

# The Standard Bearer

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## CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	The Brevity of Life <b>REV. RODNEY MIERSMA</b>	146
<i>Editorial</i>	Responding to God's Judgments <b>PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA</b>	148
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (21) <b>PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA</b>	151
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	My House, a Den of Robbers <b>MR. DON DOEZEMA</b>	153
<i>A Word Fitly Spoken</i>	Covet <b>REV. BILL LANGERAK</b>	156
<i>Strength of Youth</i>	Trembling at God's Word <b>REV. MARTIN VANDER WAL</b>	157
<i>Ministering to the Saints</i>	The History of the Office of Elder (4) <b>REV. DOUG KUIPER</b>	159
<i>Re-formed Worldview</i>	The Reformed Worldview: Truth and its Consequences (1) <b>REV. STEVEN KEY</b>	163
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Reviews <b>MRS. BRENDA HOEKSTRA</b>	165
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities <b>MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER</b>	167

# The Brevity of Life

LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

Psalm 39:4, 5

We now stand at the end of 2012 and at the beginning of 2013. The time went by so very fast. It seems such a short time ago that 2012 began. One wonders how the days could so quickly pass. But they did. One realizes too that the years of his life quickly pass by. The young may indeed envision many years before them, but the older ones realize that those years are soon past. Each day is not only “the first day of the rest of our lives,” but it is also one day closer to the day of our death. It is likewise true that we are one year nearer to the time that the Lord Jesus Christ shall return on the clouds of glory. The signs about us seem to indicate clearly that before

long Jesus will come again. Our thoughts should turn to this as we begin the new year of 2013.

David expresses in Psalm 39 the very thoughts that must fill the hearts and minds of children of God. David is not being a pessimist, nor does he reflect some sort of poor spiritual attitude. The Psalm indicates that he has gone through some terribly traumatic experience. Perhaps it was after his own son Absalom sought David's life in order to assume for himself the throne of Israel. To David's grief, and against his wishes, his son Absalom had been slain. In this period of great trial, David is brought to a consciousness of his own end. He is brought before the question of the importance and value of his own life. Not on the basis of psychology or philosophy will he learn this, but God Himself must teach him the significance of life. At the close of 2012, children of God do well to heed this Word of God for their own profit and encouragement.

David prays for knowledge, for he is painfully aware of the shortness of life and of the fact that his own days could soon be cut off. We too, on the occasion of the end of the year, are brought face-to-face with the fact that time passes, that our days and years surely pass. David comes to God, for there is nowhere else to

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

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#### Editorial Office

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418  
dykstra@prca.org

#### Business Office

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

#### Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
benjwig@juno.com

#### United Kingdom Office

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

#### Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown  
Apartment 10, Block D  
Ballycummin Village  
Limerick, Ireland

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go. He asks God, "Make me to know mine end." The fruit of such work of God in us is that we will "know how frail" we are. David surely follows a proper path in this instance. He seeks knowledge from the Source of all knowledge: Jehovah God. God can, and does, reveal to us that which we need to know in this regard. He comes in the Holy Scriptures, and through Jesus Christ, in order to unfold to us truths concerning our own days. Thus also we can know, for our knowledge is based upon God's revelation to us, a knowledge that is the fruit of faith. This is the knowledge we now seek.

Like David, we do not seek to know the day of our death. That was not David's concern. Each one has a moment of death. God alone knows the final moment. And God does not normally reveal that to man—not to His people either. Nor ought we to know this. David's prayer is rather that we might know the fact that our life is brief, and the significance of this for us. We must know, spiritually, that death assuredly comes. We will not continue on this earth forever. We must know this, not simply as a medical fact, but in a godly sort of way. David is not complaining about the brevity of life, nor is he blurting out his own rebellion against the hard ways that God sends. Affliction had surely stalked his path. David was stirred up within himself, deeply troubled. Therefore he prays for spiritual comprehension concerning the significance of life that quickly passes.

So David asks of God to show him the fact of life's brevity. In a sense he knew this, for who does not know that the end of every birth is assuredly death? Each knows this intellectually as a fact, but for David, and for us, that fact seems to make no difference—until God brings it to our attention. David would often live his life as though it would continue forever. Though David was called a man after God's own heart, yet he committed sins of adultery and murder, as though there would never be a day of reckoning, as though the sovereign God does not see.

Children of God also today can easily walk in this same sin. They can live in this world as though they were independent of God Himself. It might seem that although others die, death shall never approach me or my home. I know better, yet I live often in a way that ignores the reality of God's Word. Therefore David

and we must be brought to the awareness of what our lives truly are. He who knows the brevity of his days spiritually will also walk in the wisdom of the Lord.

What is it, then, that God reveals to us? He reveals that man himself is frail and weak. Often, especially in youthful vigor, one would consider himself very strong. The young man rejoices in his strength. It is not pleasant to consider the inevitable dissipating of this strength. Yet the child of God recognizes especially two things: that his strength is of God, and that this strength, even at its greatest, is very little. I cannot add one day to my life, nor prevent the day of my death. I am weak and frail; and I must know this well. Life is very brief, a handbreadth, the width of four fingers lying side-by-side. Each night we retire with the assurance that we shall rise again on the morrow. We assure ourselves that certainly we will have at least the scriptural three-score years and ten for our lives. We put from our minds the knowledge of death. Yet how brief are man's days. Even seventy or eighty years pass quickly. Just ask any older person. It is also very well possible that the span of life will not even reach that number of years. God has not guaranteed every person a certain span of life. Our days are quickly gone. We must recognize how short these really are.

Our life is altogether "vanity." It is like a vapor that passes from our mouths on a cold day. Quickly it dissipates. Even while it is to be seen, it is so insubstantial. Such is our life. We may consider ourselves so important and necessary. Indeed, every child has a very important place in the body of Christ. Yet man, apart from this fact, would highly esteem himself in the earth. Each one can hardly imagine how the world will continue without his own personal presence. This is the pride of natural man. Scripture teaches us that our lives are "vanity" or a "vapor." In our very best state, this is what we are. Man is but dust of the earth; his life quickly fades away.

This revelation is necessary for God's children. The child of God must not continue in blind ignorance on the earth as though his life will go on forever. He must know his end; and he must know that end in connection with his relation to Jesus Christ. The Spirit causes God's people to be born again. These are led in confession before God and directed in paths of righteousness.

These search out Scripture to discern their calling and position in this earth. These, then, see the brevity of their days.


How often our days are troublous. Another year has drawn to a close. For some, this past year was filled with many trials, sorrows, and afflictions. For others, it was perhaps a year of events of a pleasant nature. But the fact is that the year is gone again. Those who stand as before God's face must also understand that all of this life passes rapidly. Have you been giving this serious thought today? What of your end? How do you evaluate your days? One who properly evaluates in the light of God's Word will also set his heart on wisdom's way.

The lesson that we learn is that we must look beyond this life to that which is to come. For the child of God, an awareness of the brevity of his days is an awareness that he is a pilgrim here below, as we see in verse twelve. Learning properly of one's end is to learn what it means to be a pilgrim. Such a one will not hold to the things of this earth. He realizes that he has his home in another place, in heaven itself. There he shall enjoy eternal blessings with his Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. My days are brief and a vanity because I am only passing through on my way to glory.

This truth reminds the child of God of the value of the earthly compared with that which is heavenly. It is so easy to evaluate too highly the things of this earth. We want to stay here on the earth; its material possessions attract; its entertainment appears so

desirable. Our earthly ties are so very strong. When God sends trials and afflictions, He Himself teaches His people that all these things are nothing. Thus one who recognizes the brevity of life and who understands the instruction of God's Word looks more eagerly for the glory that awaits him for Jesus' sake in heaven. He walks through this vale of tears with the understanding that he has here no abiding place. His desire is the heavenly glory that belongs to the saints through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now we have come to the end of another year and face the beginning of a new one. Many things have taken place. Many signs of the end of this age we have seen. Again there were wars and rumors of wars. There has been continuing development in the realm of science. More and more there is indication of the developing kingdom of the Antichrist. Increasing emphasis is placed upon the need for a one-world government. Mankind is ready to follow one who promises to lead to an earthly peace and prosperity.

As a result, the child of God, along with David, cries out, "Lord, make me to know mine end." Hear the Word of the Lord. Your life is but a breath that quickly passes away. But those united to Christ in His suffering, death, and resurrection shall complete their pilgrimage here on the earth to enter into heavenly glory and life. These have learned the truth that they have an end on this earth, but they rejoice in the assurance of a place prepared for them in heaven. May that be your comfort as you begin this new year. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

## Responding to God's Judgments

**T**he Reformed believer confesses the sovereignty of God in all things. He acknowledges the kingship of Jesus Christ, to whom God has given "all power in heaven and in earth"

(Matt. 28:19). Accordingly, the believer knows that nothing happens by chance. Jehovah reigns supreme.

The Reformed believer worships the Holy One, the God too holy to dwell with iniquity. That God hates

all sin, and visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him.

With this realization, the believer looks back at 2012 with awe and rev-

erence. God's power, as well as His hatred of sin, were clearly manifest in the dreadful judgments sent upon the earth and upon sinful man. As I write this, the southern islands of the Philippines are staggering from the blow of a deadly typhoon that killed over 500 at latest report. That is a small part of the damage that God inflicted on this planet through floods. In the last three months alone, floods devastated parts of England, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Earthquakes shook the earth thousands of times in 2012. Adverse or shifting weather patterns destroyed cities (have we forgotten the deadly tornadoes in January-March of 2012?) and wreaked havoc on crop production, tourism, and economies around the world. And, most publicized of all, with days of predictions, untold careful calculations of wind and rain, and graphic pictures of the destruction by wind and water, hurricane Sandy was reported to the world.

Judgments of God abound. They will only increase. These are but the beginning of sorrows that the Lord promised (Matt. 24:8).

The believer is sympathetic to the plight of all those who suffer in these catastrophes. His heart goes out to those who lose their homes, their livelihood, and, most heart-wrenching, lose a husband, a wife, and/or children. The believer prays that God will care for the household of faith—that He will give them their basic needs, will uphold them by His grace, and will use this adversity for their good. Surely the believer is in no way callous regarding the horrible suffering that these judgments bring.

At the same time, Psalm 97

guides the believer in another proper response to these judgments, namely, rejoicing. Rejoicing?!? Indeed.

Psalm 97, exalting in the glory of God, begins, "The LORD reigneth." Clearly this God is to be feared. "Clouds and darkness are round about him.... A fire goeth before him and burneth up his enemies round about" (vv. 2, 3). His lightnings flash, the earth melts at His presence, and thus "all the people see his glory" (vv. 4-6).

And what does fallen man do with that glory of God? Romans 1:18ff. tell us—refusing to give God the glory, they deliberately turn to worship idols. To this agrees Psalm 97:7, as it condemns "all...that serve graven images."

The very next verse records: "Zion heard, and was glad." Zion is God's church, and that church "rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD" (v. 8). The church confesses that Jehovah is God alone, the God "high above the earth" (v. 9) who alone is to be worshiped. But knowing that wicked man nonetheless turns to idols, the church rejoiced to hear that God visited His judgments on the idolaters. Jehovah, whom they worship, is not mocked. Man may blaspheme God's name or ignore Him and deliberately turn to idols, but God will visit their iniquity with judgment. Floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, typhoons, and earthquakes in divers places. The church is glad that the God of heaven and earth manifests His sovereign power in righteous judgments. And, at the same time, the church today rejoices that the Lord is coming.

### **A Different Kind of Judgment**

God judges wickedness in different ways at different times. Jehovah God sent another kind of judgment

on America in the election of Pres. Obama to a second term. And since "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:17), it is certain that God has given to the USA this ruler who has every intention of promoting the most heinous sins. The ruler of the most powerful nation on earth in the year 2013 continues actively to support the murder of unborn children. Equally reprehensible, his policies promote the sin of homosexuality. He and his administration are determined that the entire country, indeed the whole world, approve this abomination.

Already in March of 2011 this administration brought to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva a declaration in support of the homosexual agenda. Reportedly, eighty nations supported that declaration. In June, 2012, that same United Nations council passed a resolution that endorsed the right of homosexuals to practice their abominations in all countries, and called for discussions of national laws that might discriminate against them. The support for these UN policies is predominately from Western nations.

God is visiting His judgment on the USA and on much of the Western world. Romans 1 emphatically teaches that homosexuality is God's judgment on a people who reject Him, refuse to worship Him, and turn instead to gods of their own invention. God gives them over to this sin (see verses 24, 26, and 28). That homosexuality abounds in these Western nations is God's judgment on nations that at one time had faithful preaching, but whose people rejected the true knowledge of God.

God adds to that judgment this: leaders who promote the sin and force their citizens to approve it. The abominations will spread. These countries will become as Sodom of old.

The insight of John Calvin is being verified again—God gives to a people such rulers as they truly deserve (Sermon on I Tim. 2:1, 2). In the USA, the November elections not only continued the current administration, it seated open homosexuals in both houses of Congress, and approved same-sex “marriage” in three states. Homosexuality is come into our culture with a vengeance.

Reformed Christians submit to the judgment of God. They honor those in authority for the Lord’s sake, and even pray for them. And they submit to the judgment as a chastisement from God. As citizens of their respective nations, they know they deserve what God has given.

### **A Judgment on the Church**

This is a judgment of God for which the church bears heavy responsibility. That which calls itself the Christian church has largely ceased preaching truth; she boldly proclaims the lie. No longer condemning sin, she rather approves it.

Significantly, the apostatizing churches long ago tolerated and then approved the open violation of a central creation ordinance of God, namely, the marriage of one man and one woman for life. Marry, divorce, and repeat as oft as you please, and yes, you are still welcome to the Lord’s table. The devil watched with glee. This will-

ingness of the church to contradict so clear an ordinance of God—one man, one woman for life—held great portent for the future defilement of the church—something unthinkable, namely, the approval of homosexuality.

The argument is simple. If you are willing to justify divorce and re-marriage, willing to contradict God’s clear teaching on the relationship of men and women in marriage, why not approve homosexuality? The pressure grew in those “Christian nations” as it became more acceptable in society.

And the church faltered. She surrendered to the pressure of the world, her false theology paving the way. The god she adores is love, all love, nothing but love. This god wants all to be happy. If a man can be happy only if he is allowed to fulfill his sexual desires with another man, then it must be allowed, no, approved in the name of love. God in His judgment gives these churches over to their sin. In an astoundingly short time, their ministers and elders are avowed homosexuals.

### **Personal Responsibility**

Lest the readers and writers of the *SB*, conservative Reformed and Presbyterian folk, become proud in their own conceits, and look with condemning arrogance on all those apostate churches, we must be reminded that the responsibility for these divine judgments rests on us as well. There is a corporate guilt akin to that of Daniel, who confessed that “we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing

from thy precepts and from thy judgments” (Dan. 9:5).

But our guilt is not limited to corporate. We have been influenced by the world. We listen to the songs of the world that glory in sex, rebellion, and earthly pleasures. We dress as the world that glorifies the body and provokes to lust. We seek the world’s entertainment, saturated with either blood or sex. It is all available, out in the open for the believer, to be seen and enjoyed. And we have.

At the very least, we Reformed Christians have become accustomed to it. Sins that once shocked, do so no longer, no longer repel, but rather entice. The entertainment *today* that many might consider ‘innocent,’ in the days of my youth the government would not allow in theaters, much less on the television screen. And the unspeakable iniquity of the Internet is available in the privacy of one’s own home. More than one marriage of Reformed believers, yes, Protestant Reformed members, has been destroyed by the pornography of the Internet. How many more souls are ensnared in this pit, only time, and the judgment, will reveal.

The question each of us must face is this: Do we hate and flee from this tide of iniquity? Or are we becoming increasingly tolerant, and even indulging in the iniquity of the world that surrounds us? Were any of our believing great grandfathers to return to this life for a day, he would surely be appalled not only at the development of sin, but that the church is so worldly—living with the world, living as the world.


In love for His church, therefore,

God sends judgments. Those judgments begin at the house of God. The judgment of killing wrath on the ungodly, giving them over to their sins, with leaders that promote the same, will soon result in the land becoming Sodom. Believers will be as Lot, who “vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (II Pet. 2:8). And the wicked of the land will not long tolerate God’s people, but will say, as they did with Lot, “This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with

them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot...” (Gen. 19:9).

Persecution. The worst that the church has ever faced. Dreadful to think about. But a judgment of God, on the one hand, that the church *deserves* because she has partaken of the sins of the world, and on the other hand, that the church *needs* in order to separate her from the world spiritually. These judgments underscore God’s call to the church throughout history: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto

you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 6:17-7:1; Is. 52:11).

Our confidence is in the same God who loves and chastens every son and every daughter for their profit (Heb. 12:6). “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (II Pet. 2:9). 

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAN

## Chapter Four

### Postmillennialism (21)

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

**I**n the preceding article in this series on postmillennialism, I began a critical examination of one of the texts of Scripture that are most important to the postmillennial doctrine of the last things. This text is Matthew 24:34: “Verily I [Jesus Christ] say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” Many postmillennialists explain the text as teaching that all the events prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24:4-31 would be fulfilled, completely and finally, in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Nothing of these things remains to be fulfilled in the future at the second coming of Jesus. On the basis

of this explanation of Matthew 24:34, the postmillennialists explain *all* the prophecies of the New Testament concerning lawlessness, heresies, apostasy, and, especially, tribulation for the church under Antichrist as having reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in the past and, therefore, of no application to the church in AD 2012.

Postmillennialism’s clever interpretation of Matthew 24:34, thus, enables that movement to forecast an earthly victory of the New Testament church sometime in the future, prior to the second coming of Christ. Future history is bright with promise of earthly power, earthly prosperity, and earthly peace for the church. It should be noted here that there is no biblical basis for this dream in the New Testament. Even if we grant (as we do not) that all the prophecy of the New Testament

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*Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*Previous article in this series: November 1, 2012, p. 56.*

of suffering and struggle was fulfilled, completely, in AD 70, upon the Jews, there is no prophecy in the New Testament of the earthly victory of the church as a carnal kingdom of Christ. Postmillennialism sucks this out of its thumb.

But according to postmillennialism, in light of its interpretation of Matthew 24, Jesus will not return to deliver a church that has undergone tribulation at the hands of an Antichrist. Rather, He will return to congratulate a church that has conquered the wicked world and is enjoying and exercising earthly dominion over all the nations of the world.

### Typical Fulfillment

Postmillennialism's interpretation of Matthew 24:34 is erroneous. By the happening (and this is the meaning of the word that the AV translates as "fulfilled") of all the things He had foretold in Matthew 24:4-31 before "this generation shall pass away," Jesus did indeed refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the temple in AD 70. That significant event in the history of the church was the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, inasmuch as it was a historical *type* of the destruction of the world and redemption of the church at the very end, when Jesus returns.

The meaning of Matthew 24:34 is: This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled, that is, happen, *typically*, or, *in the historical type*.

But the meaning is not that the destruction of Jerusalem would be the complete, final fulfillment of the prophecy of verses 4-31.

The evidence is that the destruction of Jerusalem would not answer the disciples' question of verse 3. The disciples did not ask only about the destruction of the temple, but also about "thy coming, and...the end of the world." The destruction of Jerusalem was Christ's coming in judgment upon the nation of Israel; His coming to put an end to the old, largely Jewish dispensation; and His coming to deliver His New Testament church from both the persecution by unbelieving Jews and the danger of entangling Jewish thinking, laws, and ways. But it was not Christ's coming in the full sense—the sense intended by the question of the disciples. The destruction of Jerusalem was not the bodily, visible coming of Christ.

Nor was the destruction of Jerusalem the full reality of the "end of the world," about which the disciples had asked. AD 70 was not the "end" in the sense in which verse 14 speaks of "the end." It was not the end of the present creation and of history.

In addition, certain of the signs mentioned in verses 4-31 obviously did not, in fact, occur before or at AD 70. The gospel of the kingdom was not then yet preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. Nor were the heavenly bodies darkened and shaken in AD 70, as verse 29 prophesies will take place before the coming of Christ and the end of the world. Neither did the sign of the Son of man appear (v. 30).

That Jesus had the reality of His coming and of the end of the world, of which the destruction of Jerusalem was only a historical type, in mind in Matthew 24 is especially evident in verses 30, 31. All the tribes of the earth "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." This is yet future after AD 70, describing the reality of the coming of Christ and of the end of the world.

Verse 36 speaks of "that day and hour," indicating that throughout His instruction concerning the last things in all of Matthew 24 Jesus had before His mind, and purposed that His disciples have before their minds, one, particular day and a certain, definite hour. This day and hour are the day and hour of His bodily return to conduct the final judgment and to glorify the saints. This day and hour are the world's last day and hour.

The right explanation of Matthew 24:4-51 is that Jesus answered the question of His disciples in verse 3 by foretelling both the historical type of His coming and the reality of His coming. He foretold the reality by means of the type. Therefore, throughout the instruction references to the type and to the reality are interwoven. Certain statements belong peculiarly to the historical type, for example, that those who are in Judea should flee into the mountains (v. 16), although even these have their application to the reality of Christ's bodily coming. The historical type would occur in the time of the generation alive when Jesus spoke



the eschatological prophecy. The reality would happen in the distant future, after AD 70.

### Biblical Realism

The implication of this right explanation of Matthew 24 is that the earthly future for the church, especially as the day and hour of Christ's return draw nearer, consists of struggle with false teachers and heresies, of the danger of apostasy, of living antithetically in a world of abounding lawlessness, and of enduring the great tribulation inflicted by the culmination of false Christs, that is, the man of sin of II Thessalonians 2 and the beast of Revelation 13, the personal Antichrist and his antichristian world-power.

Christ Himself ruled out the dream of a millennium of earthly power, earthly peace, and earthly prosperity for the church as His carnal kingdom.

Matthew 24, rightly understood, is in harmony with the history of the church on earth *after* AD 70. The church's history, *after* AD 70, has been conflict, struggle, and tribulation.

Matthew 24, rightly understood, is in harmony with the church's experience everywhere on earth at the present time. Many false prophets arise, and deceive many. Iniquity, that is, lawlessness, abounds. The love of many for the truth of the word of God, both with regard to

sound doctrine and with regard to godly behavior, becomes cold. Both among the nations of the Christian West and among the nations on which the Christian faith has had little or no influence is increasingly evident hatred for the Christian faith and way of life—a hatred that soon will produce the great tribulation. Of the prospect of earthly dominion, peace, prosperity, and ease for the true church in the world, there is not so much as a hint in AD 2012.

Most importantly, Matthew 24, rightly understood, is in harmony with all the rest of the New Testament, which uniformly warns the church of evil days, especially as the coming of Christ and the end of the world draw nigh.

It is, on the very face of it, a heavy-handed assault on the Bible, as also a stripping from the church of instruction and warning that belong to her, that postmillennialism relegates so much, and so important a part, of the New Testament, including almost the entirety of the book of Revelation, to the distant past, denying that this large portion of Scripture applies to the church after AD 70.

Postmillennialism is grievous doctrinal error, with dire practical implications for its adherents.

It has no basis in Scripture. ☞

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (7)

## My House, a Den of Robbers

Judah's history demonstrates beyond a shadow of doubt that she hankered after idols no less than her sister Israel. Their histories nevertheless dif-

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

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ferred, because the Lord graciously raised up in Judah a number of good kings, kings who brought reformation. Reformations, however, proved always to be short-lived. Think of good king Hezekiah. Hezekiah's wicked father, Ahaz, had "cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn

incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers" (II Chron. 28:24, 25). Hezekiah reversed all of that. "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it" (II Kings 18:4). And then, incredibly, his son Manasseh brought it all back. "After the abominations of the heathen...he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards" (II Kings 21:2-9).

All this...in *Judah!* In His anger, God brought upon Judah "the captains of the host of the king of Assyria" (II Chron. 33:11). Manasseh himself was carried away captive from Jerusalem, and, in captivity, he "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers"; he was brought again to Jerusalem; and he tried to undo the evil he had done. He "took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord...and cast them out of the city" (II Chron. 33:12-16). Evidently his son Amon brought them all back into the city, for we read that he "sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them" (II Chron. 33:22).

And then there was Amon's son Josiah. He personally supervised the breaking down of "the altars of Baalim" (II Chron. 34:4). And, not content with simply casting the carved and molten images out of the city, he broke them in pieces, "and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them" (II Chron. 34:4).

Hardly could Josiah have made his own abhorrence of idolatry more clear. It is telling, however, that his efforts to root idolatry out of Judah occupied some *six years* of his reign. We are not told that the people tried actually to *prevent* the destruction of their idols; but evidently they did not, either, *cooperate with the king*

by cleaning up their own cities. We can only conclude that the vast majority of the people did not really sympathize with the reforms of Josiah; they merely submitted to them. "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord" (Jer. 3:10). Small wonder, therefore, that the task of ridding the land of idols took so much time and effort on the part of the king.

And it soon became clear that that work of Josiah was not sufficient to root idolatry out of the *hearts* of the people of Judah. Jehoahaz, the first son of Josiah to reign after him, reigned for just three months, during which time he "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done" (II Kings 23:31, 32). Jehoahaz was replaced by Jehoia-kim (II Kings 23:33-37). Suffice it to say that Jehoia-kim was the king who, when the prophecies of Jeremiah were read to him, took the leaves of the scroll, cut them into pieces with a penknife, and tossed them into the fire (Jer. 36:21-24). Such was the hardness of heart in the *king's court*. "They were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words."

Jehoiakim reigned for eleven years. His 18-year-old son Jehoichin, who was just like his father, reigned after him—for three months and ten days (II Kings 25:8, 9; II Chron. 36:9).

And then we come to Zedekiah, Jehoichin's uncle, the third son of Josiah to sit on David's throne.

A mere eleven and a half years after the reign of good king Josiah! And what do we find in Judah?

"Pray not thou for this people," the Lord said to Jeremiah the prophet, "neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7:6). Why not? There can be only one reason. Because they are beyond hope. And what sin is it that particularly proves that the Jews are past remedy? Idolatry! Brazenly open idolatry!

"Seest thou not," the Lord asks His prophet, "what they do *in the cities of Judah* and *in the streets of Jerusalem*? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger" (Jer. 7:17, 18). It's a family affair. Every-

body is involved. Young and old alike. Male and female. All are participants in the worship of the queen of heaven and other gods. And it's right out in the open—as if to defy what they know to be My command that they *not* serve the idol-gods of the heathen, but Me *alone*. Their hearts are *set on idolatry*.

God's judgment of it all was declared to the people of Judah by the prophet Jeremiah. "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house," the Lord said to the prophet, "and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.... Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and [then] come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord" (Jer. 7:1-11).

A den of robbers. That is what the temple of God had become to apostate Jewry. They had heard the threats of the prophet Jeremiah. But, so they imagined, they had nothing to fear. Why not? Because they had dutifully offered their sacrifices. By bare sacrifice and offering, as they thought, they had appeased the Lord for whatever anger He might otherwise have had toward them on account of the sins in which they were living. Thus did the temple become a sort of sanctuary, or shelter, or asylum...for robbers, and murderers, and adulterers, and idolaters. Make amends for their sins, so they thought, that is all they had to do in order to be "delivered to do [that is, *continue to do*] all these abominations."

Calvin is instructive in his commentary on these verses: "Hypocrites do not in words express this; but when they make external ceremonies a sort of expiation, and seek by such means to bury their sins, do they not make God their associate? Do they not make him a partaker, as it were, with them, when they would have him to cover their adulteries?... The prophet now adds, *Ye come*, that is, after ye have allowed yourselves to steal, and to murder, and to commit adultery, and to corrupt the whole worship of God—at last, *ye come and stand before me in this temple*. God proceeds with the same subject; for it was not his purpose in this

place to condemn the Jews as murderers, and thieves, and adulterers, but he proceeds farther, even to show their shameless effrontery in coming with an unblushing front and entering the Temple, as though they were true worshipers of God. 'What do you mean,' he says, 'by this? Ye bring murders, and thefts, and adulteries, and abominable filth; ye are contaminated with the most disgraceful things: by and bye ye enter the Temple, and think that you are at liberty to do anything.'"

"Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the Lord.... Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight..." (Jer. 7:11-15).

One cannot study this sad chapter in the history of the Israel, the *church*, of the old dispensation without a sense of wonder. Wonder, that is, at the consummate folly of...men. Having been miraculously delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt, having been provided bread from heaven and water from the rock in a waste howling wilderness, having been planted and preserved in the land of Canaan at the expense of heathen nations far stronger than they, Israel had every reason to trust in, and to worship, Jehovah God alone—and to find repulsive the idols of the heathen who were driven out before them. But they did not. What do we find in the Judah of Jeremiah's day? Like their fathers, but "worse than their fathers" (Jer. 7:26), they worship the "*queen of heaven*," they "burn incense unto Baal," they "walk after other gods whom [they] know not" (that is, had no reason to trust), and then, most horrible of all to relate, they come and stand before God in His house. As if Jehovah were not a *holy* God, who was a searcher also of *hearts*—but could instead, like the idols of their vain imaginations, be pacified by mere rituals.

Almost, we would think, incomprehensibly wicked. How could they possibly have such a hankering for the idols of the world that they could make cakes for the queen of heaven on Friday—and then bring a sacrifice to the house of God on Saturday?

"Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers?"

Next time: Judicial blindness. 

# Covet

Each year the godlessness of Americans is shamefully displayed to the world by the long season of crass covetousness that follows our national day of thanksgiving. After stuffing their bellies and perhaps muttering a few words of thanks, greedy hoards then race off to the merchants to claw, shove, trample (even stab and shoot) each other for new loot. More shameful still is that many justify this as part of celebrating the birth of Jesus, He, mind you, who was found in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes and in life had no place to lay His head. Coveting is what it is.


Jesus had a thing or two to say about coveting. His law for all men everywhere and in every season is, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, his wife, servants, cattle, or anything that is thy neighbors,” including the I-pads, I-pods, and I-phones on sale in thy neighbor’s store (Ex. 20:17). “Beware of covetousness,” He warned, for, contrary to popular opinion, “man’s life does not consist in the abundance of things” (Luke 12:15). Jesus not only is wroth with the sinful activity of coveting (Is. 57:17), but He abhors the covetous sinner (Ps. 10:3). No covetous one will ever inherit His kingdom (I Cor. 6:10).

Coveting is the characteristic sin of the wicked and godless. Those of reprobate mind are full of covetousness (Rom. 1:29). They covet greedily all the day long (Prov. 21:26). While they may exercise their bodies with weights and treadmills, they exercise their hearts with covetous practices (II Pet. 2:15). They even boast of their heart’s desire and bless the covetous—and often in our day as good saviors of the economy (Ps. 10:3). Truly we see fulfilled the prophecy that at the end of time men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous (II Tim. 3:2).

Coveting is also the characteristic sin of those who trouble the church. It was the sin of Achan, who caused the Lord’s anger to be kindled against Israel (Josh. 7:21). It was the sin of Balaam, who helped teach Israel to fornicate and sacrifice to idols (II Pet. 2:15). It was the sin of Judah in her apostasy from the least unto the greatest (Jer. 6:13). It was the sin of the Pharisees who mocked Jesus and deliv-

ered Him up to death (Luke 16:13). And it remains the sin of many a heretic and false prophet who for covetousness make merchandise of the flock (II Pet. 2:3). No wonder the apostle warned to keep no company with a brother who is covetous (I Cor. 5:11), let covetousness not be once named among you (Eph. 5:3), and let your conversation be without covetousness (Heb. 13:5). Coveting is destructive to the church and hearts of the people of God.

Coveting is the original sin (Gen. 3:6) and the root of all evil (I Tim. 6:10). It is the root of all sin against the neighbor—of fornication (Eph. 5:3), dealing falsely (Jer. 8:10), theft and stealing (Mic. 2:2), oppression, violence, and murder (Jer. 22:17). It is the root of all sin against God—of idolatry (Col. 3:5), Sabbath-breaking (Ex. 6:21), erring from the faith (I Tim. 6:10), and rejecting Jesus (Luke 16:14). And covetousness is a stubborn, persistent sin rooted deep within. For out of the heart comes covetousness (Mark 7:22). To covet is to have in our hearts even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to God’s commandments (H.C., Q&A 113). It is the sin that demonstrates conclusively that salvation by works is impossible, for even the holiest of men in this life cannot keep all of God’s commandments perfectly (Q&A 114). Nay, the apostle says, I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet (Rom. 7:7).

The godly, sanctified celebration of Jesus’ birth believes in Him as Savior, who both forgives and delivers us from covetousness. He who gave His life because He coveted no earthly riches or glory imputes to us that righteous contentment of perfect obedience. Then He roots out the powerful, persistent covetousness in our hearts. He provides us with elders not greedy of filthy lucre, nor covetous (I Tim. 3:3), and He gives ministers who preach not using flattering words as a cloak of covetousness (I Thess. 2:5). He inclines our own hearts unto His testimonies and not covetousness (Ps. 119:36), so that we can truly say, “I have coveted no man’s silver, gold, or apparel” (Acts 20:33). He causes that, rather than coveting the temporary trinkets and baubles of this world, we covet earnestly the best gifts (I Cor. 12:31). This is the Jesus born in Bethlehem. 

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

# Trembling at God's Word

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

Isaiah 66:2

“Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word: Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.”

Isaiah 66:5

**W**hat is this fear and trembling at the Word of the Lord?

This fear and trembling at the Word of the Lord is very similar to the fear of the Lord. This similarity is because both have the same cause: God, in His infinite glory, majesty, and honor, as well as His infinite mercy, grace, and lovingkindness. Both have the same root in us: faith. And both have the same direction: to the honor and glory of God. When we think of these similarities we can say that the fear and trembling at the Word of God is really *because of* our fear of God. Our fear of God is a mixture in our hearts of overwhelming awe and deep affection. God is infinitely great, but we love Him and desire His covenant fellowship and friendship. And since we know of that greatness of God and of His friendship from His Word, that Word is also great and our affection for it must be great.

But this fear and trembling at the Word of the Lord is also different from the fear of the Lord. The Word is near to you. It is near as you hold your Bible

in your hands. It is near when you hear it explained to you by one of the Lord's servants in His church. It is near when you speak of it to each other. Because the Word is near, it is easier to lose respect for it. Your Bible is a book with certain, specific words in it. Those words are printed with ink on paper, bound together in a book that you can hold, open, and read. You might begin to think of your Bible as just another book among so many books. Why fear, why tremble before it?

These similarities and differences between God and His Word allow you to test yourself. Do you truly fear the Lord? What do you think when you turn to His Word, the Scriptures? Take a look at your Bible. Look on its cover, its binding, and inside the cover where the printing begins. You do not find the word “Bible” by itself. You find another word with it, the word “Holy.” When you open up and begin to read those Scriptures, do you come to understand that you are before God's holy presence? Do you get the sense that the living, almighty God is showing you Himself? And does that affect you? How deeply? How powerfully?

As you fear the Lord, so will you fear His Word. As you tremble before the God who speaks that Word, so will you tremble at His Word. That fear is also a fear of faith, because one must believe that he does truly stand in the presence of the living and true God, even though he cannot see that by any evidence before him. The fear of the Lord at His Word means that one approaches His Word with care, reverence, and respect.

To understand this kind of fear better, think about the opposite, the lack of fear. This lack is evident in an approach to God's Word that is casual and flippant, offensive to the holiness of God's Word. It is a silliness that can even joke about the Word of God. This lack of fear you can see in a discussion with an unbeliever if you mention the Word of God. Say, “The Bible says...”

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Rev. VanderWal is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

and observe the reaction. The words you speak will be met with contempt, scorn, or open hostility. Consider the attitude shown by Jehoiakim, a king of Judah, in Jeremiah 37:20-26. This lack of fear at God's Word also lies at the root of many heresies. Without this fear heretics old and new feel free to twist God's Word to their own ends.

May this lack of fear and trembling at God's Word be far from you and those in your social circles! May it be far from our hearts, and far from our Bible-study societies and our churches!

Yet, you must recognize that this lack of fear is also in you. It is part of the depravity of your nature that you received from your first father, Adam. That depravity is the sinister spiritual energy that courses through your nature.

How is that lack manifested in you? Do you find in yourself a lack of fear and trembling at God's Word? Does that Word bring out of you skepticism, doubt, or mistrust? Do you ever find yourself thinking, "That can't be true!"? Or, "This doesn't make sense!" Or, "This is contradictory!" This lack can be manifested in your attitude toward the Word. Do you always approach from below, placing the Scriptures above you? Does that sometimes change as you read? Do you move from the place where you should be, below, and rise up to a place above, where you begin to pass judgment on God's Word?

Does this lack of fear ever show itself in your discussions? Does it show when you talk about the Word? Does it ever become evident in your discussions in Sunday School or in Young People's? What flippant remarks might some make? Do you see a haughty, condescending attitude on display? Is there a bad attitude shown, that one would rather be anywhere else than among God's people studying His Word?

May God grant us grace to warn one another! May God grant us grace to be warned by one another! Are you ready to warn? Are you ready to be warned? May

we do all we can to tremble and fear at the Word of the Lord!

How must you tremble before the Word of the Lord? There are four actions you must take.

First, keep yourself before the chief aim and goal: the fear of God Himself. Are you weak or strong here? If you are strong, well and good. If you are weak here, then you need to spend time considering and exploring two truths. The first truth is the greatness of God (infinity—that great!) in His holiness, justice, truth, wisdom, majesty, and glory, as well as how those perfections make His mercy and lovingkindness so wonderful. Give yourself time simply to read those Scriptures that

most powerfully and clearly show those attributes, such as the passages that display Jesus' death on the cross. The second truth you must consider is your sinfulness. To understand your sinfulness properly, read the law. Read the application of the law to man that God's Word makes in Romans 3. Know that that Word is talking about you! As you contemplate His Word, pray that

God will teach those truths to your heart. The result will be that God will become greater and greater, and that you will become smaller and smaller. Then you will know God's great power, wisdom, glory, and truth as your salvation, all from His Word.

Second, remember whose book it is that you are holding and reading. It is given to you by the fearful work of the Holy Spirit. He so filled and controlled those men who wrote the words of that book you hold that those words are not at all the words of men, but the words of God Himself (II Pet. 1:20, 21). Those words belong to Him; they are from Him. Then the very fear that you have of God must certainly belong to His Word as well. Remember when you read: this Word is from God!

Third, think of how Scripture shows this kind of fear at God's Word. Read Exodus 19 and Hebrews 12:18-21, 29. Think of Israel purifying themselves in

*You might begin  
to think of your Bible  
as just another book  
among so many books.  
Why fear,  
why tremble before it?*

order to appear before the presence of God on Mt. Sinai. Think of seeing that mountain on fire, surrounded by thick clouds and terrible darkness. Think of feeling the ground shaking under your feet and hearing the call of the trumpet sounding loud and long. Then think of hearing the voice of God speaking from that mountain, giving His ten commandments. How Israel trembled with fear! How Moses feared!

Fourth, think also about those holy Scriptures that display the wonder of God's Word. The account of creation shows the power of the Word of God. By His Word, God brought the whole universe into existence out of nothing. Think of the voice of the Lord as it is exalted in Psalm 29 according to its power to shake the

earth. Then follow that Psalm as it brings you into the temple of the Lord, where everyone speaks of God's glory, as He blesses His people with peace. That is the same Word that you have in the Scriptures, a Word to cause great fear and trembling!

Feel that fear and trembling! Feel it according to all the glory of God shown in His Word! Feel that fear as you read, hear, contemplate, and discuss it! Let it make your knees knock and your heart faint! That is your strength, the strength of your youth! For that weakness will make the Word of God strong in you, mighty to conquer every foe and to persevere through all troubles.



## The History of the Office of Elder (4)

# After the Apostolic Age

**T**racing the history of the office of elder in the Old and New Testament eras, we have seen that the office of elder in the New Testament church is rooted in the institution of elder in Old Testament Israel and in the office of elder in the synagogue. In tracing this history, we have also noted what God revealed regarding the qualifications, work, and honor of the office. This revelation of God is the norm to which the church must conform her view of the office.

We turn now to the history of the office after the time of the apostles and the completion of Scripture. Our question is this: how close to God's norm regarding the office of elder did the church of Christ adhere

after the time of the apostles? We begin answering this question in this article, by studying the period from about AD 100 to the great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

### The Office Disappears

The early church started well by ordaining qualified elders in every church and viewing them as those through whom God ruled the church. Worthy of note is that the church understood the words "bishop" and "elder" (presbyter) in the New Testament Scriptures to refer to one and the same office.<sup>1</sup> As one evidence of this, the document known as the *Didache* ("Teaching," short for "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"), which

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*Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.*

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<sup>1</sup> In the KJV, "bishop" translates the Greek word *episkopos*, which means "overseer," and refers to the work of the office; while "elder" translates the Greek word *presbuteros*, which refers to an aged man, and so to the honor of the office.

was composed sometime before AD 150, says: "Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers."<sup>2</sup> Here, as in Philippians 1:1, "bishops" refers to the elders of the church, and is used in the plural because each congregation had more than one elder. Even into the fourth century, the church father Jerome defended the position that in the Bible, "presbyter" and "bishop" refer to the same office.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the early church began well, she soon deformed the office of elder.

This deformation was a process. It progressed over time—decades and centuries. It went faster in some places, slower in others. Some resisted it, striving to be faithful to Scripture.

(The reader must understand that, in speaking of three aspects of this deformation, I am trying to relate a complex matter very simply, and trying to compress centuries of history into a few paragraphs.)

This deformation began when the church adopted the view that the two words in the New Testament Scriptures, "bishop" and "elder" (presbyter), referred either to two different church offices, or to a distinction within the one office. Bishops and presbyters were both elders, but the bishop was a higher elder, and the presbyters were lower elders. This view is manifest in an early document called "The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles." Written probably in the middle 300s, this document was later than, but partially based on, the document to which we already referred, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." But the "Constitutions" repeatedly indicates that a bishop and presbyter are not one and the same, and exalts the bishop. We have space for only one quote:

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<sup>2</sup> "The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles," chapter 15, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), vol. 7, p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> The interested reader can consult the book edited by David Hall and Joseph Hall, *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1994), pages 57-60, to read original writings of Jerome that support my statement.

The bishop, he is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in the several parts of your divine worship. He is the teacher of piety; and, next after God, he is your father, who has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. He is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly god, who has a right to be honored by you.<sup>4</sup>

After speaking in lofty terms of the bishop's office, the document continues in the same section to speak of deacons, deaconesses, and presbyters—the latter in *distinction* from bishops.

This deformation continued as the church changed her view of what constituted the real work of the presbyter. This work had been that of rule; it became that of offering a sacrifice. Along with this, the church dropped the word "presbyter" and began to use the word "priest" instead. "Presbyters conducted services and administered the sacraments; they were thus the spiritual arm of the bishop. Later they were called priests."<sup>5</sup> To this day, Rome does not have elders or presbyters; she has a pope, bishops, and priests.

This deformation developed further as the rule of the church was transferred more fully to the bishop. Even if every church had one bishop, this would still be deformation in the office, for Christ assigned the rule of the church to a *body* of elders in each congregation. But, over time, a bishop came to be a man who had authority and rule over a number of churches in a geographic area. Eventually certain bishops emerged as more prominent, and finally the Bishop of Rome came to be considered the Pope, the successor of the apostles. As such, not only is he the supreme teacher of the Romish church, but he is the ultimate elder as well.

The church began by deforming the office of elder, but ended by removing the office of elder. With this exaltation of the bishop, and with the development of the papacy, the office of elder "fell into disuse" and "disappeared." As a consequence, the office did not merely need *reformation*, which term presupposes

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<sup>4</sup> "The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," section 24, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 410.

<sup>5</sup> Harry R. Boer, *A Short History of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976), p. 136.



that it existed in a deformed state; rather, it needed “restoration.”<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the scriptural mandate that each congregation have elders (plural) to rule over them, the church departed from the scriptural norm.

## Two Related Departures from the Norm of Scripture

In the process of this deformation and disappearance of the office of elder, the church set aside two other scriptural mandates regarding her officebearers.

The first regards what kind of men may hold office. As already noted, Titus 1 and I Timothy 3 require the church’s elders to meet certain criteria with regard to their personal life, family life, and spiritual life. But, over time, the church ignored these qualifications. This is seen in two respects.

First, while at first priests were permitted to marry, later the church forbade priests to marry or be married. My purpose now is not to trace the history of the development of this idea in the early church but to state it.<sup>7</sup> This prohibition to marry goes contrary to I Timothy 3:2, 4 and Titus 1:6, which clearly permit an officeholder to be married.

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow wording from three different authors who are substantially agreed that the office of elder was essentially lost by the time of the Reformation. “Fell into disuse” is the wording of Samuel Miller in *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (General Books [www.General-Books.net], 2009), p. 35. Miller’s work, originally published in 1831, is worthwhile reading, and includes copious citations from the post-apostolic fathers regarding the office of elder in the early New Testament church. The General Books reprint, however, is a scanned copy of the original, in which copy many scanner errors were not fixed, making it difficult to read, therefore not recommended for the general reader.

“Disappeared” is the wording of Gerard Berkhoef and Lester DeKoster in *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press 1979), p. 227. And the need for “restoration” is the wording of W. M. Henry Roberts, *A Manual for Ruling Elders and Church Sessions* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1918), p. 61. In both of these works, the history of the office of elder is treated with extreme brevity.

<sup>7</sup> The interested reader can consult Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989, reprint), vol. 3, chap. 5, section 50, for an overview of this history; or find information online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clerical\\_celibacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clerical_celibacy) (Accessed on 3/27/2012).

Second, the church became so spiritually corrupt that she permitted her clergy to continue in many sins and unbridled lusts. She also permitted men to enter office without any regard to their spiritual qualifications. Instead, her criteria for deciding whom to put into office included such things as a man’s high rank in society, his having bought the office (the sin of simony), and his being related to other officeholders. Again, these are broad and general statements. Not every clergyman was immoral; not every parish tolerated immorality in their clergy; yet during the period from AD 400 on, immorality was widespread. Philip Schaff notes that many early church councils made statements showing “the earnestness and rigor with which the church guarded the moral purity and dignity of her servants.” Yet, “the frequent repetition of warnings against even the lowest and most common sins, such as licentiousness, drunkenness, fighting, and buffoonery...yield an unfavorable conclusion in regard to the moral standing of the sacred order.”<sup>8</sup> To restate Schaff’s words in my own: the church warned her clergy against many vices that were prevalent among the clergy, but many of the clergy ignored the warnings, and continued in both their sins and their clerical offices.

The second departure from the norm of Scripture regards how men are appointed to office. The Bible indicates that the church may and should choose her officebearers: the first deacons were chosen by the church (Acts 6:3). One reason why the whole church is given to know God’s will regarding who serves as pastor, elder, or deacon (I Timothy 3, Titus 1) is so that the church can select those whom God brings to her attention as qualified.

At first the early church followed this principle, but over time the bishops, if not civil governors, began appointing the officebearers in the church. Schaff says, “The traditional participation of the people in the election...of the episcopal office, still continued, but gradually sank into a mere formality, and at last became entirely extinct. The bishops filled their own vacancies, and elected and ordained the clergy.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Schaff, *History*, vol. 3, pp. 256-257.

<sup>9</sup> Schaff, *History*, vol. 3, p. 264.

## Calvin's Analysis of This History

My analysis of the history of the office of elder, based on the writings of the church fathers and of historians such as Philip Schaff, is essentially the same as that of John Calvin.

Calvin presents his analysis of this history in the fourth book of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Having developed the doctrine of the church in the first two chapters of the fourth book, in chapter three he presents the biblical teaching regarding the officebearers of the church: which offices Scripture requires, and how men are called and ordained to office. In this chapter he emphasizes both the qualifications that God sets forth for officebearers and the right of the people to choose their officebearers. In chapter four, Calvin treats the history of the church's offices—including that of elder—in the first few centuries after the apostles. And in the fifth chapter, he demonstrates how "the ancient form of government was completely overthrown by the tyranny of the papacy."<sup>10</sup> What I present in quotes is in fact the title of this fifth chapter. The first two points he makes in chapter five are that those who held office were by and large corrupt, and that the people were deprived of their right to elect their bishops.

I do not cite from Calvin, but I do refer the interested reader to his treatment of the history of the office of elder. Calvin's analysis is significant for the Reformed view of the office of elder—for he not only witnessed firsthand the effects of the degeneration of the office of elder, but he and other reformers of his day were also used by God to restore the office to its rightful place in the church.

## Evaluating This History

Some historians present this history positively. That the church set aside the requirements of Scripture regarding the office of elder does not concern them greatly; rather, they point out that these changes in the office of elder, and the rise of the bishops as the rulers of the church, were necessary for the church at that time. It helped unify the church in an outward,

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 2, p. 1,084.

visible way. It centralized the church's administration and authority. It put the church's funds under the oversight of the bishop, which was supposed to safeguard them. And it provided spokesmen and leaders for the church to help deal with the two main troubles she was facing—persecution and heresy.

Having expanded on these reasons, Phillip Schaff concludes that, whether or not one thinks the origin of the "episcopate" (the exaltation of the bishop) to be good, "no impartial historian can deny its adaptation to the wants of the church at the time, and its historical necessity."<sup>11</sup> The Roman Catholic historian Thomas Bokenkotter also concludes that this exaltation of the position and authority of the bishop satisfied needs in the church at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Our evaluation of this history is fundamentally different. Answering the question with which we began this article, we say that the church departed far from the scriptural norm, the will of God, regarding the office of elder. This was departure in so basic a matter as God's will for how the church is governed. It is not surprising, then, that the church also departed from Scripture in her teaching and her worship. Church reformation—the church's return to the pattern God Himself gave in the Scripture, regarding what she must be and do—required not only a rejection of false teaching and idolatrous worship, but a return to right church government. Such a reformation God worked through the reformers. Next time, God willing, we will consider that era of the history of the office of elder.

Meanwhile, let us be reminded that the form of church government that we use may not be determined by practical considerations. God prescribes that there be a body of elders to rule in each congregation in which Christ's one, universal body is manifested. Any other form of church government is contrary to His will.

We thank God for the office of elder in the church, and for the men whom He has provided to fill that office!



<sup>11</sup> Schaff, *History*, vol. 2, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 32.

# The Reformed Worldview: Truth and its Consequences (1)

## Introduction

With this new rubric in the *Standard Bearer* we take up a study of the Reformed worldview, using as the subtitle, Truth and Its Consequences.

In the past several years there have been a multitude of books written concerning a Christian worldview.

My first introduction to the concept of a Christian worldview probably occurred in the 1970s, when the writings and video presentations of Dr. Francis Schaeffer were making the rounds in evangelical circles, including Reformed churches.

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984), a Presbyterian pastor and missionary in Europe—some would add Christian philosopher—was perhaps the most influential figure in the late twentieth century in attempting to develop somewhat systematically a Christian worldview. Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, moved to Switzerland in 1947 to work as missionaries for the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. In 1955 in Huémoz-sur-Ollon, Switzerland they founded L'Abri (French for “the Shelter”) as a mission outreach primarily to students to discuss philosophical and religious beliefs and to demonstrate the application of biblical teaching to all of life.

Since then many who came under Schaeffer's influence have continued to pursue the development of a Christian worldview or cultural engagement, including Os Guinness, James Sire, Nancy Pearcey, and the late Chuck Colson. Schaeffer's books were influential not only in broader evangelical circles, but in Reformed and Presbyterian circles as well. The titles *The God Who Is There; How Should We Then Live?*; and *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* at-

tempted to demonstrate that Christianity is more than an intellectual set of propositions, it must incorporate all of life.

One of the reasons for Schaeffer's resolve to develop a Christian worldview was what he observed as a rejection of biblical truth, the outworking of the higher critical views of Scripture over the preceding century and the advance of apostasy in much of the church world by the late twentieth century.

As the development of sin continues with remarkable strides in our day and as the relevance of Christianity has been called into question and even rejected in much of Western civilization, many others have written books attempting to set forth a Christian worldview. Sometimes those books attempt to demonstrate the difference between a Christian worldview and a worldview of the non-Christian religions or other philosophies such as secular humanism or postmodernism. Other worldview books are written with specific application to politics and particular social issues, sometimes with application to the arts, and sometimes with broader application to culture, including such subjects as economics and labor, history and psychology, philosophy and ethics, literature and other subjects.

The fact is, however, that even while Francis Schaeffer and others in our lifetime may have made worldview thinking more popular, the idea of a Christian worldview did not originate with Schaeffer. I intend to demonstrate that a Christian worldview has been the concern of Reformed theologians going all the way back to John Calvin.

Apart from that history, however, it is especially my purpose to consider the *Reformed* worldview.

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have been blessed by God during their history with a steadfast adherence to the truth of God's sovereign particu-

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*Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.*

lar grace and a development in the doctrine of God's covenant with its many practical implications, not only in the doctrine of the church, but also in the areas of education and marriage and family life.

For the past several years I have thought that the PRC lacked one area of development fitting with its rich theology. There has been a lack of a systematic development of a Reformed worldview as an unfolding of the treasures that God has entrusted to our churches.

That is different from saying that a Reformed worldview has been lacking in the PRC.

In the preaching of the gospel there has often been rich application to the daily lives of God's people, an application often put into practice by faithful people of God living their Christian lives in the various callings God has given them.

A Reformed worldview is also evident in many of the writings of Protestant Reformed men through the decades of the existence of these churches. There have been particular developments in the application of a Reformed worldview to marriage, to mention one notable example. In the schools established by Protestant Reformed parents there has been, to varying degrees, the application of the truth of the covenant to the various subjects of study. There have also been efforts in some of our high schools to teach a course on different worldviews and the importance of a Reformed worldview.

But a developed treatment of the Reformed worldview has been lacking. When I began laying the groundwork for this rubric, I discovered only two brief treatments of this subject found in Protestant Reformed writings.

Herman Hoeksema's *The Christian and Culture* was originally a lecture delivered in 1940 at First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The lecture, given at the request of the Young Men's Society of that congregation, indicated an interest in the subject at that time among the PRC. After Rev. Hoeksema spoke on the topic, there were many requests to publish the speech, the result of which was the publication of the aforementioned pamphlet.

Some 65 years later, David J. Engelsma wrote *The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture*, an article that first appeared in the *Protestant*

*Reformed Theological Journal*, and soon after was published in booklet form by the Evangelism Committees of the Faith (Jenison, MI) and Grandville (MI) Protestant Reformed Churches.

To my joy, as I have been working on this subject and prior to the publication of this first article, the British Reformed Fellowship saw to the publication of *The Word of God for Our Generation: The Reformed Worldview*. This 142-page book began as six lectures given by David J. Engelsma and Herman Hanko given at the biennial British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference held in 2010. This book is a noteworthy beginning of a more developed treatment of the Reformed worldview.<sup>1</sup>

The Reformed churches historically and the Protestant Reformed Churches in particular have a solid foundation upon which to develop a biblical worldview. Indeed, the foundation laid in our Reformed confessions is essential to such a worldview! Without a consistent biblical doctrine of creation, including the creation of man, as well as the doctrines of the fall and redemption; without the doctrine of God's sovereignty and His providential government of the universe, a Christian worldview is emasculated. Add to that the doctrine of the covenant that we are blessed to enjoy as Protestant Reformed churches, and we have a solid and rich foundation upon which to develop a distinctive Reformed worldview.

Such development is important.

Our own history as churches demands it.

It was the common grace controversy that gave rise to the PRC after its leaders were ousted from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). In the midst of that controversy and before the formation of the PRC, the rejection of an unbiblical doctrine of common grace by Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof brought upon them the charge that they were Anabaptist—not that they called for a denial of infant baptism, but anabaptist in the sense of being sectarian and promoting

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<sup>1</sup> The main distributors of this book are Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland (website: [www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)); Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, CA (website: [www.hopeprc.org](http://www.hopeprc.org)); and the Reformed Witness Committee (website: [www.reformedwitness.org](http://www.reformedwitness.org)).

world-flight, a withdrawal from the world.<sup>2</sup>

The charge was not true. Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema responded to the charge in an undated booklet in the Dutch language entitled *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd* (Not Anabaptist but Reformed).<sup>3</sup> In that booklet is found a detailed rejection of the charge of teaching world-flight. “The charge of Anabaptism must not be thrown any longer. In the last few years people have been much too eager to fling this mud.”<sup>4</sup>

Part of what Danhof and Hoeksema wrote directly addresses the subject that we consider:

...where have you ever heard us say that we want to go out of the world? And we will even tell you frankly that you will exert yourself in vain if you look for something resembling that in anything that has appeared from our hand. Where have you ever heard us claim that we must avoid all kinds of civic institutions, that we must not occupy any governmental office, or that we may not wage any war?

<sup>2</sup> The charge was leveled by a colleague in the ministry of the CRC, Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen, who had written a pamphlet entitled *De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Dooperish? (The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptistic?)*.

<sup>3</sup> H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd: Voorloopig Bescheid aan Ds. Jan Karel Van Baalen Betreffende De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie*, Grand Rapids Printing Co., ca. 1923.

<sup>4</sup> H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, *Not Anabaptist, But Reformed*. English translation in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 83, p. 423.

... the brother can be assured that this is absolutely not our view. Our position is just the opposite. We do not want to go out of the world at all. It is exactly our intention not to abandon any area of life. We have called God's people to occupy the entirety of life. However, we want this people of the Lord, His covenant people, not to forsake or deny her God in one single domain. His people are called to live out of grace in every domain, out of the one grace through which they were incorporated into Christ and through which they love God, so that they keep His commandments.

This is what we have written and preached. And Van Baalen could certainly have known this. In fact, already in the *Banner* of June 12, 1919 we wrote:

“Also, the child of the kingdom does not go along with this identification with the world as he strives to manifest himself in every domain of the life of that world. This is indeed his clear calling. In industry and commerce, in science and art, in state and society the citizen of the kingdom may never fail to manifest himself by drawing back into the closer sphere of the church as such. Then he would have to go out of the world whereas it is his calling to be in the midst of it.”

“World flight,” therefore, does not apply to us.... If you take “world” in the sense of “nature,” then you will certainly see that we do not separate nature and grace, but wish to live everywhere out of grace. And if you take “world” in the sense of the wicked, then we do not take flight, but we fight the good fight unto the very end so that no one may take our crown.<sup>5</sup> ∞

<sup>5</sup> H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema, *Not Anabaptist, But Reformed*. English translation in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 85, p. 285-286.

## BRING THE BOOKS...

## MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

*Empty Arms*, by Pam Vredevelt. Published by Multnomah, 2001, 176 pages paper. [Reviewed by Brenda Hoekstra.]

In an age where the mindset is about liability and compensation, even God's people can get caught up in wondering why some things have to happen the way that they do. An event going awry often gets us started mentally replaying our lives. When some small thing happens that

*Mrs. Hoekstra is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.*

we are not happy about, we wonder what could have been done differently, and where we can go to have it made up to us or ‘fixed’ for us.

For some people, something happens in their life that goes beyond inconvenience or personal preferences and it cannot be fixed. That ‘something’ can be colossal, irreversible, life altering and can make them want to scream for the entire world to STOP! In the middle of the throes of joy and beautiful anticipation, that something can be the devastating sudden death of a newborn or near-born baby.

Dashed hopes do not begin to describe the emotional

roller coaster they find themselves thrust onto. The book *Empty Arms*, by Pam Vredevelt, takes you there. From the first page, Pam takes the reader with her and her husband in their experience. Beginning with a day that starts out with a routine doctor's appointment, it brings the reader through their self-accusing guilt, their pain, sorrow, and struggles.

This book has solid, compassionate, biblical encouragement for any couple and their extended families that know this loss. With an emphasis on following a Christian's calling in such a time, this book gives solid answers and reassurance to those who experience this loss. It also shows the body of believers the biblical way to support and edify the people who need our care and love at such a time in their lives. Others want to help and don't always know how, but this book reminds us of scriptural principles on which to base the words of comfort that we want to bring, enabling us to be more careful, tactful, and empathetic.

In addition to the author's personal experience, this book also covers stillbirths, miscarriages, and tubal pregnancies. It deals with the physical and medical realities, emotional challenges, and spiritual wrestling. It offers personal insight as well as practical help. It is well researched. It is not 'preachy' or trite but straightforward as it brings God-centered hope and comfort to struggling couples.

In a litigious age and a country full of people asking 'why' and looking for someone to hold responsible, this book brings the refreshing and humbling reminder that "we live in a fallen world and sometimes the pain and suffering of that world touches our lives." It emphasizes God's sovereignty and explains why God is the safest One to run to during dark and painful times.

*Empty Arms*, by Keren Baker (lives in the UK). Published by EP Books, 2009. 125 pages, hardcover. [Reviewed by Brenda Hoekstra.]

Orphan, widow, widower; these are all words for people who have experienced the loss of a loved one. What word is there for those who have lost a child? Perhaps it is a loss that is too painful to label with one word.

Keren Baker had the uninvited intruder of death break into the life of her family, and within the space of one morning, her life and her family were changed forever. Her autobiographical book reads like a journal and takes the reader along on their journey through grief. The sud-

den loss of her very young daughter due to an acute illness gives rise to this personal account as she sorts out her feelings, fears, and faith. This book helps the reader understand bereavement and shows how God understands the bereavement of His children and how He remains near them each day anew.

Mrs. Baker is frank about the ugliness of death and reminds us of how God Himself endured the death of His own Son, an equally piercing sorrow that I failed to consider fully until I read this book.

As she and her family passed through the various phases of grieving, she relates their response in those phases. She explains the things that she did and learned to put into practice that helped her move forward. You get a sense of the struggles she went through as she describes weaknesses of her own. She sometimes gets things a little out of perspective and leaves you with a sense that she has few answers, but this was her reality and she simply wrote her experience. Answer-less is what our own perspectives can be too, especially during difficult times. She is a regular person, not a theologian; this means that she, like most of us, doesn't always have all the answers. At first this put me off, but then I realized that my expectations were misplaced. Her purpose in writing was not to give us all the answers but to have the reader walk the struggle with her in a personal way. The author gives a really solid confession in the end, and we are reminded that life is a pilgrimage in which we are often unsure of the way. Life is where we work on finding our answers by searching the beloved Scriptures in the midst of our trials and troubles. Mrs. Baker witnesses to the care of the Lord for her and her family and quotes many helpful Bible passages. She traces God's unique and providential care in the way that He had even prepared them for the loss of their daughter. She skillfully sheds some light on the difference between joy and happiness and confesses God's sovereignty.

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Thus, we have two books with the same title that deal with similar ideas. Would I recommend one over the other? No, readers would benefit from reading them both. They speak to different types of readers in their own unique way. Written by believers, these books meet the purpose of edifying others who are going through a difficult time, and I found them to be biblical books. They encourage and bring comfort. In the middle of living with the sorrowful effects of this life, they speak to the reader of God's sovereign, purposeful love and care. ☺

### Congregation Activities

The "News" begins this first issue of the year with a new feature. Starting this month and continuing through December, D.V., we will highlight the dates of the organization of our 31 congregations and our two sister churches. The News will give a reminder to you, our readers, of those anniversaries, as they come along during the year. There are no anniversaries of any of our churches this month, so you will have to wait until February. There are two that month. Do you know which ones they are?

On Sunday evening, November 18, the Choir of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA presented a program in the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Psalter. The Choir sang Psalter numbers that helped develop the theme "The Psalms: Saving Speech." The first part of the program dealt with songs of God Speaking to Us, followed by Our Speaking to God, and God's People Speaking to Each Other. In addition to the choir's singing of the Psalms, about 25-30 young ladies of the church sang Psalter 218 in beautiful three-part harmony. There were also instrumental versions of Psalter 115 and 381, the singing of Psalter 53 by children 2 years old through the 3rd grade, and the singing of Psalter 416 in English and Dutch by a Children's Choir of Kindergarten through 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.

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

On November 30 the members of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD held a dedication program for their new church building. An open house followed that program and continued on into Saturday morning and afternoon as well. We join with Heritage in praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father on this momentous occasion in their church history.

The Junior and Senior Bible Studies of Peace PRC in Lansing, IL planned a trip to Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais for Saturday, December 1, to hear the Messiah.

### Evangelism Activities

On Thursday, November 1, the Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC sponsored a lecture given by their pastor, Rev. Steven Key, entitled, "Amazing Grace: The Life of John Newton."

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI planned an area-wide Reformation Day celebration on November 2 at First CRC of Byron Center, MI. Prof. David Engelsma spoke on the timely subject, "The Coming of the Kingdom of Christ: Christianizing the World?" This speech not only critiqued the common grace and Christian Reconstruction projects that seek to turn the world into the kingdom of Christ before His second coming, but also emphasized the calling of the "office of believers" championed by the Reformation.

The Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a Fall Lecture on November 9. Rev. Doug Kuiper spoke on "Guided

into All Truth: The Formation of the Canon of Holy Scripture."

### Mission Activities

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, missionary pastor to the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA, gave a lecture on November 2 at their church. Rev. Bruinsma spoke on the subject, "William Farel: Bearer of the Cross." We should also mention that Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, was in Pittsburgh the Sundays of December 2 and 9, doing work for the DMC, helping Rev. Bruinsma investigate interest in our churches in the Cranberry area of north Pittsburgh.

Pastor John Flores, of the First Reformed Church of Bulacan, was examined the last week of November by the combined consistories of the First Reformed Church of Bulacan and the Berean PRCP. He preached a Reformed, edifying, and lively sermon on John 6:44, in Tagalog, and was examined orally for three hours, in English. Afterwards the consistories voted unanimously to approve the examination. This significant decision of the combined consistories also means that Rev. Flores will be accorded the full rights and privileges of a minister of the Word and Sacraments in a future PR denomination in the Philippines when that is established, the Lord willing.

### Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Andy Lanning, pastor-on-loan to the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore,

preached his first sermon as their new pastor Sunday morning, December 2. Rev. Lanning preached the Word of God found in Numbers 10:1-10 under the theme, "The Two Trumpets of Silver," looking at Their Identity, Their Use, and Their Blessing.

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, gave a special lecture on November 9 in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, on the subject, "Martin and Katie Luther: The Reformation of Marriage."


Rev. Stewart also gave a lecture on "The Spirit of the Age and the Church" in Lurgan Town Hall on November 22. Rev. Stewart promised to answer the following questions in that lecture: What is the spirit of the age? How does it affect the church? and What is the calling of the church regarding the spirit of the age? Remember, the church is to be militant!

**School Activities**

The Genesis PTA, of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, invited all parents, teachers, and

supporters of Genesis to a night of fun and fellowship on November 23. The PTA reserved some 5-pin bowling lanes at Heritage Lanes in nearby Red Deer for two hours of interesting bowling challenges.

**Minister Activities**

Seminary student Erik Guichelaar, his wife, Cherith, and their baby daughter were in Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA to supply their pulpit, December 2 and 9, while their pastor, Rev. Rodney Kleyn, did some work for the DMC in Pittsburgh, PA. 

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Doc and Jan Kuiper, Carol Huizinga, and their families in the death of Jan's sister and Carol's sister-in-law,

**RUTH BURGESS.**

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Rev. K. Koole, President  
Tom Bodbyl, Asst. Clerk

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Bob and Linda Huizinga in the death of his sister,

**BERTHA LUCAS.**

"The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" (Psalm 34:22).

Rev. K. Koole, President  
Tom Bodbyl, Asst. Clerk

**Resolution of Sympathy**

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Jack Brands and his daughters in the death of their father and grandfather,

**HENRY BRANDS.**

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;...for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4: 17-18).

Rev. K. Koole, President  
Tom Bodbyl, Asst. Clerk

**Classis West**

■ Classis West of the PRC will meet in Lynden, Washington on Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Lynden's consistory, using the forms provided for that purpose.

Rev. D. Kuiper,  
Stated Clerk

*Reformed Witness Hour*  
**December 2012**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Text</b>
January 6	"Obedience to Parents"	Ephesians 6:1
January 13	"Nurturing Our Children"	Ephesians 6:4
January 20	"Authority in the Sphere of Labor"	Ephesians 6:5-9
January 27	"Taking the Whole Armor of God"	Ephesians 6:13