

EDNA SCHIPPER.

May the word of God comfort them in their loss in Psalm 116: "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.... The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me.... Then called I upon the name of the LORD.... Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I believed, therefore have I spoken.... Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Dan Holstege, President
Greg Bos, Assistant Clerk

Bound Volumes

■ With the September 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, we have reached the end of Volume Year 90. For those who would like bound volumes of this year, the price is the same as last year: \$32 (\$18 for those who bring in their own copies for binding). Reminder—for those dropping off their own copies to the RFPA, please do so by the end of October to the RFPA office. Questions, call Paula at 616-457-5970.

Annual Meeting

REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION



Rev. Clayton Spronk

"The Importance of Reading Church History"

September 25, 2014 at 7:30pm
Grandville Protestant Reformed Church
4300 40th St SW, Grandville, MI 49418

Reformation Lecture

■ Saturday, October 25, 2014, at 2:00 P.M. Professor Russell Dykstra will speak on "The Reformation's Zeal for Christian Education" at Hope PRC,
1307 E. Brockton Ave.
Redlands, CA.

A public lecture: Kuyper's Common Grace 'Christianizing of Culture'

—Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?

Sponsored by Southwest Protestant Reformed Church Evangelism

Speaker: David J. Engelsma

Professor emeritus of theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

Place: Sunshine Christian Reformed Church, 3300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI

Date: September 26, 2014. **Time:** 7:30 P.M.

The lecture, a response to the publication of the first ever English translation of Abraham Kuyper's work, *Common Grace*, will examine the present project of "Christianizing" the culture by a common grace of God in light of Scripture, the Christian creeds, and the history of Kuyper's common grace project in his own Netherlands.

More information at: www.commongraceandculture.com