

The Standard Bearer

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Grace Occasions Anticipation for Jesus' Glory

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Titus 2:13, 14

The above text is part of the reason why the teachings of salvation by sovereign, particular grace are to be evidenced in a life of godliness. Paul had just detailed the godliness in verses 2-10, and then he began giving the reason in verse 11. He explained that the grace of God saves, and in saving it brings a restraint of the lusts of the flesh and a life of spiritual sobriety and righteousness. God's grace enables one to live godly, soberly, and righteously (12).

In addition, divine grace looks ahead; it anticipates. There is to be a second appearing of Jesus. The first appearing brought salvation (11). The second appear-

ing brings the glory of our Savior (13). This second appearing is the object of every believer's hope. There is godliness now; and there is a hope for something to come. And the ground for both is the work of Jesus redeeming us from iniquity and purifying us unto good works (14).

We make three observations about the translation of this text. First, the "blessed hope" is the same as the "glorious appearing." The word "and" between them could better be understood as "even": looking for the blessed hope, *even* the glorious appearing. Second, the "glorious appearing" is more easily understood as "the appearing of the glory of the great God." This wording puts the focus on the appearing of Christ and not on the glory itself. Third, the word "our" goes with both "God" and "Savior." God and the Savior are the same (another proof of the deity of Jesus)!

What is the hope of those saved by divine grace?

The "blessed hope" to which God's grace brings every believer is the appearance of glory when Jesus

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comes for His church at the end of earthly time. The grace that works salvation in every believer makes them look ahead in hope. This hope is the anticipation that something wonderful will be realized. It is not a dream, nor just a desire, for it is certain to be realized. It cannot fail to materialize. Christianity teaches that death is not the end. The saved know that the life they are given is not just here and now—it lasts forever. Also, Christianity teaches that death is a beginning. At the very beginning of this letter Paul mentioned it: “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised” (1:2). Later he will declare that we are “made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (3:7). Paul wrote about this hope in his other letters too (cf. Rom. 5:2 and Phil. 3:20, 21).

This hope is called “blessed.” By adding this word, Paul says that the hope of the saved believer is a cause of joy and happiness. It is such because it fills us up, that is, the realization of our hope completely satisfies, giving us that which we lack. Grace already gives us so much: forgiveness, justification, new birth, righteousness, sanctification, godliness, etc. But grace also assures us that there is so much more that awaits us after this life: the final perfection of salvation, the reward of grace, the privilege of being constantly in the presence of our Savior and Lord, and being freed from all sin and possibility of sinning. The half has not been told us (cf. I Cor. 2:9).

For what do believers hope?

We hope for the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior: Jesus Christ.

This glory signifies the reward that is our Savior’s as the Victor over sin and death. It is the glory of sitting at God’s right hand, ruling over all. This glory He shares with all who will rule and reign with Him in heaven. That is why they are called the church triumphant! All of the elect will participate in this glory with Him when He appears on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30).

Saving grace teaches us to look for an epiphany, that is, an appearance. We preach Christ crucified and risen and exalted, but we also preach that He is coming again. Presently Jesus lives, and our text declares that He lives as the great God and as our Savior. But there

is more: He shall appear at the end of time in the majesty of God to put an end to the dominion of sin and to bring about an endless peace.

When Jesus comes again, it will be in the glory of Him who is “the great God.” It will be with the glory of the God who is great and glorious in Himself, who is full of infinite perfections. His glory is that He is infinite in love, in mercy, in grace, in righteousness and truth, in wisdom and honor, etc.

Not only will Jesus’ coming be with the appearance of glory, but this glory is what God has prepared to give to His people in Christ on the basis of Christ’s merits. We already have the essence of this glory in the grace of salvation that justifies us and sanctifies us. But it is not yet manifest what we shall be (I John 3:2). When Jesus appears, then we shall be like Him, seeing Him as He is (Phil. 3:21).

This glory is bound up in “our Savior Jesus Christ.” It is His work as Savior that earns the glory. As Savior He “gave Himself for us.” It was the supreme act of Self-sacrifice! And His giving of Himself was the supreme evidence of His love for us!

His giving of Himself was first to “redeem us from all iniquity.” This is the negative purpose. His death paid the punishment that all of our lawlessness and sinfulness earned from the righteous and just God. He liberated and released us from the bondage and slavery of sin.

And He gave Himself to “purify unto Himself a peculiar people.” This is the positive purpose. He makes us clean. He frees us from defilements. He consecrates and dedicates us by cleansing and purifying us. Consider how clean we must be in order to be clean before Him! The holy God will only commune with that which He has purified.

He purifies us to be His. He makes us His peculiar possession. Everything in all the world is His, but we are His in a special way. We are “His own.” We are His and not our own. This indicates that He values us more than all the rest of the universe. We as sheep are what makes Him the Shepherd. We as the body are what makes Him the Head. We are the fullness of Him who filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23).

This purification is not an end in itself. We are purified unto a zeal for the good works of gratitude. This

zeal is a red-hot fervency. It is not just talk. We are saved to be on fire. That we are saved by grace alone makes us fervent and vigorous for that which is right and true. Those who sincerely profess salvation in Jesus Christ are the most anxious to express their thanks in good works, that He might be thanked and glorified now and forever.

The result is an anticipation

The grace of God that saves and sets before us the hope of the appearance of the glory of the great God moves the saved to look with eager anticipation. Our “looking” implies that we know that the object of our hope is true and real. Also we long for it as we look for

it. And we expect to receive that for which we hope. So we are looking with great anticipation.

Our blessed hope is in constant tension with our being earthly and our living on the earth. As a powerful magnet we are pulled heavenward. We know that our present possession of salvation is only the beginning. As real and as wonderful as it is, we have only a small beginning. So we stretch out for the perfection (completion) of the glory in everlasting life.

This looking and longing is a constant activity. We keep longing and expecting.

The grace of God that saves works godliness and a hope. Let us learn to evidence the grace we receive in these ways! 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Bavinck, Yes. Hoeksema, No. (4)

As stated in our recent *SB* editorials it has become plain that at present there is a concerted effort by various Doctors of Reformed Theology to put as much distance as possible between H. Bavinck’s covenantal view and that of H. Hoeksema. A perusal of recent issues of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* (*MJT*) going back to volume 19 (2008) makes this rather clear, as we have demonstrated.

From the articles dealt with, it becomes plain that the intention of the writers is not simply to distinguish between Bavinck and Hoeksema where they differ (that would be one thing), but to cast Bavinck’s covenantal view in the best of lights and

Hoeksema’s in the worst, labeling it as “extreme” and given to “scholastic tendencies,” categorizing Hoeksema in this too as one who promotes a “hyper-Calvinistic” view of things.

What we find especially intriguing is how these theologians have set about to accomplish this. As pointed out in our last article, they are doing so by identifying Hoeksema’s covenantal view with that of Abraham Kuyper and his presupposed-regeneration view in every way possible, while exonerating Bavinck from such guilt by association.

The question is why? Why are these Doctors of Divinity at such pains to distinguish between Bavinck’s and Hoeksema’s covenantal views, while persisting in identifying Hoeksema’s with Kuyper’s?

One does not have to look so far down the road for the answer.

Why Hoeksema with Kuyper, rather than Hoeksema with Bavinck? Because, in the first place, besides wanting nothing to do with Hoeksema’s unconditional covenant view, those writing in the *MJT* want to justify their rejection of it as an extreme view that poses a danger to spiritual life in the church and to the liveliness of the gospel.

More on this later.

The point is, this severe criticism of Hoeksema’s covenant view is much easier to justify if they can identify Hoeksema with Kuyper, because it is plain to all that Kuyper’s view, with its presupposed-regeneration basis for baptizing infants, is grievously flawed. And if Hoeksema’s view is identified with the view of Kuyper, his must be seriously flawed too, and Reformed theologians’ rejection of it is obviously justified.

Previous article in this series: *April 1, 2013, p. 292.*

But if Hoeksema's view were to be more closely identified with that of Bavinck, then simply dismissing it without careful reconsideration would be a more difficult task. Suddenly, after all these years of being dismissed as a 'sectarian' idea developed by a few 'hyper' theologians scholastic in all their rationalistic thinking (Have I missed any of the pejorative adjectives thrown our way over the years? I probably have. One loses track after awhile.) Hoeksema and his disciples' covenant perspective must be given some credibility in present covenantal discussion. Perhaps it is not so sectarian, hyper, and novel after all—some small tributary that wandered off the main Jordan of covenantal theology into some insignificant Wadi disappearing into the Wilderness of Zin—rather than being identified with the mainline covenantal theological flow. Unless one wants to put Bavinck, the balanced, clear-thinking Bavinck, the Bavinck who towards the end of his career became a great champion of common grace, into that category as well.

Present-day Reformed theologians are loath to do that. Bavinck's present popular, standard of orthodoxy, intellectual status is too great to be treated that way.

Such is the reason, in part, for seeking to drive a wedge between the covenantal views of these two Hermans. How else can you embrace the one without embracing the other?

In addition, only in this way, by disconnecting Bavinck from Hoeksema with his clear *unconditional*

covenant convictions, can those committed to the *conditional* covenant view have any hope of claiming that Bavinck was one of their own, turning him into a theologian who is supposedly conditional by conviction. No small feat, considering the contours of the whole body of Bavinck's *Dogmatics* and his magisterial emphasis upon the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation from beginning to end, to say nothing of his emphasis upon the inseparable relationship between election and covenant in God's saving purpose and will.

Say what you will, there is nothing Schilderian (Schilder being the conditional-covenant theologian so much in vogue these days in Reformed circles, the theologian so averse to bringing election to bear on the truth of God's covenant of grace) about Bavinck's covenant view. That much should be plain.

Judging from recent *MJTs*, it appears some will not have it so.

It comes down to this, to have Bavinck line up with Hoeksema in the conditional/unconditional controversy might prove too formidable a tandem for those prone to dismiss Hoeksema's covenant view as being "hyper" and "outside the camp."

Thus the present resolve to disconnect the two.

But that, we are convinced, is not yet the whole story.

As we stated at the conclusion of our previous article (April 1), it becomes painfully obvious that this whole matter of identifying Hoeksema's covenant view with that of Kuyper has everything to do with common grace, in particular the

version of it Kuyper set loose in the ecclesiastical world—a theory, by the way, that heavily influenced Herman Bavinck and which, towards the end of his career, became the dominant theme of his writings and shook his scriptural orthodoxy.

At first glance it might strike some as rather curious that Doctors of Divinity should be casting Hoeksema, the relentless foe of common grace, into bed with Kuyper, the champion of common grace.

There is, however, a method to this seeming madness.

The key is this: something has to account for the swift theological and moral decline of the Reformed church world and its members, first in the Netherlands in the first half of the last century and then in North America in the last half of the century just past. Because happen it did, and with a rapidity that astounds. This was especially true of the Free University of Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper in the late 1800s, and then also of the GKN, the denomination where both Kuyper and Bavinck held their membership.

In his selected writings, Dr. William Young puts it this way, "How could apostasy sweep in like a flood [!] in the university founded by Abraham Kuyper on Christian and specifically, though modified, Calvinistic principles?" (*Reformed Thought*, p. 305). And he is talking about what came to evidence soon after the deaths of Kuyper and of Bavinck in 1920.

How indeed!

I will tell you at the feet of what doctrine the Doctors of Divinity

writing in the *MJT* will *not* lay any of the guilt or acknowledge as the cause of the swift demise of theological and practical orthodoxy, first of all in the Free University, and with it the GKN, and in time in the CRC, and a host of other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations as well. Not at the feet of Abraham Kuyper's theory of common grace (and adopted by Bavinck)! Nor at the door of its inflated view adopted by the CRC in 1924! In that the theologians mentioned in our previous two articles are of one mind. The doctrine of common grace is sacrosanct, untouchable.

On this matter Herman Hoeksema and the PRC cannot be right.

But that raises the question: If the deadening of, the loss of spiritual immunity against the virus of error in both doctrine and walk in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world of the past century is not to be laid at the door of common grace, then at the door of what doctrine propagated by Abraham Kuyper and adopted by his disciples is it to be laid?

What else but his scholastic doctrine of the covenant with its presumptive-regeneration emphasis, labeled by Dr. Young in his selected writings as "hyper-covenantism"!

Young points us in that direction in a chapter in his aforementioned book entitled *Modern Relativism and the Authority of Scripture*.

In this chapter Young makes critical reference to a certain Dr. Kuitert, who taught Ethics in the mid-1900s in the Free University and who, in the name of biblical Christianity, began to justify moral relativism, a

Christianity that changes its moral standards and what it approves along with the culture in which it finds itself, in order to be "relevant" to those to whom it is called to minister.

How did a certain Rob Bell just come out and phrase it?

Before we quote Young, we cannot refrain from noting that in this quote we find reference to none other than Dr. C. Van Til! Yes, the same Van Til of philosophical/theological reputation, a man whose name appears often in earlier volumes of the *SB*, a professor of status in Machen's Westminster Seminary, whose instruction influenced generations of Reformed and Presbyterian ministers, a man who reacted strongly against Hoeksema's "rationalistic theology," subjecting it to strong criticism, renowned for his unwavering commitment to common grace and the free offer, a man who reveled in "paradoxes" to keep *his* Calvinism and its 'apparent contradictions' intact. Dr. Van Til, Christian philosopher asserting that God hath done all things in paradox, in stated contrast to the "rationalistic" approach of logic-bound, scholastic Hoeksema, which paradoxes are so necessary (supposedly) if we are to defend and maintain the sovereign *freedom* of God!

Really, the same contention made by the writers of the *MJT* as demonstrated in our previous articles.

Which brings us to the quote.

Immediately following his question of how apostasy came to sweep in like a flood so quickly into Kuyper's university and denomination following that great man's

death, so that in few short decades it approved of professors of Kuitert's ilk on its faculty, Young states:

I find a clue to an answer in Dr. Van Til's analysis of Kuitert's earlier hermeneutical work.... My suggestion is that Kuitert's extreme relativism...is rooted in what I have elsewhere diagnosed and termed "Hyper-Covenantism" [!], an exaggeration of Reformed covenant theology that has developed in various forms in the circles influenced by the work of that theologian of genius, Abraham Kuyper.... The case of Kuitert should stand as a solemn example of how swiftly radical apostasy can follow upon seemingly minor deviations from the fine points of sound doctrine (*Reformed Thought*, 305-6).

How we like that last statement.

Be that as it may, take note of the reference to "Hyper-Covenantism." And call to mind that into that category has been placed not only Kuyper and Kuitert, with their covenant view, but also Hoeksema. Not that Young would have charged either Kuyper or Hoeksema with teaching what Kuitert did. He esteems at least Kuyper too highly for that. But his point is, the *seeds* of Kuitert's perspective were inherent in his Kuyperian "Hyper-Covenant" view. The old adage, "Principles work through." The proof for this is those most grievous errors that were soon promoted in Kuyper's university and in the deadness that overcame the GKN in a few short decades, little more than one generation's time.

So, Young contends that in large

measure it is at the feet of Kuyper's doctrine of the covenant, with its extreme, hyper elements, that the blame for the apostasy of the Reformed church world in the Netherlands and of its adherents in North America must be laid.

From the pen of writers in the *MJT* it becomes plain that this is their contention as well. Kuyper's "scholastic" covenant view, with its "ontological" overtones, explains to a large measure the departure of Reformed denominations from the lively and orthodox biblical faith.

And Hoeksema's covenantal view is to be identified with Kuyper's, justifying why Reformed theologians ought to have nothing to do with that man and his doctrines.

And now the question we would put to the writers in the *MJT* and those in agreement with them: is this all true? Can their thesis be sustained? Which thesis at its heart is to answer the question, what has gone wrong in the Reformed and Presbyterian church world of the last century and a half and continues to vitiate its orthodoxy and commitment to godliness to this present day?

Surely, whatever might be the disagreements between ourselves as Reformed, confessionally-based believers, on this we do not disagree, something or things have horribly attacked the Calvinistic and Reformed church world's spiritual immunity to fight off doctrinal error and worldly mindedness.

And then the question, whose "deviations from the fine points of sound doctrine" are to be held accountable?

In other words, what is at stake in our doctrinal disagreements with the writers in the *MJT* and with their conclusions is not merely an academic exercise.

The great issue is not who can say they are right, and can point the finger at the other fellows and say "Aha, you were wrong, just as we said. And our man was right!" When the church as the body of Christ is in crisis and generations are being cut off? That ego trip does no one any good.

This whole ongoing discussion has to do with a proper diagnosis of the unspiritual viruses of error that have brought Reformed Protestantism to its present lamentable spiritual condition, leaving denominations wide open to every error in doctrine and temptation in walk.

This is our concern.

What is becoming plain is that much of the burden of guilt is being laid at the doorstep of Abraham Kuyper—but not at the feet of his common grace teaching. Oh no! But at that of his covenantal view. And then Hoeksema's with him.

This we contest.

Not that Kuyper's covenantal view of presupposed regeneration was not a contributing factor. One can understand how it would be. Presupposed regeneration carries an immunity-destroying germ within itself, the idea of a dormant regeneration in the elect, which then justifies allowing baptized members to remain within the church though they show precious little spiritual life or interests. Because, after all, they must be viewed as elect, regenerated Christians, in spite of all

their persisting unspirituality. And deadness results. We concur.

But this we contest first of all. Is Hoeksema's view to be identified with this? His critics are deaf to our protests. All we say now is, if that charge is true, then we submit to the critics that the PRC ought to be in a state similar to the GKN and others injected with Kuyper's error. The PRC ought to be overrun with doctrinal error, far down the road of apostasy, its members living in disregard for the commandants of God, beginning on the Lord's Day and continuing right on through their family and personal lives during the ensuing week.

All we can say is, one would have a hard time validating that charge, in spite of all our personal weaknesses and struggle with sin.

So, perhaps Hoeksema's covenant view is not to be identified with the worst elements of Kuyper's view after all? Maybe it is more closely to be identified with Bavinck's view? The proof is in the pudding, as they say. And we leave it there.

And this we also contest: that the heaviest burden of blame is to be laid on Kuyper's covenant view. A contributing factor? Without a doubt. But the preponderance of the guilt? And Kuyper's common grace theory is to be exonerated of all blame (and Bavinck's with Kuyper's)?

The pages of church history over the past century bear that out? In the mother church of many of those writing in the *MJT*? Error after error in biblical interpretation, beginning with Genesis 1-3 (no Adam, no Eve, no mother promise then

either?), and then the denials of the “scholastic” thinking of Calvin’s Calvinism and of the creeds—all justified in the name of what doctrine? Janssen, Daane, Boer, Dekker, H. Van Til, et al., and what doctrine they used to justify their newfound positions means nothing? Is to be dismissed? And what justifies our being more and more immersed in the culture of this present, increasingly anti-Christian world?

All we can say is that there is nothing disputable about these

men’s justification of their anti-creedal, unbiblical teachings. They flat out justified their unReformed views in the name of common grace and consistency with it. And that is to be ignored?

We would suggest in all earnestness to the Doctors of Divinity who have been so critical of Hoeksema and his views that perhaps the time has come to reexamine their diagnosis of what has gone wrong in the body of the Reformed and Presbyterian church world, with its immunity to error so severely sup-

pressed. Perhaps Hoeksema and his colleagues were on to something after all?

Indeed, Dr. Young’s statement is bedrock truth, “...how swiftly radical apostasy can follow upon seemingly minor deviations from the fine points of sound doctrine.”

The question is, what are those deviations?

Next time we turn to an article in the *MJT* 22, 2011 by Dr. J.M. Beach dealing with Calvin, grace, and the free offer. ☞

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. JAMES LANING

A “Redemption” for This World?

Redemption has been redefined by many. The true gospel is about the redemption of the church, but many today proclaim a redemption of this world.

Not surprisingly, this shift from the redemption of the church to the redemption of this world would involve a change in what is meant by the term *redemption*. Therefore it is of utmost importance that we know what Scripture means by this term, and how it is being used very differently today by many who claim to be giving instruction in the truth of the Reformed faith.

The redemption provided by Christ

To redeem is to pay the price that is required to free from bondage. By nature we were all in bondage to sin. Christ paid the price to redeem us from this bondage,

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freeing us from being enslaved to the devil, that we might willingly and cheerfully live unto Him.

These redeemed people are separated from sin, and also from impenitent sinners. Those who are redeemed praise God for this separation, as is evident from the following song that they sing as they praise their Redeemer: “thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9b).

The saved people are redeemed “out of” every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. It is not this world that Christ redeems. Rather, it is a separate people that are called out and separated from this ungodly world.

That is the first point.

A second point is that it was by His blood that Christ redeemed us. For us to be redeemed, God’s justice had to be satisfied. It was because of our disobedience that we had become enslaved to sin and Satan. To deliver us from this bondage, and to purchase for us

the right to become heavenly, our Lord had to lay down His life for us.

Indeed a great price had to be paid for us to be redeemed. That price was the perfect sacrifice offered to God by the Lamb that was slain.

A redemption of systems, not of people

Today many who profess to be giving biblical, Reformed instruction are using the term redemption very differently. They say relatively little about the redemption of the church, and prefer rather to speak at length of the so-called redemption of this world.

Rather than the redeeming of people, a particular people, they speak of the redeeming of “social systems” and of “economic structures”:

God wants to save social systems and economic structures too. If the management/labor structure contains built-in antagonism, then it needs to be redeemed. If the health care delivery system reaches only the well-to-do, then it needs to be reformed.¹

This, supposedly, is “redemption.” It is a redemption very different from that which was preached by Christ our Lord.

For one, this would be a redemption for those outside of Christ. The majority of those in such a “redeemed” social system would not be in Christ. Rather, they would continue worshipping the gods of their imagination.

That serves to bring out another point: This redemption does not involve a deliverance from the bondage of sin. Take, for example, the “health care delivery system” mentioned in the above quote. If that system provides health care for all the citizens in the society, then supposedly that system has been “reformed” or “redeemed.” The people receiving that health care may be using their improved health to continue in their sin, but the “system” that has provided them with that health care supposedly has been redeemed.

¹ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Reformed Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 97.

A redemption without the cross

A redeemed society, therefore, would not be one in which the people have actually been delivered from their sin. Many citizens in the redeemed society envisioned by these teachers would receive certain things that they would enjoy briefly in this life, only then to die in their sins and suffer everlastingly in hell.

Note well that this redemption, therefore, would not require the blood of Christ. One could provide this redemption with corruptible things, such as silver and gold. Yet we know, says the inspired apostle Peter, that this is not how God’s people are redeemed:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Clearly this redemption, and the redemption provided by Christ, are not one and the same.

A redemption many ungodly desire

Redemption, defined this new way, is something that many unregenerate people strongly desire. They desire a wage that they think is fair, and they want health care to be provided for them. They cry out for this type of “redemption,” and for a “redeemer” that can provide it for them.

Moreover, such a redeemer does not need to be one person. It can be a group of people—a large group of people. It can even be a large group of *unregenerate* people, working together as redeemers of society. Since many unregenerate desire this type of redemption, many of them can work together to bring it about.

This redefining of redemption serves to illustrate one of the tactics used by our adversary the devil. He takes what is true of the church, and tries to persuade us to think that it is true of this world. Christ has redeemed the church. The devil tries to convince sinful men that they can work together to redeem this world.

We and our children must not be fooled by those encouraging us to become “redeemers.” Rather, together we must continue to join with all the heavenly people, who praise Christ for redeeming them by His blood, out of every kindred, tribe, nation, and tongue. 

He Ascended into Heaven

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18

Question 46. How dost thou understand these words, "He ascended into heaven"?

Answer. That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven; and that He continues there for our interest, until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.

Question 47. Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?

Answer. Christ is very man and very God; with respect to his human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Question 48. But if His human nature is not present wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

Answer. Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature and remains personally united to it.

Question 49. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

Answer. First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven; secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members; thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we "seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and not things on earth.

The Catechism's treatment of Christ's ascension into heaven is quite lengthy. There are two reasons for this. The first is that the erroneous error of the Lutherans regarding the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper needed to be refuted. The other is that the ascension is an aspect of Christ's work on which we Christians would do well to meditate more often. When we think of the work of Christ, we tend to focus on His suffering and death in our place, often forgetting the importance of His ascension and continued work for us. So the Catechism speaks not only of the fact and nature of Christ's ascension, but especially of the advantage of it for us. In this article I hope to give you some things to think about with regard to Jesus'

ascension that will help you with your Christian living in this world.

The Facts of the Ascension

Along with the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the ascension is an integral part of the work of Christ.

This triumphant event in the life and ministry of Jesus was represented in the types of the Old Testament (Heb. 9:11-12), was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy (Ps. 68:18), was anticipated by Christ Himself (John 20:17), and was confirmed and explained by angels (Acts 1:9-11).

There are three main Scriptures that give us the historical record of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; and Acts 1:9. These passages look at the ascension from the perspective of the disciples. Jesus was physically pres-

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ent with the disciples. He spoke with them, He blessed them, and then in His human body He rose from the earth into the sky till He disappeared from their sight. At that moment, His human nature, His physical body, was transferred from the earthly realm into heaven and the presence of God.

The Scriptures also look at the ascension of Christ from the perspective of heaven. The moment that Christ appeared in heaven He was crowned and given the position of power at God's right hand (Dan. 7:13-14; Mark 16:19; Eph. 1:20-22).

Lutheran Confusion

Lutherans do not deny that Christ has ascended into heaven, but in their theology they do confuse what happened to the two natures of Christ after the ascension. Lutherans teach that at the moment of His ascension, Christ's human nature assumed the divine characteristic of omnipresence—ubiquity. In this way they can maintain that He is physically present in, with, and around the elements of bread and wine at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

However, in line with the Scriptures, the Heidelberg Catechism correctly teaches that the ascension did not change the human nature of Christ, but only changed the place of that human nature. Scripture speaks only of a change of location, not a change in His nature. Christ's body, because it is a real human body with limitations of time and space, can only be in one place at one time—and now that place is heaven.

A Lutheran will respond by asking, with question 47, "But hasn't Christ promised to be with us till the end of the world?" Jesus Himself answers this by telling us that He went physically to heaven, so that He could be with us in a much better way (John 16:7). The physical separation of Christ from His church does not mean that He is absent from them, but rather that He is present with all believers, in every place, all through history, in a much better way, that is, by His Spirit.

The theological explanation for this is twofold. First, even though Christ's human and divine natures are still joined and can never be separated (we call this the hypostatic union), the divine nature supersedes the limits of His human body. As God, that is, in His divine nature, Christ is omnipresent. Second, because

of the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity (we call this *perichoresis*), wherever the Spirit is, there the Son is also. Just as Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), so it is right to say that if you have the Spirit, you have the Son. The Spirit brings Christ to us (John 16:14).

The Necessity of the Ascension

In John 16:7, Jesus said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away." "Expedient" means "to your advantage." Jesus means that the ascension is necessary for the good of His church and believers.

Why was it necessary? The Bible gives us at least seven reasons.

1. Jesus ascended into heaven because He had finished the work that He came to do on earth. In John 17:4 and 11 Jesus says, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" and "I come to thee, holy Father." And so, in Hebrews 1:3 we read that "when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (see also Heb. 10:11-12).

2. Jesus ascended into heaven so that He could continue His priestly work. His earthly work as Mediator was finished, but His heavenly work had yet to begin. As our great High Priest He now stands in the presence of God as our Advocate (I John 2:1) and Mediator (I Tim. 2:5). In this role He intercedes for us and keeps us from falling (Heb. 7:25 and Jude 24).

3. Jesus ascended into heaven as the Bridegroom going to prepare a place for His bride (John 14:2). Heaven is the wonderful home, the house of many mansions, in which He is preparing a place for each of His own. It is our hope to be there with Him (John 17:24; Heb. 6:19-20).

4. Jesus ascended into heaven so that He could send the Holy Spirit. His promise to the church was to send the Comforter, but this He could not do till He ascended (John 7:39; 16:7).

5. Jesus ascended into heaven so that He might do "greater things" through us than He had done during His earthly ministry (John 14:12). Jesus' earthly body was localized. His mystical body, the church, is universal. While on earth He ministered and taught in only one place at a time. Today, through the gifts of the Spirit given to the church, He is able to work with and

through millions of people at once (Mark 16:19-20; Eph. 4:7-13).

6. Jesus ascended into heaven so that every believer, everywhere, might enjoy His continued powerful and gracious presence. His promises to be with us till the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), and never to leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5-6), could be fulfilled only if He ascended. How wonderful to know that He is with me now, in all my joys, sorrows, and temptations and through the final trial of death (John 2:1-11; Is. 43:2; Matt. 14:27; Ps. 23:4).

7. Jesus ascended into heaven as a pledge of His sure and certain return. He said, "If I go...I will come again" (John 14:2-3). Likewise the angels said to the perplexed disciples who stood gazing after Him, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Because of the ascension, we can be quite sure that He *will* come again.

Advantages for Us

Each of the reasons for His ascension are also benefits for us. He ascended "for our interest." The Catechism focuses on three ways that the ascension is for our advantage.

The first is that He is our Advocate in the presence of His Father. What a consolation this is for the sinner! John says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous" (I John 2:1). The word "if," here, means "when." When we sin, we have an Advocate. We will sin. There is still within us the principle and power of sin. And, even though all our sins were paid at the cross, the guilt of them comes over us again and again as we continue sinning in a fallen world. Then our consolation is that Jesus is our Advocate, our defense attorney, in God's presence, turning away the wrath of God, by pleading for us on the basis of His own precious blood. This means we can come before God with assurance, even though we are sinners.

The second advantage is that we have our flesh in heaven. Our human nature, which Christ took on Himself, in which He lived, suffered, died, and rose again, is already today glorified in heaven. Christ as our Head represents us. Where He goes, we will also

go. Not only will my soul, after this life, be taken up to glory, but in my flesh shall I see God. Because Christ my Savior is there, I have the right and the ability, in my own body, also to be in heaven. As a believer, I cannot wait. This is my hope!

The third advantage is that Christ, now, sends us His Spirit as an earnest. An earnest is a pledge or proof or promise that something more is sure to follow. By giving us the Spirit, God begins in us our eternal and heavenly life. The Spirit draws us away from earthly things and creates in us an attraction to heavenly treasures (Col. 3:1-3). This creates a tension between our sinful flesh and our spiritual life, but is also the living proof within us that we belong in heaven. Through union with Christ we become citizens of heaven, and we long for the day when the Lord who ascended will come again and "change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Perhaps we don't meditate on the ascension of Christ very often, but we should. It defines who we are, it helps us in the struggles of life, it gives us hope, and it tells us that Christ is King and is coming again to take us to be with Him in glory.

Questions for Discussion

1. What happened to Jesus' human nature at the moment of His ascension?
2. What do you think? Is heaven a real place, or is it enough to call it a state of spiritual existence? Give biblical evidence for your answer.
3. What do Lutherans teach about the ascension of Christ, and how do we answer this?
4. Discuss the promises and commission that Jesus gave His disciples and church at the moment of His ascension.
5. How are the physical absence of Jesus from the earth and His sitting at God's right hand important for the church in her mission today? (Matt. 28:18-20)
6. Discuss how each of the seven reasons for Christ's ascension are of benefit to us.
7. What are the primary works of the ascended Christ? What is the goal of this work?
8. The Catechism says in answer 47 that Christ "is at no time absent from us." How does Christ's spiritual presence present itself in the Word, in the church, and through fellow believers?
9. How do we know that we are citizens of heaven? How does this transform our existence here on earth? ☺

Chapter Four Postmillennialism (23)

The Reformed (Amillennial) Critique of Postmillennialism (cont.)

Introduction

One of the passages of Scripture that are especially important to postmillennialism is Romans 11:25, 26. This passage is explained by the advocates of postmillennialism as promising a dramatic conversion of large numbers of Jews in the future. According to the postmillennialists, this conversion of the Jews will occasion a similar conversion of large numbers of Gentiles, indeed a majority of the population of the world. Thus, the conversion of the Jews will both signal and actually bring about the onset of the thousand-year reign of Christ—the “golden age” of earthly power, peace, and prosperity for the church.

Romans 11:25, 26 is important for postmillennial theology because, to the mind of postmillennialism, it is the one passage that clearly and definitely forecasts a great, noticeable, and dramatic positive for the kingdom of Christ in history, prior to the second coming. The reasoning of postmillennialism is that if there is going to be such a large-scale conversion of Jews yet in future history, there can well be also all the other dramatic events dreamed of by postmillennialism, resulting in the millennial kingdom of Christ.

In the previous article in this series, I have shown the

appeal to this passage and the explanation of it by the Puritans and their contemporary disciples, including Iain H. Murray; the Christian Reconstructionists; and the Dutch Reformed theologian Wilhelms à Brakel.

Not Necessarily Postmillennialism

It must be acknowledged that the expectation of a future conversion of large numbers of Jews, on the basis of Romans 11, has been widespread in Reformed churches. This is evident from the explanatory notes appended to Romans 11:25, 26 in the *Staten Vertaling*, Dutch Bible—the equivalent in Dutch of the Authorized Version in English—the translation of the Bible in Dutch that was authorized by the Synod of Dordt. In explanation of Romans 11:26, the note appended by the orthodox translators reads: “That is, not a few, but a very large multitude and, as it were, the entire Jewish nation.”¹

Similar is the note appended to Romans 11:26 in the Geneva Bible—the translation of the Bible into English by Reformed scholars in Calvin’s Geneva in 1560. “He sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the Jews, though not every one particularly, shall be joined to the Church of Christ.”²

Such an expectation, however, is not necessarily the expression of postmillennial eschatology. Nor does it involve the return of the Jews to Canaan, much less the restoration of much, or even some, of the Old Testa-

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¹ The translation of the Dutch is mine.

² *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

ment economy of the civil and ceremonial life of Old Testament Israel. For the Jews are no longer the kingdom of God. The church is. And should it please God to save large numbers of Jews in the future, which every Gentile Christian would rejoice at, He would form them as instituted churches, wherever they happen to be living, or add them to existing churches in their countries. Earthly Canaan, that strip of land along the east shore of the Mediterranean Sea, means nothing today. Nor does the earthly city of Jerusalem.

And even if Romans 11 is prophesying the future conversion of many Jews, it is not teaching the millennium of postmillennial eschatology. Postmillennialism's introduction of its "golden age" of earthly power, peace, and prosperity into Romans 11 is unfounded, indeed reprehensible. Whatever may be the doctrine of Romans 11 concerning the Jews, the blessings that the chapter proclaims are the spiritual blessings of the gospel: mercy; faith; union with Christ Jesus (the ingrafting into the olive tree); the taking away of sins; and godliness.

Will Many Jews be Converted?

But does Romans 11, in fact, teach a large-scale conversion of Jews in the future?

The chapter does not teach a restoration of the *nation* of Israel. The nation of Israel has been fulfilled in the Messiah of Israel, Jesus the Christ, and His church. This is fundamental Christian doctrine. All talk of a restoring of the nation of Israel is inexcusable deviation from fundamental Christian and Reformed theology on the part of Reformed theologians who use this language, regardless that they may have been translators of the *Staten Vertaling* or of the Geneva Bible. Such talk is dispensational, not covenantal.

The believing church of Jews and Gentiles is the New Testament, spiritual, and Messianic kingdom of God in the world. The Holy Spirit teaches this in I Peter 2:9, where, among descriptions that identify the church of the elect as the fulfillment and reality of Old Testament Israel, He calls the church "an holy nation." Thus, the Spirit applies to the church the designation that Jehovah God first gave to Old Testament Israel, in Exodus 19:6.

The Reformed creed makes the identification of the

church as the nation and kingdom of God binding truth for Reformed theology in the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the second petition of the model prayer. "What is the second petition? Thy kingdom come. That is...preserve and increase thy Church."³

Not only does Romans 11 not teach a restoration of the nation of Israel in the future, but also it does not teach a future conversion of large numbers of Jews, probably a majority of Jews in the thinking of postmillennialism.

Election Determines "All Israel"

The error of this interpretation, especially of verses 25 and 26, is that it fails to reckon with the dominating truth of election.

Romans 11 concerns the issue of God's faithfulness in the covenant, specifically with regard to the Jews—the physical seed of Abraham. The main thought of the chapter is established in verses 1 and 2:

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, etc.

An argument could be made that God has, in fact, cast away the Jews. It could have been made in Paul's day. It could be made today. The Jews generally, the vast majority of them, were, and are today, unbelieving. Either they were, and are, worldly, or, in the language of our day, secular, or they practice a religion other than that revealed by Jesus Christ.

But Paul reminds his readers that Elijah, in similar circumstances of prevailing Jewish unbelief and disobedience, was guilty of the same erroneous argument. Already in the day of the prophet it seemed that God had cast away His people, to the extent that Elijah was "left alone" (Rom. 11:3).

The argument that God had cast away His people, the Israelites, was wrong in Elijah's day, and it is mistaken today.

³ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 123, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 352.

Indeed, the argument is sinful. How could it ever be that God casts away His people? That is, how could God be unfaithful in the covenant, failing to keep His covenant promise to be the God of His people?

The fundamental truth is that the covenant is governed by election. The covenant people from the seed of Abraham, then and now and to the world's end, are Jesus Christ and the elect in Him (see Gal. 3:16, 29). Paul expressed the truth that election governs the covenant and its salvation in the very answer that is the response to the question whether God has cast away His people: "God hath not cast away his people which he *foreknew*" (Rom. 11:2). Paul then quoted God's response to Elijah when the prophet questioned God's faithfulness to His people: "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal" (Rom. 11:4).

The truth of the gospel concerning Israel—the Jews—and concerning God's faithfulness to His covenant promise to save the Jews is this: "There is a remnant according to the election of grace.... Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:5, 7). The covenant people of God from the natural progeny of Abraham, whom God promised to save and whom He does infallibly save, is—in full reality *is*—the elect. In preserving them, God does not cast away His people which He foreknew.

This truth of election governs all the rest of Romans 11. The exegete may not interpret verses 25 and 26 apart from the truth of election in verses 1-6. Specifically, "all Israel" in verse 26 are not large numbers of Jews, probably the vast majority of Jews, alive at a certain time in the future. Rather, they are all the elect Jews in Jesus Christ, even though they are a minority of physical Jews—a "remnant."

Likewise, the "fulness" of Israel in verse 12 is the complete number of elect Jews, even though numerically they be fewer than unbelieving Jews. Has not the Spirit deliberately spoken of the "remnant" in verse 5? A remnant is not a vast, impressive number, but the few, unimpressive persons left over when the large, impressive majority are hardened in idolatry, false religion, or secularism.

A Difference between "So" and "Then"

Postmillennialism, which, in keeping with its dream of earthly success and large numbers, ignores election, *in Romans 11*, is also guilty of another critically important error in its interpretation of Romans 11:25, 26. It explains verse 26 as though the text read: "And *then* all Israel shall be saved." This was also the mistake of the Reformed translators of the Dutch *Staten Vertaling*. The note that is supposed to explain Romans 11:26 reads: "That is, then..."⁴

But the Greek original of Romans 11:26 does not read, "And *then*." As the Authorized Version rightly translates, the verse reads, "And *so*," that is, 'in this way.'⁵

The passage is not teaching that *when*, at some time in the future, the fulness of the Gentiles is saved, *then* all Israel shall be saved.

What the passage teaches, rather, is that all the while the Gentiles are being saved, that is, throughout the entire new dispensation, from Pentecost to shortly before the return of Christ, God is also grafting into the olive tree the elect Jews. As the apostle has written in verse 25, blindness has happened to Israel only "in part."

When, at the very end, the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, that is, all the elect among the nations have been saved by the gospel, "so," or "thus," or "in this way," also all Israel shall be saved, that is, in the saving of all the elect Jews throughout the present age.

To explain verse 26 as predicting a *time* in the future when there will be a dramatic conversion of large numbers of Jews is simply mistaken by virtue of the hard textual fact that Romans 11:26 does not read "then," but "so."

Herman Hoeksema's interpretation of the passage is correct.

If the apostle had intended to teach that after the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, all the Jews will be saved, he would have written, "And *then* all Israel shall be saved." In fact, he wrote, "And *so* all Israel shall be saved."

Throughout the new dispensation the Jews are hardened in part; the others are saved. And thousands of Jews have already been brought in. The hardening in

⁴ The Dutch has: "*Dat is, alsdan.*" But the Dutch "alzo" does not mean "alsdan."

⁵ The Greek is: "*houtoo.*"

part must remain until the end. And the glory of the plan of God is that when the last Gentile shall have been brought in, the last of the Jews shall also have been brought in. In this way—so—all of the elect Jews shall be saved.⁶

Not the Beginning of a Millennium

There is yet another criticism to be raised against the postmillennial interpretation of Romans 11:25, 26. It makes the conversion of the Jews the beginning of the millennium. According to postmillennialism, *after* the conversion of the Jews, and occasioned by it, will *follow* the conversion of masses of Gentiles, so that the majority of the human race, if not every single person alive at

⁶ Herman Hoeksema, “The Mystery of the Salvation of All Israel,” in *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans* (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2002), 559.

the time, will be saved, and, therefore, rule the world.

The text, however, makes the salvation of all Israel *dependent on* the bringing in of the fulness of the Gentiles. The salvation of all Israel, therefore, is not the harbinger of a revival that saves a majority of the human race and of a millennial kingdom of another one thousand years of human history. Rather, the salvation of all Israel, which is contemporary with the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles, is the goal of God with history. Therefore, it will be the occasion of the rise of Antichrist, the great tribulation of the church, and, quickly, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

As little as do the prophecies in the Old Testament of the coming glories of the kingdom of Christ and Matthew 24 does Romans 11 give any support to postmillennialism. This doctrine of the last things is devoid of biblical basis. ∞

ALL THY WORKS SHALL PRAISE THEE

MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD

Gravity Assists: The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

Thirty-five years ago NASA launched two space-probes within 16 days of each other. Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 were sent into space to gather information about some of the more distant planets in our solar system. With those original missions now completed, the probes continue on through space and are on the verge of discovering more interesting information about interstellar space. Many of these space missions conjure up debate concerning the worth and wisdom of such costly endeavors. Regardless of what motives man may have in such investigations, we can consider these voyages and the data that is gathered in a positive light; for by these means we grow in our understanding of the glory of God as displayed in the

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stars and planets of the heavens and of the “powers” He has placed within the creation.

As interesting as the data may be that is gathered about space and the distant planets, I am also amazed at how the probes *even got to those planets*. How the probes arrived at the planets is in itself a fascinating story that teaches us marvelous things about God’s work in His creation.

Newton’s Law of Universal Gravitation

In the previous article (see April 1, 2013, p. 295) we noticed that Brahe and Kepler gathered detailed data about the motions of the planets. Kepler’s three laws describing the motion of the planets were later explained by Newton’s Law of Universal Gravitation. Newton taught that all objects exert a force of gravity on other objects, causing them to change their mo-

tion. These gravitational forces explained why planets orbit the sun. As folklore has it, Newton saw an apple fall from a tree to the ground. Newton reasoned that the apple must fall to the ground for the same reason that the earth “falls” towards the sun. The sun, a very massive star, exerts a large gravitational force on all the planets, including Earth, which causes them to “fall” towards the sun, or “orbit” the sun. (Planets “orbit” rather than “crash” into the sun because of another truth that Newton discovered: that an object in motion will remain in motion in a “straight line” *unless* acted upon by an outside force. So, if the sun would disappear today, then besides all the other havoc that would result, Earth would no longer travel in a “circle-like” orbit, but would travel off into distant space in the straight path that it was trying to go). Newton correctly surmised that if Earth can “fall” towards the sun because of the sun’s gravitational pull, so then the apple can “fall” towards the earth because of Earth’s gravitational pull. So Newton correctly explained the force of Earth’s gravity, which keeps all objects on the earth, as well as the force that keeps all planets in their orderly orbits.

It was Newton’s discovery of the Law of Universal Gravitation that has proven to be essential for man to send rockets into space in order to investigate other planets.

Newton correctly explained that the strength of an object’s gravitational force is dependent on two factors: the mass of that body and the distance between the center of that body and another object. As I sit at my desk to write this article, I (because I have mass) exert a gravitational force on the desk. And since the desk also has mass, it exerts a gravitational force on me. These gravitational forces, however, turn out to be very, very weak in strength. As I work at my desk, I do not “fall” towards the desk as the apple “falls” towards Earth. And as I walk to school each day, birds and mailboxes and other objects do not “fall” towards me. I and my desk, for example, just do not have very much mass. Our masses are relatively tiny (insignificant—less than dust in the balance) compared to that of the mass of Earth or of the sun. Consequently, our gravitational forces are very, very weak—so weak that they cannot overcome frictional forces, for example, that keep objects from moving towards us.

However, there are examples in the creation where the gravitational forces are significant enough that there are noticeable phenomena. Consider the Earth-Moon system. Earth’s mass is very large, and therefore it exerts a large gravitational pull on the moon. This gravitational pull keeps the moon orbiting the earth, much like the sun’s gravitational pull keeps the earth orbiting the sun. But the moon is also a very massive object, and in turn also exerts a gravitational pull on the earth. Its gravitational pull on Earth doesn’t move the planet in quite the same way as the earth makes the moon orbit the earth, but the moon’s gravitational pull is responsible for a daily occurrence on Earth. Each day the tide water rises and falls around the coastal regions of the globe. The moon’s gravitational pull on the earth is responsible for the daily tides. In simple terms, we might say that all the ocean water is pulled towards the moon. When the moon is in one location it results in a high tide for Puget Sound, WA, for example. Later that day, when the moon is in a different location, a low tide results. So, God uses what we commonly call the Law of Universal Gravitation to cause the tides to rise and fall each day around the globe.

The “Inverse Square” Law

Not only is mass a factor that determines the strength of an object’s gravitational force, but also the distance between that object and another determines the strength of the gravitational force. Newton discovered that the strength of the gravitational force and the distance between two objects is related according to the Inverse Square Law. Suppose we consider the Earth-Moon system again. If the moon were twice as far away as it currently is, the gravitational pull the earth would have on the moon (and that the moon would have on the Earth) would be one-fourth as strong (take the number 2—because twice as far away; square it; and the answer is 4. The inverse of 4 is $\frac{1}{4}$). Thus, the gravitational pull of an object twice as far away is $\frac{1}{4}$). Three times the distance apart, and the gravitational pull would be one-ninth as strong. Any change in the distance between two objects will dramatically change the strength of the gravitational force. Interestingly, God created many relationships in the creation that fol-

low this same inverse square law—perhaps something to consider for another article.

Gravity-Assists

It was this understanding of the Law of Universal Gravitation, as well as an understanding of the motion and orbits of the planets, that was critical in the Voyager missions. How does one get the probes to the distant planets of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune? Perhaps surprisingly, this was not accomplished with large rocket boosters full of extra fuel or by any remote navigation. The ability to navigate the probes, once in space, would come from the gravitational forces of the planets themselves and a use of their precise orbital paths (which Kepler and others so carefully observed and recorded).

The goal of the Voyager missions was to use fuel only to propel the space-probes into space along a particular path so that they would intersect with the orbits of the planets. According to Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation, as the spacecraft neared a planet, it would experience a stronger gravitational pull from the planet. This tug from the planet on the fast-moving spacecraft would change the direction and the speed of the spacecraft. This is called a gravity-assist. This change in the spacecraft's path would allow it to navigate to its next destination—the next nearest planet.

But was it possible to get a gravity-assist from more than just Jupiter? Could the timing ever be right so that a spacecraft could get *multiple* gravity-assists in order to navigate towards the farthest planets? The correct timing to do such a thing is called an opportunity. An opportunity—the correct timing to send a spacecraft to pass close by a particular planet in order to obtain a gravity-assist—is available only every so often. And the opportunity to visit *four* outer-planets (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune)—*all* by the *same spacecraft* using *only* gravity-assists for navigation is very rare! Because of the alignment and orbits of the planets, such an opportunity happens only once every 175 years! The most recent opportunity was in 1977. NASA took that opportunity to launch Voyager 2 and Voyager 1 (in that order) in the late-summer of 1977. By 1979, both probes were observing Jupiter and by

1981 both had observed Saturn. Having been launched at different dates, they received different gravity-assists, and therefore took different paths through space. Voyager 2 continued on a path to intersect Uranus (1985) and Neptune (1989). Today they both continue on beyond the planets, sending communication to Earth about interstellar space.

The Heavens Declare the Glory of God: Order; Providence

Man's accomplishments with the Voyager missions may seem impressive, but they were possible only because of the very orderly creation that God created and continues to uphold. God gave to all the planets their particular motion and paths. And God continues to govern and direct the paths of the planets each day. By the word of God's power all things were called into being. By that same word of God's power all things continue to exist and move. God rules all things in the same way day by day, moment by moment. It is by that orderly and consistent rule that we observe an orderly creation. The data that Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo collected was consistent because God ordained the paths of the planets. What took the best and brightest of human minds and centuries to discover, God simply created and continues to uphold by the word of His power.

May we always be far more impressed with the wondrous work God has done in creation and in our salvation than in man's endeavors and feats with the creation. When we consider the heavens, the works of God's hands, we exclaim with Eliphaz, "Is not God in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are?" (Job 22:12). We stand in awe of how great and majestic God is who called the vast creation into existence and continues to uphold it. Truly we marvel at the work of creation—that God made all things with such beauty and with such an order and interrelatedness! Yet, as wondrous as the work of creation is, all the more the work of salvation. In reference to our regeneration, Canons, Heads 3/4, Article 12 makes the point clearly. "And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: ...but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful,

astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; *not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead.*" In light of this, we humbly bow in reverence before our Creator and Savior.

Not only must we learn to look at the creation to see God's wondrous works and praise Him for them, but we must also see in them a comforting reminder that God governs all things. The movement of the stars and the orbits of the planets are no exception. They too move at His command. The very God who directs the movement of the planets and created them with just the right mass to create a specific gravity that affects the other planets is the same God who directs all things for our good. May we never doubt His power and goodness. Truly we are a speck of dust compared to all of the creation; and yet, God cares for us each day. Humbling! How very humbling! God is great and we are less than nothing (Is. 40:17); and yet, God faithfully

provides for us all that we need, for body and for soul.

In fact, God specifically uses the ordinances of the stars (and planets) to remind us of His *covenant* faithfulness. Having just comforted His people by assuring them that He makes an everlasting covenant with them, God illustrates the enduring nature of the covenant He establishes by stating that as man cannot change the ordinances He made for the heavens, so man cannot change His covenant. "Thus saith the Lord which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever" (Jer. 31: 35-36). Despite all our failures and unfaithfulness, God is faithful! Let us praise Him always! ☺

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

Habemus Papam, or, A New Antichrist

Beneath the ornate ceiling of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel a gathering of Roman Catholic cardinals met to elect a new pope. It is fitting that the election of a man who represents all the earthly glory of Rome should take place in the monument that worldly Pope Julius II, *papa terribile*, built to outstrip all his predecessors in aggrandizing the Vatican, and that the profane Michelangelo decorated. The pomp and circumstance of the event—election and installation—are unmatched. The world waited and watched.

On March 14 the secret conclave elected an Argentinian archbishop and cardinal, Jorge Mario Bergoglio (pronounced Ber-GOAL-io), as the latest pope and idol of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). By the fanciful reckoning of Rome the man introduced from the balcony of the Basilica of St. Peter with the exclamation, *Habemus Papam*, and adored by thousands in the plaza below and millions the world over, is the 266th pope.

After the habit of popes, Cardinal Bergoglio took

for himself the new name Francis, after the thirteenth-century ascetic, Francis of Assisi, and after the cofounder of the Jesuits and militant RC missionary, Francis Xavier, in order to emphasize his new focus on justice, poverty, and RC missions. Whereas his now emeritus predecessor earned for himself the moniker *Rottweiler* by ruthlessly enforcing the decrees and councils of Rome, this man is hailed as a pope of the people, by the people, and for the people. While bishop in Argentina he gave up his bishop's mansion to live in an apartment. He cooked his own meals. He rode the bus instead of a limousine. He was called a pastor. Those looking for change are troubled by his conservatism, but he is an admitted outsider to the Vatican in whom many Roman Catholics place their trust to shake up the troubled and scandal-ridden Curia.

Parroting the press releases of the Vatican propaganda machine, newsmen and theologians alike generously apply to Pope Bergoglio adjectives such as humble, pious, ascetic, and conservative. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), an apostate ecumenical organization that is in ecumenical talks with the RCC and represents over one hundred churches around the world, including the Christian Reformed Church

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(CRC) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), in its congratulatory letter to the pope wrote,

With gratitude to God for your election as Bishop of Rome and head of the Roman Catholic Church, we congratulate you. We received the news of your election this evening with joy.... We also assure you of our continued prayers as you begin this major responsibility of your ministry in the Lord's vineyard....

We are touched by your humility. The name you have chosen is a sign for us that attention to the plight of the poor and justice for all people will be important for you....

The World Communion of Reformed Churches looks forward to being represented at your installation when the time is determined.... We pray that you and the entire Roman Catholic Church will experience the best of God's blessings during your papacy.¹

According to *Christianity Today*, Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NEA), said about the pope, "American evangelicals will benefit from Francis's conservative stance on issues such as abortion and gay marriage," and he continued, "Perhaps Pope Francis can bring us back to the biblical and Christian care for the poor and vulnerable." Thomas Schirrmacher of the World Evangelical Alliance said that he met the new pope last year at synod meetings and "he is humble and friendly."²

The WCRC president Jerry Pillay wrote, "The WCRC is very much focused on Christian unity, mission, and justice and we would welcome further initiatives to work together on these issues in order to make a difference in the world."³

Steve Van Zanen from the CRC news service wrote, "The kind of person who becomes Pope will have a profound effect in the overall fortunes of Christianity in our world." Astoundingly he uses the word *gospel* in the same sentence as the word *pope*.⁴ He points his

¹ <http://www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/PopeFrancisFINAL.pdf>.

² www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march-web-only/why-pope-francis-excites-most-evangelical-leaders-bergoglio.html.

³ <http://www.wcrc.ch/sites/default/files/PopeFrancisFINAL.pdf>.

⁴ [Network.crcna.org/forums/global-mission/pope-evangelist-0](http://network.crcna.org/forums/global-mission/pope-evangelist-0).

readers to former RCA leader Wesley Granberg-Michaelson's article on the kind of pope the world needs and in which he speaks of the pope as "called by God," his election as "inspired by the Holy Spirit."⁵

CRC missionary Adrian Helleman quotes favorably the description of the pope as a "very holy and spiritual person," and he exhorts his readers to "pray for him and the Catholic Church."

Pope Francis is not humble.

Pope Francis is not holy.

Pope Francis does not labor in the Lord's vineyard

Pope Francis is a new antichrist.

As pope he has been revealed as one of the proudest, vilest, and most unholy men that have existed in the world, a man who opposes and exalts himself against God and Christ. This is the view of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) in chapter 25.6:

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.⁶

Regardless whether one disagrees with the identification of the pope as the man of sin, the point remains that he is an antichrist.

He heads, too, along with the parliament of Roman Catholic owls that elected him, a religious organization that is not a church of Christ, certainly not *the* church of Christ, and cannot be graced with the name "the Lord's vineyard." The RCC is a false church, a synagogue of Satan. The marks of a false church according to the Belgic Confession are that she,

ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the Sacraments, as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon

⁵ www.parliamentofreligions.org/news/index.php/2013-02/why-the-next-pope-should-come-from-the-global-south.

⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith 25.6, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, repr., 1998), 3:658–59.

Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.”⁷

Rome was the false church that Guido de Brés wrote about in the Belgic Confession and she remains the same today.

The interest of the secular world, which even Rome admits is uninterested in religious matters and which she is desperately trying to reach, is intriguing. Even the ungodly pay attention when one arises who is clothed like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon. Indeed, they must because he is instrumental in their worship of the first beast (see Rev. 13:12).

The interest of the apostate or apostatizing church world in the election of Rome’s newest idol is astounding. Instead of fleeing her so as not to touch that filthy thing, they flock to her and present themselves for her advances. It is exactly what Rome wants from the church world—especially the Protestant and Reformed church world—her interest first and her submission second.

The evangelical and apostatizing Reformed church world is itching to be with Rome. They are itching for a pope who will make this happen. They lament that the pope emeritus referred to Protestants as “a sect,” and they are crying for more dialogue and cooperation with Rome.⁸

They are itching to be with Rome because in their quest to be relevant and influential in the earth—in the language of WCRC president, “to make a difference in the world”—professing Christians have turned their attention and energies to a political victory on social issues. They are hanging their hopes on this man because he represents the might, earthly might and glory of Rome, by which they think it is possible to bring about their dream. The world, the apostate church world, too, is hanging its hopes on a man. They speak as though the fortunes of Christianity depend on him. This is idolatry.

By a similar measure they despise the day of small things and the foolish means—the preaching of the gospel—whereby Christ is pleased to carry out His will

⁷ Belgic Confession 29, in *ibid.*, 3:420–21.

⁸ www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/march-web-only/why-pope-francis-excites-most-evangelical-leaders-bergoglio.html.

for the coming of His spiritual—not earthly—kingdom. Whether or not everyone has a chicken in his pot is not the interest of the kingdom of Christ. Christ’s kingdom has no need of earthly might, to win earthly elections, to end earthly poverty, or to bring about earthly justice. His kingdom does not come this way. Indeed, through the gross injustice before the bema of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, the kingdom of Christ was coming.

With the election of this man of the people and his focus on poverty and justice come also the ignorant statements that Rome is changing, or that this pope represents a possibility of change for Rome. Rome proudly boasts that she never changes, and she has not, except that she has become more adept at beguiling gullible Reformed people with assurances that she does not teach what she in fact teaches. That some in Rome can admit to corruption and scandal and the need for some changes is nothing new. During the Reformation Erasmus of Rotterdam famously lampooned corrupt Rome. But Rome does not change her doctrine. Rome may be able to flush out her stable by redirecting the river, but she remains a stable for all that.

The idea that *this* pope is going to bring changes to Rome’s doctrine is preposterous. Even by the admission of his enemies, this pope is a conservative. For most people this means that he opposes the marriages of sodomites and the civilized butchery of abortion. But opposition to homosexual marriage and abortion is unremarkable. Even pagan Greece and Rome, themselves overrun with the vile sin of homosexuality, would not have dreamed of sanctioning homosexual marriages, if for no other reason than that the state needed children as grist for their military mills. To oppose abortion is to oppose murder. The fact that few in modern society are opposed to these sins shows the progression in man’s rebellion against God and the powerful presence of the spirit of antichrist that now works in the world and that will culminate in the rise of the man of sin. With all his talk about the poor, justice, and social issues, this pope shows his shrewdness, if nothing else. He evidently knows as well as any what language rings a bell for the evangelicals he will be courting.

But if he is a conservative, then for the Reformed man or woman this means that he is a doctrinal conservative. It means that this pope, more important than his

opposition to the marriage of sodomites, opposes the gospel of grace. He opposes, and must oppose, and anathematizes all who teach and believe the gospel of the justification of the sinner by faith alone, apart from the sinner's works, and on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. This pope is committed to the gospel that a man is justified by his works, a gospel that is no gospel, but is another gospel that the Holy Spirit opposes and anathematizes.

If he is a conservative, then he denies the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and while the world and the apostate church world, including Reformed men, were fawning over him and sending him congratulatory statements upon his accession to the office, he was officiating at the accursed idolatry of the mass and busying himself denying Christ's one sacrifice.

If he is a conservative, then he is committed to the idolatry that the pope is the vicar of Christ, that he speaks infallibly, and that church tradition is equal to Scripture. If he is a conservative, then he is committed to the idolatry of Mary, and to the worship of and prayer to saints.

He is also a pope who shortly after accession urged his cardinals "to find new ways to bring evangelization to the ends of the Earth," which for this pope means the militant proclamation of the gospel that is no gospel and the religion that is at its heart the accursed idolatry of the mass.⁹ He has a vision to catholicize the world, and in his vision there will be no room for Jesus Christ, His church, and His gospel.

Let none forget, either, that this pope is a Jesuit. They ran the Spanish Inquisition and slew Reformed believers for the sake of the gospel till the rivers ran red, especially in the Lowlands. Unique in the RCC, the Jesuits take the oath of obedience to the pope, which their founder Loyola famously summarized this way: if the church [the pope—NJJL] defines something as black that our eyes perceive as white, then we will define it as black. Blind obedience to man: that is idolatry in its most blatant form. That idolatry leads to the coming of the beast from the sea, the deified state and its head, after whom the whole world wonders, and that leads to the death of those who will not worship him (see Rev. 13:1–10).

⁹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-21801700.

He is no Christian. He does not speak for Christians. He is not the most public face of Christianity. The Holy Spirit was not working in the Sistine Chapel, and Christ did not call him, except in the sense that nothing happens apart from the will of God and the One who sits on the throne opening the seven seals, not even the election of a wicked, antichristian pope.

Still more appalling than this deadly fascination with Rome, then, are the inexcusable calls for prayer for this antichrist and his false church by reputedly Reformed men.

In light of the election of this pope, I will be praying. What will I pray? I will pray this: that Jesus Christ, the only head of the church, will oppose him and everything that he does; that He will also rule in the corrupt council chambers of the Roman Catholic Church as they try to overthrow Messiah and His reign and have them in derision; that He will oppose, overthrow, and frustrate every council of Rome that opposes and exalts itself against God, Christ, and His little church, or else use everything that is decided and done for His own precious church, His church that is not Rome, but the company of the predestinated.

I will pray that Christ will take notice of all those meetings that professing Christians are having with Rome in which they sacrilegiously trample on the tombs of the prophets by giving up the very truth and doctrine that the fathers were willing to die for, and in many cases did die for, at the hands of Rome; that Christ will take notice of what wickedness is promoted in His own name and bring it to naught.

I will pray that Christ will cause through all this the coming of His own kingdom and preserve and increase His church; that Christ will do all this quickly, even as He promised; that He will also do with this antichrist what He will do with the man of sin, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (II Thess. 2:8).

I will pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, on behalf of Thy faithful church that has not bowed the knee to this Roman idol, and whose mouths have not—and by Thy grace and according to Thy eternal counsel of election never will—kiss him." ❧

Congregation Activities

Reflecting on the Word of God found in Psalm 84:10, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand," we call your attention to the anniversary of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD, organized April 23, 2010.

All the societies of the Grandville, MI PRC were invited to hear Dr. Nate Lanning and Dr. Brendan Looyenga's lectures on Tuesday, March 19. Dr. Lanning spoke on "Understanding Evolution: Reformed Consensus, Scientific Concepts, and Physical Proof," and Dr. Looyenga on "Teaching About Evolution and Evolutionists within a Biblical Framework." There was a question and answer period following the lectures.

In view of the upcoming installation of Rev. David Overway as pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, Hope's Adult Bible Society decided to study the Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of God's Word.

"Women in Zion" was the theme for this year's Women's Conference sponsored by the Byron Center, MI PRC. This year's conference was held on March 8 and 9 at the Jamestown Reformed Church. Friday evening Rev. R. Van Overloop, pastor of Grace PRC in Standale,

MI, delivered the keynote address, speaking on the theme, "Within His Courts." This was followed Saturday morning and afternoon by two more speeches: Mrs. Sue Looyenga spoke on "When in the Valley of Weeping," and Mrs. Linda Verburg spoke on "With Purpose." Squeezed between these speeches, the 268 registered ladies enjoyed times of fellowship and singing together, as well as taking part in small discussion-groups focusing on Reflecting Our Redemption in Our Trials and Reflecting God's Glory in Our Lives. Much thanks to the Byron Center congregation for continuing to sponsor this worthwhile event.

Classis West of our PR churches met in regular session on Wednesday, March 6 at the Lynden, WA PRC. The day before, March 5, the delegates, as well as others interested in the subject, were invited to an Officebearers' Conference celebrating the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563-2013. That conference featured four speeches. Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC Spokane, WA, started the conference by speaking on "The History and Significance of the Heidelberg Catechism." This introductory speech was followed by three speeches by Prof. Barry Gritters, professor of practical theology and New Testament studies in our seminary. Prof. Gritters spoke on "Preaching the Heidelberg Catechism" (1, 2, and 3).

Young People's Activities

The Federation Board, the governing body of our churches' young people's societies, was pleased to inform our young people that it had recently organized a test committee called the "Young Calvinists." According to their bulletin announcement, the Young Calvinists "had been created in order further to unite the young people's societies of our churches and foster a godly zeal for our PR heritage. Young Calvinists anticipates an exciting diversity of communication tools, activities, and opportunities for the young people and young adults. These opportunities include speeches, discussions, singing events, and more. The committee has also created a blog/website at youngcalvinists.org. The Young Calvinists blog will provide meditations and topical messages from a variety of writers, news and updates about upcoming events, and audio and video links to past speeches and events.

The Young Calvinists presented their first event, called Talking Points. This was a speech/discussion on the topic, "Who Am I... In Christ?" led by Rev. Ron Van Overloop. This meeting took place on March 16 at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI. It was designed for young people and young adults alike.

The Young People's Society of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a gym night/pizza party at Adams Christian School. The young people from the Kalama-

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

Standard Bearer

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zoo, MI PRC were invited to come and join in the fun. The excitement started around 6:30 P.M. and wrapped up around 10:30 P.M.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, along with Elder Pete VanDer Schaaf, a member of our denomination's Contact Committee, left for Northern Ireland on March 14 for a two-week visit with the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland in Ballymena. This trip came at the request of the denominational Contact Committee. The delegation planned on conducting church visitation both in Ballymena, with

Rev. Angus Stewart and his Council, and in their mission outreach in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, with Rev. Martyn McGeown and the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. Rev. Haak was asked to preach on the two Sundays of the visit, give four lectures during the week, and lead Bible studies. The delegation planned to return home on March 26, D.V.

Mission Activities

Elders Jim and Ron Kuiper, along with deacons Eric Lubbers and Jeff Potjer, a delegation from the Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI, visited missionary pastor Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, his family, and

the members of the Pittsburgh Fellowship on March 8-10. In addition to spending a Sunday in worship with the members of Pittsburgh, and having oversight of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the men also visited with the Bruinsmas and had opportunity to meet with Pittsburgh's Steering Committee. May the Lord continue to bless the work in Pittsburgh.

Minister Activities

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA, declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 2013 at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church.

Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk

Notice

■ A digital index of the *Standard Bearer* is now available for Volumes 1 – 88. Go to www.rfpa.org to order.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the First PRC of Edmonton express their Christian sympathy to Joanne Tolsma, Art and Helen Tolsma, Fred and Netty Tolsma, Rick and Sharon Tolsma, Brian and Carolyn Tolsma, Irwin and Yvonne Tolsma, and their families in the passing into glory of their husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather,

UILKE TOLSMA.

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (II Corinthians 5:1-2).

Rev. John Marcus, President
James Molenkamp, Clerk