

# The Standard Bearer

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# Propitiation for Our Sins

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.  
1 John 2:2

With this text we look at the amazing wonder of the love of God. So glorious, so marvelous, is that love, that human words fail. Yet some things must be said on the basis of God's infallible revelation, Holy Scripture, in order that His saints may be encouraged and strengthened. When God's saints know and confess that God's love completely enfolds them, they experience a comfort and a safety that can be found in nothing else.

God, in His wonderful love, provided historically the way in which His elect people might be saved and finally glorified. God leaves nothing to "chance." God not only determines eternally to save a people, but in

time He provides the actual way of deliverance—He provides the propitiation for their sins. This is the meaning of 1 John 2:2.

This must be emphasized since often this text is used to support the doctrinal view of Arminianism, which teaches that Christ dies for every person who has ever lived. The salvation of these people, however, is dependent upon their acceptance of the salvation that Christ purchased for them. Some such view has been adopted even by men within circles of the Reformed faith who have historically denied that Christ died for every man—or that God loves every man. Some have said that a Calvinist does not dare to preach on this text. However, with this article we will expound this text in the true biblical meaning, just as the *Standard Bearer* has been doing from the beginning of its publication.

Christ is the propitiation for our sins. Sin, as we have heard many times from the pulpit, literally means *to miss the mark*. It is a very descriptive word, which presents the picture of an archer who shoots at a target. On that target is a bull's eye. The archer takes his bow and inserts the arrow, but, strangely, he turns his back

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to the target with its bull's eye, and shoots in the opposite direction.

That is the picture drawn of the sinner. The bull's eye is God's perfect law. The sinner is not one who aims at this bull's eye, but misses. Rather, he turns his back to it and shoots in the opposite direction, deliberately missing the mark. He does that which is opposed to the law of God. Such is the wanton disobedience of wicked man. This is true for every man. That which natural man knows of God, he will deliberately hold under in unrighteousness.

All this is terrible rebellion. Let no one minimize the transgression; God's law has been broken. Man has taken upon himself to oppose the infinite, holy, just God. God must punish this despicable rebel in harmony with the awfulness of his sin. The sentence of God against those who rebel is death—not only physical death, but spiritual and eternal death in hell. Many dislike the mention of the word *hell*, since supposedly we are advanced beyond this conception out of the dark ages. But this is the teaching of Scripture, which says that God decrees that man who sins must die. And this death is not annihilation, but conscious suffering forever in hell.

There is no possible way for mere man to escape this awful sentence of death. If one is to escape this dreadful sentence, he must make full payment for his sin in love. But no finite creature could ever bear the infinite wrath of God, which he justly deserves for his sin, and make full payment for his sin. Into this dark, bleak picture the Word of God comes with one shining ray of hope. God's love is so great, that He provides what no mere creature could ever accomplish. God, in time, provides propitiation for this sin.

The word *propitiation* appears twice in Scripture, here and in I John 4:10. It means *to appease* or *to make full satisfaction*. That implies that there is a certain debt that requires full payment before it can be erased. It also implies that a satisfactory payment is made; the debt is paid in full. Jesus is the propitiation that God required for the debt of the sins of His people. Jesus did not merely present some sort of payment to God for the debt of sin, but He gave Himself as payment. God provided that propitiation because of His great love for His own.

What Jesus did is come as the Son of God into the likeness of sinful flesh. He came as the legal representative Head of His people. He stood before the judgment throne of God and asked the Eternal Judge what His justice requires. He offered Himself as Representative of His people to bear upon His own shoulders whatever God's justice demands. Nothing must be omitted. He will fully pay the accumulated debt of the sins of all His people. Jesus can do that, for He is the second person of the Trinity in human flesh. As man, He can justly represent His own before God. As God, He is infinite—infinite also in ability to bear the infinite wrath and deliver from it. Thus, God, in His love, provides Jesus as the propitiation for sin.

What a great work that was! Not only was Jesus nailed to the cross by wicked men, but on that cross He also bore all the wrath of God for the sins of His people. He must be forsaken of God. He must endure the agonies of hell itself until He can finally say, "It is finished." Thus, propitiation was made, representing full payment for the sins of His chosen people. Nothing more is now required to remove the sin of His own. "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (ch. 1:7).

This He did for the sins of *the whole world*. Here appears to be conclusive proof for the Arminian presentation of the gospel, which teaches that salvation is dependent upon the "free will" of man; that Christ died for all men without exception; that salvation is freely offered to all men without exception; and that one must accept Christ—then Christ will enter into the heart to apply salvation to this sinner.

But all of this is not in harmony with Scripture. Christ did not die for all men. Christ's atonement was for the sins of His own elect people, who were chosen from before the foundations of the earth.

The word *world* must be understood in a restricted sense. This is seen, first of all, from the word propitiation, which means complete and full payment for guilt. It does not mean a partial payment, nor a full payment that becomes applicable only when the debtor is ready to accept it. The word represents the final and complete payment for sin. Thus there is no more guilt. That Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world cannot then mean that He makes full payment for the

sins of all. If He did, there could be no condemnation for any man.

This is seen, in the second place, from verse 1, which tells us that Jesus delivers His people only. We have an advocate with the Father. John addresses little children, those who have been saved through the blood of Christ. He assures *them* that they have this advocate with the Father. We know that Jesus is not an advocate with the Father for every man, for He states in John 17 that He does not pray for the *world*. He is Advocate with the Father only for His chosen people—and only for them does He make propitiation.

Thirdly, this restricted sense is seen from the fact that Jesus, as propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*, is presented so for our assurance and comfort. It would never be comfort to know that, though Jesus is propitiation for all, nevertheless many are cast into hell. If Jesus' work of propitiation fails in some instances, it might also fail with respect to me. But this text is meant exactly to *assure* the saints. Jesus died for all His own, so that all their sins are paid for. He did not die only for the limited number of those who lived during the days of the apostle John. No, He died for all of His own throughout all the ages. When Jesus so makes propitiation, we can be assured that there is no doubt that we also are included.

Finally, this is seen from the word *world*. It refers to the *kosmos*, or the complete organism. The word does not usually include every possible individual. It suggests a complete unit, the total number within a certain group. It can refer to the total number of the wicked on earth, or to the totality of the earthly creation, or to the total number of the saints of God—as it surely does in this passage.


Therefore, Christ died not only for the sins of some of the saints, but for the sins of all the saints of all ages and of every tribe, tongue, and nation. God so provides for His elect people that not even one of them will be neglected or overlooked. Jesus died for all these without exception; and they shall be saved.

This is a great comfort to us. God so loved us that He provided His only begotten Son as propitiation for our sin. In this infinite love, God provided the way of complete forgiveness for the sins of all His elect people. No sin can be held against the saints anymore.

This assurance we need. We know our calling: "Little children, sin not" (v. 1). This being our desire, we hate all sin, especially our own sin. Yet again and again we do sin. John recognizes this in verse 1: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This we experience each time we examine ourselves. We confess that we belong to Jesus Christ—that we are not our own. Yet we see all manner of sin. We place undue value on earthly things, misuse our time, talents, and possessions; speak in displeasing ways; and sin in thought.

Yet in all this comes the assurance that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for *my* sin. God so loved me that He sent His only-begotten Son to blot out all of the guilt of those sins through His own precious blood. His payment is so complete on my behalf, that I can add nothing, nor need I add anything. What a blessed hope! God remembers His church—the elect from before the foundations of the world. He makes provision for them in His Son Jesus Christ—the way of the cross. Then His elect people have the right to enter into everlasting glory.

All this is an incentive for us not to sin. Some have suggested that if Christ pays for all the sins ever committed by His people, then they can become careless and sin as they will—since these sins are forgiven already. But the child of God does not live this way. He sees in the work of the living God the wonder of God's love *for* him. God applies the love of Christ to the hearts of His people. These know that they are forgiven all their sins. They know that Jesus is the propitiation for their own sins. Forever they will acknowledge before God the wonderfulness of this love.

And one who has so experienced the wonder of God's love will also walk in godliness. He will want to obey God's Word and law. He will desire to walk in love over against his neighbor. That is the fruit of the propitiation of Christ in His offering on the cross. Glorious is the love of God; by its power the sins of His people are purged so that they walk in all godliness before Him. Praise His holy name! 

# Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church— Our Newest Sister

In June, 2011, the Contact Committee of the PRC came to synod with a mutually agreed upon arrangement for a full-sister relationship with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. This was the culmination of over five years of discussion through correspondence and visits. The synod of 2011 unanimously approved the proposed sister relationship. As is the practice of the PRC, the approval was provisional. Final approval would come only after consulting with the sister church in Northern Ireland, to hear whether our dear sister in Europe had any objections to the proposed relationship. She had none.

Thus, in June of 2012, the synod of the PRC confirmed (again, unanimously) the sister relationship with CERC.

Most of the *SB* readers have rather limited knowledge of this congregation located so many miles away in Singapore. Interest within the PRC flared with the news that the Lord led Rev. Andy Lanning, pastor of FaithProtestant Reformed Church, to accept the call to serve as minister-on-loan to CERC. Yet, the reality is, most still do not know much about the congregation, and

very few have personal knowledge from a visit to the island.

As a member of the Contact Committee who had the privilege to live and work there for about 11 weeks total this year, I have a burden to introduce CERC to you. Though I will do my best to remain objective, I will inform you immediately that my wife and I came to know and love these saints. I write out of that personal knowledge of and love for the saints, as well as my knowledge of the history of the church in Singapore gained over the years.

To understand CERC, one must know something of their context, the city/state called Singapore. Singapore is a modern, well-kept, garden city located at the tip of Malaysia in southeast Asia. It is a diamond-shaped island approximately twenty-eight miles long (E to W) and fourteen miles wide (N to S). If a reader in W. Michigan were to drive from Allendale to Lowell, he would have driven the length of Singapore. NW Iowa folks would do the same if they drove from Perkins to Sanborn.

Imagine a cutout of a map of Singapore placed over a like area of Greater Grand Rapids. In that area in and about GR dwell perhaps 500,000 people. In NW Iowa, that

same area might contain perhaps 50,000 inhabitants. By contrast, on the island of Singapore, over 5.2 million people live and work.

The dominant ethnic group in Singapore is Chinese (76%), followed by Malay (14%), and Indian (8%). English is spoken by nearly all who are under 70 years of age, though a visitor will hear many different languages spoken as well, including Malay, Tamil (Indian), and several different Chinese dialects.

Singapore is also a mix religiously. Approximately half the population is Buddhist/Taoist. (Taoism has elements of Buddhism, but it is a Chinese religion that emphasizes the worship of ancestors.) Muslims account for about 15%, and Hindu, the religion of Indians, 5%. Five percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and 10% other Christians (mostly Baptist, Methodists, and Pentecostal.) About 17% claim to have no religion. Very few Reformed or Presbyterian believers live on the island.

But whatever religion one confesses, the government *demands* harmony. Several laws are on the books that threaten fines and imprisonment for one whose words or actions threaten the religious harmony



maintained in Singapore. Thus far these laws have rarely been invoked. One wonders whether an antithetical, Reformed sermon on idolatry, or marriage, or the intermediate state of the soul (after death), might one day be condemned by a judge as a violation of religious harmony.

Singapore has been completely on her own only since 1965. God gave to this tiny country with almost zero natural resources a ruler with much earthly wisdom—Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. The well-beloved Mr. Lee is the founding father of Singapore, guiding her since her independence. He was prime minister for 31 years and remained active in the government until about a year ago. His government has moved Singapore from the state of a backward, strife-filled country to a modern, prosperous, and beautiful island. Strictly-enforced law and order, coupled with swift punishment for the lawbreaker (including capital punishment for a drug smuggler), has made Singapore a city of near zero crime. Over the years, political and economic stability drew in untold foreign investment, resulting in a robust economy, making Singapore one of the richest countries in the world. Over all, Singaporeans are industrious, highly educated, and very patriotic.

In such a city/nation of 274 square miles, our dear fellow saints in CERC live, work, study, and worship.

CERC is a congregation of over 140 members. It is made up of 28 families, together with a mixture of unmarried men and women. Confessing members number 106, children 35. Membership classes

are almost always being conducted by the elders (or a minister when they have one). These classes help the youth who have been raised in the church prepare for making public confession of their faith. But much more, these classes are for individuals who have been attending for months or years, have become convicted of the Reformed faith taught and maintained in CERC, and desire now to confess their faith and join themselves to this manifestation of the true church of Christ. Many of these new members have non-Christian parents.

One of the features of CERC immediately striking a visitor is the large number of youth in attendance. Half of the congregation

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like any other church  
of Jesus Christ,  
a wonder of grace.*

(70 members) is part of a group of unmarried members under twenty-nine! A number of the older ones are dating—most within the church—a very positive prospect for CERC if the Lord blesses the church with godly marriages and covenant families.

The youth (by which I refer to those from about 15 to 25 years of age) are striking for another reason—their zeal. As a whole their youthful energy is devoted to spiritual concerns, namely to learning

the Reformed doctrines and living them. They are, in a word, hungry for the Reformed faith. Saturday afternoons will find large numbers of youth gathered for speeches, Bible studies, or a fun outing. Their fellowship is exceptional.

A sizable number of these youth have come to the faith as a result of contact with a member of CERC. Some of these came to the *Reformed* faith; some came to faith *in Christ*. They have the zeal of the new convert—eager to learn the Bible, the Reformed doctrine, the confessions, and the practical application of these to their lives.

CERC is an active, living congregation. They pack much into their Sundays due to difficulties of travel. For most Singaporeans a car is not an option, and many members depend on public transportation. For some, coming to church is an hour-plus undertaking, even with an efficient bus and train public transport system. As noted, their Sunday schedule is heavy. An average Sunday looks like this:

9:30 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. Morning Service.  
11:30 to 12:30 Catechism for children;  
Instruction class for adults.  
12:30 to 1:30 Meal together.  
2:00 P.M. to 3:15 P.M. Afternoon Service.

When a visiting minister/professor is available, the youth will hold a Q. & A. session for another hour after the second service.

In addition, various groups meet in homes for Bible study or discussion of good books. Prayer meetings are held twice a month. On the first day of the year, the congregation comes together for a day of "Prayer and Praise" to reflect on the past year, and look ahead



*June Church Camp*

to the next. They have a well-attended, week-long church camp in June (Rev. Smit spoke at the last one, see picture above). The youth have their own camps twice a year (picture below), though most of them also attend the church camp. The Reformation Day Conference is another major event for the congregation, involving much planning, promotion, and usually many visitors. Prof. Engelsma is slated to give the three or four speeches for the conference this year, D.V.

CERC members have an enviable gift. They have a knack for attracting visitors to their worship service and for receiving them well. They invite friends from school, relatives young and old, colleagues from work, and more—and people come. And some return, repeatedly. Although many never become members, some do. This conscious effort and effective witnessing by members accounts for much of the growth of CERC—God has blessed it. It also explains why they have an average of 20 to 30 visitors every week.


This year (September) CERC commemorates twenty-five years as a congregation. CERC is, like

any other church of Jesus Christ, a wonder of grace. There were times when their future was extremely dim, their very survival in question.

The history of CERC is tied to First Evangelical Reformed Church, for these two congregations have the same root, and were once the denomination called Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. Their development (from 1962 to 1997) is recounted by one of its oldest members, Pastor Lau Chin Kwee. Their story can be found on the PRCA.org website ([www.prca.org/Singapore.html](http://www.prca.org/Singapore.html)). It ought to be read by every member of the PRC. Pastor Lau recounts his (and others') being drawn out of the darkness of idolatry as students and their later contact with the PRC. He writes of the missionary labors of Pastor denHartog

and the organization and growth of ERCS, the eventual organization of Covenant ERC, and the coming of Rev. Kortering as minister-on-loan.

Not recorded is the unspeakably sad subsequent history of schism and departure from the Reformed truth. Within ten years of the history penned by Pastor Lau, the denomination ERCS was no more, for fundamental disagreements forced the two churches to go their separate ways. The upheaval and turmoil almost destroyed CERC. She abides a living testimony to the power of Jesus Christ to preserve His church.

You do not know Covenant ERC until you know more of her history and how she came to the point she is today. That, in the November 1 issue. 



*Youth Camp*

## Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (2)

## Revelation: General and Special

*Deus dixit!* God has spoken! This is the possibility of the knowledge of God. We know God *only* through His revelation to us. Apart from revelation there is no possibility of the knowledge of God. Apart from revelation God remains essentially unknowable. This is the necessity, the absolute necessity, of revelation. This we saw last time.

We also saw that God reveals Himself, desires to reveal Himself, and delights in making Himself known because He is the covenant God. Why has God spoken? Why has God chosen to reveal Himself, when He was under no compulsion to do so? Why has He spoken to man? The utterly amazing answer is that God has spoken because it is His desire to make us *His friends*. Because God is the covenant God, and because it is His desire to take us up into His own covenant life, God has spoken. *Deus dixit!*

## God's Twofold Revelation

God reveals Himself to man in two ways, or, better, God's revelation is twofold. Reformed theology has always distinguished a twofold revelation of God. There is, on the one hand, God's revelation of Himself to men in the creation and by means of all things that He has created. This aspect of God's revelation has been traditionally referred to as "general revelation." Some have objected to the use of this term, and for good reason. But the term has become entrenched in the Reformed tradition, and for that reason we will make use of it. This aspect of God's revelation is also sometimes referred to as *revelatio in res*—more Latin. The expression means, "revelation in things."

On the other hand, God also reveals Himself in His

Word, Holy Scripture, or the Bible. This aspect of God's revelation is referred to as "special revelation." It is also sometimes referred to as *revelatio in verba*, that is, "revelation in words."

This twofold distinction is both biblical and confessional. The Belgic Confession, Article 2, is entitled, "By what means God is made known unto us." The article teaches that there are two means by which God is made known unto us.

We know [God] by two means: first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse. Secondly, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.1 states:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary;

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*Previous article in this series: August 2012, p. 451.*



those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

Scripture teaches God's revelation of Himself in the creation that He has made. Job says, "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (Job 12:7-9). The psalmist exclaims in Psalm 19:1-3, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge [that is, the knowledge of God]. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." To the citizens of Lystra who had attempted to worship Paul and Silas as gods, Paul proclaimed the one, true God who "... left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

The classic passage on general revelation is Romans 1:19, 20: "Because that which may be known of God is manifested in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him [that is, God] from [note: not 'since,' but 'from'] the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." According to the apostle, the creation bears testimony to its Creator. It bears testimony to the truth that He is God: His "Godhead" and His "eternal power." And it bears testimony to the truth that He and He alone ought to be worshiped. For if He is God, truly God, the creature owes to his Creator God his worship.

God's general revelation is not only an objective testimony outside of man, something that he beholds in the creation about him. But included in general revelation is also God's work of making Himself known *within* a man. This, too, is the teaching of the apostle in Romans 1. He writes in Romans 1:19: "Because that which may be known of God *is manifest in them*; for God hath shewed it unto them." Coupled with God's testimony concerning Himself in the creation, God makes Himself known within every man, in every man's conscience. By this means, God confirms His objective

testimony in the creation. Herman Hoeksema reflects on the apostle's teaching in this passage:

Creation is not a dead book. It is a living testimony. Through it God brings the invisible things of God into man's heart. Just as He brings the living testimony of the gospel into the hearts of His people, so He brings the living testimony of creation into the heart of [natural] man.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on:

For this reason the invisible things of God are clearly seen. That is why it is a good remedy, even for the Christian, to escape from this sophisticated world for a time (for we live in a *very* sophisticated world) and go to the woods, lie on one's back, and say nothing. Don't say anything; don't spoil it by talking. Just look up at the sky, listen to the birds, and look at the trees, the flowers, and the grass. This will be the testimony: "God is! God is eternal in power and eternal in Godhead! God must be praised!"<sup>2</sup>

### All Men Know God—No Atheists

From this revelation of God in the creation, confirmed by that which God manifests in them, all men know God. They do not simply know that there is a god, a higher power, some supreme being. But they know *God*, the true God, the Creator God, the God of revelation. From God's revelation in the creation, coupled with His testimony within man, every man knows God.

No man or woman escapes this knowledge of God. For this reason, there are no atheists in the world. There are no atheists in foxholes, because there are no atheists at all. Not only are there no atheists in foxholes; there are no atheists in factories or offices, on construction sites or farms, in laundry rooms or kitchens, in classrooms or laboratories, in the White House or Buckingham Palace or Noordeinde Palace. There are no atheists in all the world.

To be sure, there are people who *say* that they are atheists. Ludwig Andreas von Feuerback (1804-1872) was an

<sup>1</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone*, 29.

influential nineteenth century German atheist. He was a harsh and outspoken critic of Christianity. He taught that God did not make us, but rather that we make God as a figment of our own imagination. Students of his philosophy, who made explicit appeal to his teachings, were: Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who applied his teaching to psychology; Karl Marx (1818-1883), who applied his teaching to politics, economics, and society; and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who applied his teaching to philosophy, religion, and ethics. Nietzsche is the originator of the death of God movement.

But there are no atheists. God will not let there be any atheists. That is the teaching of Scripture. In both Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1, the man who says that there is no God is called a fool. He is a fool because he denies what he knows to be the truth. He is not ignorant or stupid. He is a fool, a fool who knows better. He may say that there is no God, but in his heart of hearts he knows that God is. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

### God's Purpose with General Revelation

But what is God's purpose with His revelation in creation? Is God's purpose a saving purpose? Is it ever a saving purpose?

God's purpose with general revelation is not to save. The revelation in creation *cannot* save anyone. It cannot save anyone because it is only the revelation of God's wrath, as the apostle says in Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven...." It cannot save anyone because it is not the revelation of God *in Jesus Christ*, the only way of salvation. It cannot save anyone because it is not a revelation by means of which the Holy Spirit works savingly. It is not a saving revelation because of those to whom it comes: fallen and depraved sinners, sinners whose minds are darkened and whose hearts are hard.

Invariably the revelation of God in creation is rejected by the natural man. Paul teaches this as well in Romans 1. He teaches that the natural man always rejects and suppresses the knowledge of God, contradicting Karl Marx, who taught that religion is "the opium of the masses" and that people create religion in order to sedate their suffering. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness

of men, *who hold* [literally, 'hold under'] *the truth in unrighteousness.*" Not only do men reject and suppress the knowledge of God, but, as the apostle goes on to teach, they distort that knowledge in the service of idolatry. "Because that, when they knew God [they did know God], they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed [deliberately changed] the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:21-23). And the apostle adds in verse 25: "Who changed [deliberately and willfully changed] the truth of God [which they knew from the creation] into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than [that is, rather than] the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."

This is always the natural man's response to the revelation of God in the creation. He always distorts and perverts the knowledge of God by making an idol, which he proclaims to be God and before which he bows as God. That is always his response to the revelation of God in the creation—because he is a totally depraved, fallen sinner. By nature, he hates God and the truth of God. When confronted by the truth of God, he rejects it in unbelief.

Idolatry, therefore, is not to be explained as the natural man, apart from the gospel, doing the best that he can, with the knowledge that he has, to serve God. Neither is it the case, as is often taught, that general revelation can serve as the basis for a natural theology and natural religion, a natural theology and natural religion coupled with common grace that are preparatory to revealed theology and revealed religion. This is emphatically not Scripture's judgment of idolatry, either by Paul in Romans 1, or by the prophets in the Old Testament (Is. 44 and Jer. 10). Idolatry is the wicked and willful rejection of the truth that God is God—the first commandment.


What, then, is God's purpose with His revelation in creation? The apostle expresses that purpose in Romans 1:20c: "...so that they may be without excuse." God's revelation in creation is not sufficient to save; but it is sufficient to leave men without excuse. From God's revelation in creation, all men know that God is

and that He ought to be served. That leaves all men, the natural man apart from the gospel, without excuse before God. John Calvin writes:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will. If ignorance of God is to be looked for anywhere, surely one is most likely to find an example of it among the more backward folk, and those more remote from civilization. Yet there is, as the eminent pagan says, no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God. And they who in other aspects of life seem least to differ from brutes still continue to retain some seed of religion [*semen religionis*]. So deeply does the common conception occupy the minds of all, so tenaciously does it inhere in the hearts of all! Therefore, since from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion, there lies in this a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics, 20, 21 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.3.1, 1:43.

Not the natural man, but only the child of God receives the revelation of God in the creation. As reborn by the Spirit of Christ and peering at the creation through the spectacles of the Scriptures, the child of God sees God in the splendor of His revelation in the things that are made. And seeing the splendor of God, the child of God confesses and worships the God of revelation.

Next time, I want to begin consideration of God's special revelation in Holy Scripture. It is my purpose in a series of articles to set forth and defend the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. First, I intend to do that positively, setting forth the truth of the Bible's divine inspiration and infallibility. And then I hope to examine three current attacks on the historic (confessional) Reformed doctrine of Scripture. These three departures include, first, Jack Rogers' and Donald McKim's teaching of limited inerrancy, particularly by way of their distinction between inerrancy and infallibility. The second departure is that of Peter Enns, who denies the truth of Scripture by way of what he proposes as the incarnational model of inspiration. And the third departure is that of Andrew McGowan, who denies the doctrine of Scripture by way of his rejection of the traditional argument of correlation, that is, since God is perfect, the Scriptures of which He is the author must also be perfect. That argument, McGowan rejects. These men are influential, and their teachings are having an impact in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Their errors must be exposed, and God's people must be confirmed in the age-old truth of Scripture's divine inspiration and infallibility. 

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES...IN COMMON

PROF. RON CAMMENGA

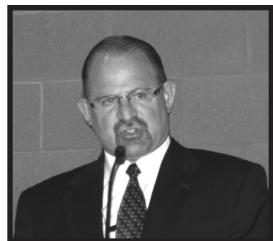
## News from the Seminary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary has begun another year of instruction. Both students and faculty have eagerly taken up once again the work of

*Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament and rector in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

teaching and learning, with a view to training men for the gospel ministry in our churches and sister churches. After the work and vacation that occupied the summer, it's good to be back in the classroom and into the routine of the school year. There is always an enthusiasm that marks the beginning of a new year of study.

The new school year began with the traditional convocation service that was held at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, on Wednesday, September 5, 2012. The undersigned spoke on “The Protestant Reformed Seminary and ‘the Good Christian Schools.’” Good attendance at convocation (and graduation) is always encouraging. This year’s attendance was disappointing. We hope that this does not become a trend.



*Prof. Cammenga speaking at Convocation*

We begin the school year without any new students. We have no first-year students. This ought to be a matter of concern and prayer to us all. Our churches have need of pastors. For this reason, parents ought to talk to their sons; Christian school teachers ought to talk to their students; ministers and consistories ought to be talking to their young men. We all need to put before young men who exhibit the spiritual and intellectual gifts for the ministry the possibility that God may be calling them to be preachers of the gospel.

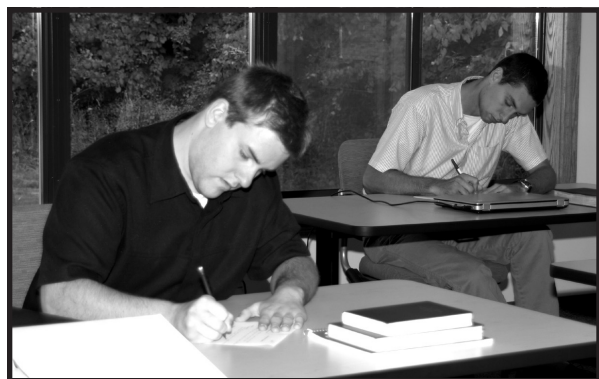
This year we have three students in the seminary. Mr. Erik Guichelaar is spending the first semester in Loveland, Colorado finishing his internship. Under the supervision of the Loveland PRC consistory and the mentoring of Rev. Steven Key, he is getting the “hands-on” sort of experience that the internship provides. During the internship, he will make and preach a goodly number of sermons, teach a couple of catechism classes, lead some Bible study societies, take part in visiting the sick and shut-ins, attend council and con-

sistory meetings as well as the meeting of Classis West, and take part in all the other aspects of the work of the ministry. Since its beginning, the internship program has proven to be of inestimable value in the preparation of our students for the ministry. The faculty is grateful to those ministers and consistories that have been willing to be a part of this program. While in Loveland, Mr. Guichelaar and his wife, Cherith, will be blessed, the Lord willing, with the birth of their first child. Mr. Guichelaar will return to the Grand Rapids area in order to finish his last semester of course work in the seminary before being examined, with a view to candidacy, by the Synod of 2013. Mr. and Mrs. Guichelaar are members of our Hudsonville, Michigan congregation.

Mr. Joshua Engelsma is in his third year of study in the seminary. Mr. Engelsma, accompanied by his wife and two children, spent most of his summer preaching in churches in the West, with an extended stay in Edgerton, Minnesota prior to the arrival of its new pastor, Rev. Doug Kuiper. By their testimony, they thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to worship with and become acquainted with the saints in these western congregations. Mr. Engelsma will be doing his internship, the Lord willing, July through December 2013. He and his wife, Courtney, and young son and daughter, are members of our Hope, Walker congregation.

Mr. Ryan Barnhill is in his second year of study in the seminary. The big change in Mr. Barnhill’s life this summer was his marriage to Miss Miranda Buiter. We pray the Lord’s richest blessing on their union. A minister’s wife is a priceless asset in the ministry. It is our confidence that the new Mrs. Barnhill will be such an asset to her husband in his future work with Christ’s bride. The Barnhills are members of our Hudsonville PRC.

Missing this year from the student body is Mr. Vernon Ibe, who along with his wife, Melody, and two young sons returned this summer to their homeland, the Philippines, and to their home church, the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines. Indeed, the Ibess will be sorely missed—brother Vernon from the classroom, and his family from the extended life of the seminary, including the regular gathering of the professors’ and students’ wives. We rejoice, however,

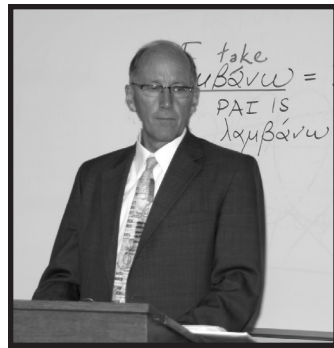


*Ryan Barnhill, second year;  
Joshua Engelsma, third year*



that brother Ibe has accepted the call that the Berean congregation extended to him to be their pastor. It is our prayer that, for many years to come, he may be used of God for the cause of the Reformed faith in the Philippines. Together with our missionaries, Rev. Richard Smit and Rev. Daniel Kleyn, may he proclaim throughout the islands of the Philippines the precious tradition of the truth that God has been pleased in His grace to give us.

Although there are no incoming students this year, our hopes are high for next year. There are seven young men living in the Grand Rapids area who are in their last year of college and who are taking Greek Reading with Prof. Gritters.



*Prof. Barrett Gritters*

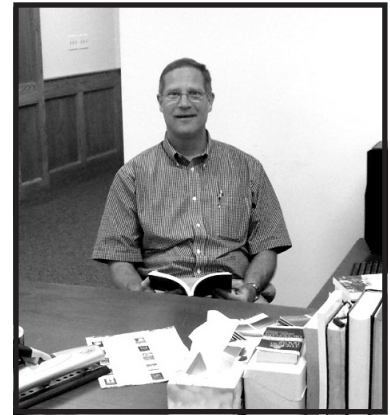
Out of a desire to be of greater service to our members, the professors have opened up a select number of their classes to auditors. We experimented with this last year and had good results. A number of auditors are sitting in and benefiting from the lectures and class discussion in History of Dogma, Church Polity, New Testament History, and Christology. If you live in the Grand Rapids area, you may want to consider doing this in the future.

The fact that there are no first-year students has made possible a rare opportunity in the history of our seminary, a kind of silver lining to this cloud, as it were. For the 2012-2013 academic year, Prof. Dykstra is on a partial sabbatical. He is teaching just one course: History of Dogma. During the sabbatical, Prof. Dykstra will be researching and writing in the area of Christian education, including "the history of Reformed Christian education, the principles that underlie this movement, and the Reformed worldview imparted through this education." It is anticipated that Prof. Dykstra's sabbatical will result in the creation of an interim course, as well as in the publication of a book or syllabus that will also be of benefit to our people, especially our elders and ministers, who seek to carry out the requirements of Church Order, Article 21.

The faculty has begun work on plans for the obser-

vance of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Fall of 2013. A conference is being planned for Thursday and Friday evenings, October 17 and 18, and Saturday morning, October 19, 2013. Mark your calendars! The conference will be held in the Hudsonville PRC, with the theme "Our Only Comfort: Commemorating the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism." Make your plans now to attend what will undoubtedly be a profitable conference. And be on the lookout for more details, including speech topics and speakers, in upcoming advertising.

We cannot thank enough the seminary's support staff. For many years now, Mr. Don Doezeema has served faithfully as our registrar, and his wife, Judi, as faculty secretary. We look forward to another year of working with both of them. Mr. Charles Terpstra was hired a year ago as the seminary's librarian. In just his first year, he has proven himself to be a valuable member of our support staff—always eager to assist students and professors. The seminary would not run smoothly without the contribution of each member of our support staff.



*Charles Terpstra,  
Librarian*

The seminary covets the prayers of the churches. Pray that God keeps our seminary faithful to our Reformed heritage. Pray for faithfulness on the part of the professors, and diligence on the part of the young men who are preparing for the ministry. May the seminary continue to be a rich source of blessing to our denomination, as it has since the days of its founding. And may young men continue to graduate from the seminary who are thoroughly prepared for the ministry and who possess a fervent determination not to know anything in their preaching "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).

For the Faculty,  
*Prof. Ron Cammenga, Rector*

# An Evaluation of Six Trends in Present-Day Missions (2)

Previously, we considered that the emphasis in modern missions is that it be counter-cultural, contextual, and ecological. Now, we will consider two more trends in present-day missions that are mentioned by the late Prof. Bosch in his book *Believing in the Future*.

A fourth trend worth considering is that modern missions should be “ecumenical.”<sup>1</sup> It is argued that for modern missions to be successful and gain more converts than ever before in the eastern hemisphere or the western hemisphere, it must minimize and eventually eliminate any substantial differences between denominations. In harmony with this growing animosity against denominational missions, it is held that church missions and mission organizations should adopt what could be called a “franchise mentality.” Denominations ought to see that none has a monopoly on missions, but all are mere specific and equally legitimate “franchises,” with their own unique characteristics, laboring together in the same overall “corporation” that labors for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Although how each addresses the needs of the bodies and souls of men differs in doctrine and procedure, yet they are and should be all one. Hence, missionaries may preach only what they believe to be the truth, but they ought to be reluctant to expose the errors of others, because in the end no specific congregation or denomination, it is argued, has a monopoly of the truth. This leads to the conclusion that divided missions cannot be successful

<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” 55-62.

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

Previous article in this series: June 2012, p. 396.

in the world, but truly ecumenical missions alone can and will succeed to convert the world for Christ before His final appearing.

However, the Word of God does not allow faithful missions to be ecumenical in the sense promoted by Prof. Bosch, because doing so would require the church to compromise and deny the truth and to embrace heresies and false doctrines. Faithful missions must preach the sound doctrine of the Word of God. Faithful missions must seek the goal, subject to God’s will and blessing, that congregations be established that function as faithful pillars and grounds of the truth of the living God. Our God of all truth does not have many truths and many different versions of the truth. His truth is one truth. Instead of pulling down the doctrinal walls of separation, missions must construct walls of sound doctrine for separation and protection. Within those walls the sheep and lambs of Christ may be safely kept to feed and to grow in the pure Word of God over against the false religions from which they have been mercifully delivered by the Lord.



The fifth popular trend in missions is the idea and practice that modern missions must be “laity-led.” Prof. Bosch writes that “a missionary encounter... will have to be, primarily, a ministry of the *laity*.”<sup>2</sup> Prof. Bosch points out in his books that missions became so successful in the East because it was laity-driven. He argues that, for a revival of Christianity in the secularized West, missions in the West must be driven and led by the laity.

By the term “laity,” we are referring to the non-ordained members of the church. These are the people

<sup>2</sup> Bosch, pp. 55-62.

of God who possess the office of believer. With the anointing of the Spirit of Christ they are prophets, priests, and kings. When this truth is applied to missions, it is argued that, since the individual has the office of prophet, the believer may also speak the Word of God and by his testimony bring others to conversion. It is even suggested that the notion of missionaries taking the lead in missions is a thing of the past, and that now the success of missions depends on the individual believer doing missions or “lay preaching.” This emphasis is seen and heard in the recruitment of young adults to do mission trips during their Spring breaks or summer vacations in developing countries, to fulfill the aforementioned and increasingly popular ecological dimension in missions: building weather-proof houses, drilling lasting water wells, making technologically advanced basic cooking stoves, installing basic and primary sewage treatment infrastructure for a vast improvement of sanitation in developing countries, and such like outwardly impressive things. While doing these “missions,” they give testimonies to the locals and win souls for Christ. Such laity-led missions seem to be the wave of the future.

According to Romans 10:14-15, however, laity-led missions is not correct. While it is true that the believer is in the office of prophet and is involved in missions through his active membership in a calling church and a missions-supporting denomination, the non-ordained believer may not and cannot function as a missionary. While the believer may and even must testify of his faith to many every day, his testimony is not the power of God unto salvation. His testimony may be used by the Lord to bring others under the preaching of the

Word and thereby to conversion, but his testimony is not itself the chief means of grace. In Romans 10:14-15, we are taught that those who believe are those who hear Christ through a preacher. The preacher is one who is lawfully ordained and sent by the church. Christ is pleased to send by the church preachers to herald officially His Word. The church must train qualified men, ordain them, and send them unto that work. His sheep will hear His voice in that faithful preaching, and they will follow Him by His grace and Holy Spirit.

What Christ has ordained in His church unto our salvation and faith, let us not reject or neglect. In addition to that, let us not fall into either of two opposing extreme errors. On the one hand, let us not teach the extreme that only and alone shall missionaries do mission work, and so deny that the individual believer has a necessary and legitimate place in mission work. On the other hand, let us not teach that it is now the age in history when only the laity can effectively do missions, and so deny the exclusive right of the church to preach in the name of Christ unto the salvation of the other elect sheep of Christ. Let us maintain the balanced understanding of Scripture and as embodied in our Reformed confessions regarding the calling of the church, and churches in common, to do the work of missions for the other sheep of Christ who must yet be brought into His fold.



The last trend that we consider, and which perhaps is the most alarming and fundamentally wrong trend, is that modern missions must be taught “with an uncertain faith.” But for this, we must wait till next time.



WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

## Living As a Single Person (2)

*Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.*

*Previous article in this series: June 2012, p. 404.*

**I**t is not the will of the Lord that all of His children be married. In our last article we referred to Paul’s instruction in I Corinthians 7. In this chapter of God’s Word the inspired apostle of our Lord says that

"it is good for a man not to touch a woman." His meaning is that it is good for a man not to touch a woman sexually, as in marriage. Paul is not writing about compulsory celibacy for the clergy of the church. This is nowhere taught in Scripture. But in I Corinthians 7 Paul is writing about certain ordinary members of the church who might choose to remain single even all their lives. In chapter 9 of the same letter Paul speaks about his right to lead about a sister and a wife. He chose not to do this. Such a choice is morally good and proper for the Christian. Paul was single by choice. He states even that he wished that all were as he was. Later, again in chapter 7 of I Corinthians, the apostle speaks of certain advantages of not being married. Such a one can devote himself more completely to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, a most noble calling.

Not all who are single are so by choice. Probably even most are not. Some for many years greatly desire marriage, but that desire is never fulfilled, even though they have earnestly prayed to God about it. Some of these can become very discouraged and depressed. Over time, they can develop a sinful negative self-image. They may imagine that no one wants or needs them. They can feel at a loss as to knowing what the Lord's purpose and calling might be for them.

The Bible teaches that the Christian should be content in whatever state the Lord calls him to live. Though this may at times be very difficult for single Christians, contrary to the imagination of some, it is not impossible. Paul, a man who remained single all of his life, confesses in Philippians 4 that he learned to be content in whatsoever state of life he found himself. He follows this confession with the beautiful confession of his faith, "I can do all things through Christ

which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). In the same letter Paul exhorts the members of the church, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). Paul gave this exhortation at the very time when he was experiencing the depressing circumstances of life in a Roman prison and wondering whether he would have

to suffer as a martyr. The exhortation always to rejoice does not exclude single Christians, as though their life is so miserable that rejoicing in the Lord is impossible.

Single Christians ought to feel that they have a place in the church. They should be loved and respected because of this place by the other members of the church. They should not be made the butt of hurtful and demeaning jokes and comments.

Single Christians should be included by those who are married in their regular activities, where they can enjoy enduring, deep Christian friendship and fellowship. Single Christians should not be forgotten. They themselves

should make a great effort to be an active and lively part of the communion of the saints in the church. This is better than worldly friendship. The communion of the saints is a vital and spiritually healthy part of daily Christian living. No single Christian should allow himself to become a recluse and live most of the time all alone. He should not try to bear the burdens and struggles of life alone and then fault others for the bitterness of his life.

Whether married or single, we all have a calling and obligation to the other members of the church. The sin of self-centeredness must by the grace of God be overcome by caring for others, giving time for others, taking an interest in others, especially our fellow saints. We find ourselves by losing ourselves in concern and interest for Christ and His kingdom and in the care and

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concern for His people. Such Christian action delivers one from sinful self pity and spiritual depression.

The single Christian who has the holy desire of heart to be married should not too quickly close himself off from the possibility of still being married someday. He should actively pursue opportunities for marriage. In I Timothy 5 Paul exhorts the younger widows to marry. There were apparently in the church about which Paul was writing an unusual number of church members who had lost their husbands through death. Widows (and by implication widowers) were encouraged to seek to be married again with a suitable partner, but only in the Lord.

There are things that Christians can and may do to increase the possibility of their finding someone to marry. Marriages generally arise out of living and active Christian friendships. Such Christian friendship ought always to be cultivated. The attraction between a man and a woman that leads to marriage has mysterious aspects to it. It can and does arise in unexpected and wonderful ways in God's providence. Biblical advice for Christian friendship is that one should always work at showing himself to be friendly. A person should not expect to find friends when he himself is withdrawn from society.

One who is always boasting about himself or seeking only his own satisfaction and fulfillment in life has a wrong perspective. The Christian virtue of humility and self-effacement is important for all Christian fellowship. How beautiful are truly Christian friendships that reveal a real Christian interest in and a sincere and genuine concern for others. Practicing this kind of true friendship has led many in the providence of God to special people in their lives whom they eventually married.

There are definite temptations that the single as well as the married Christian must always be strong to resist. Even marriage does not cure the adulterous heart of the man driven by the sinful passion of his corrupt nature and not satisfied with his God-given partner in marriage. All temptations for immoral use of sex outside of marriage must be steadfastly avoided. We must all flee from its every temptation and occasion that would stir up such sinful passion. Sex is intended by God exclusively for the intimate, lifelong commitment of the holy

bond of marriage. In our times there are single men and women who do not want the committed relationship of marriage and its lifetime serious responsibility. They prefer rather the freedom of multiple sexual partners. This is an abomination to the Lord. The single Christian should never make excuses for himself. He should not yield to the powerful and tempting opportunities common in this ungodly society for the excitement of the momentary pleasure of sin. Godliness requires self-control and self-denial at all times in our Christian life. Such a life is possible only by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit. Single men and women can sometimes make themselves grievously guilty of wrecking the marriages and the peace and happiness of the homes and families of their neighbor.


Desperation about getting married at all cost is a great danger for a single person. After years of longing to be married, someone may suddenly become very excited by personal interest shown by a man or woman towards him or her. Maybe this single person never before experienced such a thing. It is possible for the single Christian at such an occasion totally to disregard even the clearest indications that the interested person has few qualifications for being a good Christian marriage partner. It is better never to be married than to be married to the wrong person. Virtuous women and noble men who have potential for being good and faithful marriage partners are very rare. Sadly, many Christians have been led away from the church and even from the Lord by foolish choices of marriage partners.

The chief concern of Christian living must always be the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. We are called to live to God's glory and not merely for our own satisfaction.

We call attention to two striking passages in Scripture. Matthew 19 records the strong teaching of our Lord about the lifelong, unbreakable bond of marriage that God Himself establishes. When the disciples heard the Lord's teaching, they considered it to be a hard saying. In response, Jesus gave the interesting teaching about eunuchs. He made mention of those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Jesus gives to us the very important principles in seeking the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness in marriage. One of the situations in

which a Christian must remain single, even though this can be very difficult, is when they have been treacherously put away by an unfaithful and adulterous spouse. Remarriage according to the teaching of the Lord, even for the innocent party, would involve a relationship of continued adultery. The principles of the righteousness of the kingdom teach the Christian rather to continue in holiness of life as a single Christian. Let no Christian say that this is a cruel and unnecessary legalism. We must remember that keeping God's law is not grievous, and such a concern has the promise of God's favor and blessing on one's life. This is far better than an ungodly life pleasing to our sinful nature.

In I Corinthians 7 Paul speaks more positively about living as a single Christian for the sake of the kingdom of God. The inspired apostle teaches us in this chapter that there can even be an advantage in not being married and not having the cares and burdens of marriage

and the family. This is especially true in this ungodly world in the last days. The single Christian should make use of this advantage and not make his being single the occasion for passionate pursuit of a career and using his time only for earthly things. Whether we are married or single, the kingdom and its righteousness must be our great interest and occupation in life. We could continue in this article by giving a list of very specific examples of ways in which single Christians can serve the kingdom. Let all those who are in this state and calling in the providence of God think about this. When we have that great interest in our life, we will be blessed by God, and our lives by the grace of God will have great significance and meaning. Scripture records the lives of outstanding Christians who were single all their life and were of special service to the Lord and a great blessing to His church and His people. 

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING

REV. RODNEY KLEYN

## The Suffering of Christ

### Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15

Question 37. What dost thou understand by the words, "He suffered"?

Answer. That He, all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind; that so by His passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life.

Question 38. Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate as judge?

Answer. That He, being innocent, and yet condemned by a temporal judge, might thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed.

Question 39. Is there anything more in His being crucified, than if He had died some other death?

Answer. Yes [there is]; for thereby I am assured that He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God.

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*Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington.*

If you compare the Catechism to the Apostles' Creed, you will notice that in this and the next Lord's Day the Catechism moves very slowly through the creed, stopping at every word and asking

a question. The reason is that here we are looking at the greatest historical event, which is also the grandest theological truth, in all of the world—the suffering and death of Christ.

The Catechism wants us to slow down and meditate on the suffering of Christ. Not only must we consider the physical suffering of His unjust trial, the cruel mocking and bloody scourgings, and His being nailed to a cross and suspended to die, but we must also drop our eyes into hell and see what He suffered in His soul. Many others have suffered physically, but Christ suffered the curse of sin and the agonies of hell. When we think of the cross of Christ, we must remember the darkness and the lonely cry of being forsaken, and in this way we understand the true character of His suffering and the reason He had to suffer and die, namely our sin.

But we should not think that this is a dreary and morbid subject. Rather, the cross is the victory of Christ over sin, death, and hell. And today He is risen and triumphant. There was an end to His suffering, but there is no end to the benefits from it for us.

This Lord's Day deals with three more steps of Christ's state of humiliation. The beginning of His humiliation was His incarnation, His coming into human flesh. This was shameful for the Son of God. This humiliation and shame continued in His lifelong suffering, His unjust trial, and His death by crucifixion. All three of these refer to different aspects of His suffering.

The focus of Scripture and the gospels is the suffering of Christ. Of 89 chapters in the four New Testament gospel accounts of Jesus' life, 30 chapters, that is one third, deal with the last week of Jesus' life. Of the 33 years of Jesus' life, that is approximately 1,700 weeks, a third of His biographical information is focused on His death. Paul determined, as a preacher, to know nothing but "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).

### Infinite

In this article we will try to understand something of the suffering of Christ, by looking at different characteristics of His suffering. However, we will never fully comprehend what Christ suffered, for He suffered the

full weight of the infinite wrath of God. He suffered the eternal agonies and torments of hell for His people. He suffered an eternity's worth of suffering for each of His own. In the three hours of darkness, God did something to His Son that man will never fully comprehend.

### Incomparable

In Lamentations 1:12 the suffering Savior says, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Among all human suffering, and there is much human suffering, there is no pain like that which Christ bore in the day of God's fierce anger. Every form of human suffering is measured by our experience. One suffers disease, another poverty, another grief, another death, and there's a limit to this suffering, an end. But Christ's suffering is beyond measure. It is entirely unique. It is beyond the experience of any other being. This is because of what Christ suffered—the just wrath of God against sin, and this was possible because of who suffered—the eternal Son of God.

### God-ordained

The death of Christ was not an accident. He did not die as a religious leader whose dreams had failed. His death was more than just the result of an act of wicked men.

The death of Christ came about by a determined and deliberate act of God. Eternally God ordained to send His Son into human flesh as the one who would be punished for sin. This is why the Bible speaks of Him as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (I Peter 1:20), and who was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" to be crucified and slain by wicked men (Acts 2:23).

### God-inflicted

Not only was the suffering of Christ planned by God, but it was God Himself who inflicted the pain of

the cross on Jesus. Too often we think of the suffering of Christ as a story of what Pilate, the soldiers, the Jews, and even the disciples did to Jesus. But the Catechism says that Christ “sustained the wrath of God.” All these were simply the rod of God’s hand to afflict His Son.

Isaiah 53 states this very plainly when it says that He was “smitten of God” (v. 4), that “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6), and that “it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (v. 10).

### Real

Perhaps you think that because Jesus is God, His suffering really amounted to nothing. Then you misunderstand.

It was a man, a real man, that suffered in our place. God cannot suffer, and God cannot suffer in our place. It had to be a real man that bore our punishment. This is what happened; all the suffering of the cross was experienced by a real man in His human body and human soul. Yes, He was God, but it was His human nature that suffered. The divine nature sustained the human, that is, kept it going to sustain all that sin deserved.

### Voluntary

We were born into a world of suffering apart from any choice on our part. But Christ chose to come into the world of suffering. Philippians 2 tells us that, as God, He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men and...humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (vv. 7-8). This choice to enter our suffering was a choice Christ pursued all the way to the cross. Every moment of His life, He chose the path of suffering. He who could have called legions of angels to His aid, silently went to the cross. He gave His back to the smiters and hid not His face from shame and spitting (Is. 50:6).

In the voluntary suffering of Christ we see His great love. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

### Lifelong

When we think of the suffering of Christ, we should not think only of the end of His life and His death, but we should see that His entire life was one of suffering under the heavy hand of God’s wrath. Isaiah calls Him the “man of sorrows” (Is. 53:3). You can have a “man of wealth” or a “man of pleasure” or a “man of happiness.” Jesus was a man of sorrows. To look at Him was to see suffering. This is because all suffering and death are the result of sin, and so, in every bit of suffering, Jesus was experiencing the wrath and curse of God against sin. When He was tired, when He was hungry, when He was rejected, when He was sick, when He cried, in every pain He experienced the results of sin and knew His task was to remove that curse.

### Substitutionary

Jesus Himself was innocent. The Catechism notes this when it points to His trial under Pontius Pilate. In His innocence, Jesus took the place of others who were guilty. He died as a substitute. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). He stood in our place as the condemned, so that we might stand with Him as sons and daughters of the living God.

This doctrine of substitution is the greatest of all truths. What better news can the sinner hear than this, that the Savior has taken his sins and borne the wrath of God in his place? When you take this out of the gospel and make Jesus’ suffering a mere example or a display of commitment to a cause, then you have no gospel anymore. This is the gospel: Jesus died in our place!

### Definite

Jesus’ suffering was definite in both purpose and effect. His purpose was to take the place of His elect people before the just God, and to pay the price of their sins so that their curse would be removed. He had a definite group of people in mind as He went to the cross. In John 10 He says, “I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:15). The effect of His death is that all for whom He died are actually delivered from the guilt and power of sin. His suffering makes an actual payment for their sins.

This means He did not die to pay the price of the




sins of all men. If He died for every person, then we can no longer say that He died as a substitute who took the place of others. Instead, the most we can say is that He made possible man's salvation, and we must do our part now and come to Him. And that is contrary to the gospel.

### Necessary

Jesus died by crucifixion. The mode of His death points to the necessity of His death. Death by crucifixion, in Scripture, symbolizes that a person is accursed of God. Suspended between heaven and earth, it's as though neither God nor man will have him (see Gal. 3:13). The curse came on man as a result of his fall into sin in paradise (Gen. 3:17-18). The curse was especially this, that he was separated and driven out from the fellowship of God. Separation from God, this is hell. Jesus bore this for us in the bitter agony of the cross.

The true believer makes this his personal confession. He understands that it was the curse of God against him that made necessary the suffering, death, and cross of Christ. "He took on Him the curse which lay upon me; for the death of the cross was accursed of God." In the knowledge of my own sin, I depend entirely on the death and suffering of Christ for my salvation. "With his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5).

### Questions for Discussion

1. How was Jesus' suffering different from other human suffering?
2. What is meant by the "lifelong" suffering of Christ?
3. What does Acts 2:23 teach concerning the suffering of Christ?
4. What characteristic of Jesus' suffering especially shows His love (John 15:13)?
5. What is the significance of Jesus' being tried by an earthly judge?
6. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be crucified?
7. Why did God bring three hours of darkness while Jesus was on the cross? What happened in that darkness? (Matthew 27:45-46)
8. How do physical depictions of the suffering of Christ such as crucifixes or drama detract from the true nature of Christ's suffering?
9. Why do many people hold to the false idea that Jesus intended to die for all men? How is this teaching inconsistent with the gospel?
10. What great comfort can believers take from the truth that Christ's death was substitutionary and effective? 

## CLASSIS WEST REPORT

## REV. DOUG KUIPER

Classis West met on September 5, 2012, in the new facilities of the Calvary PRC of Hull, IA.

Rev. J. Marcus opened our meeting with a meditation on Luke 10:2, calling attention to the continual necessity of praying for faithful laborers in God's harvest.

In addition to routine matters, Classis advised a consistory to proceed to erase a baptized member for impenitence in sin.

For many decades, the Reading Sermon Library has been in the custody of the Edgerton PRC. At the request of Hope (Redlands) PRC, the Reading Sermon Library

has been transferred to their care. Churches who need reading sermons should now contact the clerk of Hope Redlands.

The one vacant church in the Classis, that in Randolph, was supplied with classical appointments for the next six months.

The meeting adjourned before noon. Expenses totaled \$7,219.90. The next regular meeting of Classis is scheduled for March 6, 2013, in Lynden, WA.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

### Seminary Activities

Classes for the new year at our PR Theological School in Grandville, MI began Tuesday, August 28. There are three students in the seminary this year. Mr. Eric Guichelaar is a fourth-year student and is presently serving a six-month internship in our Loveland, CO PRC. Mr. Joshua Engelsma is a third-year student, and Mr. Ryan Barnhill is a second-year student. There are no first-year students this year. May the Lord daily equip the students and professors, and their wives and children, for their labors and prepare the students for being commissioned as ministers of the gospel to wherever He may be pleased to call them. Romans 10:14, 15: "...how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

Even though classes at our Seminary began August 28, Seminary Convocation did not take place until September 5. This year the Convocation was held in the Grandville, MI PRC, with Prof. R. Cammenga speaking on "The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the 'Good Christian Schools.'"

Once again this fall the Seminary invited those who were interested

and able, to attend selected classes this school year. Prof. B. Gritters invited auditors to Church Polity, a class in which he teaches the principles of church government and gives instruction in the Church Order. Prof. R. Dykstra invited auditors to History of Dogma, a class in which he treats the development of the main doctrines of Holy Scripture from the ancient period through the Middle Ages. And Prof. R. Cammenga invited auditors to his Dogmatics class, focusing this semester on Christology, the study of the truth concerning the Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, beginning with the doctrine of the covenant, and to New Testament History, which will cover the inter-testamentary period up to the passion week.

### Congregation Activities

All members of Hope PRC in Walker, MI were invited to attend a four-week series of classes on "The Reformation of 1953 in the Protestant Reformed Churches." The first class of this series was held on Tuesday evening, September 4, and was taught by Prof. R. Dykstra. In preparation for the class, Prof. Dykstra provided a recommended reading list, including the book *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism*.

During the month of August the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada was busy with some renovations to the sanctuary. The work was scheduled for August 13-18, with some of it being done by

volunteer labor from the congregation. Among the renovations was the rebuilding of the front of the sanctuary, including a new pulpit. The week following, all the pews were removed from the sanctuary and new carpet was installed throughout the entire building. This was followed by a thorough cleaning of the pews as well as of the entire inside of the church.

Members of First in Edmonton also enjoyed a group hike on Labor Day in Jasper National Park. We are not certain, but we think members of neighboring Immanuel PRC in Lacombe were also invited to join Edmonton for the day.

Members of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD were encouraged to reserve the evening of August 28 for a meeting to discuss starting a school society in Sioux Falls. A subsequent bulletin from Heritage informed us that at that meeting a committee was appointed to draft a constitution. When that work is complete, another meeting will be called to ratify that constitution and form a school society.

Somewhat in the same vein as the above, we read this past summer in a bulletin from Hope PRC in Redlands, CA that the School Board of Hope Christian School there has appointed a High School Subcommittee. This sub-committee held two meetings, one on July 16 and another on August 20. Anyone wishing to attend, or to submit questions, was encouraged to do so. Without doubt, both our Heritage

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

and Hope congregations covet our prayers as they go forward with these plans.

The members of Calvary PRC in Hull, IA enjoyed their annual church picnic on August 4. In addition to the usual church picnic activities, this picnic featured Calvary's Second Annual Church Picnic Grill Off! If you were a member of Calvary and enjoyed grilling you were invited to demonstrate your skills. You simply had to tell the Activities Committee what you planned to grill and they would supply the meat. And that's not even the best part. After that, the church members sampled the fare and voted for their favorite.


So if you weren't interested in grilling you could simply eat and enjoy! Sounds like a win, win to us. Supper started at 6:00, with optional swimming to follow.

Now that the Sunday School season is complete at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, the members there will again be visiting and singing to the members of their congregation who are unable to worship with the members each week. Families of Faith visit and sing with these individuals in between worship services every other Sunday.

### Sister-Church Activities

The Consistory of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI has granted the request of our denomination's

Contact Committee to have their pastor, Rev. A. den Hartog, go to Singapore and preach for four weeks at the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. Covenant will be celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 23 and the request to have Rev. den Hartog there for this event was a personal request from Covenant. Rev. den Hartog, along with his wife, anticipated leaving for Singapore on September 18 and returning on October 15, D.V.

Our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, recently added two translations of the Athanasian Creed to their website, one in Vietnamese and the other in Hungarian. 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Notice

■ The Lord commands His blessings upon His people. It was 40 years ago that our Lord confirmed His call to

#### REV. RONALD J. VANOVERLOOP

to serve Him by ministering to His precious bride, the church. In October of 1972, Seminarian VanOverloop was ordained to serve as pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan. Since then he has spent and continues willingly, faithfully, and wholeheartedly to spend himself in answer to that call. We take notice of this milestone in Pastor VanOverloop's life, and thank him and our Lord for those 40 years of ministering to us, and of demonstrating that to which all officebearers are exhorted in 1 Peter 5:1-5: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

The Council of  
Grace Protestant Reformed Church

## Reformation Lecture

Friday, October 26, 2012

7:30 P.M.

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra

***False Prophets and the  
Certain End of the World:  
What the Reformation Can Teach Us***

to be held at :

Immanuel Fellowship Church  
6015 West H Avenue  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

sponsored by the  
Evangelism Committee  
of Kalamazoo PRC

## Standard Bearer

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### Wedding Anniversary

■ Mindful of God's covenant faithfulness, we rejoice and give thanks to God on the occasion of the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents,

**JOHN and CAROLYN  
CLEVELAND.**

God is faithful to His promise in Psalm 128: "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel."

Their children and grandchildren  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

### Notice

■ Consistories of the PRC are hereby notified that the Reading Sermon Library, which has long been under the custody of the Edgerton consistory, is now under the care of the Hope (Redlands) consistory. Any consistories needing to obtain reading sermons, or having old sermons to return, should do so by contacting the clerk of Hope Redlands, using the contact information found in the Yearbook.

For Classis West,  
Rev. Douglas Kuiper,  
Stated Clerk



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### Reformed Witness Hour October 2012

#### Date

October 7  
October 14  
October 21  
October 28

#### Topic

"Regenerated into Christ's Church"  
"The Wall of Separation Broken Down"  
"The Church's One Foundation?"  
"Paul: Administrator of the Mystery"

#### Text

Ephesians 2:1-5  
Ephesians 2:11-15  
Ephesians 2:20-22  
Ephesians 3:7-9

### Bound Volumes

■ The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 88. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFPA office** before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.