

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • July 2014



VOLUME 90 • NO. 18

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Cover picture of Delegates to Synod 2014

Left-to-right: Rev. C. Haak, H. Langerak, Rev. D. Kuiper, Rev. W. Langerak, P. VanDerSchaaf, G. VanBaren, J. Regnerus, Prof. B. Gritters, Rev. M. McGeown, Rev. A. Brummel, J. Decker, L. Uittenboggard, D. Terpstra, Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. C. Spronk, J. Lenting, Rev. R. VanOverloop, N. Kleyen, A. Bylsma, Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. K. Koole, Rev. S. Key, Lee Wong Wee, Rev. Laning, Prof. R. Dykstra

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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.

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Subscription Price

\$21.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$21
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$10.50.

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

Acknowledged To Be Blessed of Jehovah

“And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.”

Isaiah 61: 9

The church of God in Isaiah's day was filled with so much sin, that God commissioned Isaiah to declare severe judgment. “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land” (Is. 6:9-12).

This prophecy was fulfilled. The Lord used the Babylonians to bring utter desolation to the nation and to the land. A vast multitude of the people were killed. Of those who remained alive, almost all were carried away into captivity. All the houses and buildings were destroyed and left as burnt piles of rubble. The worst for the few sincere believers was the destruction of the temple. Its destruction deprived them of any sign of the forgiveness of their sins in the sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering. And there was no more visible presence of Jehovah with them. Further, they were forcibly removed from the land of promise and carried into Babylon.

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

This is the abbreviated text of the Pre-Synodical Sermon that Rev. VanOverloop preached on June 9, 2014.

Amazingly, God would have Isaiah also declare comfort and bring promises of a great and wonderful restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem. Our text is a part of this latter commission given to Isaiah. Let us note that the promises of restoration have three steps of fulfillment. The initial fulfillment is the return of a people from captivity back into the land of Canaan. The nation was restored after seventy years of captivity. The second fulfillment is the coming of the promised Messiah and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the new dispensation. The complete fulfillment is the heavenly and new Jerusalem in the creation of the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (compare Isaiah 60:1-22 and 61:4-11 with Hebrews 12:22; 13:14 and Revelation 21:2-4, 9-27).

The Amazing Fact

The captivity of a nation usually meant that the existence of that nation ended. It became extinct as a separate nation. This is what happened to the nation of Israel. They were no more. The judgments that Isaiah prophesied would come to Judah forecasted the same sad ending. This would mean the end of the church of God, which was identified with the seed of Abraham. And if the people are no more, then their children certainly will not be anymore. In light of the promised judgments, the nation of Judah would never be a nation again.

But instead of the shame of extinction, Isaiah comes with amazing and great promises. In chapter 60 Isaiah begins a description of Zion's glory and blessedness after captivity. This is a divine promise that the nation of Judah would not only continue, but would prosper! So real and so powerful are God's promises of blessing that there can be talk about their children and those who are yet unborn.

Using the language of types and shadows, there are promises of the rebuilding of beautiful cities in Canaan, though it was only rubble at the time (4). Even more,

Isaiah declares that Israel will be served by foreigners (5) and fortified by those who had been enemies (6b). Further, Gentiles would be saved and gathered into the nation of Judah (60:4; 43:5, 6). So, instead of shame and embarrassment at their ruin and captivity, they would receive double honor and glory (7). Instead of confusion, they would give a ringing cry concerning their portion of grace from God. They would receive not only forgiveness but also perfect righteousness. A further description of their double portion is that the exiled Israelites would return to Canaan as kings and priests (6a). Judah's beauty is their wearing brilliant garments of righteousness (10b; Rom. 3:22; Rev. 6:11).

When these promises would be realized, then the true Israel of God would be recognized and acknowledged as having God's blessing upon them. First, when Judah would return from captivity and again occupy Canaan, their Samaritan enemies had to acknowledge that God was blessing them, if even Cyrus and Darius would show them favor. The next fulfillment is that of the church of the new dispensation to whom are given the blessings of the Spirit of Christ. When the disciples of Jesus are moved by the Spirit to love one another, then all men knew that they were Jesus' disciples (John 13:34). And when the elect form a unity and when they work together as one, then the world knows that God sent Jesus, for only a divine power is able to take all the saved and join them together as one body (John 17:23). The complete fulfillment of these promises takes place in the new heavens and earth. Then those who saw our good works will glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). When Jesus' disciples bear much fruit (as branches abiding in the vine), then the Father is glorified, for it will be revealed to the ungodly in the judgment day that we are blessed of Jehovah (John 15:8). In the judgment day, all that see the elect will acknowledge that they are the seed that Jehovah has blessed.

The real cause

Isaiah was certain that this future blessedness would take place. His (and our) certainty about this future blessing is because of God's "everlasting covenant" (8b; 55:3). That any sinner is saved is only because of God's eternal, unilaterally-established relationship with them. That any saved sinner remains saved is only because God

unilaterally maintains His relationship of loving fellowship with them.

The "everlasting" character of God's covenant receives the emphasis in our text. Judah is returned from captivity and restored to greatest blessedness just because God's covenant is everlasting. That it is everlasting means that it is unchanging. God's covenant is not dependent on the objects. They were and will always remain unlovable and unlovely. If God's relationship of love depended on us, then it would constantly change. It is a relationship of love toward His people while they were yet sinners (Rom. 5:6-10), and thus it is always first. This relationship of love is not interrupted by our sins. Instead, our sins manifest and exalt the great glory of the graciousness of God's covenant.


Secondly, the covenant is everlasting because it is rooted in God's own eternal being. God's covenantal love is without beginning because it is found in the relationship that eternally exists between the first and second persons of the Trinity, and also in the relationship of triune God to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. God's relationship with us is an extension of His own relationship of eternal love. God's love for Himself means that He will see His purpose and His name and His cause realized.

Thirdly, that the covenant is everlasting means that it is sovereign. It will accomplish what He purposed. The salvation God gives consists of a wonderful, secure relationship of love. It accomplishes the forgiveness of all of our sins and the gift of eternal righteousness. Thus we know that this promise of loving fellowship will be realized in the perfect glory of the new heavens and earth.

The everlasting covenant centered in Christ, who is described in the first verses of this chapter. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus declared that these verses of Isaiah 61 were fulfilled in Himself. He and His work of redeeming those He loved is the basis for God to have this beautiful relationship of loving fellowship with His own. He preached good tidings to the meek. He bound up the brokenhearted and proclaimed liberty to the captives and opening of the prison to them that are bound. This He did in returning the captives from Babylon. And this Jesus does repeatedly in the lives of His sinful children when His Spirit works in them godly sorrow and communicates to them the joy of forgiveness.

The resulting joy

Knowing God's blessing in the covenant is the reason the true Israel of God rejoices. They rejoice in the God of their salvation (10, 11). Their joy is not little, but great ("I will greatly rejoice"—literally, "rejoicing I rejoice"). Their joy is sincere, for it arises out of their "souls." And it is a joy that becomes evident. They sing, they whistle, they hum, they smile. It is as evident as the handsome clothing of a bridegroom and the ornaments of an adorned bride (10). As the garden in the spring of the year brings forth plants and then fruit, so God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

As the broadest gathering of the denomination begins its meetings, the delegates may be assured that God's promises are with them. They gather as a very real part of the true Israel of God. They may be conscious of their personal weaknesses and know that spots adhere to their best works, but they are also to know of God's everlasting covenant. His relationship with them as His elect children will not change—they will not be forsaken. He will be with them in their meetings. May the knowledge of God's everlasting covenant enable the delegates of synod to labor in great hope and joy. They are more than conquerors! 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

Synod 2014: The PRC Working Together

In the age of the Internet where most news travels "faster than a speeding bullet," it's hardly necessary for an SB editorial to report the decisions of Synod 2014. The student examination (the bulk of synod's first two days) was streamed live, and summaries of each day's business were given by synod's clerk, so that for those who are interested (and have access to a computer) the news of synod is old by now. For those who would yet like to see the daily reports—and many pictures of the delegates of Synod 2014—please go to prca.org, click on "About" and then "Synod."

The climax of the churches of the PRCA working together is their synod. One of the most beautiful evidences of the wisdom of Reformed church government is the synod. If she labors as she ought in "ecclesiastical matters only" and in an "ecclesiastical manner" (Church Order, Article 30), synod displays a richness of Christ's church greater than any local congregation can by herself.

The PRCA have always emphasized that they are churches, plural, not the "Protestant Reformed

Church," singular. Each local congregation is autonomous; each is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. Yet it is a misunderstanding of Reformed church government to suppose that the denomination is only a loose collection of independent churches that at times assemble in a classis (regionally) or synod (as a whole) to discuss matters of common concern. The local Protestant Reformed churches show their real unity in these assemblies—in synod particularly. At synod, Protestant Reformed churches are doing the

work of Jesus Christ *as one body*. The churches federate as one body in a denomination, and the federation becomes visible and active especially at synod.

Regrettably, some churches that have been abused by rogue synods overstepping their authority or departing from truth and right have rejected synods altogether. These churches remain independent. They want nothing of synods. Other churches, knowing that independency is not Reformed, have maintained denominational ties in

synods but liberated themselves from synod's real authority. Both of these reactions to abusive synods do injustice to the importance of denominational authority and to the work local churches are called to do together. Together.

These things were running through my mind as I observed with joy the workings of Synod 2014, especially as student Joshua Engelsma was being examined and then was declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the PRC. Together our churches have established and together they maintain an institution to prepare Protestant Reformed ministers. The seminary's governing authority is the synod's Theological School Committee. Admission into the seminary to any student is granted by the churches working together in the synod. Professors are chosen by and then overseen by the churches working together in the synod. That is, the seminary is a denominational seminary. Even the final examination of prospective PRC ministers is conducted by the synod in one of her public meetings (the examinations and graduation ceremonies took about 12 hours—over 30%—of the synodical delegates' time in public assembly).

The beauty of this way of working together—and so publicly—is that all the churches and all her members can have confidence that the graduates of the seminary are properly prepared to take up the work of a Protestant Reformed pastor: PRC pastors have had PRC training by PRC professors chosen by PRC synods for their commit-

ment to PRC doctrine and life. In this way the unity of the PRC is protected. Churches without pastors can have strong assurance of the kind of pastor they may call.

At a conference recently I had opportunity to talk to a member of an *independent* Reformed church. He told me about their efforts to replace their pastor who had taken a call elsewhere. His problem: he did not know the ministers who might be called and was not certain where they had been trained. Granted, his consistory can (and will) interview

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men, listen to their sermons, invite them to their pulpit, and even find reports about the men they might recommend to the congregation. But the reality for them is—without a denominational seminary—the new minister may come from any one of a number of seminaries, probably non-denominational seminaries themselves, may transfer from any number of other Reformed denominations or another independent church, and then may or may not come with some sort of recommendation from a church whose consistory they do not know. The conversation made me thankful for what God has given us in the PRC.

Synod's actions with brother Engelsma bolstered my gratitude to God.

The Protestant Reformed Churches now have spoken, together: "Candidate Joshua Engelsma, eligible for call on or after July 12, 2014. Congratulations, brother!"

In connection with the church's working together in the seminary, synod instructed her Theological School Committee to report to next year's synod about what preparations are being made to ensure long-term stability of and continuity in the seminary's work, given the fact that the three present professors, according to the regulations now in force, must begin the replacement process in three successive years—2019, 2020, and 2021. The present rule is that when a professor turns 65, synod begins seeking his replacement, and when he turns 70 he must fully retire. The TSC will need to convince synod that, for the good of the seminary, and in light of the many factors to be considered, it will be wisest either to abide by the present rules or depart from them. In one scenario, one professor's replacement could begin a year or so before he turns 65, and another a year or so after his 65th birthday—thus spreading out the transition process. What will govern synod's decision is the welfare of the school—what is best for the training of PRC ministers. (We commit to the Lord the matter of the future health and strength of the men who must be replaced.)

The PRC also work together in missions. It's not that no congregation does mission work on its own, but when the PRCs work together to spread the gospel, they do so synodically. The churches together rejoiced to hear Rev. Bruinsma's oral report of the work in Pittsburgh—work that the denomination does through the calling church, Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, and oversees through its all-volunteer Domestic Mission Committee (DMC). It must have been encouraging to the DMC to hear some delegates of synod openly express their encouragement to the DMC to go forward with a proposal to call another missionary for domestic missions.

The PRC work together in the task of foreign mission work in the Philippines with two full-time missionary-pastors and their families: Rev D. Kleyn and Rev. R. Smit. Synod approved the decision that Rev. Richard Smit return to North America in July 2015. They also gave the go-ahead to the FMC and the Doon congregation to begin already to call a replacement for him. These PRC foreign missionaries—Smit and D. Kleyn—were intimately involved in the work of forming a new denomination in the Philippines, where two Filipino pastors and consistories now labor together for the Reformed faith, and other congregations are looking to join her. They are training men, both within and without the new denomination, to be Reformed officebearers.

Not to be sneezed at is the references, by the FMC, to two other

significant possibilities. First, they have discussed with the missionaries in the Philippines, with our minister-on-loan in Singapore, and with our seminary professors, what might be the possibilities of PRC seminary-training in Southeast Asia—an exciting prospect. Second, they are considering asking the churches of the PRC to send a third foreign missionary to Southeast Asia. Their eye is on Myanmar (Burma) and India and the contacts the Lord has given there.

Together the PRC seek to establish contacts with other churches of like faith. Seeking relationships with other churches outside of the denomination is a work no local congregation is free to do. We have agreed that the work of manifesting the catholicity of the church is a work of the “churches in common,” as our Church Order puts it in Article 30.

Together the PRC have established sister-church relationships with the CPRC Northern Ireland, and the CERC Singapore—both of which sent delegates to speak to the PRC Synod. The thrust of both delegates' speeches was the beauty of our denominations working together. Synod heard that these two denominations are now meeting each other for possible formal relationships.

Jointly we have established corresponding relations with the EPC of Australia. There is a *relationship* with these saints “down under” because of the close agreement we have with them; it cannot be a *full sister-church* relationship because of the differences. Synod is sending

another delegation to Australia, as well as to the BERG in Germany. The contacts are developed by carrying on important theological discussions. And synod instructed the Committee for Contact with Other Churches to send another delegation of observers to the 2014 meeting of NAPARC, to study further the constitution and by-laws of this organization, and to recommend principles and guidelines for participation in such organizations. All this the churches do together.

Together we support the needy churches of the denomination. Seven churches have not the means to maintain themselves with a full-time pastor. By this action, the smaller churches are reminded of the interest the PRC has in bestowing abundant care upon every member of the body. In concert we support the retired ministers and their widows.

And through probably the least known of all the denominational committees, the PRC together even produce and approve instructional materials for use in the catechism classes for the churches' children. The unity of our denomination is primarily a unity in truth, a truth imparted to our covenant children also in the catechism room. All the members of the denomination, in answer to all the important questions of the gospel, give the same answers, that is, they speak with one voice...*together*.

We labor while it is day, till the night comes when no one can work.

And we resist every effort of the devil to divide us. In truth, we labor together for the Lord Jesus Christ.



Ken Ham Debate

I commend the *SB* for publishing Rev. Clay Spronk's recent article "The Bill Nye vs. Ken Ham Debate" (May 15, 2014, p. 370). Like Rev. Spronk, I watched the debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham with great interest, and came away with an appreciation for the way that Ham defended the importance of Scripture in interpreting science. It is the Bible that *must* be the "corrective lens" for logical interpretation of scientific evidence by a believing scientist, as it is the only means for obtaining a true vision of the natural world around us.

While I largely agreed with Rev. Spronk's article, I wonder whether the word "silly" is a good way to characterize the conclusions of evolutionary science. My concern is that use of the word "silly" to describe the elaborate—and often convincing—constructs of modern evolutionism leaves believers with the impression that these scientific interpretations are shallow and easily defeated by any believer with a bit of good logic. My experience is that this is not the case. The lack of solid answers that Ham could provide for some of the questions raised by Nye clearly demonstrates the difficulty of interpreting *all* scientific observations in light of Scripture, even for an experienced believer with considerable scientific knowledge.

The problem with atheistic science is *not* its failure at logic, but rather its failure to comport with the truths of Scripture. In many—but certainly not all—ways, evolutionary interpretation of the natural world makes logical sense. But absent Scripture and the eyes of faith, these interpretations are prone to error since fallen man will naturally seek to "worship the creature more than the Creator," even in his logic (Rom. 1:25). As the temptations of Satan are so often presented under the deceptive guise of "half-truths," so the arguments of atheistic scientists are cloaked in remarkable logic and convincing interpretations of data, all intended to exclude God from the picture. As such these arguments are most certainly "foolish" in the biblical sense, but perhaps not "silly."

Brendan Looyenga

Response:

In my article I mentioned that Ken Ham argued that creationists can be highly skilled scientists and that he illustrated this point by playing prerecorded clips of bril-

liant scientists who are creationists. Readers of the *SB* should know that Dr. Looyenga (although not mentioned by Ham) is an example of a creationist who is a highly skilled scientist. His knowledge of the arguments of atheistic scientists used to buttress the theory of evolution far exceeds my own. I appreciate Dr. Looyenga's ability to respond intelligently to the arguments of evolutionists and have profited from his efforts to share his expertise with other Christians to help them understand and respond to the dangerous and evil theory of evolution.

Dr. Looyenga is right to emphasize that the main problem with modern evolutionism is unbelief. And his caution against thinking that the arguments of modern evolutionists are easy for Christians to answer with "a good bit of logic" is spot on. Therefore, I am willing to concede that my use of the word "silly" was not as careful as it should have been when I used the word to characterize "every...silly man-made belief that is part of the theory of evolution." I can see that "foolish" would have been the better word to use when making such a broad generalization.

However, I am not ready to give up the word silly altogether. I can see, for example, the logic, though it is based on foolish unbelief, of the atheistic scientist's argument that the world must be millions of years old because of the many layers of ice they observe in the Arctic. But there is no logic to the argument that consciousness developed from unconsciousness or that man developed from monkeys—even rocks! These are both foolish and silly arguments that scientists in their blind unbelief have put forth because in the hardness of their hearts they will not admit the existence of God.

Some evolutionists are even willing to admit that some of their constructs lack a logical foundation but are motivated by a determination to deny God. In an article published on the Institute for Creation Research website, Henry Morris III cited an example of such an admission (<http://www.icr.org/article/7258/>). He wrote,

Dr. Richard Lewontin, a Harvard University geneticist, biologist, and social commentator, wrote an article in *The New York Review of Books* entitled "Billions and Billions of Demons." Written less than 20 years ago, the article acknowledges that those who are "the initi-

ated” of the scientific world are well aware of the need to formulate and process data that will prevent creationist thinking—even though it is an obvious effort to stop a “divine foot” from getting in the door:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.... It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.

I agree with Dr. Looyenga that the reason all Christians, scientists or not, should sharply and confidently condemn the theory of evolution, even though it is taught by brilliant scientists, is that it is contrary to Scripture. But I think it is also possible and important for Christians, who are able to see the truth clearly because they are guided by the “corrective lens” of Scripture, to recognize the absurdity of some of the claims of evolutionism.

—Rev. C. Spronk

Correction from the SAC

The Student Aid Committee desires to correct two misconceptions that were conveyed in your Synodical Preview article “Blessings and Opportunities” (May 15, 2014, p. 364). Both had to do with the special Seminary Student Assistance Fund administered by the Student Aid Committee. The part of our report to Synod 2014 that appeared in the printed Agenda showed a balance of more than \$100,000 in this fund. And that part of our report showed no disbursements from it. Understandably, you concluded that the Seminary Student Assistance Fund is a “large, little-used fund.” But it is not.

Disbursements over the last five years totaled approximately \$117,000. We have reported those disbursements to synod each year in the part of our annual report that is treated in closed session and is therefore not in the printed Agenda. The pertinent numbers do appear also, later, in the financial spreadsheet in the Acts of Synod. But we see now that, to avoid misunderstanding, we should in the future include that information in the part of our report to synod that gets into the printed Agenda.

The other misconception is in regard to the purpose of the fund. You write that it is “intended for emergencies.” That is true. But Synod 2005 did not *restrict* it to that. The adopted motion states that the funds will be “distributed to the seminary students who demonstrate additional need.” Emergencies can and do arise; however, the funds are primarily disbursed monthly to cover normal budgeted needs.

What a blessing this fund has been for our students, and for us as churches to assist these men and their families.

For the Student Aid Committee
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Amen

Amen is the last word of God. It is the last word of God declared in His eternal counsel. It is the last word of God to us in Holy Scripture. To everything in the Bible, from its “In the beginning” to its concluding “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,” to every word of history and prophecy, providence and miracle, blessing and cursing, law and gospel, exhortation and promise—the faithful, true, and everlasting God adds one final word. Amen!


Amen is a Hebrew word that means “it shall truly and certainly be” (H.C., L.D. 52). This word is very familiar, for it is one of the few Hebrew words used in the Greek N.T. and retained in almost every translation of the Bible no matter the language. Dutch, Germans, Italians, Russians, Spanish, Swahili, Koreans, Filipinos, and others the world over know the word amen. Among the egregious errors of recent Bible translations is that they strip God’s Word of many amens. In these, our Lord’s Prayer, the four gospels, and many epistles have no concluding amen.

Rebellious, unbelieving man despises God’s amen. To the history and miracles of God’s word man says, “Not so.” To God’s prophecies and promises he declares, “It shall not be.” Man always wants the last word. As far as he is concerned, Darwin and Dawkins, Kant and Dewey, Franklin and Jefferson, Hollywood and Nashville, get the last word. And even in churches where amens loudly ring out, Pelagius and Arminius routinely are given the last word by preachers adding many “ifs” and “buts” upon which God’s amen depends. A-men becomes Ahh!-men!

God’s children love God’s amen. And by the almighty and gracious power of God, they make His amen their own. Amen is the last word of faith. Amen expresses faith’s certainty that everything God has revealed in His Word is true. Amen expresses faith’s confidence that whatever God promises in His Word—especially the remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation—is mine, by grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits (H.C.,

L.D. 7). Therefore, to all the commands of God (I John 5:21), the promises (Rev. 22:20), prophecies (Jer. 28:6), history (John 21:25), blessings (Rom. 15:33), and even cursings of God on the disobedient (Deut. 27:15-26), the believing church says, “Amen.” No ifs, ands, or buts. By faith, amen is the last word of every sermon, and of all our praise, worship, and thanksgiving of God (Neh. 8:6). Amen is the last word of our prayers (Matt. 6:13) and confession. Rightly, amen is the last word of the Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, the Canons of Dordt, and Belgic Confession. And, appropriately, the last word of God explained in the Heidelberg Catechism is amen.

God speaks this last word by Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the Amen of God. He is the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God (Rev. 3:14). In Him all the promises of God are yea and amen (II Cor. 1:20). And this word is certain, for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:36). Jesus speaks and seals these promises of God with His own amens. “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20). “I am He that lives and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen” (Rev. 1:18). “Surely I come quickly. Amen” (Rev. 22:20).

Above all, therefore, faith desires, expects, and says amen to God’s eternal glory and blessedness in Jesus Christ. By faith every believer yearns that the Lord be blessed forevermore, and from everlasting to everlasting. Amen (Ps. 89:52; 41:13). Faith anticipates His glorious name being blessed forever and the whole earth being filled with His glory, amen and amen (Ps. 72:19). Faith exclaims amen, it shall certainly be, that unto God be glory in the church by Jesus Christ in all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:21). And when Jesus returns, and that last word of God is spoken, the angels, the whole creation, and the church dressed in robes washed white in His blood will say only this: “Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 7:12). 

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

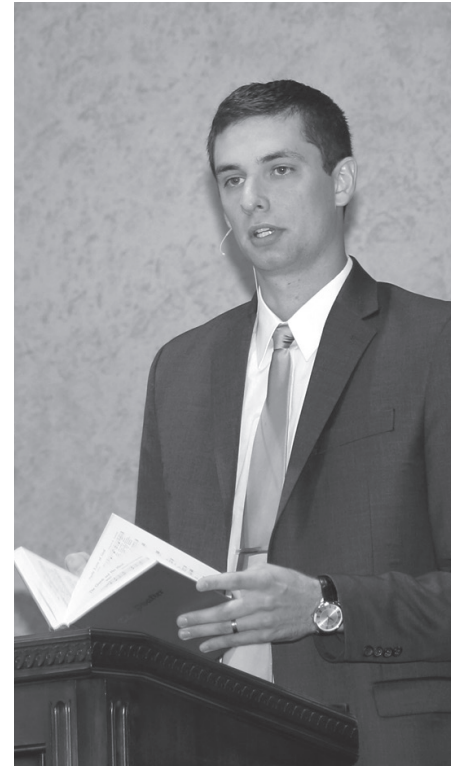
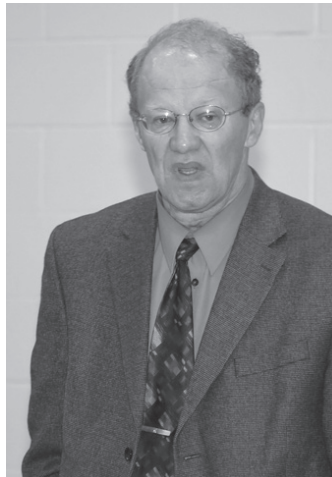
SYNOD 2014



◀ Pre-synodical service, Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, on Isaiah 61:8b-9.



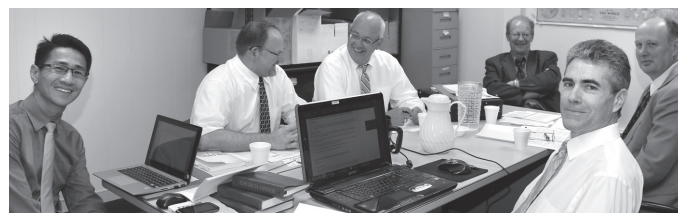
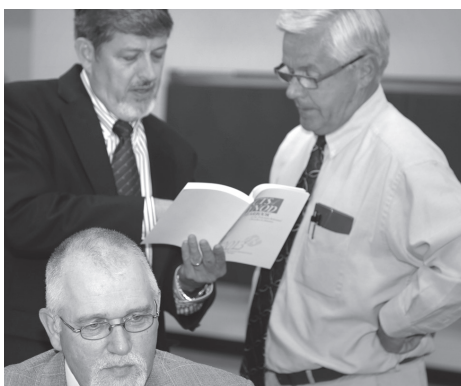
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Rev. D. Kuiper, 1st Clerk; Rev. C. Spronk, 2nd Clerk

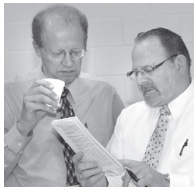
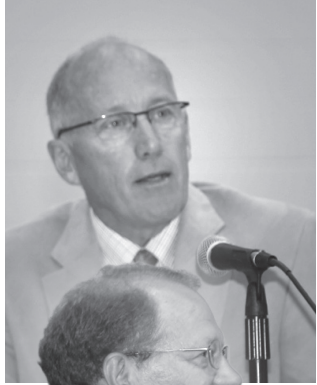
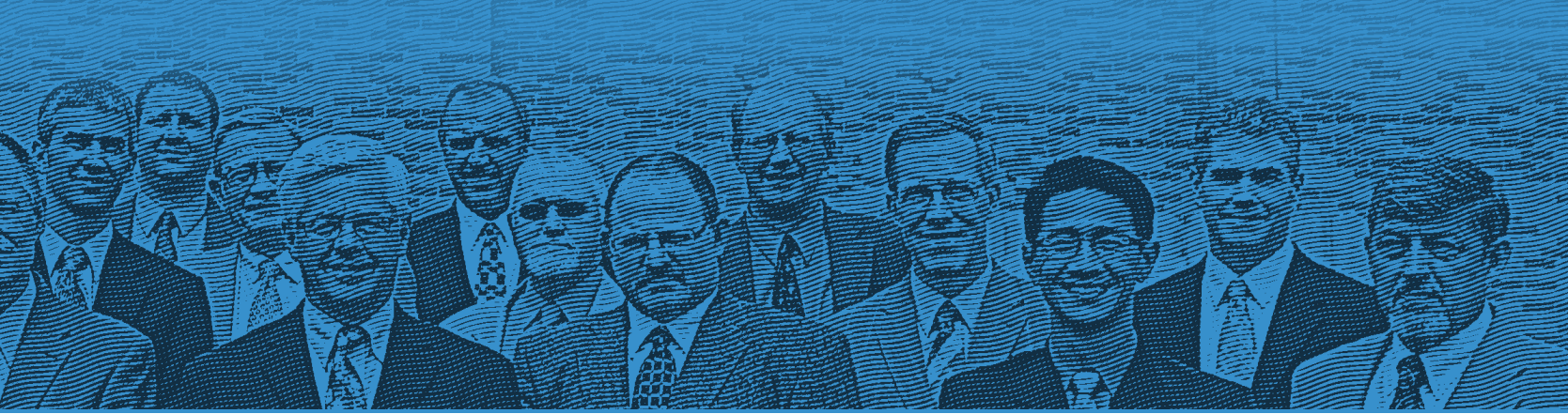


Seminarian Joshua Engelsma,
Specimen Sermon: "Search Me,
O God!" (Ps. 139:23-24).



SYNOD HIGHLIGHTS





Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (9)

What the Bible Says about the Bible: The Testimony of the Psalms (1)

Introduction

In marvelous ways God reveals Himself. First, He reveals Himself in the creation, for “[t]he heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). Because of God’s revelation in the creation the psalmist exclaims in Psalm 8:1, “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” Besides God’s revelation of Himself in the works of His hands in the creation, He also reveals Himself in the history of the world, as He orders all things that happen for the accomplishment of His purposes. The psalmist teaches this in Psalm 33:11: “The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

But even more clearly than His revelation in creation and history, God has made Himself known in the Holy Scriptures. *Deus dixit!* God has spoken! “[F]or thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Ps. 138:2). Because God has exalted His word above all His name, the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119:18 is: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

The Bible is a book like no other book. The Bible is the word of God. The Bible is not merely a book *about* God. Neither is the Bible the testimony of religious people *to* God. The Bible does not only *contain* the word of God, as though the word of God can be found in the Bible, along with the words of men, particularly the men who wrote the various books of the Bible. This is the view that many today have of the Bible.

But all these views are mistaken. They are mistaken for the simple reason that the Bible *is* the word of God.

The Bible is the word of God as a whole, and the Bible is the word of God in all its parts. From beginning to end, the Bible *is* God’s word. What it says, God says. From Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21, God is speaking. In every book, in every chapter, in every verse, we are confronted with “Thus saith the Lord.”

This is what the Bible teaches about itself. The Bible proclaims itself to be the word of God. What is true of the Bible as a whole is also true of the Old Testament. The Jews divided the Old Testament into three main parts: the law (Torah or Pentateuch), the prophets (Neviim), and the writings (Kethuvim or Hagiographa). We have considered together the testimony of the Old Testament that it is the word of God. We have considered together the testimony of the Pentateuch that it is the word of God. And we have considered together the testimony of the Old Testament prophets that what they wrote is the word of God. It remains for us to consider the testimony of the third division of the Old Testament, what the Jews referred to as the writings.

The Book of Psalms and Psalm 119

Although the third division of the Old Testament Scriptures includes more than the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms is prominent in it. And although every book of the Bible has its unique canonical significance, the book of Psalms is unlike any other book of the Bible. It is a book that has not one, but several different human writers, whose lives span more than a thousand years. Included among the human writers of the psalms are David, Solomon, Moses, Asaph, Heman, Ethan, and others. As far as its main content is concerned, the book of Psalms does not contain laws or record historical events, although many of the events of Israel’s history are

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Previous article in this series: June 2014, p. 391.

referred to. But as far as the nature of the book of Psalms, it is a devotional book. It is made up of songs (a psalm is a song sung to musical accompaniment) and prayers to God. In the psalms the psalmists call upon God, cry out to God, praise God, beseech God, extol God's greatness, and magnify His glorious name.

Moreover, the psalms are personal and experiential. Throughout the psalms the personal pronouns "I" and "my" and "we" and "our" occur time and time again. The psalms give expression to the struggles, sorrows, disappointments, righteous anger, fears, doubts, and cares, as well as the joy, hope, assurance, and triumph of God's people in every age. John Calvin was accustomed to calling this book "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul" of the believer.¹ The psalms were intended to be used not only for private devotion, but also in the public worship of God's people, as indeed they have been in every age, beginning with the worship of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament and continuing into the New Testament in the worship of the church. Many of the psalms indicate the place that they have in the public, corporate worship of God's people, being directed, as the heading of many of the psalms indicate, to the "chief musician."

The book of Psalms has more chapters in it than any other book; there are 150 psalms.² The longest chapter in the book with the most chapters contains 176 verses. This is Psalm 119, which is by far the lengthiest of the psalms—more than twice as long as the next longest, Psalm 78, which has 72 verses.

The psalms are poetry and belong to the group of books that are often designated as the Poetical Books of the Bible. As poetry, Psalm 119 has a unique structure, a structure that sets it apart from most other psalms. It is an acrostic psalm. There are three main kinds of acrostic psalms. Psalm 119 represents the first type. Psalm 119 consists of twenty-two distinct sections or stanzas. The first letter of each of the eight lines that make up each stanza begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza is devoted to the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; in fact, each section is named after the

letter of the Hebrew alphabet with which in the original Hebrew the first word of every line begins, Aleph through Taw. Other psalms than Psalm 119 use the same basic device, but altered so that each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These psalms are Psalms 25, 34, and 145. This is also the structure of the last part of Proverbs 31, the section that begins with verse 10 and continues through the end of the chapter, verse 31. This is the section of Proverbs 31 that describes the "virtuous woman." Then there is a third type of acrostic psalm, one in which not every section nor every verse, but every line within each verse begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There are two such psalms and they are successive: Psalm 111 and Psalm 112.

There is a special significance attached to the acrostic psalms. It is not simply that the orderly arrangement of the psalm makes remembering the content of the psalm easier, although that is certainly part of the reason. But the main idea of the acrostic psalms is that in these psalms a given subject is covered, we would say, from A to Z, from Aleph to Taw. Everything important about a particular truth is contained in the psalm. The psalm covers a particular truth completely, from every angle and from every viewpoint. This is important as far as the exegesis (interpretation) of the psalm is concerned. That is also the case with Proverbs 31:10-31, which sets forth every important truth regarding the virtuous woman.

What is true of the acrostic psalms generally is true of Psalm 119 specifically. Psalm 119 sets forth every important truth regarding the word of God. The truth of the word of God from A to Z is set forth in Psalm 119. This is very significant. The longest chapter in the lengthiest book of the Bible is not devoted to an exposition of the truth about marriage, the family, the church, the Trinity, or the coming of Christ. But this acrostic psalm is devoted to the truth of God's word itself. This is of great significance. And undoubtedly the significance is that foundational to all truth and to every individual truth revealed in Scripture is the truth that the Bible is God's word. The psalm is an ode to God's word. In the psalm, God's word is exalted. And the psalm makes plain the central place that God's word occupies in the church and in the life of the believer individually.

This is the main, really the only, subject of Psalm 119. In nearly every one of the 176 verses of the psalm, God's

¹ John Calvin, "The Author's Preface," in *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, p. xxxvii.

² The book of Psalms, of course, does not, strictly speaking, consist of chapters, but contains 150 distinct psalms. It is also worth noting that the chapter and verse divisions in our English Bible are not inspired but are human inventions.

word is referred to. Nearly every verse of the psalm contains a reference to God's word, by means of one of the synonyms for God's word that appears throughout the psalm. Besides God's word, the psalmist refers to God's law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and judgments.

The Attitude and Experience of the Psalmist

Although we are not informed who the human writer of Psalm 119 was, we do learn some important things about the psalmist. First, it is plain that the psalmist is a young man. He asks the Lord in verse 9, "Wherewithal shall a *young man* cleanse his way?" The human writer of Psalm 119 is a young man, likely in his teens or twenties. Everything that he says in Psalm 119, he says from the perspective of a young person. The delight in God's word, the determination to obey God's word, the love for God's word, the persecution for the sake of God's word—all are the delight, obedience, love, and persecution endured by a young man. When we read Psalm 119, we must not think of an old gray-headed saint, who has lived out most of his days and in the wisdom of old age makes confession of God's word. Rather, we must think of a young man, a young man who has just reached maturity, a young man who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit sets forth in Psalm 119 the conviction of his faith with regard to the word of God.

In the second place, it is apparent that this young man was experiencing affliction, severe affliction, at the time that he penned Psalm 119. Verse after verse makes that plain. He prays in verse 22, "Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies." In verses 50-53 he writes, "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." In verse 75 he traces his affliction to the sovereign hand of God: "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." In his suffering he laments, "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes" (v. 83). So extreme was his suffering that "[u]nless thy law had been my delights, I

should have perished in mine affliction" (v. 92). In verse 107 he prays for the grace to bear up: "I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word"; and he adds in verse 153: "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law."


The psalmist's sufferings were sufferings that he endured at the hands of wicked men, men who did not love, but despised God's word; men who did not delight in, but rejected God's word; men who did not live in obedience to God's word, but despised God's good commandments. They were men who "had [him] greatly in derision" (v. 51). They were men who "reproached" him for his confession and walk: "Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies" (v. 22), and "Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good" (v. 39). His suffering was suffering that wicked men brought against him: "The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law" (v. 61), and "The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts" (v. 110). They were "proud" men, who abhorred God's humble servant: "Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause" (v. 78); "The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law" (v. 85). Before God the psalmist pleads: "Leave me not to mine oppressors" (v. 121) and "Deliver me from the oppression of man" (v. 134).

Because the psalmist suffered at the hands of wicked men and because he suffered for his godly confession and walk, his suffering was the unique suffering of persecution. "Many are my persecutors and mine enemies" (v. 157), the psalmist cries out. His prayer to God is: "When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?" (v. 84). He complains in verse 86 that "they persecute me wrongfully." And in verse 161 he laments: "Princes have persecuted me without cause." The fact that "princes" persecuted him may indicate that the psalmist was David and that he wrote the psalm at the time when he fled from King Saul. But this is only a conjecture.

Psalm 119 magnifies the word of God. Fundamental to every other truth concerning the word of God is the truth that the Old Testament Scriptures are the word of God. Clearly that is how the psalmist views Scripture. The Scriptures are "the law of the Lord" and "thy law"

(25 times); “thy commandments” (more than 20 times); “thy precepts” (more than 20 times); “thy word” (more than 20 times); “thy judgments” (20 times); “thy testimonies” (14 times); and “thy statutes” (more than 20 times). The Old Testament Scriptures are God’s law, God’s commandments, God’s precepts, God’s word, God’s judgments, God’s testimonies, and God’s statutes precisely

because they are the infallibly inspired and inerrant word of God.

Next time we will return to Psalm 119 in order to see that the psalmist sets forth all the perfections of Scripture and also teaches us by his own example what our attitude ought to be towards the word of God. 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. RICHARD SMIT

The Effect of “The Declaration” on Missions in This Global City

I recently read a book written by Prof. David Engelsma and published by the RFPA in 2013 about the history of the origin, the writing, the adoption, and the rocky reception in the PRCA of *The Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches* during the early 1950s. While reading the book, I wondered whether in our mission work with those brought out of superstition and idolatry, cults, false churches, or churches far down the road of apostasy, the *Declaration* has any value *today* in our work with them.

While answering that question, keep in mind that the *Declaration* expresses, over against serious error, the understanding of the Three Forms of Unity in regard to the truth of God’s unconditional covenant of grace, double predestination, the promiscuous preaching of the particular promise of the gospel among the nations, holy baptism, saving faith, and even the autonomy of the local church.

How can that 63-year-old statement, whose original intent was very limited, have any value beyond that time and beyond the borders of North America in very different places and cultures? Our answer is that although the historical context of the *Declaration* was limited, yet agreement with the *Declaration* today does positively influence the work of missions in man’s global city.

Rev. Smit is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.



First, agreement with the *Declaration* prepares a missionary for work in a world that is steadily becoming a global city. This unavoidable reality affects foreign missions directly. For example, the variation of church denominations that one may experience in North America may also be experienced to one degree or another in some Southeast Asian nations, particularly in the Philippines. At the same time, the variation of world religions in the Asian region is more and more found throughout North America.

Even though its origin and original application was limited to small parts of North America, yet the *Declaration* applies to places and cultures beyond North America. Agreement to it prepares a missionary for global warfare by and for our “catholic, undoubted Christian faith” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 7, Answer 22). Since the Reformed faith is “catholic,” the Reformed missionary is assured that he will be bringing to a mission field the global truth that applies to all of God’s people in every nation, tribe, and tongue. Hence, a missionary need not worry, when affirming according to the *Declaration* what the Reformed confessions strictly maintain from the Word of God, whether he can properly preach the Word wherever the Lord might send him in man’s global city for His sheep and lambs.



Secondly, agreement with the *Declaration* equips our foreign missionaries to remain distinct from the missions of other churches today. It is a temptation sometimes not to be distinct. Realizing the reason, the discussion, the work, and cost to the PRCA of the adoption and defense of the *Declaration*, a missionary will resist having blurry preaching, and he will be motivated to show forth the full colors of the Reformed flag on the flag pole. When he carries the banner of truth onto the mission field (Ps. 60:4), by the grace of God he will be unashamed of the gospel and its distinct colors. He will be directed to proclaim the colors of Jehovah's glory in their adorable brilliance through faithful labors.

In that regard, the *Declaration* has a place with the flag of our Reformed confessions. It is an explanation of what the true colors of the Reformed confessions are in distinction from other beliefs in the church world, which essentially teach that in some way the church's righteousness, salvation, peace, and hope are based upon something that the church has done, can do, and must continue to do. The *Declaration* guides a missionary to hold high, and to keep clean and clear, the banner of truth, so that our churches in their work of foreign missions may fulfill the calling from Christ to be a pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:14-15).



Thirdly, agreement with the *Declaration* prepares a foreign missionary to combat error. Certainly, he will face many, such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism, the Federal Vision movement, Roman Catholicism, antinomianism, hyper-Calvinism, sickly radicalism, and even a loathsome haughtiness on the part of those who know the truth toward those who do not know the truth or who have not yet been converted fully to the truth.

To resist and overcome the host of errors that multiply, a missionary needs a sharp sword in his sheath. The *Declaration* shows how sharp the preaching of the Word ought to be in regard to all of the truth of God's sovereign grace, but also in regard specifically to the covenant of grace, the promise of the gospel, double predestination (election and reprobation), and other doctrines. At the same time, the *Declaration* shows how balanced and humbling the truth of the Word of God is for the avoid-

ance of radicalism and legalism. Of course, a missionary will need to use that sharp sword with wisdom and tact according to the needs and situation of those with whom he labors. Even so, in the faithful application of that sword in his labors, the missionary will be a tool to bring the other sheep to Christ in true faith, as well as a tool for the condemnation and destruction of the kingdom of darkness.



Fourthly, agreement with the *Declaration* reminds a missionary about the complete breadth and depth of being truly Reformed. A little investigation according to our Reformed standards reveals that some are not as fully Reformed as they may have thought. Full conformity to our confessional standards is still needed in doctrine, church government, worship, and in areas of daily antithetical living. They need to learn the complete answer to the question in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, Question 22: "What is necessary for the Christian to believe?"

Agreement with the *Declaration* compels a missionary to give the full answer. The full answer is clearly summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, wherein is set forth the whole gospel promise and truth that we must believe. The *Declaration* prepares a missionary to teach that the Reformed confessions do show that it is even necessary to believe the doctrines concerning the particularity of the grace of God, election as the source of all of the blessings of salvation and one's place in God's unconditional covenant, and the gospel proclaimed globally with a particular promise for His eternally chosen church.

That complete answer a missionary must declare throughout his service to Christ's other sheep in missions, so that by the time he must lay down his labors, he can say with all his heart what the apostle Paul did to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27: "...I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."



Finally, agreement with the *Declaration* by its last point underscores the need for a foreign missionary to teach Reformed church government, including proper church membership. In its last point, it affirms that the PRCA confess the principle of the autonomy of the local

church and that only the consistory has authority over the local congregation.

By its affirmation of Reformed church polity, the *Declaration* reminds a missionary of his mandate to oppose the errors of congregationalism, independentism, hierarchy, rule of a church by one pastor, rule of a church by deacons, errors concerning proper church membership, as well as other errors related to the offices, assemblies, ceremonies, and discipline of the church. The *Declaration* motivates a missionary to teach by word and example the doctrine and blessed life concerning Reformed church government and Reformed church membership. He is guided to preach the blessedness of submission to the rule and care of Christ through the offices of elder, deacon, and preacher in a local, Reformed congregation. The good result will be that individual believers and believing

households are led to give a complete confession of the Reformed faith and to experience the full joy of their only comfort in life and death within the communion of the saints under the means of grace weekly.

Therefore, we acknowledge that a missionary's genuine appreciation for the history of and his full agreement with the content of the *Declaration* does have a good influence upon his work. In honor and obedience to our Lord, it promotes our missions to have a full-colored banner, a sharpened sword, and a trumpet's clear sound. That approach is necessary in order for our missions to be rightly successful for the gathering and protection of Christ's church over against the false religions, idolatries, heresies, ungodliness, and false teachings that lurk among the diverse neighborhoods of this increasingly global city.



WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

MRS. MARGARET LANING

A Mother's Song Exalting Humility

A friend of mine shops at a second-hand clothing sale and finds a handsome men's suit. Because it is priced very low, she eagerly searches the lining for the size. Alas, the tag is missing but she has a creative solution. Instructing her companion to hold the coat at a specified height, my friend wraps her arms around it in an embrace. Ignoring some stares, her companion dutifully holds on. After another hug or two, my friend is convinced the coat feels just right. She brings the suit home to her loved one and it fits him perfectly.

Three thousand years earlier, Hannah, another wife and mother, has a similar clothing dilemma. She has a coat for her family member, too, but her situation is far more challenging. She has not seen her dear one for an entire year and he is a growing child, at that.

This child is Samuel. From the time of his weaning he lives at the house of the Lord in Shiloh learning the

work of a priest. As recorded in I Samuel 2:19, "His mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." Just once a year, a brief moment to wrap her arms around her child and give him a coat—a little bigger than the previous one. The coat is a constant reminder to Samuel of his mother's love and care. She unselfishly leaves him to be raised among the priests, acknowledging that he is "lent to the Lord."

When she leaves little Samuel for the first time, she prays. Christians often call her prayer a song, and in essence it is. It is thankful, joyful praise magnifying the Lord's glorious perfections and just judgments—the substance of a God-glorifying song. Joy and singing go together, do they not? This song is also instructive. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, there are striking reversals: The mighty break and the weak are strengthened; the full are hungry and the hungry are full; the proud are debased and the humble are exalted.

By referring to these examples, Hannah makes known that with the handmade coat and priestly linen ephod,

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Samuel still needs a different article of clothing to do his work. It is with humility that Samuel must, as the Spirit has said, "...be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5:5). Most any mother will give her child a coat for the cold, but only a godly mother will pray that her child be clothed in humility.

Now to another period of time—approximately 1,100 years later. Two women rejoice in a song strikingly similar to Hannah's. God has revealed to Elisabeth and Mary, both with child, that their children will be used mightily in His service. Elisabeth's baby, John, will herald the coming of the Christ, who is Jesus—the babe in Mary's womb and the author of these very songs. Like Hannah's, this song is prophetic in nature, magnifying God's promises, power, and holiness. Yet, it is the astounding reversals that make them resemble one another most especially. The similarity cannot go unnoticed:

Mary: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52).

Hannah: "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up" (I Sam. 2:7).

Mary: "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:53).

Hannah: "They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased..." (I Sam. 2:5).

Mary: "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (Luke 1:51).

Hannah: "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces...and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed" (I Sam. 2:10).

The world rejects this truth. That the poor are rich and the humble are exalted is nothing but foolishness to them. The sin of pride will increase in the end times. "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud..." (II Tim. 3:3). Temptation comes in many forms, yet there is an unprecedented allurements today. Our children are the first generation to grow up online. The availability of social media networks and online video sharing sites can become a compelling stage replete with audience feedback and clicks of the "like" button. A myriad of reality television and talent shows are also popular, featuring obscure people skyrocketing into overnight stardom. Although social media and

video sharing networks can be used rightly, the danger of feeding our pride and selfish ambition is there. It is just another way, but a powerful way, Satan uses to "...corrupt by flatteries..." (Dan. 11:32).

A study was conducted analyzing the values of children ages 9 to 11.¹ Over a 40-year span, sixteen values were rated on a scale from most important to least. For the first 30 years, from 1967 to 1997, children consistently rated values conducive to family and community living the highest. However, from the period of 1997 to 2007, there was a shift. The combination of fame themed shows and the opportunity to showcase oneself online, has the makings of a perfect storm. It is not surprising that in just one decade fame soared to the number one spot, the most important value, among children.

This desire for glory is troubling. The famous of this world have an old saying, "It is lonely at the top." How true, when one is at the top in his or her own estimation. Pride makes people selfish. They cannot see the needs of others with the limelight blinding them in their pursuit of glory. Pride makes people friendless. With the lifting up of oneself while looking down upon others, how can it not?

How is digital media affecting our covenant children? With all the hours of this form of entertainment, are they remembering to be clothed in humility? Are they experiencing God-glorifying activities and godly fellowship? Being clothed in humility is not an external putting on, but an inner—a putting off of our old man of sin and putting on of the new. This calls for much prayer and frequent self-examination.

Perhaps ask your children what their estimation is of themselves. Hannah and Mary spoke of their low estate. They were poor in spirit. They had poverty of self-will and poverty of pride. They spoke of their Savior from sin. They magnified and rejoiced, not in themselves, but in the Lord. Do we and our children view ourselves this way, too?

This song of mothers is a warning to all of us: There is no grace for those who walk in pride. Without God's grace it is impossible to serve the Lord. Our children

¹ Yalda T. Uhls and Patricia M. Greenfield, "The Rise of Fame: An Historical Content Analysis," *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial research on cyberspace* 5, no. 1 (2011): 1. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2011061601>.

must expect that in their homes there will be strong words for boasting and for putting others down. "Talk no more so exceeding proudly..." (I Sam. 2:3)! I never cease to be amazed that while giving correction to my children, that same correction comes right back to me. This song is for every Christian mother to sing. How we need to pray for the grace to be humble.

Then, everyone will love us? Our children might think so, at first. However, a truly humble person does not do whatever pleases man. A humble person is not self-willed but delights to do God's will. Sometimes being humble means remaining silent. Other times it means we must speak. It is especially the latter that comes with persecution. As it did with John the Baptist. He told Herod that he could not marry his brother's wife. Divorce and remarriage was a problem then, too. Herod did not listen. His new wife, Herodias, hated John for what he said. Herod put John in prison. In his bleak cell, doubts and feelings of despair began to creep in.


To speak humbly against sin is extremely difficult for adults. How much more for our children? Lord willing, there will be times when they must speak. Perhaps when they are tempted by their peers to sin. This, of course, can bring backlash. I have a friend who went through such a time. She told me that looking ahead just one hour seemed overwhelming to her. She learned to pray even before getting out of bed. She prayed for strength for that hour...and then the next. The Lord uses such trials for our children to see humbly their need of Him. The Psalms in Scripture and the Psalter are so encouraging for prayer and for singing together. "In need am I, and poor;

O God, make haste, I pray; Thou art my Saviour and my help, O Lord, make no delay" (Psalter 189).

John saw his need. He called for his disciples to ask Jesus, "...Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?" (Luke 7:19). Jesus responded, "...Tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7:22).

As John sat in chains listening to the words of Jesus, his heart was surely strengthened. Those reversals again! Certainly John remembered the stories from his childhood of how his mother and the mother of Jesus rejoiced in them? Even when life gets most difficult, the promises of God shall never fail.

In correcting our children do we talk about the promises of God? Or do we keep finding ourselves saying, "Do this... Do not do that...Do this...Do not do that..."? Why leave out the best part? Listen to Hannah, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory..." (I Sam. 2:8). Dunghill to royalty, lifted to heights unimaginable are the ones who are clothed in true humility. Beginning in this life. Every grace received in humility lifts us to a higher blessedness. There is a treasure trove of God's blessings for poor and needy souls. An exponential magnification of His blessings! "Grace for grace," said John—as much as we can take in.

Every mother in Israel who loves the Lord rejoices to know that her child is being used for God's service. By teaching our children to be clothed in humility, we are loving and faithful mothers. To God be the glory. 

CLASSIS EAST REPORT

MR. JON HUISKEN

May 14, 2014

Trinity Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at the Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. M. VanderWal was the chairman of this session.

The main item of business for classis consisted in dealing with the report from its committee of pre-advice concerning an appeal from a brother concerning a consistory's decision to change the date of the annual Prayer Day service. The committee of pre-advice submitted a majority and a minority report. The majority report prevailed as classis decided

to sustain the appeal of the brother that the consistory's decision to change the date of the annual Prayer Day service should be sought by way of overture to the broader assemblies. The grounds given by the committee of pre-advice were adopted by the classis. The grounds (summarized) were: 1) The decision of the consistory is not merely a change in a practice that does not bind the other churches but rather is a substantial change from the letter, spirit, and historical interpretation of Article 67 of the Church Order, which is that the churches celebrate Prayer Day together on the same date. Evidence was given that historically this has been the case in the Netherlands and the United States. 2)

It is the way of wisdom, decency, and good order that any substantial change in the meaning, interpretation, and even established practice with regard to the Church Order, be done by the broader assemblies.


The consistory involved and any other churches that have made a change in the date of the Prayer Day service are being permitted to observe the 2015 Prayer Day service as they have decided. This will give any consistory time to decide if they wish to appeal to or overture the broader assemblies on this issue.

Classis granted classical appointments to Faith PRC and

First PRC. A discipline matter was considered in closed session. Expenses for this session amounted to \$311.85.

Rev. James Slopsema was in attendance at his last meeting of classis as a delegate. Classis took note of this and expressed words of appreciation for his work in our churches and for his leadership on many issues that arose in the classis.

Classis will meet next on September 10, 2014 at the Grandville PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Minister Activities

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, declined the call extended to him from the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to serve as their next pastor.

On Sunday morning, May 18, Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, announced that he was led by the Lord to decline the call extended to him from the Doon, IA PRC.

On May 25, Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, declined the call from the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to serve as their next pastor.

School Activities

In late May the school society of Genesis PR Christian School in Lacombe, AB, Canada met. In addition to approving their annual budget for 2014-2015, they also approved a proposal to proceed with building a new school building on property adjacent to the Immanuel PRC. The Lord

willing, the society hopes to have this building finished in approximately 16-18 months, or, in other words, ready for the 2015-2016 school year. The plan is to hire a general contractor, but with many trades people in Immanuel, the society anticipates cost savings coming from doing some of the work themselves. The proposed building is 4700 square feet and has four classrooms capable of seating between 15 and 25 students each, for a total enrollment of 100 students. The projected cost is \$650,000. To date, the society has raised \$125 k in local pledges. They have another \$150 k of value in their current building and property, which they hope to sell. Letters have also been sent out to our denomination asking for more pledges and loans. If you have the opportunity to help, please prayerfully consider doing that.

This summer two of our Christian schools are offering a Bed and Breakfast to those who may be traveling in their area. Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA is one; and Loveland, CO PR Christian School is the other. If your travel plans include either of those destinations, you may want

to consider the possibility. Check your church bulletin board for more information.

Each May the second grade students of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI take part in a contest to see who among them can bring to school the dandelion with the longest stem. According to unofficial records, this year's entries produced a record dandelion. One student brought a dandelion to school with a stem of 98 centimeters. For those of you challenged by the metric system (I include myself in this group), that converts to a stem of almost 39 inches in length. I am just thankful the weed was not found in my yard.

We also pass along our congratulations to those in our churches who celebrated graduations this year, whether from grade school, high school, college, or seminary. The Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN celebrated their graduation program on May 19 at the Edgerton, MN PRC. Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor at Edgerton, spoke on their theme, "Guided by God," taken from Psalm 48:14.

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

Congregation Activities

It is always amazing how children are able to memorize. What more wonderful thing to memorize than the Bible. Our congratulations and admiration goes to various children in our churches who continue to accept that challenge. One such student from the Southwest PRC memorized all 45 verses of Psalm 105. Two more from the Hudsonville, MI PRC learned all 40 verses of Hebrews 11. Still more from the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA and the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI are learning various chapters of Scripture this summer.

The Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA invited members of our churches to join them on Sunday, May 25 for a Sunday of dedication for their new church building. As they did this they reminded themselves that they were not so much dedicating a place and a building, but were dedicating themselves to the work of the Lord in Spokane and the use of this building for that work. The two sermons preached by Rev. Rodney Kleyn, their pastor, served to remind

the congregation of their calling as a church in this world and of their calling as believers in the church. Rev. Kleyn preached from Revelation 2:8-11 in the morning, under the theme, "The Church in the Last Days," and in the evening from Nehemiah 11:2, under the theme, "Blessed Volunteers." Covenant of Grace also enjoyed a potluck dinner between services and a Sunday evening sing-along.

Missions Activities

Our missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, gave a lecture on Friday, May 9, in their sanctuary on the subject, "What Did Calvin Teach?" Twelve visitors were present at that gathering. The same lecture was given in Cranberry on May 21.

Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn left their home in the Philippines on June 2 for a six-week furlough in North America. There are many purposes for missionary furloughs, one of which is to give the missionary and his family a time of refreshment and encouragement in the work. The Kleyns initially flew to Michigan

and then traveled to Iowa, arriving in Doon on June 5. While there he had opportunity to meet with the Council of Doon (his calling and sending church) and the Foreign Mission Committee, as well as preach there on June 8. Rev. Kleyn also planned to attend the PRCA Synod when the Philippine mission field was the object of its attention. Other activities had the Kleyns visiting and preaching in some of our churches and giving presentations regarding the mission work that he and Rev. Richard Smit are doing in the Philippines. After some family vacation, the Kleyns planned to return to the Philippines on July 17.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA hosted a Reformed literature booth this year at the Market Night in downtown Redlands every 2nd and 4th Thursday of June through September. Those manning the booth have opportunity to speak with people who stop by, and they hand out pamphlets and sell books. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

GLEN and BETTY KOOIKER,

as they have been blessed with 50 years of marriage on May 29, 2014. We have seen God's faithfulness in His care of them through the years and have been blessed by their covenantal instruction. We praise God for their godly example to us and our families. Our prayer is that God will continue to guide and uphold them with His mercy and grace. "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good; because his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 118:1).

✿ Veryl and Kandace Heynen

Kassandra, Heath, Kolette, Kalista, Karina, Dalton, Collin, Koralee, Ethan, Torrey, Keahna, Kierra

✿ Carlos and Kristin Tavera

Charles, Brandon

✿ Kimmy and Cheryl Kooiker

Christina, Brady, Rochelle, Shania, Anthony, Joshua

✿ Kerwen and Catherine Kooiker

Kordell, Braxton

Sheldon, Iowa

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Rev. Michael and Dawn DeVries in the death of his mother,

MARILYN DEVRIES.

May their comfort be found in God's Word, "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isaiah 51:11).

Tom Verbeek, Vice President

Dan Kiel, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to our members Bill and Donna DeKraker in the death of Donna's mother,

CHARLOTTE PONSTEIN.

"But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more" (Psalm 71:14).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, Pres.

David Kregel, Asst. Clerk

Classis West

■ Classis West is scheduled to convene Wednesday, September 24, 2014, at the Peace PRC, Lansing, IL. All material to be included in the agenda must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than Monday, August 25. Delegates who need lodging or transportation to/from the airport should so inform Peace's clerk, Mr. Barry Warner, by phoning (219) 322-9773, or by e-mailing elderbtwarner@hotmail.com. An officebearers conference is being planned for Tuesday, September 23; delegates should bear this in mind when making travel plans.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Ray Ezinga, Steve and Jody Ezinga, Larry and Pam Kooienga, Robert and Tammy Van Uffelen, and to Ray's grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the death of Ray's wife,

MRS. JEAN EZINGA.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Notification of Candidacy

■ All Protestant Reformed congregations are hereby informed that the 2014 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has declared Mr. Joshua Engelsma a candidate for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Candidate Engelsma will be eligible for a call on or after July 12, 2014.

For contact information, see page 417.

Don Doezeema, Stated Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness and gratitude to our heavenly Father, we celebrate with our parents and grandparents,

PROFESSOR and MRS. RONALD CAMMENGA,

their 40th wedding anniversary on July 19, 2014. We are very thankful to our gracious God for their covenantal instruction and godly example. We pray the Lord's richest blessing upon them as they continue life's walk together. "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

- ✿ Marc and Rebekah Kuiper
- ✿ Kerwen and Catherine Kooiker
- ✿ Ben and Liz Cammenga
- ✿ Chuck and Catherine Cammenga
- ✿ Lee and Laura Kooienga
- ✿ Derek and Leanne Cnossen
- ✿ Bryan and Amy Knott
- ✿ Daniel (in glory)
- ✿ Josh and Tracy Meinzer
- ✿ Erik and Cherith Guichelaar
- ✿ Jared Cammenga

27 grandchildren

Grandville, Michigan

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, 2014 at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 11, 2014.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Lois Kregel, and fellow officebearer David Kregel and his wife and family in the death of their beloved husband, father, and grandfather,

MR. CHARLES KREGEL.

"Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:23-24)

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Dan Key, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ On June 17, 2014, our beloved parents, **CARL and MARY POTJER,** celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We their children, grandchildren, and great grandchild rejoice in God's goodness to them. We thank the Lord for His mercy, faithfulness, and love shown toward them and us. The covenant bond between Christ and us is beyond measure. We are so thankful for the sacrifices that Christ led them to make to insure that we remained faithful to the church and were instructed in a Christian home and school. Psalm 136:1: "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

- ✿ Mike and Teresa Potjer
Annika, Cassandra, Zachary, Naomi
4 in glory
- ✿ Steve and Beth Potjer
Zach and Lauren Feenstra
Lindsey
Brad, Austin, Brooke, Charlie, Luke
- ✿ Jeff and Sara Potjer
Heidi, Colleen, Caleb, Adam, Laci
- ✿ Russ and Lisa Potjer
Isabella, Carter, Addison

Jenison, Michigan



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Reformed Witness Hour July 2014

Date	Topic	Text
July 6	"Arise, Go, Cry Against It"	Jonah 1:1, 2
July 13	"The Prophet Who Ran Away"	Jonah 1:3
July 20	"The God Who Would Not Let Go"	Jonah 1:4-17
July 27	"Prayer from a Whale's Belly"	Jonah 2